

the essential narcissism: what Miguel «loved» in her was her adoration of himself. But while attracted physically by Miguel, she began to «love» him only when she believed him to be a reflection of her own tastes and opinions. Considerable cynicism imbues Riera's bitter implication that all love is reducible ultimately to a *Cuestión de amor propio*.

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JANET PÉREZ

Maria Antònia Oliver. *Antípodes*, Edicions de la Magrana, 1988, 235 pp.

Sailing on stormy seas (both literal and figurative) in her second adventure, Lònia Guiu, the Mallorcan detective invented by Maria Antònia Oliver, once again manages to turn the *roman noir* on its often sexist ear. Guiu, who first appeared in 1987 in *Estudi en lila* (translated into English by Kathleen McNerny, Seal Press, 1987), is a strong, intelligent woman who immigrated from the island to Barcelona as the Franco dictatorship was creaking to an end, and moved from department store detecting through clandestine political activities to her own small private investigation firm, aided by her male assistant and secretary, Quim. While *Estudi en lila* took a cold look at rape in the Catalan society and the exploitation of Filipino maids, *Antípodes* deals with prostitution and, ironically, the way shallow values in the Mallorcan upper crust sometimes lead the island's own daughters to sell their bodies.

In clear, flexible Catalan with Mallorcan-flavored dialogue Oliver constructs her plot with a logical sequence of events and a deftly surprising ending.

The book's sexual politics are also conveyed clearly and without pamphleteering, and Oliver passes with ease from the sensitive description of Quim's coming out, to the unembarrassed presentation of Lonia's sexual and affective needs. Particularly adept is Oliver's variation played on the theme of the detective who sets out to rescue a pretty young girl caught up in the web of prostitution, a situation in which the male detective is often propelled by sexual desire masked as paternal or chivalrous concern. Oliver's inversion of this scheme is brilliant, and constitutes

the nucleus of a novel that far transcends the strictures many practitioners of this genre impose on themselves.

No man is an island, if you believe John Donne, but as the title of this book implies, some women may be. The genius of Maria Antònia Oliver here lies in describing the island condition, and then providing both characters and readers with navigational charts to get from one island to another.

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PATRICIA HART

Álvaro Pombo. *Los delitos insignificantes*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1986, 199 pp.

Según J. L. Aranguren, «la relación homosexual, escondida o clandestinamente llevada, por la fuerza de las circunstancias de una existencia oficialmente presentable, es vivida por dentro como una tranquila, dulce, cotidiana necesidad de 'estar' con el otro» (Prólogo del primer libro en prosa del poeta Álvaro Pombo, *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*, Barcelona, La Gaya Ciencia, 1977, p. 7). Esta frase podría aplicarse —equivocadamente— a la casi totalidad de *Los delitos insignificantes* antes del desencadenamiento de la tragedia final anunciada por una acumulación de procacidades estridentes, voluntariamente fuera de tono en la novela y en el universo discretísimo de la futura víctima, Ortega («chupar», pp. 166 y 197; «dar por el culo», pp. 166, 197 y 198).

Pero la relación homosexual entre el casi viejo Ortega, escritor frustrado, y el joven, guapo y medio abúlico Quirós («Igual me da estar aquí que en otro sitio», p. 146) aparece sólo como una peripécia superestructural en una novela cuya infraestructura se basa en otros elementos también apuntados por Aranguren en el prólogo citado más arriba: «los acontecimientos considerados por todos decisivos, la muerte misma, quedan desdibujados, disueltos, desustanciados, desrealizados» (p. 8). La «falta de sustancia» del primer título se relaciona estrechamente con lo «insignificante» del último.

Lo esencial de la novela es esta presentación de un mundo «desustanciado», desestructurado, invertebrado, casi absurdo y tan desordenado como las conversaciones de los dos protagonistas:

«—¡Qué conversación más desordenada!

—Las mejores conversaciones son así» (p. 11).