Uncanny Periphery: Existential(ist) Latin American Narratives of the 1930s

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UNCANNY PERIPHERY: EXISTENTIAL(IST) LATIN AMERICAN NARRATIVES
OF THE 1930s

By
Edwin Murillo

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
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UNCANNY PERIPHERY: EXISTENTIAL(IST) LATIN AMERICAN NARRATIVES OF THE 1930s

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This dissertation investigates the narrative practice of Latin American Existentialism. My project tracks the structures, themes, and interpretations of Existentialism across national borders in the belief that a common expression exists which is distinctly Latin American. I begin this philosophical cartography, with four Existential(ist) novels produced in Latin America during the 1930s. Specifically, I will examine the Existentialist quality of Enrique Labrador Ruiz’s El laberinto de si mismo (1933), María Luisa Bombal’s La última niebla (1934) and La amortajada (1938), and Graciliano Ramos’s Angústia (1936). These narratives are analyzed in relation to the core thematic of Existential philosophy. I read these narratives as Existential(ist) because they are of, relating to and characterized by a philosophy of existence, and because they simultaneously produce an Existential discourse.

My study is, at one level, comparative in that I pursue the points of emergence of Existentialism’s prominent categories not only across national borders, but also across disciplines. I relate the tradition of Latin American thought in the first half of the 20th century and Existential philosophy from Europe to collectivize the thematic points of contact. These I contrast with our literary
production of the 1930s. By emphasizing the particularities and continuations of Latin America’s contribution to the Existential canon I, in effect, periodize an era which is foundational in the history of Latin American literature. Furthermore, by acknowledging the literary presence of Latin American Existentialism we can appreciate the explicit narrative interrogation of the Self through aesthetic, ethical, and ontological parameters.
Agradecimentos

I read once (an English bloke, I believe) that "brevity is the soul of wit." Não concordo. Pode ser que eu nunca consegui entender isso. As pessoas que me conhecem bem juram que eu não consigo resistir à uma boa conversa. Não acreditem neles. Sempre foi um amante do silêncio, das palavras escritas, e dos meus sonhos da minha Mariana. A los aficionados de literatura, que lleguen a esta tesis por deber, curiosidad o displicencia, quedan ustedes bien advertidos. Estos personajes son de siglos pasados, sin embargo sus nietos y bisnietos nos rodean hoy.

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Chapter I:
Uncanny Periphery: An Introduction

This dissertation is an investigation of the narrative practice of Latin American Existentialism. My project tracks the structures, themes, and interpretations of Existentialism across national borders in the belief that a common expression exists which is distinctly Latin American. I trace this philosophical cartography through an analysis of the following novels: the Cuban Enrique Labrador Ruiz’s *El laberinto de sí mismo* (1933), the Chilean María Luisa Bombal’s *La última niebla* (1934) and *La amortajada* (1938), and the Brazilian Graciliano Ramos’s *Angústia* (1936). These narratives will be analyzed in relation to a core thematic of Existential philosophy, and from this Existential nucleus I approach the texts as either Existentialist novels or novels with Existential thematics. To distinguish the two, I define the Existentialist novel as a narrative which within a paradigmatic confessional model produces explicit philosophical discourses. On the other hand, I identify the novel with Existential qualities as that which is related to and characterized by a philosophy of existence, but which can take on distinct artistic tendencies (*i.e.*, Avant-Garde, Surrealist, or Neorealist novels).

I employ the rubric of Existentialist, in this dual capacity, as my investigative springboard from which to expound on the aesthetic, ethical, and
ontological quandaries of the novels I consider. I will argue that Existentialist literature is the narrative space in which humanity’s fragmented sense of self, his estrangement from the enlightened discourses of bourgeois modernity, the search for relevance lived as a consequence of lost faith and the recognition of man as orphaned are played out. These novels showcase humankind’s solitude incited by the nascent sensitivity to the bankruptcy of modern civilized society and the grand narratives of progress. This disenchantment functions as a Damoclesian shadow of "demonic modernity," to use Matei Calinescu’s words here, which would loom large in the narrative consciousness of many writers in Latin America over the course of the second half of the 20th century.

My study is, at one level, comparative in that I pursue the points of emergence of Existentialism’s prominent categories not only across national borders, but also across disciplines. I relate the tradition of Latin American thought in the first half of the 20th century and Existential philosophy from Europe to collectivize the thematic points of contact. These I contrast with our literary production of the 1930s. By emphasizing the particularities and continuations of Latin America’s contribution to the Existential canon, I periodize an era which is foundational in the history of Latin American literature.

The selection of the aforementioned novels allows me to directly spotlight the period prior to the emergence of the canonical variant of Existentialism. In doing so, my dissertation assesses the Latin American narrative contribution to the poetics of this literary mode, for the most part overlooked from critical and theoretical perspectives. In no way does my study mean to suggest that the
association of Existentialism with literature has been ignored. Rather, I seek to organize a focused intellectual history and trace some of the particularities of the narrative manifestation of Existentialism in Latin America. By acknowledging the literary presence of Latin American Existentialism we can appreciate the explicit narrative interrogation of the Self through aesthetic, ethical, and ontological parameters.²

One of the challenges to the study of Latin American Existentialism has been the repeated critical evaluation as either mimetic or subordinated to the variant disseminated in Europe. Historically, however, the catastrophic milieu credited with helping crystallizing Existentialism as a philosophical phenomenon was a socioeconomic collapse of global proportions. The ensuing Great Depression, as it would be known, although most familiar in its North American and European dimensions, was truly an international event. As Hugo Achugar has pointed out, for Latin America this meant: "una vivencia de la realidad cotidiana de nuestra América; ahora ineludiblemente consciente de su inserción en el mercado, en la sociedad y en la cultura mundial" (641). In fact, the post Black Friday narratives I study reflect this consciousness; this self-awareness of the encroachment of "la cultura mundial" reflected in the symptomatic fragmentation of rationality and disjointed appreciation of the self prevalent in cultural production of the continent.

In Latin America, the depression marked a pronounced stimulus to new kinds of proactive political actions, and particularly greater state involvement in planning and direction. New government vigor did not alleviate the economic
effects of the depression, which escaped the control of most individual states, but it did set in motion a neo-authoritarian phase of sociopolitical evolution. As Thomas Skidmore has stated "the ensuing world depression put great pressures on the political systems of Latin American countries, many of which suffered military coups" (52). This point is of consequence because a widespread return to socioeconomic austerity and political authoritarianism is prevalent throughout the region.\(^3\) A generalized turn away from what Ángel Rama called "the vogue of ‘modernization’" \((\text{Lettered 74})\).\(^4\) Another point of contention with respect to the autonomy of Latin American Existentialism has been the inattention to its historical fingerprints. Therefore, the indictment of Latin American Existentialism as a mimetic alternative to the European original is problematic because of the presence of an explicit Existential discourse on our continent as early as the turn of the century.

**Archeological Curiosity**

My dissertation is inspired by two peculiarities in the history of Latin America literature. Firstly, the self flagellation of the world renowned Boom writers which led many of them to mourn their genealogical void. As José Donoso has explained these Boom writers sought to "borrar las fronteras, los criollistas, regionalistas y costumbristas, atareados como hormigas" \((23)\), compelling them towards deconstructive discourses of liberation. However, in the process of lamentation they also acted dismissively of their inherited narrative tradition, a legacy that was treated as a debilitated literary consignment.
Following this vein of thought, Rebecca E. Biron has pointed out how this disavowal was symptomatic of an attempt to legitimize their take on cultural identity. Biron finds that in such novels as Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La casa verde* (1966) and Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (1967), to name only two, a male-centered discourse of myth-making tended to rely "on a cult of authorial originality" (4). The two points to emphasize, here, are that these giants of Latin American literature first attempted to negate a rich literary history as a means of liberating themselves from traditions they viewed as limiting. However, these writers have almost in unanimity hailed the "authorial originality" of the work of María Luisa Bombal and Juan Carlos Onetti.

In fact, the disenfranchised individuals which populate Bombal’s and Onetti’s novels were applauded by the Boom and the critics alike for their ecumenical characteristics. Removed from the much maligned provincialism Donoso mentions, Bombal and Onetti represent two literary beacons in the continent’s history. Yet like the Boom generation, both the Chilean and the Argentine, did not represent an isolated incident of estranged brilliance or a spontaneous combustion of presence. These two authors are joined by the likes of Eduardo Barrios, Pablo Neruda, and Roberto Arlt in the first two decades of the 20th century. To these writers I can add such novelists as Eduardo Mallea, Clarice Lispector, José Marín Cañas, and Miguel Angel Cevallos in the 1940s and 1950s, casting a dubious light on Donoso’s claims of "padres debilitados" (20) in the literary history of Latin America.
The second point of departure for my project concerns the central role of Onetti’s *El pozo* (1939). Rama has noted that Onetti’s text is a "pieza fundamental de la literatura- y la estética- que comienza a abrirse paso [...] entre jóvenes intelectuales y que luego se impondrá de modo rotundo" (123). Following Ramas’s lead, Mario Vargas Llosa in his editorial "Primitivos y Creadores" for *The Times Literary Supplement* also isolates the genesis of the "Nueva Narrativa" with one specific author, Onetti, and with one particular novel, the aforementioned *El pozo*. Onetti’s novel cultivates a fractured vision of man and more importantly the Uruguayan’s work has categorically been characterized as Existential. However, Marilyn Frankenthaler has stressed the self-determination of *El pozo* by emphasizing that "Onetti es existencialista a lo Onetti" (137). The critical accord on the fundamental role of Onetti’s text and its characterization as an Existential novel makes the neglect of this narrative mode an incongruity from a literary history perspective. In this respect, my study takes the first steps to begin to rectify this lapse, given the foundational role such a narrative vision has had in the literary history of Latin America.

In general terms, the Existentialist texts I utilize explore the aesthetic and psychological costs of the searching out of authenticity. These texts, I argue, are discursively belligerent self-questioning quest narratives and as such, they embody a poetics of contestation. My project approximates pivotal 1930s in order to highlight how these narratives are built upon complex aesthetic reformulations from the historical Avant-Garde, while pursuing explicit interplays between ontological and ethical questions. In this line of thinking, the ideological role of
the Avant-Garde can not be understated. Renato Poggioli has remarked that an
estrangement within modern society could be singled out as the impetus for the
resurgence of an art of contestation. In this vein, the ideology of the Avant-Garde
is stimulated by a sense of alienation, a similar perception of existence which
stimulates Existentialist thinkers:

At least theoretically, it is not that society against which the avant-garde means to react, but against the civilization it creates and
represents [...] Faithful to qualitative values, the artist facing the
quantitative values of modern civilization feels himself left out and
rebellious [...] so much a derelict, rejected and isolated. (108)

Given Poggioli’s analysis of the historical Avant-Garde’s ethical problems which
project outwardly esthetically, I must call attention to the fact that Labrador Ruiz’s
Laberinto begins with an aesthetic crisis which evolves rapidly towards the
Existential problem of the protagonist’s sense of validity. For her part, Bombal's
texts employ a highly experimental narrative approach to convey her anti-
heroine’s confrontation with their asphyxiating existence, and Ramos’s
protagonist is a failed poet whose highly unconventional narrated life attempts to
capture the anguished burden of his insignificance. What I want to reiterate is the
historical Avant-Garde in Latin America created the ideological and aesthetic
fissures for the manifestations of Existentialist narratives, afterwards. And so the
shared ideological visions which inspired the reassessment of aesthetic and
ethical perspectives and the explicit resentment so palpable in both are to be
expected as we read these narratives.

Francisco Larroyo has also brought attention to Existentialism ’s "actitud
de independencia frente a la tradición, frente a las convicciones y creencias de la
‘comunidad’. En dicha actitud, el filósofo se pone por encima de cuanto existe, ya que busca los principios del ser” (208-9). These contemptuous and individualized attitudes, which Larroyo directly relates to the philosophical texts, are also displayed by the narratives. In the Latin American Existentialist novels I focus on, this credo of rebelliousness develops to encapsulate the insoluble problematic of identity through reflexivity.

In order to establish the common space which allows me to group these texts by authors representing different nationalities, I have divided my introductory comments into the following six sections. In section two the focal point is Existentialism, outlining the operational definition of the term. I focus on the work of Julio Fausto Fernández and Rhéa Sylvia Maurão who have taken up the task of collectivizing the literary and philosophical intersections of this phenomenon. The third part will showcase Latin American Existentialism, with emphasis placed on the philosophical texts of Raimundo Farias Brito and Carlos Astrada. This is followed by the literary legacy of Existentialist narratives in Latin America; while in part five I discuss the anti-hero. The formal structures of the Existentialist novel are discussed in segment six. In this section I will underline the poetics of the Existentialist novel through a discussion on Fiódor Dostoevski’s Notes from the Underground (1864), Jean-Paul Sartre’s Nausea (1938), Onetti’s El pozo (1939), and Ernesto Sábato’s El túnel (1948). I close this chapter by introducing the novels I explore in my dissertation and the aspects I will focus on in each.
Existentialisms

Demetrio Estébanez Calderón defines "existencialismo" as a "movimiento filosófico que se desarrolla en Europa durante el periodo de entreguerras (1918-1939) y en la etapa inmediatamente posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial, "to which he adds that the central thrust of this philosophy is "la afirmación de la primacía del individuo concreto frente a lo universal, y de la existencia frente a la esencia" (179-180). Taken this premise, I would add that to speak of Existentialism, as such, becomes more fruitful if we begin to accept individualized visions of what this philosophical method signifies. José Fernandes suggests that this manner of understanding existence, because of its deconstructive quality, demands that instead of a unified Existentialism, we should "falar de existencialismos" (28). Nevertheless, given the multiplicity of interpretations in Existentialism "hay un fondo común en todas estas direcciones que constituye lo peculiar y característico del existencialismo" (Larroyo 19), which is the preeminent preoccupation with recuperating individuality.

As much a literary phenomenon as a philosophical one, Existentialism is a heterogeneous cluster of philosophical ideas which in their narrative manifestation create literary case studies contextualized within concrete historical and social backdrops. A common element of Existentialism is the often cited Sartrean position that existence precedes essence. This Existentialist tenet puts forth that no overarching meaning exists in the universe beyond that which we choose to create through our actions, resulting, paradoxically, in the burden of responsibility. The emancipatory characteristic of this philosophy of suspicion
conveys modern humanity’s existence in the world as the signifying epicenter from which to reconfigure the implications of ethical behavior.

Built on a series of hypotheses derived from European and Latin American thinkers, an operational definition of Existentialist thought stipulates the following:

1) Existentialist thought is reactionary to the abstract, systematic and collective view of humanity. Existentialism is a dystopian post-modern discourse reflecting what José Joaquín Brunner calls the "exasperation with modernity" (53). Existentialism’s reflexivity functions as an apologia to the importance of the individual, a grounding of sorts of the theory of the individual into the visceral experience(s) of life. 2) Existentialism does not aspire to be scientific, objective, nor definitive. The individual’s experience communicates his/her existence and his/her involvement within the ever changing modern world. 3) Existentialist thought unveils humanity’s burden: the realization of its freedom. This recognition produces feelings of fear, anguish, nausea, alienation, and denial. 4) Existentialism produces graphic visions of life which jeopardize normative notions of ethics, morals, projects, and beliefs. In a narrative form, Existentialist novels stress the protagonist’s will towards authentic existence. 5) Ultimately, the exploration of these lived experiences points to liminal moments of action. At least three outcomes are possible: either affirmations of the self by accepting one’s responsibility, the abnegation of one’s freedom through conscious self-denial, or neither which is a de facto forfeiting into bad faith.

The narratives I study fictionalize these five hypotheses and to varying degrees allow me to consider the following questions: What ongoing aesthetic,
ethical, and thematic phenomenons make these narratives particularly Existentialist? To what extent do these narratives reflect the socio-historical concerns of Latin America? What roles do memory, history, and writing play in these individualized narratives? The cross-examination of the novels I concentrate on will show how (and what) an Existentialist angle changes in regards to the literary history of the Latin American novel in the 20th century. The questions I have outlined lead me regard the novels I study as literary case studies contextualized within concrete historical, social backdrops, showcasing the individual’s struggle for significance.

