

## **Female *Bildungsromane* by Rosa Chacel and Ana María Moix: An Intergenerational Dialogue**

**Olga Bezhanova**

Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville

The second half of the nineteenth century and the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of Spain's feminist movement. This movement achieved its greatest victories during the Second Republic. The Constitution of 1931 granted women the right to vote and proclaimed men and women equal. The rate of female illiteracy decreased significantly between 1931 and 1936, and more women gained access to higher education (Nash 349).

However, Franco's regime undid the advances in the struggle for women's liberation, and the 1889 Civil Code was reinstated in 1938. The dictatorship paid special attention to the way women were educated: "The attack on co-education . . . was particularly ferocious. . . . Middle class girls were taught in single sex Catholic schools; working class girls in the girls' section of municipal schools, and country girls often not at all" (Davies 177-78). This regression in terms of women's rights is mirrored repeatedly by a regression to an infantile state experienced by the protagonists of the female *Bildungsromane*.

The greatest masterpieces of the female *Bildungsroman* genre in Spain were created during Franco's dictatorship. The 1940s saw the publication of Carmen Laforet's *Nada* (1944) and Rosa Chacel's *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945). In the 1950s, Dolores Medio contributed to the genre with *Nosotros, los Rivero* (1950), Carmen Martín Gaité published *Entre visillos* (1957), and Ana Maria Matute created *Primera memoria* (1959). In 1962, Mercè Rodoreda published *La plaça del Diamant*.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The novels of female development by Laforet, Medio, Martín Gaité, and Matute were awarded the Premio Nadal. Both Chacel and Rodoreda went into exile because of the Civil War and this delayed their official recognition at home. When Chacel returned from exile, she was honored with Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas in 1987 for the totality of her literary production. Rodoreda's contribution to the Catalan literature was recognized in 1998 by the establishment of a literary prize in her name: the Premi Mercè Rodoreda de contes i narracions. Between 1953 and 1998, this literary prize (Premi Mercè Rodoreda de contes i narracions) bore the name of Victor Català, a *nom de plume* of Caterina Albert i Paradís. Català's most important novel, *Solitud* (1904-05), is also a *Bildungsroman*. The fact that one of the most prestigious literary prizes of Catalan literature was named after the writers who became widely popular both at home and internationally through the publication of their *Bildungsroman* is a testimony to the importance of the genre to the Catalan literati.

The towering achievements of these writers inspired a later generation of female authors. In the closing years of Franco's life, Concha Alós, Teresa Barbero, Ana María Moix, and Esther Tusquets published *Bildungsromane* that borrowed heavily from the narrative strategies and the thematic concerns of the earlier novels of female development. In this article, I will analyze the inter-generational dialogue between Chacel and Moix, two authors of female *Bildungsromane* who marked, respectively, the first and the last years of the dictatorship.

Born before Franco's regime in 1898, Chacel witnessed the advances in women's rights that were achieved before the Civil War. Leticia Valle, the protagonist of her *Bildungsroman*, actively fights against those who try to infantilize her. Leticia's greatest goal is to abandon the world of childhood as soon as possible and join the adults as an equal or a superior intellectual. Whenever anybody treats her like a child, Leticia becomes enraged and strives to prove that she is to be taken as seriously as any adult. At the end of the novel, Leticia is defeated and her belief in the capacity of linear development is undermined. Nevertheless, Leticia's strength and resilience render her a memorable character.

Born during Franco's regime in 1947, Moix created a *Bildungsroman* whose female protagonist, Julia, resigns herself to being acted upon by external forces. In contrast to Chacel's Leticia, Julia never questions any aspect of the reality she finds unsatisfactory and prefers to infantilize herself in order to avoid any responsibility for her own failed *Bildung*.

Interestingly, these two authors were correspondents. In 1965, at the age of eighteen, Moix wrote to Chacel to express her admiration of the older writer's novel *Teresa*. Fascinated with her young correspondent, Chacel sent her a copy of *Memorias de Leticia Valle*<sup>2</sup> and *Sobre el piélago* and expressed a hope that Moix would continue writing to her (Kingery 103-05). Moix continued to write to Chacel and the correspondence between the two women lasted for ten years until it ended abruptly in 1975.<sup>3</sup> Chacel's *Memorias de Leticia Valle* had a profound influence over Moix's first novel *Julia* published in 1970 (Kingery 103; Mayock 44). Rosalía Cornejo Parriego points out that, in one of her letters to Moix, Chacel stated explicitly that her young correspondent reminded her of Leticia (86).

In spite of her deep regard for Moix, Chacel was profoundly disappointed with her protégée's novel. Chacel's belief that *Julia* lacked artistic value might have been the reason why the decade-long correspondence between the two writers ended (Kingery 113-14). In her diaries, Chacel expresses her conviction that Moix's novel has little originality: "Llegó el libro de Ana María Moix. Bien, muy bien,<sup>4</sup> pero yo esperaba más. . . . Reúne los tópicos de moda—bueno, una moda ya sin novedad—, como es una niña que tan pronto ama como odia a sus padres y desea la muerte a todo bicho viviente por menos de nada" (*Alcancía* 205)<sup>5</sup>. If anybody was entitled to reproach Moix for *Julia*'s lack of originality, it was Chacel,

---

<sup>2</sup> Chacel's novel was not published in Spain until 1975.

<sup>3</sup> The correspondence between Chacel and Moix was published in 1998 under the title *De mar a mar* and was accompanied by a prologue by Ana Rodríguez-Fischer (Barcelona: Península).

<sup>4</sup> In her diary, Chacel often says "bien, muy bien" in respect to novels that fail to excite her.

<sup>5</sup> Chacel's diary traces the struggle between the writer's desire to be supportive of her friend's literary ambition and her incapacity to muster any enthusiasm for the novel. Chacel talks of "un supremo esfuerzo para escribirle [a Moix] una carta satisfactoria." When the letter is finally finished, she refers to it as "una hazaña" (*Alcancía* 234).

the writer who had created one of the most memorable characters of the Spanish female *Bildungsroman*.

