

I will not reveal the final surprise in this book full of surprises. I will say, however, that with *Sentimental* Sergi Pàmies has certainly managed to create a powerful and suggestive narrative that captures the urban angst of our time without giving in to any sentimentalism. And that is indeed no minor achievement.

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Ana Rodríguez-Fischer. *Objetos extraviados*. Barcelona, Lumen, 1995, 200 pp.

This novel transforms raw autobiographical material into fiction through the story of a woman associated with one of the most extraordinary artistic groups in modern Spain. The narration itself is complex: Rodríguez-Fischer experiments with technique and perspective, using her subject as the means to explore dimensions that transcend the personal story. The protagonist's unsentimental review of her life is bittersweet, tinged with irony; her remarks expose a subversive and critical attitude that characterized her generation.

Maruja Mallo (1902-1995) was born in Galicia but went to Madrid when she was a young woman. There she associated with members of the Generation of 1927, forming friendships and taking part in their activities. She was a well-known artist in her own right: her vanguardist paintings gained international recognition. She also shared the fate of other intellectuals of her day: a long period of exile (1937-62), the return to her homeland, the inevitable disillusionment and alienation as she saw the conformism that permeated life under the Franco regime.

The retrospective «autobiography» begins in a hospital where Mallo lies dying. Thus sterile, confining space is the point of departure for an incursion into the past and a chronological journey through her life, which she describes with the sensitivity of an artist rather than the detailed eye of a chronicler. Disjointed sensations, ideas, and visual images become the springboard for memory, a technique which gives an oneiric, surrealist quality to the chapters of her life. The title itself is a quotation from Gómez de la Serna («El sueño es un depósito de objetos extraviados»), an apt way to show how she gathers in her memories and displays them in her highly personal style. The opening words are one example: «Tubos. Plástico. Transparencia. Suero. Gotas. Gotas lentas, tristes. Monotonía. Silencio» (13).

With death as an ever-present leitmotif, Mallo reviews the events in her life, moving from her childhood in Galicia, her experiences in Madrid (art school, discovery of the city, relationship with the intellectuals of the day), her days as an art teacher in Arévalo, to the years of self-exile in South American and eventual return. Interspersed throughout this life

story are Mallo's explanations of how her art captures and translates the essence of key episodes in her life.

Her playful, nonconformist nature balances more serious events with a light note: winning a cursing contest in Madrid, dressing as a man so she could visit the Silos monastery with Lorca and Dalí, arriving at a tertulia wearing nothing but a fur coat. Her anti-bourgeois attitude also appears in her identification with and admiration for the *pueblo*, which incarnates her own rebellious spirit and desire for authenticity.

The chronological presentation has a highly visual dimension that unfolds through impressions, surrealistic images or other experimental modes. The narrative supports this innovative (auto)biographical form: alternating between first and second person, Mallo typically complements a train of thought with a series of rapid, often hermetic allusions, the unusual juxtaposition of ideas, words or scenes, and a predilection for cubist images and configurations.

The final chapter adopts yet another experimental form: much in the manner of a musical reprise, the narrative condenses and transforms the components of Mallo's life into a fairy tale, ironically (and truthfully) omitting the traditional happy closure.

A second level sets Mallo's life within the historical and artistic times in which she lived. Allusion rather than detail chronicles her interaction with the artists of her day: the book is replete with references to «Federico,» «Ramón,» Dalí, Buñuel, and a host of others. The social and political scene of Spain forms an omnipresent (and menacing) background. She provides tragic details concerning the atrocities and dirty tricks of the *falange* and later, after her return, feels estranged by the passivity and lack of imagination that characterize the younger generation.

Still another level deals extensively with Mallo's artistic development: her credo, artistic ideas, and works. The translation of experience to canvas is a major theme, as she fully discusses how her art comes into being. In effect, recollection of an episode often moves into a visual mode as she elucidates the relationship between reality and art.

In a forward, Rodríguez-Fischer explains that whenever possible she has incorporated fragments of Mallo's lectures or other written works, interviews, etc., thereby allowing the «protagonist» to speak for herself. The reader is always aware that this fictional autobiography may be more fact than fiction: the ratio between the two is never clear, although in her «Epílogo anticipado,» Rodríguez-Fischer gives her «subject» due credit for the majority of the work. Having staked out both life and art as her territory, the author makes it impossible to disentangle fact from fiction or to discern the boundaries between the two.

Whether viewed as a fictional autobiography or the rendition of a crucial historical period as seen through the lens of a creative artist, this novel provides a chronicle and a translation of the spirit of a unique age that disappeared after the Civil War. Through her subject the novelist

transmits a very vivid sense of discovery, a desire to transcend, and the feeling of isolation that the alienated individual experiences in the face of attitudes and events at odds with her beliefs. As Mallo herself states, «Esa es mi gran tragedia: haber estado siempre sólo medio loca» (185).

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MARGARET E. W. JONES

Belén Gopegui. *Tocarnos la cara*. Barcelona Editorial Anagrama, 1995, 231 pp.

Gopegui (Madrid, 1963) pertenece plenamente a la oleada narrativa de la última década de este siglo veinte, habiendo publicado su primera novela, *La escala de los mapas*, en 1993. Muy admirada por la originalidad de sus estrategias narrativas y la brillante sencillez de sus inesperadas metáforas, esta ficción inicial le valió a su autora el premio Tigre Juan (1993), asimismo como el premio iberoamericano de Primeras Novelas «Santiago del Nuevo Extremo» (1994). La segunda novela de Gopegui exhibe las mismas cualidades que trajeron el éxito a su antecesora.

Narración en cierto sentido de protagonista múltiple, utiliza una técnica en apariencia autobiográfica, con una narradora en primera persona quien, después de cinco breves capítulos iniciales de anonimato, resulta llamarse Sandra (aunque suele referirse a sí misma en tercera persona). Hace la presentación de sí misma de manera impersonal, a través de la colectividad de su generación. Pertenece, con los demás personajes para-protagónicos, a la periferia del mundo teatral, un grupo de estudiantes dramáticos, discípulos de un extraño, brillante, frustrado profesor experimental, Simón Catero. Este, separado de su mujer después de años dramáticos de teatralidad matrimonial, parece empeñado en conseguir el fracaso, cuánto más rotundo, mejor. Cuatro alumnos entre los más allegados al profesor forman un círculo interior: Ana y Oscar, que ya se alejan en busca de existencias más estables, y Sandra e Íñigo, que todavía estudian con Simón cuando éste decide embarcar a los cuatro en un nuevo proyecto experimental, la creación de un «teatro personal», individualizado para cada espectador o patrón, una experiencia única e irrepetible, absolutamente diferente cada vez. Algo parecido a la confesión o la relación entre el alienista y el cliente, dicha «representación» de nuevo teatro se puede situar entre el psicodrama y el «happening». Utilizan un lugar que llaman el Probador, que más parece un vestuario de bailarinas, todo rodeado de espejos. Los cuatro participantes parecen cifrar el sentido de sus existencias en la tarea imposible de complacer al profesor y conseguir el éxito en un juego cuyas reglas no sólo se desconocen, sino que se siguen cambiando. Los escasos ingresos económicos dependen de encontrar para cada función una persona adinerada dispuesta a pagar una función de naturaleza y contenido desconocidos tan-