Similarly, to speak of Existentialism one must take into account that this is a philosophical current which crescendos in the 20th century, but has its roots in the previous centuries. As Julio Fausto Fernández succinctly pointed out:

> En el existencialismo desembocan varias corrientes de pensamiento elaboradas a través, no diremos de años, sino de siglos. La manera peculiar de enfocar algunos de sus temas particulares, como la actitud frente a la muerte, la aspiración a un conocimiento de tipo místico mediante la intuición, las afirmaciones libre-arbitristas y otros muchos, tiene orígenes antiquísimos. (97)

The immediate "orígenes" which Fernández is referring to are the religious crisis of Søren Kierkegaard and the irreverent skepticism of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the 20th century the names most associated with Existentialism are Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. In the Spanish speaking world Miguel de Unamuno and a generation later José Ortega y Gasset are the recognized precursors of Existentialism. Interestingly, the works of William Barrett, Walter Kaufmann, and Gordon Marino have singled out the Spaniards as foundational figures in the history of Existentialism.12
The contribution of the "Spanish Armada" to Existentialism is undeniable. Julián Marías has argued that "Spanish thought in the 20th century has anticipated the majority of discoveries made by philosophers know as Existentialists and, at the same time, have constructed a whole part of its doctrine unknown in other places" (182). Along with Unamuno’s often cited *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913), José Ortega y Gasset’s *History as System* (1941), first published in English in 1935, constitute the pillars of the Spanish contribution to Existentialism. In Ortega y Gasset's case, the Spanish philosopher posits that "man has to be himself in spite of unfavorable circumstances; that mean he has to make his own existence at every single moment" (111), to which he concludes: "Man in a word, has no nature; what he has is –history. Expressed differently: what nature is to things, history, *res gestae*, is to man" (211).13

In spite of the Spanish contribution highlighted by Manuel Lamana, Francisco Larroyo, and the aforementioned Fausto Fernández, the systematic study of Existentialism has overlooked, I would say disregarded, almost in unanimity the contributions of Raimundo de Farias Brito, Miguel Ángel Visaroso and Moisés Vincenzi, to name but a few.14 The same silence occurs when the issue becomes Existentialist novels, in which case the focus is unanimously Dostoevski, Sartre, Camus and Franz Kafka.

This critical oversight becomes all the more pronounced taking into account Rhéa Sylvia Maurão's work which has attested to the fact that Latin America was not immune to the "proporções catastróficas deixadas pelos efeitos da primeira Guerra Mundial, corroboradas pelos da Segunda" (13). This interwar
period was a proverbial cauldron of sociopolitical and economic chaos which brought to light humanity’s sense of estrangement and disorientation. In conjunction, these factors conspired to engage disenfranchised intellectuals to revisit humanity’s concrete existence. Maurão explains this as Existentialism’s preoccupation with "o sujeito concreto e existente, com o eu, com o mundo da consciência e da reflexão subjetiva, com a reação" (14). Yet Maurão’s work only begins to place the Latin American variant of Existentialism into dialogue with the European, leaving outside of the discussion the literary component.15

Synecdoche of Presence: Latin American Existentialism

It is worth mentioning that although the earliest biographers of Existentialism in Latin America ignored the continent’s contribution, the closing decades of the 20th century witnessed a recuperation of Latin American presence in the constellation of Existentialism. As the very title expresses, David Sobrevilla’s "Phenomenology and Existentialism in Latin America" (1988) undertakes the cataloguing of "not only the members of the phenomenological and Existential movements in Latin America, but also those who have come under its influence" (86). The virtue of Sobrevilla’s work is not only biographical; he also inadvertently touches on a critical point in the history of Existentialism, Latin America’s anticipation of the Europeans. A succinct survey of Sobrevilla’s text confirms that in Mexico, Samuel Ramos’s *Hacia un nuevo humanismo* (1940) predates Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1942). In Argentina, Carlos Astrada’s *El juego existencial* (1933) anticipates Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) by almost ten years, while Miguel Ángel Virasoro’s *La libertad, la
existencia y el ser (1942) precedes de Beauvoir’s The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947). 16

The aforementioned foundational thinkers of Latin American philosophy are characterized by their consistent preoccupation with the "Self." Firstly, they choose to represent and convey a vision of their world which is labyrinthine, wherein the pursuit of self-affirmation results in confrontation, anguish and a defense for the disintegration of the inauthentic being. I will mention two such Latin American intellectuals, the Brazilian Raimundo de Farias Brito and the Argentine Carlos Astrada based on the strength of their conceptualization of the Self. I will counterposition the Europeans, at distinct moments, so as to create an inclusive portrait of Existentialism, which is needless to say not exhaustive.

As I pointed out previously, Existentialism considers the Self as a concrete entity lacking essentiality, in the metaphysical sense. Furthermore, for Existentialism, human beings are in a constant process of becoming, choosing what to be in situations that are not always of their own making. This will towards the Self connotes a cyclical action with the implicit problematic of constant reconfigurations. The Existential vacuum in the character of the individual is the proverbial Nothingness of Brito, Heidegger, and Astrada.

Farias Brito, more than ten years before Heidegger, expressed a similar understanding of humanity’s tragic sense of existence. The Brazilian’s foundational position in the advent of modern philosophy is attested to by Aquiles Côrtes Guimarães in As origens do existencialismo no Brasil (1979). However, Guimarães places special emphasizes on the cearense’s autonomy: “Farias
Brito, que jamais leu Jaspers, Heidegger ou Sartre. Estes filosofos [...] estavam ainda na fase inicial de formação [...] quando desaparece o nosso pensador“ (23). Guimarães concludes his introductory chapter by explaining that Farias Brito planted the philosophical seeds “ainda que em horizontes distintos, mostrando que as fronteiras do pensamento não são geográficas“ (23).

In the aptly titled O mundo interior (1914), Farias Brito explains that consciousness and the duplicity of the Self are inseparable. For the Brazilian philosopher to exist is to be in a state of split awareness, whose focal points reconcile the absurdity of the world through language. As evidenced in O mundo interior, Farias Brito’s innermost concerns are the multiplicity of the individual, ontological reflexivity as evidence of the duality of the self and the conspiracy of death with nothingness. The following passage captures these ideas:

O nada-eis, pois, o fim e a verdade definitiva para a vida. Além disto viver é sofrer e prolongar a vida seria tornar eterno o sofrimento. Pode dizer-se que a vida é uma agonia contínua; e o momento em que começamos a viver é já, por assim dizer um começo de morte [...] Para vencer, pois, o desespero e a desgraça irremediável da vida, só há um meio: o completo esquecimento de tudo no nada. O nada-eis, pois, a suprema liberação. (37)

This passage synthesizes Farias Brito’s position on human existence. In a Buddhist-like interpretation of life, the Brazilian philosopher equates life with suffering. However, this does not constitute a final turn towards nihilism nor fatalism for Farias Brito. In fact, his position is the diametric opposite, as the viewpoint espoused here seeks to "vencer." In other words, the individual conscious of the impervious presence of death in life confronts its humanity and seeks to triumph in the midst of his solitude. In this capacity, the glorification of
"O nada," the realization of humanity’s complete responsibility for itself becomes the supreme liberation, a paradoxical burden of isolation and alienation to be approached cautiously and warily.

Heidegger employs the term Dasein to encompass the idea of the authentic Self, which is concomitant with the concepts "thrownness," potentiality, and death. In Being and Time (1927), Heidegger’s concept of existence is historical. To exist is to be contingent on a particular temporality but not determined by a linear series of events. Furthermore, the individual thrown into a peculiar temporality represents for Heidegger "a constant unfinished quality [...] This lack of totality means that there is still something outstanding in one’s potentiality-for being" (219-20). The consciousness of an Existential temporality begins with the recognition of our being in the world, and our infallible mortality. Central for Heidegger is the Self’s longing for realization, a desire to become more than our circumstances all within the economy of our concrete existence.

The shadow of death looms large in Heidegger’s conceptualization of Dasein. In fact it is death, or better yet the individual’s reconciliation with death, which constitutes "its own most potentiality of being" (232). In Heideggerian language, Dasein represents an authentic existence insofar as the projects that give shape to the individual’s existence are ones to which that being is committed to in light of its situation and contingency. However, though the existentially aware individual belongs to, and defines, a moment, the choices made are not simply of the moment.
For Heidegger to be authentic constitutes a confrontation between
potentiality and the entire complexity of concrete existence. This is undertaken
firstly by recognizing our "throwness" into the world and entails mediating the
angst of our inevitable mortality:

The Existential project of an authentic being toward death must
thus set forth the factors of such a being which are constitutive for it
as an understanding of death in the sense of being toward this
possibility without fleeing it or covering it over. (240)

In Heideggerian terms, these projects consist of our intersubjectivity and our
choice. Heidegger implicitly portrays authentic existence as a constant interplay
between the forces of life, death, and freedom, underscoring at the same time
the consequences of such interactions for the individual. For the German
philosopher in the consciousness of this chaotic system lay the constant anguish
of humanity, fueled by dread of nothingness.

This signifying void is fundamental in the articulation of the Self for
Astrada who in *El juego existencial* asserts that "la existencia es esencialmente
nula. El conocimiento de esta nulidad que es la existencia es el juego en que el
hombre está puesto. Esta nulidad nos dice de la falta de asidero de la existencia"
(26). Astrada continues this vein of thought by reiterating the nothingness which
man must negotiate in the realization of his existence: "la existencia humana es
el acróbata que sobre la cuerda floja de la transcendencia juega el ser, y solo
puede ganar la nada" (26). Astrada’s Existential man engages in a self-
egotiation of identity through negation. In other words, the balancing act of the
Self recognizes the Existential void, a two prong maneuver of recognition and
reconciliation. Implicitly, this balancing act of consciousness becomes a
performance of nothingness as freedom, the identification of the profound responsibility of humanity for itself.

Existentialism is understood here as both a philosophical and literary phenomenon whose focal point is the uniqueness of the individual and that individual’s experience. For Guimarães "suas mais variadas teses convergem sempre para um ponto comum: o homem lançado no mundo. A existência autêntica não pode ser vista senão a partir desta grave realidade" (14). And so it follows that the emblematic leitmotifs of Existentialism gravitate or project, like a juggernaut of consciousness, toward the individual. From the Heideggerian position of the supremacy of existence, through Astrada’s re-evaluation of nothingness and the tragic sense of life as expounded upon by Farias Brito, the individual (by default humanity as well), is at last count, revealed to embody the sum of its actions. The Existential costs of this realization manifest themselves psychosomatically and aesthetically. The texts I have chosen explore this anguished reflexivity of the protagonists from distinct angles and in real time. By this I mean that the ideological transformations, the "Existential epiphany," take place in situ. Furthermore, they consider how the protagonists attain a level of respite after having understood and reconciled the absurdity of their existence.

**Existentialist Narratives: Literary legacy**

The unsettling quality of Latin American Existentialist novels has left a partial critical imprint. Individual case studies interrelating the most emblematic novels of Latin American Existentialism with their more celebrated European counterparts have been undertaken, leading critics such as William Nelson to
affirm that in relation to Sábato’s work, the studies "are agreed (insofar as they address the matter at all) that El túnel is an Existential novel" (459). However, as previously mentioned, a collective study interweaving Existential essays, treatises, and narrative has not been conducted.¹⁸ A review of the cartography of Latin American letters reveals that the Existential novels under appreciation have been aided by the cosmopolitan vs. rural poetics debate.

In general terms, Existentialism finds the categories of the metropolitan or the autochthonous to form part of a larger identity problematic which is a tributary to the progressive ideas of bourgeois modernity. In this vein of thought, Existentialist narratives convey the individual’s struggle within a metropolitan or rural setting, but do not attempt to reproduce stories which can be said to be representative of a cosmopolitan or a rural reality which is inherently Latin American. These identity debates are sophistic according to Existentialist thought since they represent inauthentic ideological spaces in themselves, as they are subjective imaginaries attempting to masquerade as objective realities.

Nonetheless, concurrently to the intellectual cultural wars of the first half of the 20th century, an explicit literary presence of Existential poetics is palpable. Gerald Martin maintains that in sharp contrast to this political hyperrealism of the 1930s the "non-socialist writers withdrew into ‘philosophical’, fantasy or the new Catholic Existentialism, as the aftermath of 1929 and the collapse of international trade turned the 1930s into another moment of relative isolation in Latin America" (145). While the era I begin my study with was privy to sustained poetics of social realism in the 1930s and a late vanguardism in the 1940s, what is constantly
present during this time are the burgeoning narratives of disbelief. The renewed isolationism of Latin America in the 30s fuels a philosophical line of narratives which takes up the experiences of the human spirit in the midst of socioeconomic and political catastrophes. These Existentialist narratives, engaged fully in poetic promiscuity, speak of man’s spiritual wreckage, of Latin America’s cultural impasse in the wake of the sociopolitical juggernaut of Modernity in its Latin American expression.

In Brazil, Alfredo Bosi likewise finds a bifurcation of the novel starting in 1930, and he points to the appearance of a "romance introspectivo, raro em nossa letras desde Machado e Raul Pompéia" (434). These psychological novels have as a central concern "o grau crescente de tensão entre o ‘herói’ e o seu mundo" (441). Taken as a whole, Latin America’s Existential narratives of the 40s complement the rebelliousness, skepticism, and contentiousness of the anguished philosophical narratives of the 1930s. These philosophical narratives bring into play the technical innovations of the Avant-Garde to communicate a nightmarish vision of "the bourgeoisie’s official ideology of honor, hard work and decency […] contradicted everywhere by reality" (Martin 154). While the dominant trends in Latin American literature during these two transitional decades point to an apogee of the socially conscious narrative, in the post crash era and the beginning of narrative heterogeneity of the 1940s, a consistent ontological concern with man’s existence remains.

Before I begin with the poetic characteristics of Existentialism, the stentorian figures of Roberto Arlt and Jorge Luis Borges, two Latin Americanists
foundational for the new narrative of the 20th century, deserve mention. For Noé Jitrik, Arlt’s work "inaugura definitivamente la literatura urbana con proyección universal" (qtd. in Shaw 23). Likewise, Borges’s contribution to the evolution of a distinct variant of Latin American narrative is no less imperative. For Donald Shaw with Borges "la narrativa en América Latina alcanza su madurez; de Tlön sale el camino que llevará a Comala y a Macondo" (44). While both writers engage Existentialist themes as is the case with Arlt’s quasi-Existentialist hero Erdosain in Los siete locos (1929), the anonymous writer of El escritor fracasado (1933) or the absurdly suicidal Juan Dalhmann in Borges’ El sur (1944), I have chosen to organize my study focusing on narratives which expand the Latin American Existential imaginary.

For the purposes of my dissertation Arlt and Borges construct Existential characters who conform to most of the formal structures of Existential narratives. Whilst these two writers are foundational in the history of Latin American letters, their contribution to a study of Existentialist narratives has been documented, although their role is primarily thematic. However, as my project attempts to sketch a continental picture of Latin American Existentialist novels, I do analyze the canonical representative figures of Onetti and Sábato, but these appear only in this introduction, because the Existentialist quality of their work has been thoroughly demonstrated. Furthermore, in my attempt to draw a panoramic perspective inclusive of both the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian contingency, I will place my emphasis away from the Southern Cone writers to shed light on the
presence of this literary phenomenon in other less studied areas: such as, the Andean region, the Caribbean and Brazil.

**Existentialist Narratives: The Anti-Hero**

Existentialist narratives enthrall us with their exhibition of anguish, violence and anger; they seduce by way of their uncanny familiarity. Through their characters, the reader is confronted with a gripping horror, which Sigmund Freud attributed to the phenomenon of the *Unheimliche*. In the similarly titled *Das Unheimliche* (1919), the psychoanalyst explained it as an ambivalent reaction to "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (241). The problematic of the Existential anti-hero reveals at its core an alienation from within and a double consciousness of estrangement and awakening. This Existential uncanniness is two-fold: firstly it consists of the recognition of the otherness within the Self and the nothingness which sustains that idea of the Self. This unsettling quality of being differentially similar permeates throughout our continent's Existential experience. In general terms, in the literary production of Latin America this protagonist becomes a familiar stranger; however, the Latin American Existential anti-hero is neither a spontaneous apparition, nor an orphaned vagabond.

The forefathers of the Latin American Existential anti-hero are found in the latent romanticism and decadentism of *modernismo* prose, which as Max Henríquez Ureña pointed out was notorious for its "polifacetismo": "en el movimiento modernista cabían todas las tendencias, con tal de que la forma de
expresión fuese depurada" (17). If I identify the protagonist of Latin American Existentialist narratives to be an anti-hero it is because of the stark contrast with the notion of the Romantic hero as traditionally defined by critics such as Walter Reed, George Ross Ridge, and the previously cited Estébanez Calderón.

Reed's notion of the hero focuses on "that singular and energetic individual whose character contains his fate, who dominates as well as represents the society around him," to which Reed concludes "the hero stands above and beyond the common range of human experience" (1). This deification of the hero echoes the evaluation of Luis B. Eyzaguirre who explains that these protagonists are "conscientes de su condición singular, es decir, se saben diferentes al resto de los mortales y se creen desde luego superiores" (31).

In Latin American literature the Romantic hero was likewise evoked as a collective superego, full of normative idealisms of morality, bravery, and selflessness.21 Northrop Frye describes the god-like qualities of the Romantic hero in terms of its collective importance, "in the fact that such characters, who are conceived in human likeness and yet have more power over nature, gradually build up the vision of an omnipotent personal community beyond an indifferent nature" (Fables 19). What these critics have highlighted is the pragmatic utilitarianism of the hero, whose existence is justifiable in respect to the strength of character. The Romantic hero's purpose is that of savior and redeemer. In this direction, the Existential protagonist of the novels studied here are the antithesis of the Romantic hero, in other words, the anti-hero par excellence.
The noble qualities and virtuous attributes of the Romantic hero are the idealistic underbelly from which to define the antithetic quality of the Existential anti-hero. Estébanez Calderón has alluded to this seemingly geometric opposition of the anti-hero when he states that this protagonist "se ha privado de las cualidades con las que habitualmente se presenta al héroe en la tragedia clasica [...] belleza, juventud, valor, nobleza, etc." (28). Ross Ridge further identifies the anti-hero as the abject negation of the hero, going so far as to state that "there is nothing grand or noble about his vacillation and weakness," to which he adds "the anti-hero is often absurd, and nothing is more unheroic than an object of ridicule" (115). While I agree, in principal, with Estébanez Calderón’s definition of the anti-hero, in that it is the antagonist of the Romantic protagonist, I differ from both Ross Ridge’s and Estébanez Calderón’s negative characterizations. In fact, I judge the Existential protagonist of the novels I study to be anti-heroes because they are muscular contestations to the inauthentic collective which surrounds them. And in this vigorous estrangement from firstly the Romanticized and subsequently the modernized environments which asphyxiate them, the Existential anti-hero's marked lineage dates back, at least, to Modernismo prose.