### **Chacel's *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (1945)**

Chacel's protagonist Leticia narrates the story of her development in a manner that is surprisingly mature for a twelve-year-old. More than anything, she wants to grow up and leave behind her childhood and her dependence on the care of adults behind: "Nunca me cansaré de decir el asco que me da esta enfermedad que es la infancia. Lucha uno por salir de ella como de una pesadilla" (*Memorias* 153). For Leticia, childhood is a nightmare from which she will awaken the moment she becomes fully grown. Even the title of the novel leads the readers to believe that Leticia is older than she is since writing memoirs is an activity one usually undertakes later in life.

One of the strategies that Leticia employs to help herself grow up as fast as possible is accumulating knowledge. She loves reading and learning and is driven by a ceaseless "angustia de tener que aprender unas cosas para comprender otras" (Chacel, *Memorias* 10). Her father's alcoholism and her aunt's efforts to conceal his addiction prevent Leticia's immediate family members from taking an active interest in her reading matter. Nevertheless, her first teacher and her doctor feel uneasy about Leticia's dedication to learning: "Tanto ella como el médico decían que yo sabía demasiado y que me convenía más pasear que estudiar" (11). Leticia's desire for intellectual independence leads her to dislike the very idea of being a woman. For example, she decides to give up her embroidery lessons because she considers them to be "ocupaciones de mujer" (56). In Leticia's mind, her gender represents the only significant hindrance to her intellectual growth. When her studies do not progress as well as she hopes, Leticia blames this on being a "woman" and expresses disgust with her gender: "En aquella flaqueza que me acometía al intentar concentrarme en el estudio . . . sentí un asco de ser mujer que me quitó la fe hasta para llorar" (52-53).

Leticia absorbs this contemptuous attitude towards women from those who surround her. For example, one of the people who teach her to despise women and their pursuits is Leticia's confessor. His influence leads Leticia to disdain everything that might be associated with the world of women: "Me había zambullido de tal modo en el mundo de las mujeres 'con sus tonterías y sus pequeños vicios'; ésta era la frase de mi confesor" (Chacel, *Memorias* 52). Leticia sees her gender as nothing more than a handicap that can prevent her from studying at the pace that she sets for herself.

In the house of her teachers, doña Luisa and don Daniel,<sup>6</sup> Leticia has a chance to observe the difference between the way of life reserved for men and women. While she admires doña Luisa's household skills, Leticia accords more respect to don Daniel vast store of academic knowledge. During a Christmas celebration in her teachers' house, Leticia wonders at doña Luisa's readiness to be excluded from the conversation between don Daniel and the doctor: "Esto era lo que yo no acababa de comprender. Ella sabía más que yo de todo. Era verdaderamente instruida, y, sin embargo, se mantenía sin sufrimiento a aquella distancia, porque no dejaba enteramente de prestar una cierta atención a lo que decían" (Chacel, *Memorias* 75). Even though doña Luisa's interests attract Leticia, she is

---

<sup>6</sup> Doña Luisa and don Daniel are married.

unwilling to accept the reality that excludes women from learned conversations and only allows them to shine in the kitchen. Leticia realizes that “aceptar ser ‘mujer’ es tolerar la marginación de los ámbitos intelectuales y los desafíos concomitantes que la seducen; conlleva, en efecto, la marginación del tipo de las conversaciones y sociabilidad que la atraen” (Pérez-Magallón 147). Leticia begins to compete with doña Luisa for her husband's affections. In part, she is trying to prove to herself and to the world that her alternative way of being a woman is just as valid as the traditional image of submissive womanhood embodied by doña Luisa.

Gender identity is one of the main problems that Chacel's protagonist has to confront in the course of her development. Leticia lives in a society where male and female roles are strictly defined, and she believes that assuming her identity as a woman will preclude her from engaging in the intellectual pursuits that she enjoys. As a result, she often behaves in a way that the patriarchal society considers masculine. Her attitude toward doña Luisa, for example, often resembles the attitude of a man courting a woman. Don Daniel notices the gender ambiguity in Leticia's conduct: “Me parece que si tú fueras un caballerito tendrías el arte de hacer regalos a las damas, y me parece también que a ti te gustaría algunas veces ser un caballerito” (Chacel, *Memorias* 79). Leticia is grateful to her teacher for this observation since it demonstrates to her that don Daniel understands the nature of the problem that confronts her (80). According to Jesús Pérez-Magallón, Leticia remains unable to create a stable gender identity for herself at the end of her *Bildung*:

La narradora no logra salir de ese estado de confusión, de esa indeterminación en cuanto a su propio género. Del mismo modo que el relato no conduce a ninguna resolución evidente y está caracterizado por una intencionada sensación de incertidumbre, tampoco el personaje logra escapar a esa indeterminación en cuanto a su identidad. Lo binario no ha logrado imponer uno de sus términos y la niña-mujer que se niega a serlo, incapaz de asumir su realidad, solo puede abandonarse a lo vegetativo, a lo puramente “natural” por no humano. (157)

Does Leticia's failure to conform to the traditional vision of womanhood testify to the failure of her *Bildung*? We have to remember that Leticia is still only twelve years old at the end of the novel. Her capacity to understand and formulate her gender-related concerns demonstrates a heightened self-awareness that is evidence of exceptional maturity. At her young age, Leticia has a well-defined vision as to what kind of person she wants to become. Even though her attempts to escape the constraints society places on women by rejecting her womanhood are rather naïve, they are evidence of an active attitude towards her own development.

Early in the novel, Leticia arrives at a consciousness of her own exceptionality, believing that her story deserves to be told (Chacel, *Memorias* 5-6). One of the goals she sets for her development consists of elaborating an original way of thinking. She is driven by “[la] necesidad de pensar por cuenta propia” (8). The mere possibility that she could ever come to accept the opinions of other people terrifies Leticia: “¿Es que podré llegar alguna vez a entender las cosas como los otros? Eso sería el mayor castigo que pudiera esperarme. Porque las gentes viven, comen, van y vienen, como si tal cosa, aunque vean el mundo con ese asco. Yo no: yo, si llego a verlo así, me moriré de él. Yo no quiero vivir ni un día más si voy hacia eso” (19-20). Leticia resents being treated as a child and despises her

schoolmates whom she sees as “enfermas de su niñez” (17). In Leticia’s view, the success of her *Bildung* depends on being recognized as an intellectual equal by men, especially by don Daniel.