Following this retrospective direction, Aníbal González’s work on Modernismo prose merits mention and sheds light on the Existential anti-hero's self-conscious ancestry. Modernismo prose is important, among other reasons, for its "punto de vista profundamente antipositivista y crítico" (González 121), which immediately links it to the similarly distrustful cosmovision of Existentialist
narratives. And unlike the fatalist decadentism prevalent in Europe (e.g., Goethe’s Werther, Huysmans’s Des Esseintes) Modernismo prose corresponds to a high level of irony and self-consciousness, this last quality being an earmark of Latin American Existential novels. This reflexivity present in Modernismo prose transforms into a vehement sense of disillusionment, resentment, and abhorrence. Complicit in this deep feeling of crisis is the sociohistorical backdrop of Modernismo, portrayed by Ricardo Gullón as a kinetic juggernaut of "industrialización, el positivismo filosófico, la politización creciente de la vida, el amarguismo ideológico y práctico, el marxismo incipiente, el militarismo, la lucha de clases," which provoked "en las gentes y desde luego en los artistas una reacción compleja y a veces devastadora" (69).

I will briefly discuss two prominent examples of the estranged protagonist found in Modernismo prose, defined as "antihéroe" (122) by González, and whom I judge to be precursors to the Latin American Existential anti-hero. These protagonists are José Fernández in De sobremesa and Alberto Soria in Ídolos rotos. The protagonist of José Asunción Silva’s novel is described by González as "un arribista rico y energético, además de esteta" (126). In contrast with the fragile sensibility of the Romantic anti-hero described by Ross Ridge, the anti-hero pariah of De sobremesa is a muscular malcontent whose problematic encompasses:

Como vencer la "decadencia", como llegar más allá de la contemplación pasiva a la acción. El protagonista, Fernández, está inmerso en un mundo radicalmente estetizado en el que no solamente se rodea de objetos bellos, sino que intenta juzgar todo (conceptos, experiencias y objetos) [...] además trata de no caer en los valores y usos burgueses [...] y cuando se rinde ante ellos
It is important to call attention to three points of González's succinct explanation of Fernández's cosmovision. Firstly, Asunción Silva's anti-hero is not consumed by "decadencia" as much as energized by what Fernández perceives to be its omnipresence. Secondly, this anti-hero -unlike the chivalrous Romantic hero- represents a radicalized beauty, filled with a constant desire to possess, judge and resist the normative "values" of bourgeoisie life. Lastly, the protagonist of *De sobremesa* redefines the notion of surrender to signify ironic engagement in life and, as Gonzalez explains, the conformity of the anti-hero is "una especie de deporte." These perspectives of José Fernández's attitude vis-à-vis his temporality could very easily represent the ideological blueprint of the Existential anti-hero, who is similarly ill at ease with himself. In fact, Asunción Silva's anti-hero's explicit inwardness is a tormented testimony, the consequence of mounting instabilities and insecurities.\(^2\)

Manuel Díaz Rodríguez's *Ídolos rotos* is another example of a protagonist in crisis. Alberto Soria’s problematic is two-fold: a simultaneous rejection and confrontation with what he perceives as a decadent bourgeoisie collective. Part of Soria's anguish can be attributed to conformism as he:

Recordaba siempre con disgusto los días de incertidumbre y dolor que siguieron al término de sus estudios filosóficos [...] no le seducía el estudio mismo del Derecho ni el de sus fuentes históricas. Lo seducía la faz menos científica y más brillante de la profesión de abogado, idealizada por la figura del abogado triunfador en causas célebres. (13)

As this passage makes clear, Díaz Rodríguez's protagonist is struggling with the
choice he must make, either negate his philosophic impulse or surrender/collapse under the weight of familial expectations. As Luis Beltrán Guerrero explains, Soria endures "la desilusión de un medio agobiante e implacable, donde la mezquindad y la corrupción política sumadas a la profunda ignorancia, cercan al artista [...] sufre el choque brutal de ver sus obras destruidas [...] y se lanza al autoexilio" (5). The description Guerra provides of Soria paints a protagonist whose self-imposed ideas and subsequent exile could fit into the parameters of the Existential anti-hero.

The point I would like to draw attention to with these two characters is that like Existentialism in its philosophical manifestation, the literary practice of Existentialism has common ancestry in the previous century. In the case of Latin America, the immediate precursor in terms of philosophical and literary tradition can be found in the lettered production of the "fin de siglo" writers. The conflation of disillusionment, crisis, and re-evaluation which reenergized the likes of Asunción Silva and Díaz Rodríguez would appear once again some thirty years later, in the mist of a global economic catastrophe and the approaching shadow of an international war.

The Latin American Existential anti-hero is the inheritor of the dark side of modernismo and Modernity. The one which sought a rupture with the vulgarity of bourgeoisie values, what Calinescu describes as "bourgeois Modernity" that is to say the "cult of reason, ideals of progress, and science" (42). What differentiates the Latin American Existential anti-hero from the modernismo anti-hero is that unlike the late-nineteenth century protagonist, who stays true to the
idealistic search for the über-aestheticization of language and "el culto supremo a la belleza y en una exigencia artística depurada" (Estébanez Calderón 326), the twentieth century literary scion maintains his absurd cynicism; steadfastly jaded and skeptical. And while the Latin American narratives I study fictionalize the protagonist’s confrontation with their (dis)placement in the world the Existential anti-hero of these novels embodies incredulity, and simultaneously uncovers the protagonist’s self-fulfilling capabilities.

**Existential Narratives: Structures and Leitmotifs**

Since my study is comparative in nature, the structural poetics of Existentialist narratives are derived from my assessment of Dostoevski’s *Notes from the Underground* in conjunction with Sartre’s *Nausea* and Onetti’s *El pozo*. And as Sábato’s *El túnel* represents the immediate continuation of Latin American Existentialist literature of the 1940s, the Argentine’s novel invariably merits mention. The juxtaposition of these texts suggests that the formal trends in an Existentialist novel consist of a narrative hybridization. Firstly, Existentialist prose favors the intrapersonal confessional perspective, where an overt first person narrator-protagonist dominates, and whose preoccupations encompass art, writing, love, morality, anonymity, resentment, and death, to name only these.

Secondly, these confessional narrators distrust concepts of cohesiveness and order, employing such devices as stream of consciousness and "the treatment on an equal footing of fact and fiction, reality and myth, truth and lying, original and imitation, as a means to emphasize undecidability; self-referentiality
and ‘metafiction’ as means to dramatize inescapable circularity” (Calinescu 303-04). While Calinescu’s characterization specifically references the poetics of the historic postmodern texts (i.e., post WW II narratives), they also reflect the aesthetic devices of our Existentialist narratives for the purposes of contesting the elitist art of Modernism, which predominates during the first half of the 20th century. Thirdly, time and history lose their referential qualities. Time loses the romantic notion of progress and linearity, becoming both fragmented and psychological. The deterministic weight of history suffers a critical crisis, as it is questioned for the prescriptive limitations. The protagonist’s reevaluation of time and history highlight the determinism of the individual’s freedom and its choices.

A prominent example of these formal Existentialist qualities is Dostoevski’s Notes. Guillermo de Torre has highlighted the central importance of Dostoevski going so far as to assert that: "Kierkegaard se apoyaba en Dostoiewski, el Dostoiewski de las Memorias del subsuelo. Y su desazón, al buscar un modo de conocimiento más flexible que el metro rígido de la razón, lindaba, a la vez, supiéralo o no, con el desasosiego de nuestro Unamuno" (Valoración 62). This assessment is seconded by Kaufmann, for whom the Russian’s text becomes "the best overture for existentialism ever written [...] the major themes are stated here that we can recognize when reading the other so-called existentialists from Kierkegaard to Camus" (Existentialism 14). What is perceivable is a new perspective on the individual. For the Russian writer, man is wretched, revolting, and indefinably contradictory. With Notes the redemption of man is a meaningless idea, Dostoevskian man believes neither in original sin nor
in God, a liberating depravity reacting to the immorality of civilization. William Barrett has succinctly captured the revolutionary spirit of Notes:

What the reformers of the Enlightenment, dreaming of a perfect organization of society, had overlooked, Dostoevski saw all too plainly with the novelist’s eye: Namely, that as modern society becomes more organized and hence more bureaucratized it piles up at its joints petty figures like that of the Underground Man, who beneath their nondescript surface are monsters of frustration and resentment. (139)

The resentment experienced as a double alienation from society and estrangement from oneself is eloquently captured by the anonymous civil servant’s caustic monologues. The central crux of the conflict can be reduced to the Underground Man’s confrontation with society, causing a plethora of feelings of resentment, sickness, and anger. Chief amongst the problems he expresses against society are symbolized by his inability to love, in fact, the dysfunctional relationship he engages in with Liza, a prostitute, would be recast several times by the other Existentialist novelists. A revolt against the inauthentic existence of civilization becomes the focal point for the narrator, and the following passage captures that position:

I ask you, gentlemen, listen sometimes to the moans of an educated man of the nineteenth century suffering from toothache [...] as a man affected by progress and European civilization, a man "divorced from the soil and the national elements," as they express it now-a-days. His moans become nasty, disgustingly malignant. (Dostoevski 18)

What this anonymous narrator is rejecting is the empty promises of civilization which he considers artificial. From his dilapidated apartment in St. Petersburg, the protagonist rails against civility and progress, a rejection of the (im)moral society which has relegated him to the underground. The dénouement of the
novel does not presume to communicate a romantic vindication of man and his existence, but represents his own continued malcontent. Paradoxically, the Underground Man's increased introversion into himself is coupled with the recognition of the burden of consciousness, or as the narrator puts it "to be too conscious is an illness-a real thoroughgoing illness" (9). This yoke would be carried by other voices of discontent throughout the 20th century.

One such voice which echoes from Dostoevski's underground is Antoine Roquentin, protagonist of Sartre's *Nausea*. Like the Dostoevskian underground man, Sartre's protagonist is caught in a mire of anguish as a consequence of a burgeoning acuteness of the inauthenticity besetting him. Sartre's novel literalizes Existentialist anguish and contingency, while highlighting choice and the other as affective forces in the individual's configuration of the Self. These ideas are addressed in the most emblematic passage of Sartre's text: the 6 p.m. episode in the park.

For Roquentin the anguish he feels is a byproduct of his present state, which becomes inflamed as he becomes aware of a transformation within. In short, the narrator's anguish-induced nausea is symptomatic of the realization of the "nothingness" which sustains his world. The opening pages of Roquentin's journal make this phenomenon clear: "Something has happened to me, I can't doubt it anymore. It came as an illness does […] and now, it's blossoming" (4). Interestingly for Roquentin, his time at the park brings him to understand the implications of his illness: "The nausea has not left me and I don't believe it will […] it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is I" (126). This newfound state of
inconformity takes on the form of a sickness with curative effects. In this vein, Sartre’s protagonist takes his first steps into Existential consciousness as he experiences the demystification of language.

The arbitrariness of language and its unjustifiable hegemony on representation are Roquentin’s preliminary realizations of the nothingness of existence. Roquentin comes to realize that language is a vacuous conspirator in the service of humanity and is in constant need of substantiation: "The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface […] it left me breathless" (127). Nietzsche had intuited this superficiality of language when he wrote that words were "illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are" (On truth 1), some sixty-five years earlier.

The erosion of language’s power of signification leads Roquentin to recognize existence’s absurdity. Roquentin’s feelings of nausea come from moments when he realizes that words create the essences of objects. Roquentin’s anguish is centered on the subjectivity of previously held objective notions of things and values. Eventually, Roquentin arrives at the absurd reality of the arbitrariness of object’s essences; this becomes explicit with Roquentin’s encounter with the bark:

I drew my heel back, I saw that the bark was still black. Black? I felt the word deflating, emptied of meaning with extraordinary rapidity. Black? The root was not black, there was no black on this piece of wood- there was…something else. (130)

That something else is nothingness, whose connotations are the liberation of the individual. Roquentin becomes aware of the power of his freedom, which is
simultaneously longed for and dreaded. The possibility of his nothingness has contradictory consequences. For the narrator the confrontation with the bark's "something else" hurls him into the aпорia of his existence, in which humanity's choice is inescapable. The affirmation of the Self necessarily carries axiomatic repercussions, because one's choice founded in nothingness necessarily endows significance to itself. Sartre, in *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946), makes this point clear when he writes:

In fact, in creating the man that we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be. To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose. (17)

This need for Existential arbitration brings the being-for-itself back to an anguish state, in which the choices essentially become two: engagement or bad faith. Roquentin likens this new state of being to bearing a burden: "Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance; it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart" (132). For Roquentin, a regression to the previous state of inauthenticity is a personal impossibility. As Arthur C. Danto has discerned, Roquentin "perceives as a logical and hence vivid possibility that things should begin to behave in flagrant disconformity with the comfortable, shielding regularities" (18) of what Danto christens "common sense" (19). In this affirmation of life, Roquentin negates his bad faith and engages his newfound freedom through a redirection of his energy. Roquentin rejoices in his Self and recommits himself: "I had learned all I could know about existence. I left, I went back to the hotel and I wrote" (135). By engaging his nothingness
Roquentin becomes the quintessential sartrean man, one who chooses himself and then enacts the consequences of his choice.

To this point, the two novels I have employed as paradigmatic Existentialist narratives exemplify the poetics of Existentialism in both form and content. However, I reiterate that I have thus far spoken of the Underground Man and of Roquentin as Dostoevskian and Sartrean men, respectively. This is due in large part because although these characters form part of a larger pantheon of Existential anti-heroes, they focus distinct problematics: Dostoevskian man’s malcontent is principally ethical, whilst Sartrean man’s is aesthetic. Similarly, Onetti’s Linacero and Sábato’s Castel are individualized visions of disenchantment, although both protagonists suffer the torment of what they perceive to be a disaffected existence. For Linacero this means an aesthetic problem, for Castel this represents an ethical incompatibility between himself and María, his married paramour.

My reading of Onetti’s hero leads me to deem Linacero’s obscured existence as authentic inso much as he accepts the impossibility of transcendence and rejoices in the generative power of his imagination. The potentiality for being is the search for satisfaction and communication which Onetti’s Linacero undertakes. Although Hugo Méndez-Ramírez reads Linacero’s alienation and sexual deviance as a symptom of his "desintegración de la personalidad" (84), I find in his conscious act of writing his memoirs a process of reflexivity and the confrontation with his temporality. By this I mean that Linacero,
through the cathartic exercise of writing and creating, combats his sense of alienation.

Onetti’s Linacero far from being demented is a protagonist keenly aware of his contemporariness. Linacero affords the reader a temporal window into his existence by mentioning, on several occasions, his attentiveness to the comings and goings in the world. Two such examples are his references to the chaos in Europe and the historical figure of the Russian Nobel Prize winner in literature.²⁵ If in fact, Linacero manifests symptoms of mental disintegration, his lucid recollection of literary works and subtle allusions to 19th century Russian writers is noteworthy. I would suggest that Linacero is the literary manifestation of the disenchanted zeitgeist of the 1930s, a spiritual crisis which results in resignation.

However, Linacero does not fall back into quietism, and according to Frankenthaler this engagement by Linacero is prototypical of Onettian Existentialism which "excluye la posibilidad de la vida auténtica postulada por Sartre […] pero conserva, por lo menos, una posibilidad de salvación" (144). While I do not share Frankenthaler’s assertion that Onettian characters can not achieve a level of respite, I do share her view on the generative quality of writing. It is through writing and his imagination that Linacero creates his authentic self. Furthermore, it is in spite of his existence that Linacero fashions his Existential worldview:

Todo en la vida es mierda y ahora estamos ciegos en la noche, atentos y sin comprender […] Las extraordinarias confesiones de Eladio Linacero. Sonrío en paz, abro la boca, hago chocar los dientes y muerdo suavemente la noche. Todo es inútil y hay que tener por lo menos el valor de no usar pretextos […] Esta es la noche. Voy a tirarme en la cama, enfriado, muerto de cansancio,
This is Linacero’s contingency and his exercise of freedom. The submergence into his dream world is not an escapist metaphysical reversal, to cite Camus. Linacero’s choice constitutes a configuration of authentic self because he does not fall into an idle chatter of self-denial, Linacero simply chooses in light of his history.

In Linacero’s absurd smile lay the key to understanding the authenticity behind his resolution to write. In fact, to dismiss Linacero’s commitment to his imagination as decent into lunacy is to ignore the exegetical quality of his dreams which attempt to convey his sense of dislocation. As Donald Shaw has pointed out "Linacero experimenta el mismo asco y cansancio ante el espectáculo de una vida sin sentido [...] no sólo sufre; está consiente de sufrir y de sufrir más que nada por algo abstracto" (62). I would add that Linacero’s Existential malcontent is not exacerbated by the abstract but rather the concrete reality of his existence. People, civilization, himself, political movements with utopian goals cause his nausea; Linacero explicitly voices his discontent and his desire to not make excuses. In this capacity, Onetti’s Existential man reveals through his defiant candor his absurdist anti-hero quality.

As the commodification of Existentialism did not transpire until the post-war years and taking into consideration the durability and its permeation of distinct levels of the collective, I will briefly address Ernesto Sábato’s El túnel.26 The behavior of Juan Pablo Castel can be read as an overt attempt to
communicate his dissatisfaction within an impersonal society. Ángel Leiva describes the novel as "el escenario de la diáspora en la que el hombre ve perder su propia identidad [...] el caos, la maledicencia en la que actualmente se encuentra esa criatura que es el ser humano" (Introduction 14). The chaos mentioned by Leiva brings to mind Camus’s judgment of the chaotic quality of existence, which in turn helps to shed light on Castel’s apparent irrational actions. Camus constructs a worldview that does not assume that there is some sort of rational structure to the universe that the human mind can apprehend.

Camus calls the impasse between humanity and existence "the absurd." The conflict between what we want from the universe and what we find in it creates an imbalance: "what is absurd is [...] the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world" (15). From the onset humanity is revealed to be a constant state of suffering and a persistent desire to transcend that suffering, and in turn man is compelled to a leap of faith [in the best tradition of Kierkegaardian Existentialism], or to the conclusion of a meaningless [Sartrean Existentialism]. However, Camus proposes a third possibility: reconciliation with suffering. In this capacity, an absurdist existence would be a logical structure which admits the following:

A total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest). (23)

The absurd is a contradiction that cannot be reconciled, and any attempt to reconcile this contradiction is simply an attempt to escape from it: facing the
absurd is a constant struggle against it. To ignore the absurd chaos of existence constitutes a form of suicide. For Camus, this philosophical suicide consists of the incompatibility between meaning, order, and transcendence in an ineffable situation. However, revolting with the absurd is a confrontation with the uncanny fear it elicits: "the absurd cannot be settled. It escapes suicide to the extent that it is simultaneously awareness and rejection of death [...] That revolt gives life its value" (40). In short, Camus has returned to man his will to discontent as a positive ideological attitude.

This position of seeking out the "value" of life is carried out by Sábato’s Castel. The critics of Sábato’s novel "are agreed (insofar as they address the matter at all) that El túnel is an Existential novel" (Nelson 459), specifically when interpreting Castel’s Existential angst as a symptom of his alienation. I propose, however, that his Existential malcontent is concomitant with his (vital) choice to "confess." The act of writing it, his interpellation of the reader is an active attempt to engage the "truth" of his actions. The opening lines of El túnel convey Castel’s attempt to communicate his effort to transcend his isolation: "me llamo Juan Pablo Castel. Podrán preguntarse qué me mueve a escribir la historia de mi crimen [...] y sobre todo a buscar un editor" (62).

Castel’s conscious attempt at communication (also a blatant attempt at procuring an editor) through confession is representative of two Existential positions. Firstly, the crime he speaks of was the necessary death of María Iribarne, as a means to seek out justice. In other words, Castel refuses to be complacent; he seeks out death as a means of self-affirmation. Secondly, his accountability for
the murder, Castel’s full recognition of his role as assassin is a telling gesture of self-realization that Camus called "a total absence of hope." Castel is not attempting to dissuade his responsibility, nor gain the sympathy of the reader. Castel is explicitly exercising his power of subjectivity.

This position of accountability by Castel does not divert responsibility for his situation; he killed María Iribarne, not as a consequence of his environment, a moment of insanity, or an accident. Castel's crime is one of passion, an act of jealousy, a conscious act of violence which he takes responsibility for by first confessing the murder to Allende, as a means of liberating María’s husband of her treachery, and secondly when he gives himself up to the police at six that morning. In short, Castel acknowledges the consequence of his choice to kill María Iribarne. The third act of Castel’s authentic existence is his written confession, in which he acknowledges the incomprehension he feels about Allende’s suicide. Here the act of suicide, as it was for Camus, is more absurd than the absurdity of life. The blind man's suicide is the incomprehensible act, not Castel's pledge to life. In fact, the evolution of Castel's behavior has uncovered that the underlying guiding principle in his existence has been and continued to be the conscious attempt to overcome his loneliness.

From Dostoevski to Sábato a common formal thread can be found which favors an intimate reflexivity intended to seduce the reader into a state of uncanny inertia. Conceding that a prominent first person perspective is favored, Existentialist narratives take up a core set of issues, shared with the philosophical texts. Sobrevilla summarizes the themes most attached to
Existentialism in the following manner: "the priority of existence over essence, the defense of freedom, and the conception of man as Being-in-the-World, the feeling of being thrown into the world, and the opposition in the first instance of man to God" (85). To this core set of leitmotifs I add two more. First, these texts continuously evidence the problem of the Other, lived on a personal level as well as an interpersonal reality. Secondly, Existentialist narratives also divulge the affective presence of bad faith in everyday life. As these novels deal with the constant experience of the inauthentic, an initial or pervading struggle against falling back into a practice of self-denial also becomes a constant variable in these narratives.

As is to be expected, perceivable innovations are evident in Latin American Existentialist novels which augment the aforementioned Existentialist trends. Firstly, a third person narrator appears, at times producing a narrative ambiguity through indirect discourse and free indirect discourse. Oscar Tacca explains that these narrative perspectives, different from the ever present internal monologue of Existentialist narratives, help to maintain "como punto original de mira al narrador" (82). These narrative techniques of indirect and free indirect voices create indefiniteness for the reader, vacillating with the notion of realist narrative perspectives by implicating the reading process in the novels’ signifying practices. By adding a complex reading dimension to the novels, Latin American Existentialist text jeopardize notions of objectivity, disassociates the narration with accountability as the novel uncovers the subjectivity of the individual and his/her existence.
Thematically, this manipulative unstable intrusive narrator (in first and third person) suffers the burden of a peripheral modernity dissimilarly from the canonical Existentialist. While the better known Existentialist novels of Kafka, Sartre and Camus convey the alienation of modern man in a dehumanized society, which naturally the Latin Americans also deal with, our Existentialist narratives take the problematic outside city limits. In doing so, the local and rural become dystopian spaces, similarly corrosive for humanity. What the novels I study undress is Latin America’s experience (interpretation) of the ideas of Modernity which continue to be asymmetrical and truncated, and result in complex expressions of search, rumination, and generative constant malaise. The burden of conformity, expressed as a unilateral dynamism towards community, whether that will toward community expresses itself as either cosmopolitan or local becomes the very center against which the dramas our existentialists narratives revolt.

The narratives of the 1930s I analyze undertake as their fundamental projects the Existential quests and ontological interrogations of authentic being. My dissertation puts forward that these narratives are clear evidence of a fragmented assessment of what the Self, authenticity, and freedom configure themselves to signify aesthetically and ethically. Astrada refers to this as the core responsibility of the Existential thinker: "Ser es la tarea de la existencia humana. El hombre, en tanto existente, es un ente destinado a ser en alguna forma, de este modo o del otro" (Juego 109). My dissertation will show how and to what extent the novels studied here are packed with Existential reflections on the Self,
the interpersonal relationships we antagonize (and patronize) and issues expressed as symptoms of the exasperation with Latin America’s variation of Modernity. The complexity regarding the responsibilities and limits of freedom, the legitimacy of violence both physical and psychological, the tension between the experiences with others and the question of authenticity pervade these Existentialist writings and remain in sum, ambiguously "Post" modern.

**Latin American Existentialist Narratives: 1933-1938**

Labrador Ruiz’s *El laberinto de sí mismo*, Bombal’s *La última niebla-La amortajada* and Ramos’s *Angústia* highlight the constant presence of violence in the individual’s reflexive, intrapersonal existence. These novels stand as aesthetic responses, sharing the communality of history, which reflect personalized experiences of being. Collectively these Existentialist novels encapsulate the philosophical complexity of what being entails, all in the context of an absurd era. The Existentialist texts in this study highlight the impasses of individuality within a collectivized (read Modern, essentialist) world. The novels I study are the apotheosis of inconformity which focuses on the violent consequences of exercising individuality.

In the first chapter of this study, titled "The Introspective Voyeur: Existential Exegetist in Enrique Labrador Ruiz’s *El laberinto de sí mismo,*" I focus on how the intrapersonal quandary of the anonymous poet is both of an aesthetic and ethical quality. Rita Molinero has emphasized the novel’s confessional characteristic in which the protagonist explores notions of "valores auténticos y que se encuentra apresado en su propio laberinto de ideas y emociones" (25).
find that *Laberinto* retools the Minotaur myth as a means to extrapolate the metaphor of modern man’s existence.\textsuperscript{30} To this end, the myth and the poet’s quest expose humanity’s spiritual bankruptcy as a consequence of its inexorable freedom. The novel imagines the poet’s preoccupations, doubts, distress, and alienation as self-perpetuating, leaving death, not art, as his only ally. However, even this Existential project is ambiguously undertaken.

In chapter two, titled "*Sibi Dedita*: María Luisa Bombal, Raconteur of Ambiguity" I examine the contradictory role of memory in the anti-heroines’ project of self-realization. I consider memory to act in a paradoxical fashion because instead of justifying the protagonists’ martyrdom, memory incriminates both the anonymous wife in *Niebla* and Ana María in *Amortajada* as accomplices in their own asphyxiating lives. With Bombal’s first novel, I find that the wife’s sadomasochism is a consequence of her bad faith, which attempts to deny her freedom. In my analysis of *Amortajada*, I find that Ana María confronts death as a viable Existential venture. I argue that Ana María’s assessment of her existence, which is coupled by the omnipresent narrator’s commentary, articulates the phases of her subjectivity. By this I mean that in exploring the permeability of fate, *Amortajada* is ultimately concerned with obscuring the borders of reality with the residual effect of underscoring the individual’s role in the continuation of their anguish.

In the fourth chapter of my study I argue that chaos is the governing principle of Graciliano Ramos’s *Angústia*. To advance this idea, I turn to the concept of chaos as understood by Antonio Benítez-Rojo. For Benítez-Rojo
chaos is a cultural phenomenon that encapsulates the social fabric of what is known controversially as the Caribbean. However, in the capacity of a qualitative diagnostics of cultural manifestations, the chaotic taken to describe narrative style can be said to synthesize Ramos’s novelistic mode. I have chosen to approach the *nordestino*’s novel from the perspective of chaos as (dis)order for the purposes of fishing out the Existential quality of the novel. In the narrator’s process of plotting vengeance, his memories reveal first the burden of anonymity as a poisonous agent and second the manifestation of his authentic self as a homicidal act of self affirmation. In other words, murder becomes simultaneously a regenerative act of catharsis, revenge and a viable project of existence.

I close with a final thought before proceeding with my analysis of each author’s work. The 1930s constitute a foundational and tumultuous time in Latin America, in which the literary responses though diversified are not thematically antagonistic. These narratives synthesized the estrangement of individuals, from society and within themselves. The argumentative core of the texts I analyze focuses on the ubiquitous presence and the poetic complexity of the physically and psychically violent in existence. These novels fictionalize Existential angst in ways that destabilize the narrative practice they engage in and, in the process, they experiment with a new sense of subjectivity fully invested in accountability.
Chapter II:
The Introspective Voyeur: Existential Exegetist in Enrique Labrador Ruiz’s *El laberinto de sí mismo*

Hay pues, en el hombre, en primer término una capacidad dualificante, por la cual la totalidad de su ser se escinde en dos polos o subregiones, a saber: el hombre y el mundo […] el yo y el no-yo-

Humberto Piñera Llera

No hay más diálogo verdadero que el diálogo que entablas contigo mismo, y este diálogo sólo puedes entablarlo estando a solas-

Miguel de Unamuno

The two quotes that serve as an introduction to this chapter synthetize the philosophical characteristics that I will argue are central to the Cuban Enrique Labrador Ruiz’s *El laberinto de sí mismo* (1933). Unamuno’s quote captures the idea of authenticity in the context of self-understanding. For the Spanish writer the intradialogue constitutes the only proper form of communicating with the deeper voices which can be repressed by distinct external forces. Piñera Llera confronts the same problematic of the individual capturing the multiplicity of the experiencing "I." In Piñera Llera’s assertion, the individual is a subjective being, affectively intertwined with exterior agents. The quotes here are drawn from larger texts that address the central ontological and ethical questions of the individual, as such, and in this sense could be said to be representative of the discursive center of Labrador Ruiz’s *Laberinto*.

Labrador Ruiz’s novel constitutes the opening salvo in his "gaseiforme" trilogy. This trilogy, which he called a "triagonía," corresponds to a foundational collection of narratives which in retrospect reveal his attempt at renovating the novel in Latin America in the first decades of the 20th century. Matías Montes-
Huidobro describes the Cuban author’s text as "una nueva novela que apunta a una temática más enfocada en la problemática del ser humano y que contiene muy valiosas innovaciones estructurales y estilística" (29). These innovations were neither well received nor understood. However, Labrador Ruiz's contributions to the "nueva narrativa" in Latin America have experienced a process of reassessment, thanks in large part to the work of Elio Alba Buffill and Reinaldo Sánchez.35

This re-evaluation begins by championing Labrador Ruiz's place in the literary history of Latin America, based in part on the strength of his aesthetic contributions. As Alba Buffill explains, Labrador Ruiz "es uno de los primeros escritores en usar en nuestro continente, narraciones interpoladas, de tanta raíz cervantina, que sirven para dar una sensación de ambigüedad en el desarrollo narrativo" (32). These interpolated narratives comprise one facet of the stylistic, structural, and thematic contributions of Labrador Ruiz, which diverged from the pervading social realist and naturalist tendencies of the turn of the last century.36

Laberinto’s protagonist portrays, as his fundamental concern, the will to transcend, an Existential project not unlike the one highlighted by Samuel Ramos in Hacia un nuevo humanismo (1940).

The Mexican philosopher explains this need to transcend as a projection of humanity’s desire for self-determination. Inconformity also informs humanity’s quest to "un sentido que trascienda el mero vivir y que represente, además de la conservación, un enriquecimiento de la vida" (63). As Ramos puts forward, the individual’s malcontent with mere existence propels humanity into an
engagement with life as a means to provide a measure of relevance to it. In order to find sense in a senseless universe, Ramos proposes that humanity, within the confines of facticity, exercises its right to choose and in doing so involves itself with the breadth of possibilities of being.

In this reconstructive vein, Labrador Ruiz’s novels redirect their attention to focus on the plight of contemporary man and in particular, the preoccupations, doubts, distress, and alienation suffered as a consequence of an intrapersonal reflection. Lilia R. Díaz Montero describes this narrative preoccupation in Labrador Ruiz’s text as follows: "la inquisitiva de todos los tiempos, la universal, la que hace diferente al animal humano del irracional […] que produce en un punto crítico una angustia inherente a la condición del ser humano" (38). I would venture that what Díaz Montero has intuited in Labrador Ruiz’s work, without explicitly underscoring it, is in fact the Existential angst in Laberinto. This philosophical quality of Labrador Ruiz’s work transgresses the nationalistic imaginary, redrawing the narrative lines to include the humanistic concerns of the invisible individual, which is a new proposition in Latin American letters.37

I begin this chapter by drawing an analogy between Unamuno and Labrador Ruiz based on their respective narrative visions. Montes-Huidobro has also placed the author within the agonizing tradition of Unamuno, going so far as to assert that Laberinto’s protagonist is “el agonista alienado, sometido al dominio de los objetos, es, además, un agonista existencialista entre Unamuno (aunque el autor lo negara) y James Joyce” (144). Although the narrative dialogue between Labrador Ruiz and Unamuno was resisted by the Cuban, as
Montes-Huidobro mentions, the points of contact between the two show to what extent and in which capacity *Laberinto* forms part of a larger community of narratives which shared similar ethical and aesthetic preoccupations.