Don Daniel feels threatened by the fascination that the eleven-year-old Leticia exercises over him. He attempts to reaffirm his power over her by intimidating her with the extent of his knowledge:

Cuando todo parecía marchar por sus cauces habituales, con un inciso abordaba regiones desconocidas, sin prevenirme, como dando por sentado que aquellas regiones habían sido siempre dejadas al margen por condescendencia suya o más bien por certidumbre de que mis fuerzas eran escasas para penetrar su intrincamiento. Así, al abordarlas, lo hacía siempre con una frase neta, precisa y tan compleja que en un instante proyectaba delante de mí todas las perspectivas de mi ignorancia. (Chacel, *Memorias* 126)

Leticia feels deeply humiliated when she realizes that she is not capable of following her teacher’s explanations (127). Within the system of values that she has elaborated for herself, recognizing her intellectual inferiority is a painful experience. She resolves to avenge her humiliation by demonstrating to don Daniel the extent of the sexual attraction he feels towards her. Even though she scorns women and “sus tonterías y sus pequeños vicios” (52), Leticia finds an opportunity to dominate don Daniel precisely in her capacity as a budding woman. She establishes her power over her teacher by reciting Zorrilla’s poem “La carrera,” with a strong sexual subtext: “En esta otra ocasión era yo quien le enseñaba la imagen desde la tribuna, con toda mi osadía, porque él no podía hacerme callar ni obligarme a cambiar de tema” (144). After the recital, Leticia feels that her domination of don Daniel is so complete that she can even influence the way he thinks: “Lo que se reflejaba en su cara en esos momentos ... era exactamente lo que yo había estado queriendo provocar con mi pensamiento” (170-71). She enjoys her newfound capacity to force her teacher to see “fantasmas horrorosos” (170).

However, in spite of being very mature for her age, Leticia is still quite innocent about sexuality. She grows up in a society that preserves a young girl’s modesty through surrounding all sexual matters with silence. In many situations, Leticia can describe the actions and the words of adults but her ignorance prevents her from offering an interpretation of what is taking place (Davies 159). As a result, she fails to see the dangers implicit in her struggle with don Daniel: “Leticia is precocious enough to want a sublime relationship with an older man, and naïve enough to think this is attainable without sordid sexual undercurrents” (161). A short time after the recital, don Daniel finds himself incapable of resisting the feelings he has towards Leticia who, in his words, is “capaz de incendiar Roma” (Chacel, *Memorias* 161). Although Chacel tells us nothing explicitly, we are led to understand that something happens between her and don Daniel behind closed doors, something so horrible as to rob Leticia of her cherished capacity to understand and analyze. Cornejo Parriego suggests that don Daniel is driven to assault Leticia and dominate her sexually not because of the sexual attraction he feels for her but, rather, because he wants to wreak vengeance on her for the humiliation he experiences during the recital (73). The trauma of her rape is now the subject of “inmundas reflexiones que el ama iba haciéndose” (Chacel, *Memorias* 163). All she can think about in the midst of her confusion is the images of dead birds, rabbits, and rats who did not manage to outrun their enemies:

“Porque esos bichos no viven más que mientras tienen fuerzas para huir de sus enemigos; en cuanto pasa un cierto tiempo caen, sucumben, porque están rodeados de peligros por todas partes” (164). Leticia’s image of herself as being strong and sophisticated enough to defeat don Daniel is shattered. Now she identifies with helpless creatures who succumb to somebody far more powerful.

Leticia discovers that she can do nothing to oppose either don Daniel’s brute force or her family’s power to exile her to Switzerland. Having realized the extent of her helplessness, Leticia chooses to frustrate her own development. She begins to abhor the idea of moving ahead: “Volveré hacia dentro todas mis fuerzas, echaré a correr hacia atrás hasta quedarme sin aliento, hasta llegar al final, hacia perderme. Luego volveré hasta aquí y retrocederé otra vez” (Chacel, *Memorias* 7). Since she is unable to grow and develop on her own terms, she finds empowerment in a refusal to accept the reality that she has not chosen for herself: “No, aquí mismo no llegaré nunca. Me parece más fácil llegar hasta allá, hasta el principio. Todo lo demás, lo que está a la derecha o a la izquierda, puedo tomarlo o dejarlo, y no tomaré más de lo que verdaderamente quiera” (7). Leticia’s refusal to go forward results from her realization that her unique way of being can only lead to tragedy.

In addition, after realizing how little power she possesses over her own life, Leticia creates a narrative universe where she can finally exercise some degree of control. Instead of testifying to Leticia’s powerlessness (Dávila Gonçalves 60), the way she tells her story is indicative of her skill at exorcising her lack of power through the manipulation of her narrative. For example, the way Leticia tells her story endows even the most seemingly insignificant events with an aura of importance: “Cuando se lee esta novela, da la impresión de que la mirada de su niña protagonista enriquece la realidad, de que ésta es mucho más cuando la miramos a través de sus ojos” (Rosales 223). Also, Leticia is very skillful at revealing only the information that she wants to make known. For instance, whenever she experiences an insight into the feelings of people around her, she informs her readers about this important realization: “Precisamente en ese momento tuve un golpe de claridad y comprendí lo que pasaba en mi casa” (Chacel, *Memorias* 40). However, Leticia refrains from explaining what it is that she has been able to understand in her moment of clarity. In a similar manner, she avoids discussing the most painful events of her life. We can only guess what happened between Leticia and don Daniel: we can deduce that he killed himself after raping Leticia but she never states this directly.

At the beginning of her story, Leticia suggests that regaining control is precisely the reason why she starts writing: “Aquí ya no pueden quitármelas,<sup>7</sup> ni ellas pueden irse; aquí serán como yo quiera, no pueden nada contra mí, como tampoco pueden estas otras que están de veras a mi alrededor; las veo, pero me niego a creerlas” (Chacel, *Memorias* 6). She feels that her relatives try to rob her of her experiences by silencing the unpalatable truth of what really happened to her. The adults are preoccupied by eliminating the consequences of Leticia’s tragedy without discussing the painful events: “Ahora, ya cada uno de nosotros tres por separado, éramos menos peligrosos; de lo demás, ni hablar. Ni un comentario, una alusión al drama que había determinado todo aquello” (188-89). Leticia is not prepared to abdicate the right to her own story. Instead, she reserves the privilege to tell it the way she wishes: “De pronto me acuerdo. . . . No, eso no lo escribiré” (187).