I find it important to note that the association of Labrador Ruiz and Unamuno is not arbitrary, as Unamuno's place in the pantheon of Existentialist thinker is well documented and serves as a canonical source for Existentialist ideology. Also, Unamuno is well remembered for his esthetics projects (the nivola novel) which centered on ethical questions such as the limits of reality and man's place in the world. It is worth mentioning that Labrador Ruiz's esthetic projects (the gaseiforme novel) also evolved into philosophical treatises, however, in the Cuban's case the ethical problematic of the protagonist's are centered on Existential questions of authenticity, bad faith and his confrontation with death. 38

**The Origins of the Species**

First published in Habana, by Compañía Carasa, Labrador Ruiz's *Laberinto* received a hostile reception by the so called literary elite. In the words of the author, *Laberinto*’s audaciousness prompted the reprimand levied towards the writer: "yo era para ellos, no un creador, sino simplemente, un discolo que me salía de los moldes sin que nadie me lo hubiese autorizado" (*Nota i*). 39 However, the explicit attempts of *Laberinto* to free itself from the telluric narrative forms dominant in Latin America during the first decades of the 20th century have been, in retrospect, the stimulus behind the novel's reappraisal. In fact, such narrative reconfigurations immediately recall the similar aesthetic projects undertaken by Unamuno with *Niebla* (1907). 40
Unamuno, and later Labrador Ruiz, employed the misfortunes of a single individual in love and life, to comprise the backdrop from which to narrativize the ethical consequences of a reconfigured aesthetic cosmovision, brought to light through an intrapersonal dialogue. These texts, built exclusively on a confessional structure in which Existential conceptualisms abound, dared to stretch the narrative limits followed by the lettered elite in their respective countries. In this vein, Unamuno's *nivola*, and later Labrador Ruiz's *gaseiforme* novel, transcend the historical limits of the Hispanic world of letters each one occupied. As Unamuno explains in *Niebla*, therein lay the key to understanding the appeal of his text:

"Es que la fantasía y la tragicomedia de mi *Niebla* ha de ser lo que más hable y diga al hombre individual que es el universal, al hombre por encima, y por debajo a la vez, de clases, de castas, de posiciones sociales, pobre o rico, plebeyo o noble, proletario o burgués. Y esto lo saben los historiadores de la cultura, a los que se les llama cultos. (90)"

As the passage explains, the dialectic of man with himself becomes a dominant motif of Unamuno's *nivola*, and as I will argue shortly, is also central to understanding Labrador Ruiz's *gaseiforme* novel. In addition, as this excerpt alludes to, *Niebla*'s agenda is communicative; a dialogue of man as a method of self-understanding. Piñera Llera found this drive towards rationalization to be emblematic of a new wave of Avant-Garde humanism determined to "preguntarse desde sí mismo por la razón de ser de ese contorno del cual se escinde inespacialmente y en cuya virtud se torna extraño y extrañante" (20). To achieve such a space to speak to "hombre individual," Unamuno deviced the intradialectic novel, which he christened *nivola*. The question, then, becomes
unavoidable: what is this *nivola* novel? And for that matter, how can a *nivola* be of use to modern man? Fortunately, these questions are answered by Unamuno’s text itself. In the process, the interaction between Víctor Goti and Augusto Pérez, the two central characters of the *nivola*, affords the philosophical usefulness of these narrative forms. The explicit depiction of *Niebla’s* narrative vision comes in the form of a dialogue between the two aforementioned characters in chapter XVII, wherein the conversation begins on the aesthetic level:

Pues le he oído contar a Manuel Machado, el poeta, el hermano de Antonio, que una vez le llevó a don Eduardo Benoit, para leerelo, un soneto que estaba en alejandrinos o en no sé qué otra forma heterodoxa. Se lo leyó y don Eduardo le dijo: “Pero ¡eso no es soneto! ...” “No, señor —le contestó Machado—, no es soneto, es... *sonite.*” Pues así con mi novela, no va a ser novela, sino... ¿cómo dije?, *navilo... nebulo,* no, no, *nivola,* eso es, ¡*nivola!* Así nadie tendrá derecho a decir que deroga las leyes de su género... Invento el género, a inventar un género no es más que darle un nombre nuevo, y le doy las leyes que me place. ¡Y mucho diálogo! (200)

As Goti would have the reader understand, the genesis of the new narrative form has its beginning in a need to open the narrative field of expression, free it from the stifling limitations of the realist novel, while not erasing the established order. In short, the *nivola* is born out of an esthetic need for renovation. The *nivola* becomes a new outlet for dialogue which does not so much as invalidate tradition, as it does not presume to "derogar" the normative structures of the novel, but rather creates a new-fangled space for problematizing the concrete self, or as Unamuno himself would call it "el hombre de carne y hueso" (*Del sentimiento* 7).
The response to Goti’s vision of the *nivola* comes a little later in the text in the form of a monologue by Pérez. These thoughts reveal the ontological ramifications of Goti’s aesthetic proposition: “Al separarse uno de otro, Víctor y Augusto, iba diciéndose este: "Y ésta mi vida, ¿es novela, es nivola o qué es? Todo esto que me pasa y que les pasa a los que me rodean, ¿es realidad o es ficción?" (201). What is clear now with the exchange between these two characters is that the will towards an aesthetic regeneration brings with it the possibility and responsibility of starting from ground zero.

This new narrative proposition allows the act of writing, which becomes central for the protagonist of *Niebla*, to function as therapeutic, a *logotherapy* which takes up questions of ethical proportions through issues of memory and identity. Furthermore, the problematic confrontation of man with himself eventually leads him to debate his own mortality. In sum, these formal and thematic concerns, prominently displayed in Unamuno’s *Niebla*, are also present in Labrador Ruiz’s *Laberinto*, marking the Cuban’s work as a kindred narrative voice of discontent in the tradition of the Spaniard. However with Labrador Ruiz’s text the self-questioning by the narrator is ontological, poetic, and Existential, meaning that *Laberinto* broadens the narrative space opened by *Niebla* in both form and content. The anonymous poet of *Laberinto* renders the question of being as fragmented and enigmatic, all the while exposing the distinct layers of the individual. The distinction of the two texts becomes clearer if I invoke Ramos once again.
For the Mexican philosopher the layers of the individual can begin to be understood thinking of humanity as contrasting forces of the spirit and the soul:

Los movimientos del alma pueden ser reprimidos o liberados por otras fuerzas de nuestra persona que ejercen el control. El espíritu es el centro de la persona, el «conjunto de actos íntimos de que cada cual se siente autor y protagonista.» El espíritu está integrado por la voluntad y el pensamiento. Constituye estrictamente lo que se llama el yo. (80-81)

As Ramos explains, the individual's soul is the representation of the libidinal and the unpredictable, encompassing emotions and passions. The spirit thus becomes the conscious barometer of the self, in which the individual has much affective power and influence. This "yo" is the experiencing "I" which Laberinto concerns itself with. In Ramos’s terminology, Unamuno’s Peréz suffers the punishment of the soul while Labrador Ruiz’s anonymous poet is at the mercy of his soul and is burdened by his spirit. These multiple layers of his being are signified by the conscious mask that the poet considers as being on display for society and which mortify him.

**The Gaseiforme Novel as Triagonía**

As mentioned previously, Labrador Ruiz was seen as a wayward (díscolo) writer removed from the political revolutionary reality of the island in the 1930s. In fact, Labrador Ruiz envisioned a different purpose for his narratives altogether. Regardless of what the reception would be to his new endeavor, Labrador Ruiz decided to engage in the creation of a different kind of novel, whose discourse and form would be reconceptualized. Paraphrasing the author, the gaseiforme novel would be an ellipsis of reflexivity which ambiguously needs an audience to crystallize, much in the same way Unamuno’s *nivola* created an intimate
relationship between author and readership. In this vein, Labrador Ruiz’s text renegotiates the narrative realism as the interaction between text and reader, pushing the aesthetic limits of the contemporary novel in Latin America.

My present reading of the Cuban’s text builds on the most recent assessments of Labrador Ruiz’s *Laberinto* which go beyond the novel’s aesthetic contributions. As I will argue *Laberinto*’s Existential altruism is stimulated by a desire to contest the collectivized vision of modern 20th century man. *Laberinto* seeks to rehumanize the individual burdened by the awareness of "la radical indigencia y menesterosidad de ese mundo al cual se encuentra religado, en el sentido de un doble nexo: el del hombre respecto al mundo y el de éste respecto al hombre" (Piñera Llera, *Posición* 20). Employing a soliloquy-esque stance, Labrador Ruiz’s novel expounds on the nascent incredulity of the poet marked by a nonconformity and liberation drive. This obligation to question in the novel is analogous to the desire of humanity to transcend its banal existence. Piñera Llera explains this will to transcend in the following manner:

> Pero de modo aproximado podemos decir que la trascendencia es a la par la razón de ser primera y última de la existencia humana. El hombre se pone como tal, como *existencia de una conciencia*, en el hecho primario de su dualificación respecto del contorno, o sea de la mundificación de éste; pero, además, y como remate de su puesta como hombre, ha de manifestarse como *conciencia de una existencia*, o sea como advertencia de ese mundo y su correspondiente patencia de la separabilidad nunca absoluta, y por lo mismo causante de la extrañeza por un lado y del sentimiento de menesterosidad por otro. (*Posición* 20-21)

*Laberinto*’s Existentialist concerns can be described in a similar manner as Piñera Llera described humanity’s will to "mundificación." The poet of the novel attempts to make sense of his existence in full awareness of the symbiotic
relationship which ties him to his environment. Furthermore, he attempts to sort out which have effected his behavior as an individual while searching out, via his art, what can only be said to be an authentic existence. This quest is undertaken in full knowledge of the uncanny emotions he feels, that is to say, "extrañeza por un lado" and "menesterosidad por otro" (21).

In this capacity, Labrador Ruiz’s text is the literary exposition of the nascent incredulity within pockets of modern Latin-American thinkers, still reeling/drifting in the vestiges of a positivistic, utilitarian cosmovision. With this end in mind, the gaseiforme’s aesthetic nonconformity allows the writer a narrative space from which to expound on ontological, epistemological, ethical questions from within an Existentialist model.

The previously cited "nota" to the second novel of Labrador Ruiz’s triagonía, Cresival, gives an explicit delineation on the narrative agendas of the gaseiforme novel. In fact, this prologue to the 1936 text functions as a de facto literary treatise to the whole triagonía. Labrador Ruiz’s own words provide an insight into the enigmatic structure and purpose of his narrative projects: "Laberinto —, novela gaseiforme, esqueleto de novela, elíptica de asuntos. Esqueleto de novela, no cadáver…el esqueleto es también un tránsito, pero con perfil…que aspira a una corporeidad sucinta y ecuménica" (Nota ii).

For Labrador Ruiz, the gaseiforme novel is principally to be understood as such only in its rudimentary form. By this I mean that Laberinto at its structural and discoursive core signifies the new, the distinct, and the modern, keeping to its Latin root novellus. As such the novel’s complexity and innovations diverge
from the tellurically entrenched manifestations of the genre which typically consisted of a plot, organized in a sequential of action and scenes.

Secondly, *Laberinto*’s skeletal organization, to continue with the own writer’s metaphor, is to be understood as an ambivalently inconclusive narration whose focus would be the concrete concerns of the invisible individual. As such, Labrador Ruiz’s text is a novel only in a skeletal sense, with both a revolutionized internal economy and a distinct focus, all of which is continuously manipulated via the montage, the chaotic ordering. Interestingly realistic, however, is the cutting and piecing together of experiences and memories in nonlinear manners which convey and recreate the aporetic experience of the protagonist. In this capacity, *Laberinto*’s diegetic mixtures present the reader with a puzzle of Existentialist proportions with cubist effects.

Lastly, as per the author’s own admission, *Laberinto* is to be approached as a living organism which needs the reader's participation, making the reader and the reading process accomplices in this new definition of realism: "Así mi libro no es nada en mis manos mientras yo lo estoy escribiendo… *Laberinto*—, al contacto con la inteligencia y la sagacidad de mi lector" (*Nota* iii). Labrador Ruiz’s text reproduces a three-dimensional relationship between author, text, and reader which undertakes the ontological problems and Existential opportunities encountered by modern man at an exasperated speed and in a capricious order. In sum, Labrador Ruiz’s narrative places the final burden of interpretation and the significance of details on the reader.
In *Laberinto*, and for that matter the entire *triagonia*, realism in literature is not contingent on veracity or the hyperreality of the narrative but rather on the absurdly contradictory, the irrational and the arbitrary. Labrador Ruiz’s narrative universe cultivates dramatic ethos from the mundane. This aesthetic cosmovision becomes the only avenue to avoid "seguir siendo pura filfa," to which the author adds "debe la literatura producirse en exacto como la vida es; llena de altibajos, de contradicciones, de violencias, de ternuras, de ridiculeces dudas o de magníficos sacrificios que no se sabe por qué se hicieron" (Nota vii). However, the innovative reconfiguration of what constitutes narration for Labrador Ruiz does not mean the death tolls of the national novel or worse still an escapist project. In fact, Labrador Ruiz promulgates a return of sorts: "Al triunfo del colectivismo propongo una suelta individualidad, ni edificante ni demoledora más bien contradictoria" (Nota viii). Neither fatalistic nor chauvinistic, Labrador Ruiz’s projects and visions for his work advocate a return to the individual, an apotheosis of the self within the hegemony of the collective.

In this capacity, *Laberinto* engages a long tradition of dissident voices, such as Unamuno’s *nivola*, concerned with the apathetic, collectivized vision of humanity. Interestingly, both Unamuno and Labrador Ruiz envisioned their new prose projects as neither deconstructing, invalidating nor adhering to their literary legacies. Rather, these anthropological philosophers advocated an individualized journey, in which the novel’s structures are redrawn so as to permit each one to exploit their creative Existential uncertainties via dialogues. In this respect, each narrative’s logotherapy, understood here in all its manifestations, whether in the
guise of the internal monologue, the dialogue or the soliloquy gravitates in turn man's nascent awareness of a signifying cultural vacuum. The aesthetic norms require reassessment, freed from the constraints of pragmatism, rationalism, and transcendentalism. With *Laberinto* the reader witnesses the protagonist's search for a rehumanized "I," what Ramos called the individual's "personalidad" (127). This journey will take the narrator to confront his existence in an attempt to reconcile with his authentic role. In this vein of thought, the novel's protagonist actively pursues his own "personalidad," understood here as Ramos explains it as a role "que representamos," however in contrast to being merely an actor with a script given to him, *Laberinto*’s narrator realizes that "ese papel es creación nuestra, somos al mismo tiempo el autor y el actor" (127).

**Laberinto Mythology Revisited**

As the very title of Labrador Ruiz’s novel suggests, the symbol of the Labyrinth is central to the critical assessment of the novel. In fact, I would summarize the novel's figurative and exegetic importance as subordinated to Labrador Ruiz’s use of the labyrinth image. I do not believe it a hyperbole to emphasize the ubiquitous importance of the mythological maze as a signifying practice of Latin American letters in the 20th century. The labyrinth symbol has engrossed Latin American thinkers from Borges to García Márquez, and on a more implicit level, Brazilian writers like Graciliano Ramos and Josué Montello because of its signifying complexity and mythological legacy. On an artistic level, mythology has been a creative point of departure for the Cuban novelist, as evidenced by the recasting of the Teutonic legend of Parzival in *Cresival* (1936)
and the recasting of the Greek myth of Antaeus in *Anteo* (1939), the final act of Labrador Ruiz’s trilogy.\(^{46}\)

A succinct history of the originating Greek myth helps to elucidate the symbolic importance of the labyrinth in Labrador Ruiz’s work. Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology* (1942) asserts that in Greek folklore the labyrinth was an intricate maze designed by the master architect Daedalus for the purposes of confining the Minotaur, bastard progeny of king Minos’ wife Pasiphaë. Having received a bull from Poseidon and subsequently disobeyed his command to sacrifice it, the Greek deity had punished Minos by making Pasiphaë fall madly in love with the bull. The resulting offspring would be a monstrous symbol of man’s beastly duality. As it is told in Book VIII of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the labyrinth was “famous throughout the world. Once inside, one would go endlessly along its twisting paths without ever finding the exit” (Hamilton 212). Taking all of the above, I would like to emphasize that the labyrinth’s signification as a prison and the presence of an implicit monster of minotaurian proportions are central in Labrador Ruiz’s novel. However in my reading of *Laberinto*, the Existential self-questioning of the poet will show how his consciousness becomes his labyrinth and how the Minotaur inside that labyrinth is to be embraced, not feared.

As will become clear shortly, Labrador Ruiz’s *Laberinto* becomes one of the more astute depictions of the Existential puzzle, wherein the journey outward, toward freedom is fraught by endless possibilities and choices. However, this freedom, that is to say the possibility of man’s journey out of the labyrinth, lay in his proverbial hand. However, the appearance and proliferation of the symbol is
not what interests me here; my concerns lay with the text’s appropriation of the mythological symbol to convey human consciousness as both curse and blessing. In effect, the narrator’s self-reflexivity will reveal the labyrinth is an auto-construct, a metaphor for the protagonist himself. In Laberinto the poet protagonist becomes conscious of the prison of his inauthenticity and he implicitly will seek escape.

In my analysis of Labrador Ruiz’s anonymous poet, I will put forth that he functions as a de facto Minotaur entangled in the solitude of his own labyrinth. Rita Molinero shares, in part, this same reading as she explains that the protagonist is “un poeta en busca de los valores auténticos y que se encuentra apresado en su propio laberinto de ideas y emociones” (25). In that search for freedom and the authentic self that Molinero highlights, the Minotaur’s symbolic importance is fundamental. In my reading the Minotaur’s monstrous quality is not damning but rather liberating. By this I mean that reconciling with his beastly duality, meaning the liberation of his visceral energies, is the means through which the poet’s authentic state, understood here as his artistic realization, will be attained.

Interestingly the misanthropic quality of the man-beast also encapsulates the self-hatred suffered by Labrador Ruiz’s protagonist as a consequence of his artificial existence. Like the anthropophagus monster of antiquity, Laberinto’s Minotaur suffers the burden of his duality, the grotesque union of id and ego. In this capacity, the monstrous poet also comes to represent the ethical struggle
within, a struggle shaped and affected by the uncanny ambivalence felt towards his inner demon.47

**Exposition of the Labyrinth**

The absence of a traditional plot, in Labrador Ruiz's text makes summarizing the story problematic. However, a succinct version of *Laberinto’s* drama could be simplified as a young artist coping with his interpersonal uncertainties, caused in part by unrequited love. Molinero’s likewise synthesis the plotlessness of the novel in the following manner: "una serie de recuerdos juveniles sin orden cronológico o lineal en la proximidad de la muerte del protagonista" (26). This hopeless romantic appealed to the written word to alleviate the sorrows of unanswered love in an implicit Goethean gesture. 48 However, in contrast to the exclusively amorous ailment of Goethe’s well-known Werther, Labrador Ruiz’s protagonist suffers explicit aesthetic and Existential troubles as well. Furthermore, while in Goethe’s work, Werther commits suicide in a final act of loyalty and selflessness, for *Laberinto’s* bard, death is an act of self-liberation and affirmation, most importantly his enactment of his will. 49 Death becomes a vehicle for *Laberinto’s* poet which liberates him from "la horrible máscara que lo oprime" (Molinero 41).

The text begins with a soliloquy-esque epigraph which succinctly exposes the Existential matrix of the novel. The stepping into the labyrinth begins for the protagonist with the following queries: "¿Qué es la verdad, y el amor, y el renombre, y el buen parecer y todas las otras cosas?-preguntaba a menudo el otro yo que soy yo mismo" (8). Two points become clear immediately, the
protagonist’s motivation for his plunging into his quandary and the recognition of multiple Existential selves, the presence of "el otro yo que soy yo mismo" (8). The unequivocal driving concerns for the anonymous narrator-protagonist are ethical, amorous, and aesthetic; which from the onset of the novel shed light on the crux of his anguish.

From the opening pages of the text the reader is privy to the inquisitive characteristic of the novel at hand and the numerous ontological selves of the poet which are searching for proverbial answers to individualized questions. This poet-protagonist imprisoned in a labyrinth of his own making, leads me to think that the constant reflexive inquiries are not mere romanticized self-flagellation. But rather, if I may be indulged one last time with the mythological allusion, the self-reflexivity of the protagonist is representative of his attempts to appease, liberate, and ultimately reconcile with the misanthropic beast within. The appeasement begins immediately with the first act, "Un tiempo."

This first act consists of the first seven chapters, in them motley crews of personas are laconically "introduced," I stress the inaccuracy of the idea of an introduction here due to the character vacuum in Labrador Ruiz’s novel. While, the protagonist transits through the city (an explicit labyrinth motif), the characters, whether antagonists, foils or stock characters are not developed historically, meaning no background information is provided whatsoever. The reader must thus supplement the character void in Laberinto to draw impressions of the world which surrounds the poet.
With "Un tiempo" the disquietudes synthesized in the epigraph are expounded. In short, the protagonist's memoirs, as this is *Laberinto*’s most accurate designation, problematize Existentialist charged notions of love, art, civility, and man’s complex cultural masks. The confession begins with an apostrophic affirmation. Here we learn of the protagonist's quixotesque qualities, chief among them his devotion to reading: "Por mucho tiempo el mundo para mí estuvo en los libros. Habiendo leído todo cuanto en mis manos cayera [...] me hallaba saturado de literatura y expresiones literarias como el pez de su elemento. Tenía veinte años" (11). Like Cervantes's famous hero, Labrador Ruiz’s protagonist is a man of letters, well versed in literature, philosophy and the most recent "ideas escritas menos communes" (11). Unlike Cervante's most renowned character, however, Labrador Ruiz’s poet is a young man when his literary voyages began.50

As per the poet's memories, the twenty year-old describes himself metaphorically as a geologist, explorer and alpinist, or in a word an adventurer. However, above any other aspiration, *Laberinto*’s protagonist is a poet. This self-portrait becomes central because the morbid sensibility which gives way to philosophical pathos throughout Labrador Ruiz’s novel originates with an Existentialist crisis. In "Un tiempo," the reader witnesses the poet’s Existential epiphany as being, as an artist and as a love-sick poet, all within the context of his conscious attempt to not "convertirme en el escriba del alma de mi tiempo" (14). In fact, it is in this very capacity as lyrical zeitgeist, as the voice of the
ethically and aesthetically bankrupt Latin-American man of the 20th century, where the historical and literary merit of Labrador Ruiz’s novel lay.

Such manifestations of this bankruptcy are witnessed by the reader through the internal ramblings of the anonymous bard. Laberinto’s fragmented narration in several occasions throughout the novel spontaneously presents this Existential problematic of man. The first such example in Labrador Ruiz’s novel engages the question of how can the phenomenon man be laid out? The proverbial answer is presented as a negative reflection:

El hombre no vale nada por sí mismo, ni por las cosas que sabe, ni por los libros que ha leído; el hombre sólo vale por sus reacciones frente a la vida […] el hombre es un sujeto de reacciones, de estados; un compaginar de estados. Estos estados juntos, estos matices, hacen su carácter. El carácter es la vida, o la intervida, o la infravida. O nada. (18)

The metaphysical pathology of the poet comes to him as an epiphany. The sense of uncertainty the poet experiences, which he suffers as a sickness, enlightens his essence. In Laberinto, however, essence is retooled as the denial of a nonnegotiable transcendental reality of collective man. Furthermore, the poet's essence is not to be understood as that invariable nature of being, but rather by its significant temporal feature(s). As the narrator tells us, the constitution of the self is not found in the material (libros) nor the immaterial (las cosas que sabe) but rather in the interrelations fostered by each individual. Here the narrator is affording the reader his personalized vision of modern man, however, what he is asserting is his own understanding of his self: a reactionary, contingent being plunged into his temporality.
It is misleading to read the assertion of man’s immediacy, that is to say his state of *nowness*, as a harmonious collection of conditions as the pronominal verb "compaginar" suggests. However this misrepresentation of the individual’s contigency is not to be unexpected, considering the unreliability of the poet-protagonist. Nevertheless, the polysemic quality of the poet’s views, as presented here, is shaped by the protagonist’s last utterance: "nada." When he comments that man’s personality is a collection of "matices" and nothingness, the poet is underscoring man’s autonomy to create from the void of freedom produced by nothingness. In a sense, man produces his personality, not vice versa. And that production process is not carried out in a void; it requires internal and external negotiations. Also, by betting on the existence of that "nada," the narrator, in reality, is presenting the reader with a strictly individualized vision of himself, within his thoughts on the collective.

**Gastronomic Encounter with Being**

From this opening exposition on the denotation of man’s self, Labrador Ruiz’s poet returns, or to paraphrase the protagonist, he *happens* upon himself. From a panoramic vision of the human, he finds a pause, a chiasm amongst the drab backdrop of dehumanized society from which to affirm his concrete existence. Here again, *Laberinto’s* narrator reconfigures the normative limits of consciousness and dream to provide the audience his own vision of himself:

Por ahí me encontré conmigo mismo. Hallé un relieve, una anfractuosidad, un hombre dentro de mí; roto, maltrecho, dolorido, pero un hombre. Este relieve, este hombre-me dije- no debo adobarlo.- Para servirlo al capitoso paladar de los amigos me parece bien en su ácido sabor y su amarga raíz […] la desolada
crispatura de la verdad va bien andando sola. Lloré. Cayó el ensueño y quedó la pesadilla. (19)

This passage represents one in a series of epiphanies for the poet, from which the exploration of his surroundings yields a closer understanding of his being. The narrator's emphasis on the individual elaborated through gastronomic symbols attests to the interdependency of the self with the other. Simultaneously, the narrator reveals the desire to interpellate his friends, and in effect the reader, to the burdening weight of his consciousness.

The passage above frames the experience of the protagonist's catharsis as firstly a chance encounter during the wanderings of the mind, employing the well used motif of the journey to convey the idea of soul-searching. The findings of the poet's expedition inwardly, results in the discovery of a repressed "I" or the "otro yo que soy yo mismo" (8) from the epigraph, which will lead to a final act of gastronomic consumption. The depiction of the "yo" is undertaken utilizing traumatic imagery; the reader is presented with a vision of this internalized man as broken and battered. Yet this labyrinthine man is not to be pitied nor abetted but rather embraced and in final instances served up, in his acidic (ácido) and bitter (amargo) state, that is to say in his primitive irritating condition, to his friends. This cannibalization of fragmented man employs culinary terminology to explore the concept of authenticity and its consumption. The ingestion of this acidic man will, invariably, have unsettling effects, evidenced by the protagonist's cathartic weeping.

The succinct voyage from encounter with the self, through the cannibalization of fragmented man to the lachrymal discharge into consciousness
takes only a few lines. Yet this conflation of the philosophical, the alimentary, and
the oneiric, seeks to structure the aporetic epiphany experience of the narrator
for the reader at a pace which recreates the poet’s thought process. In doing so,
the economy of language displaces the final burden of interpretation onto the
reader.

The narrator’s descent into a dream/nightmare reconfigures the signifying
power of the binary to reveal an Existential pronouncement on authenticity. Here,
*Laberinto* reimagines the binary to relate the nightmare as the authentic reality of
the self and the inauthentic state of ignorance is associated to the dream.
Astutely employing the verbal image of "caer" for the dream and "quedar" for the
nightmare, the poet conveys the action of an unveiling to transmit his thoughts on
the authentic being. This affirmation of the self is predicated on the reconciliation
that within himself lay a man who is "roto" and "dolorido," in short a realization of
a nightmare state of being within himself. However, this nightmarish man is not to
be altered. This necessary conciliation is reactionary to the “capitoso paladar” of
dehumanized society, represented throughout the novel as a decrepit
bourgeoisie collective. It is this bitter man, enveloped in his nightmare state and
served up to be devoured, which opens the first act of *Laberinto*. From this
opening entree, the narrator’s thought turn to the aesthetic and amorous
problematic of his being.

**Penciled Colloquy**

Immediately after this first encounter with himself, further insight into the
poet’s aesthetic cosmovision begins with a figurative *coup d’état*. I am referring to
the anthropomorphic appearance of the poet’s three pencils. As with the spontaneous characters which the narrator will encounter on his sojourns throughout the city, the poet’s three pencils simply come to life. Montes-Huidobro suggests that these pencils provide a surrealist perspective on the poet’s personal disillusionment, conveying: "el efecto deshumanizado de las circunstancias" (146). In contrast, I find that these pencils serve to provide insight into the poet’s state of consciousness, which immediately evokes the well known Freudian trinity of the mind. Like the Austrian psychiatrist’s configuration of the psyche, Laberinto’s pencils function as aesthetic agents of the poet’s psyche.

Each pencil accomplishes a specified task. Pencil one works as the hunter of thoughts, the unbridled Dionysic drive of inspiration, feverishly annotating any and every thought to later dissect "su presa" (15). The second pencil is described as the hunter of the thoughts of others; an analogous role to pencil one. However, pencil two becomes the component of the creative machine that experiences and recollects the phenomenon of the outside world. In this capacity pencil two mediates between the internal voice of creation and external social, intellectual world. Pencil three, described as warn and stoic is the eraser, the editor. In Freudian terms, these pencils are the Id, the Ego and the Superego, respectively. Through the pencils the reader is positioned to witness the protagonist’s particular artistic method.

From the pencil’s colloquy, as they do in fact engage in debate with each other, the audience learns that the poet’s technique consists of absorbing all inspiration which falls into his hands; this method of literary assimilation pencil
two, the mediating ego, classifies as larcenous plagiarism: "¡Qué cosa! El roba en los clásicos, y en los modernos y en los que han de venir: él roba en todo. / - no tiene conciencia" (20). As becomes clear, the protagonist’s "professional ethics" knows no restrictions, compelling the protagonist, in a parasidic gesture, to devour all manner of writings. The second pencil’s viewpoint not only finds the poet’s actions morally reprehensible, but also provide a telling picture of his aesthetic self-awareness.

The emphasis on the poet’s frenetic accumulation of thoughts, ideas and words, taken into account that the poet does not attempt to publish, portrays him as irrational. Yet the poet’s irrationality veils a purposeful reason. I am referring to the use of dice (15) by the protagonist to formulate his poems. The arbitrariness in the act of creating his poetry recreates the capricious internal organization of his universe. By this I mean that the artist’s methods tell us as much about his aesthetic cosmovision as they do about his understanding of the organizing principles of his existence, which are all at once arbitrary and unpredictable but nevertheless methodological.

The second scene with the trinity of pencils, once again focuses on the protagonist’s artistic preferences. Much to the regret of the first two pencils, the poet is a minimalist: "Él ama más lo que tiene menos. Ama el artificio de una mujer que no existe, fantástica, de una mujer sin nombre y se complace en crearle artificio/ -es ridículo. / -es idiota. ¡es un poeta! ¡un poeta!" (21). As the pencils would have us believe, Laberinto’s resident poet values not only the ideal of woman and the "ensueño" which permits his encounter with his art but also the
creative process which brings into existence the inspiration. In short, _Laberinto_’s poet envisions art as a heterogeneous process of inconsistent forces, in this respect his art is a realistic form of representing the absurdness of human existence.

This phantasmagorical idealism in the poet is shaped by the embracing of the minute, in the words of the second pencil: "Él ama los detalles, las cosas pequeñas, las cosas falsas y también las absurdas [...] todo lo que puede ser amado y ser odiado a un tiempo mismo [...] porque a veces-dice él- se puede tener dos almas sin saberlo" (21). This phenomenological approach to art emphasizes the ambiguous and the miniscule and touches on the ambivalent narrative economy of _Laberinto_. Labrador Ruiz’s novel proposes a sensorial and impressionistic vision for art. To the collective, the protagonist prefers the individual; to the holistic the poet devotes his energy to the heterogeneous, as evidenced in his theory of multiple souls. What the colloquy of the pencils reveals is that the poet has taken to reconciling with "la mitad de bestia y la otra de ángel, según se llama a sí mismo" (22). Hence the poet has begun to reunite with his labyrinthine Minotaur as a generative artistic means. In this sense, _Laberinto_’s poet has begun to cultivate his own voice.

**Teresa, L’*enfant terrible* **

The story of Teresa, the poet’s paramour, begins with a single utterance. Used onomatopoeically and punningly, her prescription as a "peripatética..." (37), uncovers multiple personality and exegetical qualities of _Laberinto_’s female protagonist. Staying true to its etymological roots, the word encapsulates, in
particular, two distinguishable qualities of Teresa’s character. Explicitly, the idiom symbolizes her professionally. Taken from the Greek and Latin *peripaté* to literally mean walking, the narrator’s use alludes to Teresa’s work as a prostitute. Onomatopoeically, the utterance makes use of its prominent root, *patética*, to imbed the idea of the wretched and the pitiful with the persona of Teresa. However, implicitly the term also captures Teresa’s more decisive function in *Laberinto*’s narrative drama, that of philosopher. In this capacity, it is important to recall the term’s relationship with Aristotelean philosophy. What I am referring to is the association of "peripatetico/a" with the philosophical performance of Aristotle, whose pronouncements where carried out while walking the halls of the Lyceum.\textsuperscript{51}

The point I would like to emphasize is that "peripatética" captures Teresa’s discursive function in *Laberinto*. Teresa functions as an externalized foil to the poet’s interior voice; she is an antagonistic philosopher in her own right who confronts the poet. She not only stimulates the poet’s thoughts but also affords the reader her own point of view which in turn sheds light on the Existential enigmas which have tormented the poet up to this point in the narrative. Perla Rosencvaig, takes a feminist perspective, suggestings that Teresa carries out the arquetypical picaresque role, a marginalized malcontent who embodies how "la mujer, para sobrevivir, tiene que transigir, pactar desde su posición de ser inferior con los que disponen las reglas" (972). I read this self-preservation drive in Teresa as analogous to the egocentric will to being characteristic of the
alienated poet. As such, the personal interests of each character create a symbiotic relationship central to the narrative evolution of Laberinto.

Teresa’s appearance in Laberinto is staged as an innocuous encounter at a café. An informal meeting of drifters, voyeurs, described in short fragmentary sentences. Molinero has observed that she is introduced in the same vague manner that is characteristic of Laberinto: "la ausencia de rasgos físicos definitivos una vez más nos permite tan sólo conocer lo que interesa presentar al autor: los rasgos de un alma oprimida" (31). Teresa is introduced metonymically, with the emphasis placed on the contrasting colors of her skin with the translucency of her expression. This inventory of her physiological appearance is further contrasted by the warn accessories which first captivate the poet’s gaze. This initial hypnotization is facilitated by Teresa’s oblique smile: "Como para los locos inmortales sus sueños fueron su realidad comprendí que para esta mujer su sonrisa era su felicidad" (40). Taking into account, that Teresa’s anguish lay, in part, in the economic hardship she faces, the transcendent smile which transfixes the poet becomes mythologically telling.

Teresa’s ability to grin in the face of her dilemma, recalls the absurd happiness of Albert Camus’s Sisyphus facing the eternal torment of ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain. Much in the same manner as the Thessalian prince’s punishment reveals the essence of his being, so too does Teresa’s enigmatic smile reveals the self-sustaining quality of her existence. In my judgment, the happiness attributed to her smile, both ironic and defiant, is far from the negative connotation attributed to her by the narrator, when he mentions
Teresa in the same breath as with "locos inmortales." Furthermore, the burden of her profession becomes the means to her survival, not its incontrovertible finitude. As Molinero has highlighted it is precisely Teresa’s irrepressible spirit which most fascinates: "Dueña de una sensibilidad profunda y de una sensualidad enervante [...] Teresa logra cautivar al lector a pesar de la neblina que la rodea" (32).