---

<sup>7</sup> With the word “las,” Leticia refers to the important events in her life that she calls “mis cosas” (6).

The goal of Leticia's development process is to create a new way of being a woman. This new kind of femininity combines both intellectual and sexual power with independence. Leticia strives to put into practice this understanding of femininity, which is different from the female conduct that her society finds acceptable. Leticia's efforts fail, but, as a protagonist of a female *Bildungsroman*, she is no longer a mere object of the societal forces that participate in her formation. Leticia does not stop at questioning the lack of life choices that society offers to women. She goes much further in her search for personhood. Chacel's character has her own vision of the kind of woman she would like to become. Even though society is still not ready to accept Leticia's project of self-development, the very existence of such an alternative understanding of womanhood constitutes an important breakthrough on Leticia's part. Leticia does not internalize the patriarchal system of values that expects her to humble herself and behave as any other girl her age: "No aprenderé el alemán, ni esquiaré, ni estudiaré nada. No iré por este camino que me marcan, no seguiré a ese paso; iré en otro sentido, hacia arriba o hacia abajo, me escaparé por donde pueda y no se darán cuenta" (Chacel, *Memorias* 7). Leticia's refusal to progress is not a sign of her defeat, but, rather, the only way she can find to maintain her independent way of thinking. She is incapable of opposing the patriarchal system of values in an active way and thus chooses to take refuge in her inner world and in her writing.

### **Moix's Julia (1970)**

Julia,<sup>8</sup> the protagonist of Moix's eponymous *Bildungsroman*, shares many characteristics with Leticia. She feels marginalized and lonely within her family and turns to her teachers, señorita Mabel and Eva, for comfort. Julia perceives her mother's lack of interest in her daughter as emotional orphanhood: "Al oír cómo se perdían los pasos de Mamá en el silencio de la noche, Julia sintió una profunda pena, dolor en la garganta y en el pecho, ganas de llorar por algo que se había perdido, irremisiblemente, para siempre" (Moix 57). She sees her father as weak and incapable of offering his daughter any kind of support. While Leticia's father, coronel Valle, is almost incapacitated by his alcoholism, Julia's father is defeated by having married into a rich family whose representatives do not treat him with respect. For years, he tolerates his wife's infidelities and he is despised by his wife's Francoist mother for being financially dependent on his wife. In addition, his anarchist father despises him for the same reason. As a child, Julia fantasizes about killing the father she perceives as weak and inept (78-79). When she grows up, she joins other adults in her family in expressing contempt towards him: "Al verle derrotado, vencido en el sillón, reclamando paz y tranquilidad, lo despreciaba" (37). One of the very few times Julia's father attempts to express an opinion of his own is when he shows a dislike of Víctor, a young man whom his wife welcomes into their country house (65). As usual, Julia's mother dismisses her husband's concerns and pays no attention to Víctor's excessive interest in her six-year-old daughter. Her mother's indifference and her father's incapacity to make himself heard cost Julia very dearly. During an outing on the beach, Victor rapes the little girl who is incapable of either understanding or verbalizing what has happened to her (66-67).

---

<sup>8</sup> Anny Brooksbank Jones points out that we never find out Julia's last name, which is one of the multiple indications that this character lacks a stable adult identity ("Ana María Moix" 30).

The twenty-year-old Julia, whose memories constitute the novel, never manages to overcome the trauma of the rape or recognize that this is what happened to her. Repeatedly, she finds herself haunted by the image of Julita, the childhood version of herself who was the victim of sexual violence. Sandra J. Schumm suggests that “*Julia* describes a violent sexual act against a young girl that is much more vile than those in earlier novels by women” (158). The critic compares Moix’s novel with Laforet’s *Nada*, Matute’s *Primera memoria*, and Rodoreda’s *La plaça del Diamant* but fails to mention *Memorias de Leticia Valle*, a novel whose young protagonist is similarly traumatized by a rape and suffers from the same inability to put her ordeal into words.<sup>9</sup> Both Chacel’s and Moix’s *Bildungsromane* discuss the consequences of rape without ever naming it.

Julia’s violent initiation into sexual victimhood by an older man reinforces her dislike of her gender. Her earliest experiences teach her that being female puts her at a disadvantage. Julia’s mother prefers the company of her sons to that of her daughter and is annoyed by Julia’s demands for her attention. When she sees Julia, she greets her with remarks that are critical of her appearance: “Qué facha, con esos pelos. No me digas que has salido así a la calle” (Moix 35). When Julia grows up, she realizes that her relatives and teachers see her femininity as lacking. Julia often becomes a subject of conversations as to how she can be made to look more feminine:

Mamá, esta mañana he visto a Julia por la calle. Casi no me he atrevido a saludarla. Parece un espantapájaros; deberías vestirla mejor. Mamá se enfurecía: ¿Y qué quieres que haga? Aunque me gaste un dineral en ella parece que va de prestado. . . . Conozco montones de chicas de su misma edad, que siendo más feas que ella dan otra impresión, se pintan, se arreglan. (173)

However, Julia’s mother and her brother Ernesto, who condemn her for not being womanly enough, also have trouble inscribing themselves into traditional gender roles. Julia’s domineering mother is unfaithful to her husband, which leads to the couple’s separation. For years, Julia’s parents appear in public together in an attempt to conceal the disintegration of their marriage from their acquaintances (160). When her father returns to his wife, Julia’s mother and grandmother consolidate their power over him and the entire family: “El regreso de Papá tuvo como resultado aumentar la supremacía de Mamá y de la abuela Lucía para hacer y deshacer cuanto les viniera en gana. . . . [El padre] no sólo se daba por vencido; al esclavizarse de nuevo aumentaba las cadenas de Julia y, en el fondo, las de Ernesto” (205-06). Geraldine Cleary Nichols points out that Julia’s family, where powerful women dominated the father and the maternal grandfather, is clearly a matriarchy (123). The piety of *abuela* Lucía, Julia’s maternal grandmother, and her insistence on female inferiority (Moix 177) conceals a reality where women impose their will on men.