The profound sensibility of Teresa begins to reveal, through the enigmatic lyrical note she uses to ensnare the poet, the lucidity of her agenda. Appealing to a mixture of Hellenistic and modern urban metaphors, Teresa appeals to the poet’s sense of curiosity, and in the process inverts the narrative roles developed in the novel. The poet-narrator, who had been described as a ruthless hunter of classics and ideas becomes the prey. I present a portion of Teresa’s note to the poet which illustrates this inversion of roles:

¡Adiós! Ni tú ni yo tendremos esta noche más que un solo recuerdo lacerante que no podremos confesarnos nunca. Es triste y sin embargo mañana correrás de nuevo sobre el asfalto urbano como una loca musa descendida a caza de cualquier ligero fauno, mientras yo paseo las enardecidas calles con la felicidad idiota de un ser que no se entera. (43)

Implicit in Teresa’s note is the redressing of the Actaeon allegory. Making use of mythologically charged symbols, such as the "loca musa" and the "fauno," to create a predatory relationship between the two, Teresa’s words in effect transform the poet into the hunted. The adjective use of "lacerante," "triste" shroud Teresa’s note with a tragic quality, while keeping the poet and the reader engaged in the proverbial damsel in distress charade. However, what does
become revealed by Teresa’s behavior is not her self-professed idiocy, but rather a shrewd woman of letters, capable of weaving romantic images with mythological figures.

The effect on the anonymous protagonist, whom she perceptively tags as an urban drifter and whom I read as a differentiated hybrid flâneur and voyeur, is the further destabilization of a perplexed individual. Specifically, the poet experiences the aftershock of Teresa’s romantically tragic situation as a "peripatética." His reaction to her note, which reveals her as his philosophical doppelgänger, deepens the narrator’s anguish, reducing him to a state of uncertainty: "no sé [...] no sé [...] no sé" (Laberinto 43). This anaphoric perplexity closes the scene with Teresa, thrusting the poet into an uncanny state of ambivalence, unsure if the emotions felt toward Teresa are attributable to the clarity of her verses, which have keenly expressed his everyday toil.

Interestingly, Óscar Montero López has highlighted the propensity in Laberinto to fashion "varios alter-egos quienes aparecen y desaparecen de la novela" (74). However, not only does Laberinto present a motley agglomeration of character extensions which show the other side of protagonists, in Labrador Ruiz’s text certain characters function as uncanny counterparts or unsettling mirrors. Otto Rank describes the function of this literary double as an explicit "predilection of the author for the unreal and uncanny, to his desire to depict distinct and separate traits of himself, or to his desire for another existence" (xiii). In Teresa’s case, I would argue that her role is to portray a dissimilar vision of
Laberinto's protagonist, which showcases the Existential preoccupations which drive his anguished wandering.

Following this vein of thought, I posit that a different Teresa appears in chapter six; in fact she has evolved into the poet's external inquisitor, a de facto psychoanalyst. It is her analysis of the poet which reveals several of his personality traits which have influenced his desire to write. The scene unfolds with the now typical internal monologue of the protagonist. The reader is informed of a childhood memory of a virginal love that had the palliative ability of quieting the protagonist's "locuras" (Laberinto 65). However, the memory of the virgin becomes cloaked in ambiguity, as the validity of the narrators' recollection becomes truncated by the possibility of her existing only in dream. The stage is set, then, for the re-entrance of Teresa, whom duly begins to inquire about the narrator's stoic disposition.

From a series of questions aimed at inquiring about the poet's past amorous liaisons, Teresa hypothesizes that the narrator's masochistic aloofness is attributable to his disallowance from love: "Lo llevas a flor de piel: no lo puedes ocultar. Se trata de la angustia de vivir; de la humana angustia de vivir. Lo de todo los días," to which she concludes "ya sé que no podrás ser feliz. Ya sé que de todos modos, aunque seas feliz, no dejarás de sentirte desgraciado" (Laberinto 73). This estrangement becomes, according to Teresa, the poet's incendiary birthmark; and in fact it is his self-inflicted narcissistic desire to be different.
However, the poet’s own thoughts on the matter suggest that the initial memory of the virginal figure veils the deeper metaphysical infatuation from which the poet writes. In fact, the virgin comes to be associated with "el nudo para el nudo de los silencios definitivos" (74); in other words she becomes associated with the definitive silence of death. In this capacity, the stimulant of the poet’s existence, that is to say the ideal love of the virgin, becomes the metaphor from which to explore the romance with his own mortality. What’s more, the poet’s seduction by death will produce his most vivid philosophical assertions in the following scenes of act one.

**Masking the Self**

"Un tiempo" closes the first act of *Laberinto* by returning to the question of individuality. Spurred on by the accusations of Teresa, which have partially diagnosed the narrator’s egocentrism, the poet begins with the problematic of love, in its epistemological manifestation. Through the now paradigmatic intrapersonal dialogue, the protagonist problematizes the possibility of love as signifier, that is to say the myth of love, is no more than a performance. Beginning with a personal lament on his ambivalent psyche, the protagonist becomes aware of the qualitative similarities between the capriciousness of man and the indeterminacy of love. In fact, the poet zeros in on two tangible essences of love.

The first casts love as material; simultaneously in the economic sense, as a means to profitable ends and on the other hand as literally a manifestation of the desire to possess. This materiality of love points to its second characteristic,
for which the narrator finds recourse in a single word: usefulness. As the narrator concludes, these expressions of what love is, profitability, companionship and convenience only serve to unmask the constructiveness of love, in the words of the poet the "economía del amor" (76). As per the poet, love is a utilitarian social project with palliative effects which feeds on necessity, adapting to its temporality. In its palliative capacity, love signifies the complacency of companionship, the outlet of libidinal energy, and the nurturing of the ego.

The poet's inquisitive nature does not restrain itself to the topic of love alone. The protagonist's estimation of love takes him to comment on the empty essentiality of human identity. Likewise, Ramos found an essential vacuity in the constructs of identity, which he termed "mascara," and which he associated with theater:

Persona [...] en latín se ha formado de personare, resonar a través, y significaba en su origen la máscara a través de la cual el actor antiguo declamaba, luego el papel que interpretaba y, al fin, el 'carácter', 'la personalidad'. Así la designación de la naturaleza humana se ha adherido al nombre latino de la máscara trágica que no vive sino cuando se eleva la voz del histrión. (126)

In a similar vein, Laberinto's narrator carries out the demystification of the self by highlighting humanity's performativity, the metaphorization of individuality as a mask, taken also to connote multiple variations and expressions. As with love, the narrator's interior rumination results in the exegetical unmasking of the self. However, this new interpretation of the self as a temporal mask does not resolve the identity puzzle but rather only deepens the discussion: "andar con una máscara entre la gente, estar contento, feliz, alegre; ser discreto, ingeniosos, ágil...¡y no ser nada de eso! Estar sangrando penas [...] y reir, reir, reir..." (78).
The poet is speaking of his own personal mask, which, like Teresa’s enigmatic smile, takes a defiant posture to the exterior world, epitomized by his laughter vis-à-vis the interior anguish of his existence. The poet’s laughter attempts to hide with an "efímera carcajada" (78) his private torment.

Inevitably the masquerade does not profit the narrator. In fact, the palliative means to subsist, that is to say the mask he wears, only exasperates his disgust to the point of unsustainability. The apocopic appearance of "yo veo" (79-80), exploiting the latent voyeurism of the poet, exposes the repulsive sentiment of the protagonist towards the decay of civility. Rosencvaig finds a sociopolitical critique implicit in the protagonist’s growing nausea:

El discurso, sin alusiones temporales, pero con referencias espaciales que reiteran una visión frívola y decadente del medio habanero, cuestiona desde dentro, con su propia estructura irreverente, no sólo las formas opresivas de poder, sino los productos culturales (en particular la novela de su época) sometidos a la retórica oficial. (972)

In this respect, not only is his own mask sickening to him but also through his gazing of others, the poet becomes disgusted by the surrounding superficiality to the point of asphyxiation. The percolating indignation within the poet which explodes into a full fledged revulsion is, paradoxically, inspired by a sense of the ethical.

The own words of the poet are clear; his disdain born from an interpersonal reappraisal evolves outwardly because of the hypocrisy he witnesses, what Molinero explains as "el conflicto de la dualidad humana" (39) characteristic of Laberinto. Inevitably, given the introspective nature of Laberinto, the indictment does not radiate solely outwardly. In a boomerang-like movement
of clarity, the narrator returns to himself, focusing the center of his discontent back on him:

Odio las máscaras de todo corazón, yo, que no soy más que una máscara [...] la pobre máscara de un hombre contrahecho de dudas y paradojas, de timideces y atrevimiento, violentado por su suerte y terriblemente inconforme de su destino... ¡Todo lo aborrezco! (82)

The poet's logotherapy is prefaced by a character inventory which reveals the ambivalent complexity of the narrator's mask. His humanity is attested to because all at once he is contradictory and audacious. What the reader is privy to is a malcontent finitely attuned to the concomitant state of his mask and the performativity of his existence. Yet the destiny which he has experienced does not subjugate nor paralyze his being as his hatred becomes the stimulant in his efforts to reproach/counter his destiny. In short, his own performativity becomes the center of his reproach; in doing so the poet expresses dissatisfaction with his own inauthenticity. This self-rebuke signifies a desire to cultivate a poetic project more in tuned with his own agendas, not as a collateral effect of his circumstance. What we see then is a man "terriblemente inconforme de su destino," in other words a man in search of realization.

At this point, the poet's Minotaur appears. As I argue, the omniscient narrator who accompanies the poet is the protagonist's interior critic and this critic who was described as half beast/half angel (22) is symbolic of the labyrinthine Minotaur. The poet describes this narrative voice as an accusative agent who "se sienta en la silla de gobierno y dicta las leyes" (82). For this Minotaur, described previously as a man-beast, the poet's confession of hate
becomes a means of subsistence. In a gesture of indifference and with an analogous smile of disdain and apathy this Minotaur utters "-Bueno, en ese caso, ¡que lo pases bien!" (82).

The role of the labyrinthine Minatour in chapter seven can not escape mention. The poet’s other, represented in the interrogative voice which appears in no less than seven instances throughout the chapter, moderates the narrator’s internal monologue. In this mediating capacity, the poet’s other accomplishes the continuation of his internal monologue by bringing into question the validity of the assertions while directing the course of the discussion.

Secondly, *Laberinto’s* Minotaur, in a similar capacity as the Teresa character, functions as an irritant, fueling the uncertainties of the poet. What’s more, the Minotaur role as a sarcastic counterbalance, mocking him, highlights the poet’s contingency. Ramos explains that these interpersonal relationships stimulate our self-aware and generate an awareness of "un conjunto de realidades que actúan sobre mí y que a la vez son objeto de mi acción. La conciencia me hace sentirme pues, como una existencia en medio de otras" (61). In this capacity, the Minotaur, described in the text as: "El que se goza en contrariarme" and who ominously tells the narrator "/-ten cuidado con la máscara, que a lo mejor no existe" (77) serves an ontological and Existentialist purpose.

Firstly, as a superego, this other voice puts in jeopardy the very problematic of the mask metaphor as identity. Secondly, *Laberinto’s* Minotaur questions the absurd performativity implicit in the aforementioned metaphor,
taking into account that these personal masks do not remedy the individual's frustrations but rather only anesthetize them. In sum, the poet's labyrinthine Minotaur, long repressed by his inauthentic performances behind the mask has appeared to liberate and validate the poet's uncertainties. By serving this function, as the constant motivator and narratee for the poet, Laberinto’s protagonist is able to reach a temporary internal armistice at the close of "Un tiempo." However, the tranquility within the poet is short lived.

**The Monster Within**

"Otro tiempo..." is the continuation of the philosophical corrosion of Laberinto’s protagonist. With the second act of Labrador Ruiz’s novel the focal point becomes the artist's problems, as such. While the first act of Laberinto favored the ontological self-questioning of the narrator within the context of his confrontation with love and art, "Otro tiempo..." inverses the puzzle to engage the denotation of what it means to be an artist. The poet-narrator lays out the history of his poetic formation through an explicit self-portrait framed within journey symbols. This voyage motif is expressed through telling metaphors which help to fabricate in "Otro tiempo..." the sensation of movements, beginning at sea, then moving the narrator's presence to land and closing at a café. By mapping out the artistic maturation and configuration of the protagonist through these spatial metaphors Laberinto conveys the experience of the poet while taking the reader along the same trip.

As was the case with the first chapter of the novel, the narrator readily acknowledges his artistic focalization. He explicitly refers to poetry as the labors
of the imagination and secondly, and in my estimation the etiological root behind his memoirs, the "oficios del entendimiento" (85). This labor of understanding is propelled by a desire to realize himself as an individual, as a lover, and as an artist. From the initial confession as to the main concern for the second act of the novel, the narrator reveals that the voyage into his art begins with quiet contemplation to later immerse and uncover the "dionisíaco rescoldo de sal" (85) which the narrator employs as the symbol of his poetry. Of methodological interest here, however, is the extension by the poet of the signifying power of the Greek god of wine.

In Laberinto, the Dionysian trance connotes the chaotic intoxication of the instinctual and the pleasurable, but also celebrates the bitter artistic passion of the agonizingly repulsive. Worth noting of Laberinto's narrator here with this classification of his poetic means of creation is that his will to poetry is in fact negative. By this I mean to emphasize that what the poet reveals as the propelling energy of his craft is resentment; in his own words "un picante sabor de odio inextinguible" (85). This poetic stimulant, which has to this point in the narrative pushed the entire memoirs, becomes paradigmatic of the narrator's lyrical drive but also his Existential understanding of himself. I say paradoxically because this epistemological toiling, the inner probing by the narrator becomes both blessing and curse. The end product, the memoirs, expose that his art is a Damoclesian sword, which liberates and condemns simultaneously.

Undeniably telling of the novel's historical Avant-Garde backdrop, is the narrator's metaphorical association of poetry with daydream. In turn, this
daydream becomes a concrete objet d’art. Here the poet explicitly begins to frame his journey, which stands in for his aesthetic formation, by using imagery which brings to mind manual labor. First the poet mentions the blacksmith and then a sailor: "yo estaba trabajando como un herrero con su duro hierro y un marino con su fuerte calabrote" (85). These images help to associate art, and its creation, with vivacity and action and portray poetry in particular as a dynamic enterprise, far removed from the passivity of the Modernistas. As per the poet, his art is to be forged, tempered, sharpened, and finished. In this lyrical laboring the first labyrinthine decree propagates patience. The three epanaphoric appearances of "saber sacrificarlo todo" (86) takes on a mantric quality for the poet-smith. Furthermore, ocean imagery abounds, which I view as the poet’s implicit attempt to convey his artistic vision through voyage imagery:

Trabajos y oficios de los sueños, de los enfermizos y estimulantes sueños, de los mejores sueños, trabajos y oficios del entendimiento y la imaginación, quisiera hundirme para siempre como un ancla rota en el perfil definitivo de un agua amarga y muerta. (87)

The anaphoric recurrence of "trabajo y oficios" puts emphasis on poetry as vocation. In turn, the lyrical effect of such a repetition succinctly unites three dissimilar concepts: work (vocation), dreams (imagination) and understanding. By relating these concepts, embedded within the oceanic symbolism he has been building up to this final passage, the narrator accomplishes the linking of self-consciousness with the artist’s commitment to the capriciousness of his art. Also, the repetition of "trabajo y oficio" connotes a progression, as with art, life is a continuous process. Ramos shares a similar point of view with regards to humanity: "El hombre es, como los demás vivientes, un proceso en constante
devenir [...] La vida se le presenta como un problema imperioso que debe resolver” (62). I find that Laberinto is conveying a similar idea of projection of being, however, with the novel the use of oceanic images transmit the idea of the artist’s search for his voice as a sea voyage, lived out and bursting with both negative and positive consequences.

Continuing within the ocean symbols, Laberinto’s narrator characterizes himself as a fragmented anchor. The "ancla rota" ambiguously recharges the signifying power of these shipping images while insisting on the unromantic disposition of Laberinto’s resident bard. The self-reference as a broken anchor speaks of the poet’s self-image as spiritually bankrupt and uses this image to connote his desires to achieve poetic stability, recalling the anchor’s traditional use as a stabilizing mechanism. In fact, the own words of the narrator express the aspiration to achieve a level of tranquility, an appeasement of the anguish of the creative storm.

Yet the subjunctive mood of "querer" expresses the ever-present insecurity of the poet. As the verb connotes, the action of submerging is not a fact, but rather a contingent longing, dependent upon the egocentric surrender for his art. This reckless abandonment into his art is a negative maneuver, a symbolic delving into the dark side of his artistic inspiration, as seen in the images of the anchor being dropped into the bitter, lifeless water the artist wishes to rest in eternally.