Julia’s elder brother Ernesto also has trouble fitting into the image of conventional masculinity. His father refers to him as “afeminado” (Moix 44), and the family’s maid, Maruja, drops hints that Ernesto might be gay (51).<sup>10</sup> Julia’s mother attempts to introduce

---

<sup>9</sup> In spite of the fact that Chacel acted as Moix’s literary mentor for ten years and clearly inspired her first novel, critics tend to compare Julia to Laforet’s *Nada* and Matute’s *Primera memoria* instead of to Chacel’s *Memorias de Leticia Valle* (Masoliver Rodenas 11; Schumm 149-50).

<sup>10</sup> The character of Ernesto is based on Ana María Moix’s brother, the writer Terenci Moix.



her son to young women “de buena familia” (226) on numerous occasions and is puzzled by her attractive son’s failure to establish a relationship with any of these prospective brides. Julia never refers explicitly to her brother’s homosexuality but participates in helping him conceal his personal life from the family (226-27). By criticizing Julia’s perceived lack of femininity, Ernesto and her mother attempt to compensate for their own unconventional gender identities that their Francoist society could not but view with suspicion.

Julia is a brilliant student whose extensive knowledge of Latin, acquired at an early age, continually surprises her parents and teachers. Unlike Leticia, however, Julia does not pursue knowledge because of a desire to fashion a completely original way of being or because of her love of learning. She only studies hard when attempting to please an adult. For example, at the age of eight, Julia starts learning Latin to impress her grandfather. At school, she cares little for her studies but works hard helping her principal, señorita Mabel, who, for the moment, becomes the most significant adult in Julia’s life (Moix 168). As a twenty-year-old university student, she only studies for a class taught by Eva, a professor of literature and a woman who is deeply admired by both her father and her grandfather: “A Julia no le importaba en absoluto la carrera que había elegido. Nada le importaba. La aburrían los estudios; de hecho, apenas estudiaba. Sólo la asignatura de Eva y nada más” (33). Paradoxically, for Julia, accumulating knowledge is a way of frustrating her own *Bildung* since she only applies herself to her studies as a way of ingratiating herself to an adult.

At every stage of her life, Julia attaches herself to a grown-up whom she invests with supreme importance and whose affection she desperately seeks. Julia insists that she dislikes seeing her reflection in a mirror (Moix 48). Instead, she prefers to become a mirror image of the adults she admires. In this, Julia differs profoundly from Leticia who, in spite of the deep admiration she feels towards her teachers, attempts to dominate them. Julia’s childhood adoration of her mother gradually transforms into indifference and resentment because of the daily indications she receives of how little her mother cares for her: “Mamá, un extraño y peculiar universo llamado Mamá, había sufrido una degradación paulatina, pero bien delimitada; el alejamiento había quedado claramente marcado” (57). Julia’s exile from the orbit of her mother’s existence leads to her physical removal to the house of her paternal grandfather, Julio, and her aunt, Elena. Catherine G. Bellver observes that Julia becomes her grandfather’s double and attempts to refashion herself in his image (38). She parrots the former anarchist’s speeches on the importance of freedom and resistance to tyranny and tells him lies about how much everybody respects and fears her at school (Moix 141). In reality, Julia’s school experiences are disastrous but she feels unable to reveal the truth about herself to her grandfather. Instead, she constructs an image of herself that he will greet with approval. Linda Gould Levine suggests that Julia is motivated by “an obsessive need to find a strong female figure with whom to identify and in whom to find solace” (305). This reading fails to take into account, however, Julia’s indifference to the gender of the adults she imitates and worships.

After don Julio’s death, his granddaughter transfers her affections to the principal of her *colegio*, señorita Mabel. In order to help Julia adapt to school-life, señorita Mabel invites Julia to help fill out paperwork and grade other students’ Latin homework in her office. This kind gesture prompts Julia to appoint the principal to the role of the most significant

person in her life. Time spent away from señorita Mabel becomes intolerable to Julia: "En el balcón recordaba las palabras de la directora, sus movimientos, sus gestos. Le daba pánico pensar en el verano. Dejaría de ir al colegio durante tres meses. Los domingos y sábados por la tarde estaba de mal humor. Las horas que la separaban del lunes se le hacían siempre interminables" (Moix 169). The greatest desire of sixteen-year-old Julia is that her family should disappear, which would allow señorita Mabel to adopt her: "Deseaba que Mamá, Papá y la abuela Lucía desaparecieran para que su sueño pudiera cumplirse. Pero, aun en caso de que desaparecieran, era demasiado mayor para que la señorita Mabel la tratara como una niña, para que la consintiera y mimara" (171). Indeed, Julia's goal is to frustrate her development and remain a little girl forever.

At college, Julia is considered by other students to be mute because she rarely, if ever, says anything (Moix 142). Brooksbank Jones suggests that Julia's incapacity to speak is a metaphor for being silenced by Franco's regime ("Incubus" 81). However, the dictatorship does not prevent other characters in the novel from speaking. Julia's grandfather expresses his anarchist views to a group of friends, her teacher Eva is a highly articulate woman, and her classmates at the university participate in student protests. In contrast, Julia's silence seems to be simply the silence of a person who does not have much of her own to say. She abdicates her entire personality to the adult she happens to worship at the moment and experiences no need to communicate with anybody else. Although Julia's family spares no expense in providing her with a high-quality education, she chooses to silence herself and is indifferent towards studying. Other than following around the significant adult of the moment, she has no interest, hobby, or pursuit of her own. At home, Julia "se aburría mortalmente" but, when Ernesto attempts to entertain his sister by taking her to a cinematographic club, Julia falls asleep out of boredom there, too (Moix 194). It is much easier for Julia to find things that bore her than for her to find things that do not: "Salir con Andrés, acudir a clase por las mañanas, ir al cine, leer, o escuchar cualquier disco, le aburría tanto como permanecer en casa" (33). References to the boredom she experiences appear regularly from the beginning of the novel until its end. Both at school and at the university, Julia perceives herself as different from other students. She entertains violent fantasies about the suffering she could inflict on them: "Ella imaginaba una lluvia de piedras sobre los centenares de estudiantes que deambulaban de un lado a otro, o lo divertido que resultaría clavarles un pie en el suelo y desde el último piso del edificio rociarles con un buen chaparrón de petróleo" (31), "si el día anterior le hubieran puesto en las manos un arma capaz de eliminarlos a todos, la hubiera aceptado con gusto" (191). Such fantasies seem to be the only activity that relieves Julia's boredom.

When she becomes a university student, Julia develops an obsession with her professor Eva. According to Cornejo Parriego, her relationship with Eva is "la relación más decisiva de Julia" (104). Since the story is narrated during the moment when Julia is still obsessed with her professor, it is not surprising that Julia's feelings for Eva sound like the most intense feelings she experiences towards anybody. However, her attachment to Eva is so similar to her previous attachments to her mother, grandfather, and señorita Mabel that we should be wary of assigning any special significance to Julia's fixation of the moment.

In Julia's own words, she attaches herself to Eva "como un perro faldero" (Moix 201). Now that she is older, her intense admiration for her teacher acquires sexual overtones. As usual, Julia fails to analyze her feelings and limits herself to recounting them: "Eva, Eva.

Debía pensar en Eva. Se esforzaba en imaginar que Eva abría la puerta y corría hacia la cama. Ella, Julia, alzaba los brazos hacia Eva, escondía el rostro en su pecho y le contaba lo sucedido. . . . Cerró los ojos e imaginó la escena a su antojo” (12). What sounds like an erotic fantasy, however, immediately transforms into a childish dream where Julia is beset by scary monsters and Eva is her savior who chases the terrifying creatures away: “Eva aparecía junto a la cama, creía en sus palabras y sostenía la persistente mirada de los monstruos que acababan por desaparecer, vencidos al fin” (12). Brooksbank Jones suggests that references to Julia’s lesbian fantasies “participated in the widening of alternatives for women during the last years of Francoism” (“Ana María Moix” 35). Schumm agrees that “the themes of rape, insanity, and female homosexuality . . . help make it a transitional and progressive novel” (166). However, the value of seeing homosexual desire alluded to in a work of fiction is diminished by the fact that a deeply traumatized individual experiences this desire. In her relationship with Eva, Julia is as prepared to erase herself as she is with her grandfather and señorita Mabel. Queer or not, Julia does not take a single step on the road to personhood.

Julia lives for the moments when she can go to Eva’s house to help her with research. As a highly educated, self-sufficient, and professional woman she deeply admires, Eva could have provided Julia with a model of development. However, it never occurs to Julia that she could follow her teacher’s example and become an independent grown woman. Julia carefully observes everything Eva says and does in order to retain her in the same unchanging universe Julia herself inhabits: “Durante las cinco horas se mantenía despierta, sin pensar en nada . . . siguiendo atentamente los gestos de Eva, sus palabras. Por la noche, a solas en su dormitorio, trataba de recordar detalle por detalle de lo sucedido durante la tarde, grabarlo en su mente y alargar de este modo en su memoria aquellas horas” (Moix 222). Levine suggests that Eva is “an intellectual model for Julia” (305). However, Julia never mentions anything about Eva’s research, her teaching, or the ideas she expresses. On the contrary, she cherishes being with Eva because, in Eva’s study, Julia can avoid thinking (Moix 221-22). As usual, Julia hands over all the responsibility for her life to a powerful adult. Once, when Eva is either incapable or unwilling to talk to her on the phone, Julia attempts to kill herself. After her failed suicide attempt, Julia gains no insights into what happened to her and consoles herself with fantasizing about being saved from monsters by Eva.

Melissa A. Stewart observes that the novel is narrated in a way that underscores Julia’s passivity and lack of agency:

Just as the protagonist has little control over the course of her own life, as a focalized character she is prevented from having any influence on the discursive form her story takes. . . . Julia’s thoughts and feelings are filtered through the narrator, who determines what will appear in the text. Clearly, the distancing of Julia from a position of control on the level of discourse mirrors what occurs in the story. (44)

Unlike Leticia, Julia does not analyze what is happening to her and, instead, allows incomprehensible external forces to act upon her: “Pensaba que algo anormal había en ella, algo que la diferenciaba, pero no se detenía a pensar en ello” (Moix 194). On various occasions, Julia mentions her efforts to avoid thinking (28, 29, and 222). Due to her incapacity to understand what is happening to her, Julia spends her life feeling terrified.

The word “miedo” is reiterated on numerous occasions in the novel<sup>11</sup> and is used to describe Julia’s experiences throughout her life. Julia attempts to escape from her innumerable fears by reverting to a childhood state: “Con los ojos cerrados, sin poder ver su cuerpo, se sentía empequeñecida. Tendida en la cama, le parecía que sus piernas habían mermado la mitad y los brazos disminuido, y las manos, pequeñas, las notaba allí donde en realidad empezaban los codos” (59). The childhood version of herself that she calls “Julita” is an all-powerful presence in Julia’s life. Julita resides in a shady “universo inmóvil, sin tiempo” (68) where no growth is possible.

Even though Julia dreads Julita’s regular assaults on her memory and her attempts to trap Julia in the past, she offers little resistance to this threatening presence. On the occasions when she manages to liberate herself from the pain and guilt that Julita forces her to experience, Julia immediately succumbs to the need to return to the world of her childhood terrors: “Conseguía tranquilizarse. Una paz muy dulce la embargaba. Lograba respirar con normalidad, despacio, profundamente. Entonces, algo en ella la obligaba a regresar al estado anterior, buscar motivos para entristecerse de nuevo, volver a sumergirse en un universo de tinieblas y miedo” (Moix 69). Even though Julia perceives her relationship with Julita as one of complete enslavement (83), she does not attempt to break free of this childish version of herself: “Le dolía saberse mayor por fuera y pequeña por dentro. . . . Se desesperaba. Sus deseos no correspondían a su edad, pero se abandonaba a ellos” (171). To the contrary, she evokes Julita every time her misery seems to abate and she begins to enjoy life. Julita is Julia’s way of terrifying herself back into an endless childhood. Julia believes that Julita has the power to trap her in the past and she feels incapable of resisting her. Repeatedly, Julita invades her memory and frustrates every attempt on Julia’s part to construct a coherent story of her life.

The image that haunts the adult Julia is that of six-year-old Julita sitting in the doorway of the family’s house in Sitges: “Julita, sentada en el portal de la casa, pequeña y delgada, los pies descalzos, las trenzas medio deshechas, el pantalón corto y el jersey azul marino con un ancla dibujada en el pecho, la mirada baja, fija en dos piedras que machacaba una contra otra, la obligaba a recordar cosas así, confusas, inconexas” (Moix 68). The imagery of this scene directly relates to the central conflict of the novel: Julia perceives herself as anchored on the threshold between infancy and adulthood. Her hair is still in childish braids that are half undone, suggesting a more adult hairstyle. During her teenage years, Julia’s only attempt at rebelling against the authority of her mother and grandmother consists of wearing her hair loose (49). She can differ from Julita in her choice of hairstyle and nothing more.

The image of Julita sitting on the threshold of the summer home is significant to Julia because it takes her back to the day when she fantasized about killing her father: “Papá podía caer al pozo. Aún más—y entonces lo supo, sin dudas—ella podía levantarse con cuidado de la silla, avanzar unos pasos sin hacer ruido y empujarle” (Moix 78). On that day, her father made his first and last attempt to exercise some authority over his family. Since her mother and grandmother were absent, Julia was next in line to rule their matriarchal family: “Papá les reñía por nada. Pegó una bofetada a Ernesto. . . . Pero a Julita no le importaba nada de lo que dijera o gritara Papá. Era como si el deseo de aquella mañana

---

<sup>11</sup> See the following pages: 10, 13, 28, 38, 48, 69, 100, 156, 158, 181, 186, 224, and 234.

junto al pozo se hubiera convertido en un arma poderosa con la que pudiera vencer a Papá en cualquier momento; un arma infalible de la cual ella, Julita, iba a disponer desde entonces" (79). This newfound sense of power terrified Julia. She sat in the doorway, waiting for her mother to come home and reestablish the order in the family (82).

Cornejo Parriego suggests that Julia is driven by the need to rebel against an oppressive gender binary (103). However, such binary is not strictly enforced by anybody in the novel. In the course of her life, Julia is surrounded with people who defy gender stereotypes: her chronically sick and weakened brother Rafael; her gay brother Ernesto; her shy, gentle admirers Andrés and Carlos; and strong, authoritative women like her mother, grandmother, classmate Lidia, and principal Mabel, and teacher Eva.<sup>12</sup> Schumm points out that Julia fantasizes about murdering her father because she transfers some of the rage she feels towards Víctor, her rapist, onto him (160). It is equally important, however, that Víctor's gender identity is cast into question on the eve of the rape: "A Mamá le gustaba Víctor, su presencia en la casa. Es un chico fino, educado, simpático y distinguido. Otra cosa que me callo, decía Papá. Para ti un hombre atento, elegante y sensible ya es un... le respondía Mamá excitada" (Moix 65). The world of fluid gender identities that Chacel tried to inaugurate through Leticia in *Memorias de Leticia Valle* is present in *Julia*, but nothing has become simpler as a result. Violence and abuse are still ubiquitous. As she sits in the doorway of the Sitges house, Julita castigates herself for fantasizing about taking her mother's place. She fears that now that she has imagined herself doing so, her mother might die. From that moment on, Julita frustrates every attempt her adult self makes to escape from her eternal childhood. What Julia's mother sees as her daughter's confused gender identity (156) is, in reality, nothing but a fear of adulthood.

Many different critical interpretations exist of Julia's fixation on this particular memory of Julita in Sitges. Nichols suggests that on that day Julia decides to castigate herself for sharing in society's unfairness and loving her undeserving mother more than she loves her downtrodden father (118-19). Sara E. Schyfter believes that Julita's sense of guilt stems from her violation of society's taboos against wishing to murder one's parents (45). For Cornejo Parriego, "Julita simboliza la rebelión contra la degradación de un universo femenino y la negación a vivir en una sociedad donde no hay lugar para su deseo" (110). None of these readings, however, take into account the nature of Julita's punishment. Of all the things she could renounce to castigate herself, she chooses to give up adulthood. Since she remains sitting eternally in the doorway wearing her childish short pants, she does not have to face the task of fashioning an adult gender identity.

Julia's desire to punish herself for this fantasy is when she feels, for the first time, "la necesidad de pensar en algo que la llenara de dolor, de miedo, de angustia" (Moix 82). For the next fifteen years, she will evoke this moment whenever she experiences a temptation to liberate herself from the past and move ahead in her development. Bellver suggests that Julita is resentful of Julia and wants to punish her for "having grown up and left her behind" (31). However, there is no evidence that Julia has grown up. At the age of twenty, she is as

---

<sup>12</sup> Julia's single experience of a traditional patriarchal family structure is the one she observes in the house of her grandfather and her aunt Elena. However, in Julia's own words, the years she spent in her grandfather's house "habían sido cinco años en blanco, cinco años felices que resbalaron sobre ella y de los que no quedaba absolutamente nada" (Moix 191).

dependent on a significant adult's approval as she was at five and she is incapable of being even remotely self-sufficient. For example, as a child, Julia spent hours waiting for her mother to come home. As an adult, she does nothing but wait for Eva to pay attention to her. The reason why Julita is stuck on the threshold between infancy and adulthood is that Julia does not let her go.

Ellen Cecilia Mayock refers to *Memorias de Leticia Valle* and *Julia* as “inverted Bildungsromane” (45). It is true that both Leticia and Julia decide to frustrate their development in a society that does not welcome female intellectual and personal growth. However, Leticia arrives at a decision to stunt her growth at the age of twelve, which is hardly a time when one's *Bildung* is truly complete. In contrast, Moix's Julia is curled in bed in a fetal position at the age of twenty, unable to formulate what is causing her misery. Stewart points out that even the act of invoking memories is a passive one on Julia's part: “She is not the remembering subject, but rather, the object around whom the memories accumulate” (42). At the end of the novel, Julia repudiates her entire existence and arrives at the conclusion that everything that took place in her life did not really happen: “No habían transcurrido quince años, nada había sucedido. . . . Julia—lo sabía ahora—jamás existió. . . . Sólo Julita había existido durante aquellos quince años, de los que nada, absolutamente nada, quedaba” (Moix 234). Her *Bildung* did not fail; it simply never took place.

During the thirty-six years of Franco's dictatorship, the interest of both the writers and the readers towards the female *Bildungsroman* genre did not diminish. Franco's regime stripped women of the rights they had won during the feminist struggles of the early twentieth century. Women were deprived of the right to decide freely upon the course of their lives. In the Spanish society of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, discussions about the best way to educate women had proliferated and the leading thinkers and writers of the period participated in these discussions. The dictatorship silenced this plurality of voices and imposed a monolithic discourse as to the only acceptable way of being female. Therefore, female *Bildungsroman* flourished during Franco's regime because it was the only space in which different versions of female development could be explored. Writers belonging to different generations and separated by exile, like Chacel and Moix, could establish a dialogue about female *Bildung* in their novels of female development.

We have no way of knowing whether Leticia will carry out her plan to stunt her growth permanently. The novel ends with a traumatized twelve-year-old making a decision she might not uphold later in life. However, the way Chacel's novel is narrated offers the readers a glimpse into the likelihood of Leticia's continued self-infantilization. Leticia attempts to make herself sound older than she is even though she narrates her story after her decision to stop developing any further. Her complex sentence structures and rich vocabulary attempt to conceal the instances when Leticia is incapable of understanding the actions and the words of adults (Davies 159-60). In contrast, Moix's *Julia* is narrated in short, simple phrases with a minimum of introspection. The indirect free style of the novel mirrors Julia's infantile speech. For somebody with a great knowledge of Latin, her vocabulary is surprisingly limited. Therefore, when compared to Julia's speech, Leticia's expressed wish to stop growing is not borne out by the manner in which she tells her story. No doubt, Leticia would place Julia among the women who are “enfermas de su niñez”

(Chacel, *Memorias* 17). Leticia's tragedy is a result of her desire to grow up too fast while Julia's tragedy is a result of her refusal to grow.

In her discussion of European and American *Bildungsromane* by George Eliot, Theodor Fontane, and Kate Chopin, Marianne Hirsch suggests that the novels of female development written by both male and female authors of the nineteenth century demonstrate the impossibility of progress for their female protagonists: "The plot of inner development traces a discontinuous, circular path which, rather than moving forward, culminates in a return to origins. . . . With this circularity, structures of repetition rather than structures of progression come to dominate the plot" (26). In Spain, novels of female development that rely heavily on a circular plot and structures of repetition became ubiquitous in the twentieth century during the decades of Franco's dictatorship. In addition, the characteristics that Hirsch assigns to nineteenth-century *Bildungsromane* featuring female protagonists apply much better to novels by Chacel, Laforet, Matute, Rodoreda, Barbero, Tusquets, and Moix. These characteristics include "the heroines' refusal of a heterosexual social reality that violates their psychological needs, a reality defined by images of fragmentation, separation, discontinuity, alienation, and self-denial . . . allegiance to childhood, spiritual withdrawal, and ultimately death" (27-28). The protagonist of Chacel's *Memorias de Leticia Valle* struggles against a society that denies her opportunities to grow and progress. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the female protagonists of *Bildungsromane* abandon the struggle. They frustrate their own development and regress to a childhood stage of their own free will.

### Works Cited

- Bellver, Catherine G. "Division, Duplication, and Doubling in the Novels of Ana María Moix." *Nuevos y novísimos: Algunas perspectivas críticas sobre la narrativa española desde la década de los 60*. Ed. Ricardo Landeira and Luis González-del-Valle. Boulder: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1987. 29-41. Print.
- Brooksbank Jones, Anny. "The Incubus and I: Unbalancing Acts in Moix's *Julia*." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 72.1 (1995): 73-85. Print.
- . "Ana María Moix and the Sacrifice of Order." *Letras femeninas* 23.1-2 (1997): 21-40. Print.
- Chacel, Rosa. *Memorias de Leticia Valle*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1993. Print.
- . *Alcancía. Vuelta*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1982. Print.
- Cornejo Parriego, Rosalía. *Entre mujeres: Política de la amistad y el deseo en la narrativa española contemporánea*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007. Print.
- Davies, Catherine. *Spanish Women's Writing, 1849-1996*. London: Athlone, 1998. Print.
- Dávila Gonçalves, Michele C. "El archivo de la memoria: La novela de formación femenina de Rosa Chacel, Rosa Montero, Rosario Castellanos y Elena Poniatowska." Diss. U of Colorado, 1997. Print.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm." *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover: UP of New England, 1983. 23-48. Print.

- Kingery, Sandra. "Writing Away the Distance: Letters between Ana María Moix and Rosa Chacel." *Hispanic Journal* 23.2 (2002):103-17. Print.
- Levine, Linda Gould. "The Censored Sex: Woman as Author and Character in Franco's Spain." *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols*. Ed. Beth Miller. Berkeley: U of California P, 1983. 289-315. Print.
- Masoliver Rodenas, Juan Antonio. "La base sexta contra Ana María Moix." *Camp de l'arpa* 9 (1974): 9-12. Print.
- Mayock, Ellen Cecilia. "Shifting Families and Incest in Chacel and Moix." *The Ties That Bind: Questioning Family Dynamics and Family Discourse in Hispanic Literature*. Lanham: UP of America, 2004. 43-61. Print.
- Moix, Ana María. *Julia*. Barcelona: Lumen, 2002. Print.
- Nash, Mary. "Women's Role in the Spanish Civil War." *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women*. Ed. Christine Fauré. New York: Routledge, 2003. 347-56. Print.
- Nichols, Geraldine Cleary. "Julia: 'This Is the Way the World Ends.'" *Novelistas femeninas de la postguerra española*. Ed. Janet W. Pérez. Madrid: Studia Humanitatis, 1983. 113-23. Print.
- Pérez-Magallón, Jesús. "Leticia Valle o la indeterminación genérica." *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea* 28.1 (2003): 139-59. Print.
- Rosales, Elisa. "Memorias de Leticia Valle: Rosa Chacel o el delecto de lo inaudito." *Hispania* 83.2 (2000): 222-31. Print.
- Schumm, Sandra J. "Progressive Schizophrenia in Ana María Moix's *Julia*." *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos* 19.1 (1994): 149-71. Print.
- Schyfter, Sara E. "Rites without Passage: The Adolescent World of Ana María Moix's *Julia*." *The Analysis of Literary Texts: Current Trends in Methodology*. Ed. Randolph D. Pope. Ypsilanti: Bilingual, 1980. 41-50. Print.
- Stewart, Melissa A. "Memory in Ana María Moix's *Julia*." *Ojancano* 10 (1995): 41-49. Print.