Expectedly, the poet’s mood becomes as capricious as the oceanic symbols used in the first artistic edict. From the principle of patience, the poet
stakes his art on "Saber resistir, he ahí el secreto" (88). This second poetic pronouncement is projected and inspired by the telluric. Confronted by the terrestrial, by the flora and the fauna which surround him, the narrator confesses his admiration for their rebellious quality. However, the appreciation of his surroundings does not conceal a contemplative passivity in Laberinto’s poet, but rather reveals the omnipresent gaze of a god-like figure:

Otras veces yo me estaba, hombre solitario y perezoso, tendido en el suelo sin moverme, quieto, atento, viendo ir y venir las cosas que por el suelo andan y que bajan [...] muchedumbre molecular de lo invisible, de lo apenas alado, de lo que gravita más bien que pesa...si esos ojos me vieran yo les parecería su Dios. (87)

The poet's voyeurism roots his unrest, as does his low intensity megalomania. In fact, the repugnance excited by the offensive "muchedumbre," guilty of inconsequential invincibility, stirs the resentment and the rebellion within the narrator. A residual effect originated by the poet's gaze becomes the latest self-portrait as a carver (builder), both images manipulating metaphorically the God reference in the passage above. The self-referentiality as a god figure is telling of the narrator's cosmovision, as the poet functions in an omnipotent capacity as poet and philosopher. Likewise, the other's gaze becomes constitutively imperative.

I would emphasize here, that the poet's existence though characterized by a philosophical and aesthetic solitude, nevertheless finds the presence of the other to be indispensible. As I have shown previously, for Ramos the presence of the other, the interrelationships which surround humanity, affect our understanding of ourselves: "cada uno de ellos se encuentra condicionado por el
anterior, de manera que no hay personalidad sin conciencia, conciencia sin vida orgánica, vida orgánica sin una estructura natural mecánica" (117). In this capacity, the nauseating inauthenticity of the narrator’s world effects his configuration as a being, be that as a philosopher or an artist. The will towards poetry, in Laberinto finds that the narrator labors with the burden of a nascent sensitivity to the hollow organisms which gravitate more than substantiate. In fact, this god-like consciousness, which propels him to feel repulsion for "lo que gravita más bien que pesa" (87) also drives his lust for the written word.

Laberinto’s poet takes the rebellion principle, the aforementioned "Saber resistir" belief, further by explicating the philosophical importance of such a worldview. This rebelliousness functions as an apologia of the individual, which through the exercise of the self affronts the will of destiny. In opposition to the orthodox and to the spirit of conformism, taken to signify the inauthentic masks first encountered in chapter one, the novel's poet prorogates "lo espontáneo y lo auténtico, que son las rebeliones primas del temperamento [...] así el modo personal opuesto a la manera común" (93). However, this Existential conviction which in truth borders on outright narcissism is not without its perils. The poet's credo dictates his immersion into the inextricable labyrinth of himself.

The poet's conviction to the principle of rebellion comes with the liberating burden from "todo lo que está trazado a escudra, premeditado, preconcebido, preconizado" (93). However, this axiological emancipation plunges the poet into the orphanhood of his own devices, into the realization of his freedom which opens the door to the frightening thought of his various possibilities. However,
this initial anguish in *Laberinto’s* protagonist does not paralyze him, but rather invigorates his Existential projects. In this sense, the exploration for his own voice is affirmation, making of his rebellion, in the words of Ramos, "la determinación nueva que cada ser introduce en la estructura inferior que lo sustenta. Es pues una libertad en sentido positivo" (118).

**Dead Sculptor Walking**

The previously commented chapter eight of *Laberinto* marks a defining moment in the evolution of the novel. Structurally the chapter functions as the midway point in the novel and diegetically it represents the turning point for the poet’s aesthetic and ethical behavior. From here on, visible humanistic rebelliousness characterizes the poet’s words. Such spiritual insubordination and ideological inconformity crystallize in the figure of the condemned sculptor the poet meets in chapter eleven.

As has become the norm in *Laberinto’s* story telling, no background information is afforded to the reader as to the events which have transpired in the poet’s life at the start of chapter eleven. Neither justification nor explication is given to the circumstances which have developed, and which now find the poet in the same prison as the condemned, anonymous sculptor. No temporal reference is given and the nonlinear presentation shrouds the episode in the paradigmatically ambiguous narrative practices the novel has been nurturing. Nevertheless, the absence of a narrative preamble only functions to heighten the focus and sharpen the contrast between the sculptor and his opaque milieu.
The interpolated appearance of the condemned sculptor serves three purposes. First, the nameless sculptor operates as an artistic doppelgänger to Laberinto’s poet, complementing the external philosophical foil which Teresa represents and the internal alter-ego the Minotaur symbolizes. It merits mentioning that the poet portrays the sculptor as young, stoic, and an inquisitive figure similarly fascinated by death. Secondly, the emergence of the unnamed young sculptor in Laberinto reinforces the Minotaur motif, as he cuts a fearsome figure: "un cuello poderoso de bestia de trabajo. Eso era él. Encima de ese cuello la viva simpatía de los pocos años" (115). Lastly, the young condemned man becomes the fixation for Laberinto’s poet as an example to pursue.

The nameless convict’s beastly figure becomes the aesthetic and ethical archetype for the poet’s being. The attraction begins at the physical level to transcend into the realm of the metaphysical, which is to say with the transfiguration of sculptor into death personified. From the interpretation of the sculptor’s execution, the reader can witness the epiphanic moment for the poet which simultaneously reveals the sculptor’s secret:

Lo vi todo enseguida. ¡Todo, todo! Su música, su maleta, su accidente; su silencio, su sonrisa, su retrato perdido... ¡Todo! ¡Ah, las cosas que no tienen nombre, las cosas que se olvidan y que fueron una vez! [...] Lo vi todo enseguida: muerto, muerto...se había evadido. Se había evadido de sí mismo y al que ajusticiaron ya estaba en paz. (125)

As the narrator explains the experience of the artist’s death was lived by guards and inmates alike. However, it is through Laberinto’s narrator that the philosophically insightful nature of the sculptor becomes unveiled. As the
narrator explains the methodical compartmentalization by the dead artist was his personal inventory, his reckoning before death. In this capacity, the sculptor’s quiet smile represents the reencounter with himself, symbolically mentioned as his finding of "su retrato perdido" (125).

The nameless thing the young carver questioned the poet about, the "cosas que no tienen nombre" (120) are the stimulating memories which spur the condemned artist’s authenticity. Another possible reading of the young man’s question is that the sculptor is penetrating the ineffable, that which defies expression or reification. Better still the condemned artist is pursuing that which because of its indeterminacy is incapable of being expressed. These abstract dream memories propel the condemned man’s will to being, a metaphoric tribute to the regenerative power of nothingness.

The quiet dignity and self-realization of the sculptor represents the embracing of his authentic being. Recalling that the sculptor had been dispossessed of his chisel due to the possibility of suicide within the first lines of the chapter, the sculptor’s audacity and subsequent suicide before his execution signifies his triumph in life and in death. This reckoning by the sculptor becomes an evasion of his destiny insofar as by refusing to accept his death sentence and by committing suicide the sculptor has achieved his Existential nirvana. What’s more, his courage vis-à-vis "a la muerte" and "nada" (122), explicitly confirms the artist’s self-reconciliation with nothingness. As the law of man did not enslave him, Laberinto’s external Minotaur found in suicide the projection of his freedom
to choose his will and not have his fate dictated for him. This bringing into play of suicide will have a lasting impression on the poet.

**Appetite for Destruction**

The episode with the condemned artist alters *Laberinto’s* narrator. However, true to its nonlinear narrative form, the metamorphosis of the narrator’s being transpires instantaneously. Without prelude or forewarning, the reader witnesses the narrator’s invert anew the axiological focus of his soliloquy. Having begun "Otro tiempo..." clearly trained on his *ars poetica*, with the penultimate chapter of the second act of *Laberinto*, the narrator returns to the problematic of his Existential ethics.

As the narrator’s exegetical energy converges once again on his experiencing "I," subtle differences are tangible from the protagonist encountered in the first act of *Laberinto*. To begin with, the protagonist no longer relishes in his own depredation. The martyrdom caused by his nascent consciousness, albeit self-inflicted, stokes his incendiary thoughts. Secondly, love and more emphatically poetry have become jaded palliative means of subsistence. In fact, in this penultimate episode the shadows of love and art do not appear, as these have been discredited as allies in the narrator’s quest for an authentic existence. It must be noted that the decrepitude of the poet’s existence has not, however, dimmed the allure of the generative capabilities of words, but only the romantic belief in their forms. This becomes explicit in the insistent intrapersonal soliloquy of the narrator.
Laberinto’s logotherapy approach reopens with the psychosomatic awareness of an internal malice which is visible in the narrator's "sonrisa a medias" (137). The poet argues that the sickening yoke of discontent is responsible for the torpor of mind and body. This inner corrosion of the self projects outwardly to such a degree that the narrative ego fragmented in two from the beginning of the novel, is now referred to as a "fantasma tácito" (138). The ensuing interrogative dialogue led by the "fantasma tácito," which in my reading has been the inner Minotaur the protagonist has been struggling with from the onset, echoes repeatedly the questions which stimulate the narrator’s thoughts. Which I read as the protagonist’s longing to go beyond banal existence, which can not, according to Ramos, be reduced to "la mera conservación y aseguramiento de la existencia" (63).

The phantom’s queries strike at two distinct temporal levels: firstly, what has occupied the narrator’s past deeds? And secondly, what concerns his present preoccupations? The initial retort by the poet can only be described as quixotic: "He querido la nube, el sol, la estrella y el lejano mar [...] Soy el mismo de antes, amo lo de ayer [...] ya sé que esto no formaliza una respuesta pero es tan desolador cuanto vendrá, que tiemblo por todo" (140-41). The poet continues to embellish himself with romantic imagery, references to man’s inner music and the euphoric inebriation of poetic creation. However, upon further recrimination by the phantasmagorical Minotaur, the poet regresses into his ontological skepticism, affronting the specter’s questions with a familiar philosophical negation, the "no sé" of chapter three:
"No sé" reverberates throughout the remaining passages of the chapter. In fact, this negation becomes the maxim for the narrator, encompassing the new conviction to skepticism of his philosophical principle. The narrator is explicit in the polyphonic significance of his maxim, which embraces the duality and multiplicity of his aesthetic and ethical worldviews.

This will to life, as evidenced in the "no sé" motto, denotes the narrator’s endorsement of the absurd arbitrariness of existence. However, this axiological engagement with the cynic side of life is neither a resignation to his fate nor a catatonic acquiescence to an inconsequential existence. Instead, confrontation with life becomes his humanistic obligation. Life becomes central to the poet’s cosmovision, life as a project, life to the best of his abilities. The emphasis on struggle is implicit in this worldview, in fact it is his "ley primera" (142), that is to say his first cardinal rule of life insists on confronting what life and the world affords and negotiating a niche as best as possible.

This humanistic obligation, which I read as his sense of duty as artist and as philosopher, is furthered along with the filial metaphor. By representing life as mother, the narrator conveys two ideas: life as guide and life as disciplinarian. Laberinto’s poet represents life as informing the personal understanding of his "I," in a similar fashion as a parent would with their children. And secondly, the narrator’s use of the mother metaphor emphasizes the mutual
interconnectedness between life and the poet. This intimacy between life and the poet is predicated upon the resolution to live dangerously, in full responsiveness to the absurdity of life. The narrator commits to this mode of existence "integramente" (142), in a word wholly, or he risks his philosophical contradiction, he risks existing inauthentically. Such a cosmovision accepts the Manichaean quality of life, good/bad, love/hate, and salvation/damnation. This new insight becomes the poet's raison d'être, the reason and justification for being. However, in keeping with the ambiguity of the narrative voices and the spontaneity of the novel’s narrative trajectory the poet’s philosophical disposition in the final trajectory of the chapter becomes altered again.

This change begins when the poet recalls his youth and the moral weight of those years, that is to say, where they were good or bad. In doing so, Laberinto’s poet enters into an axiological soliloquy about life in general. The narrator professes that the weariness he feels towards the long journey of his life, is due in part to his having enjoyed as much pain as joy. However, at this reflexive crossroads in his life, the poet senses he has lost his way and here at this impasse two words symbolize his state of being: "Taedium vitae" (143). This loathing in the poet deconstructs the belief in living dangerously, postulated only a few pages back.

Here again the poet is lost yet freed from the dreams which fueled his illusions; he concludes that Existential satisfaction in life is oxymoronic, as life's configuration and infrastructures are predicated on the absurd:

-Se comprende... ¿Qué puede esperar aquel que ha vivido? Exaltar las cosas más absurdas de la tierra es no tenerlas, porque
esas cosas absurdas están reservadas para otras gentes, precisamente para los que no las exaltan... Son felices, sus corazones son pausados [...] Pero los que por un sueño se vuelven locos y por una esperanza se tornan frenéticos... ¡Es imposible! Caminaba por una calle solitaria, por una calle interior que iba derecho al corazón [...] el profundo desdén que me inspiraba mi propia desdicha. (143-44)

The poet’s discontent, which he generalizes, radiates from a fundamental conflict of interests between modern life and modern man. The contradiction of life consists of happiness being equated with ignorance, and consciousness rewarded with anguish. Man’s rejoicing in life, (recalling that we are speaking of a man who has "vivido"), the surrendering to the life principle coupled with the awareness of life’s only undeniable destination, mortality, is the inextricable sentencing into the labyrinth of oneself, a liberation turned incarceration.

What I would like to draw attention to is that for the poet his mortality, that is to say his reconciliation with it, can be a regenerative force for the unabashed exaltation of life, the rejoicing in the now. However, the exaltation of life is in the end an absurd performance for the poet. As we will realize shortly, the poet’s idealism becomes an empty gesticulation, and he commits himself to a death project, much in the same way the condemned sculptor encountered in this chapter.

For *Laberinto’s* protagonist the incompatibility between his consciousness and his world is stirred by what he calls "demasiadas idealidades contraihechas" (143), which have conspired to compartmentalize humanity, repressed the will towards individualization, rendering man invisible. Montero López explains that Labrador Ruiz’s novel revolves around that incompatibility, a quest narrative in
search of "razones para la existencia del dolor, del amor, y del fracaso; pero ni las encuentra ni logra aprender como eliminar la presencia de todas estas fuerzas en su vida" (74). Humanity’s catatonia, the resignation of the individual voice, manifests itself anew as the incendiary state of being which the narrator calls absurd. The poet’s lust for self-realization, indivisibly associated throughout Laberinto as the lyrical, is paradoxically confronted everywhere by the decaying forces of life.

The consciousness to this absurd reality, which I call the poet’s Existentialist nirvana, seals his axiological projects. Faced with the futility of the absurd, Laberinto’s protagonist relents to his ever growing suicidal urges, the only authentic possibility in a decrepit landscape. In the narrator’s own words "-no meditar en el suicidio es traicionarse a sí mismo" (145). And so for the poet death is the liberation he has sought and not to contemplate suicide is in itself self-treachery, an inauthentic performance of bad faith.

Suicide becomes the poet’s new philosophical approach to being because of what he perceives as its cathartic quality. At once, the possibility of suicide becomes an adventure which reinvigorates the stale spirit of the narrator. The protagonist views suicide as a tribute to immortality which promises a rebirth or in the very least, the taking of his life will be a "chapuzón de espiritual higiene" (145). However, this invocation of death as a manifestation of man’s freedom unravels because of its syllogistic idealism, or better still, because of the unabashed faith in an unknowable experience. However, here at the rapture of suicide the poet’s Existential superego appears again. This narratee encountered
at distinct intervals in the novel, and most notably in chapter seven, appears to insist on the absurdity of life and the certainty of nothingness: "Alma, pobre alma, mía, ya no queda nada en ti… ¡Dudas, dudas, dudas nada más! ¿Y qué cosa es la duda…?" (146). The skeptic Minotaur of the opening soliloquy returns with a vengeance to reassert his philosophical presence, leaving the poet once again at the threshold between authenticity and conformity.

With the closing stages of chapter thirteen the reader witnesses the poet's suicide. However, what the reader has experienced throughout the novel has been the slow dying of the poet through the resigning his existence as inauthentic because of the absurd performativity of man's self. The philosophical suicide of the poet then is exemplified by the vacillating poetics of patience and resistance seen in chapter eight, and finally concludes with the unearthing of life's absurd anatomy in the penultimate scene of "Otro tiempo…" Nevertheless, this discursive crescendo/decrescendo, forms part of the larger finale which will be played out on two levels: the physical and the narrative.

While with chapter thirteen, the reader is afforded the postfactum closure of his rebellion poetics and the nascent curiosity for suicide, the physical manifestation of the narrator's demise does not take place until the last sequence of chapter fourteen. Recalling *Laberinto’s* structural and formal unruliness, the manifestation of multiple deaths of the poet at the end of the novel is not too surprising.

The narrative anachronisms, the ubiquitous presence of the self-reflexive narrator and narratee have lent protagonism to the reading experience. At the
same time, these narrative devices overpower the expectations of a nominal plot and open the possibility for the irrational deaths of the polymorphic poet. Nevertheless, the multiple death idea was foreshadowed in the first act of *Laberinto*, during the colloquy of the three pencils.

It is worth recalling that in the first chapter of the novel, the possibility of numerous deaths for complex individuals was entertained. One such individual in possession of a wealth of souls, masks, and consequently deaths was true, according to the pencils of William Shakespeare. As portrayed in chapter nine of the novel, "Chexper" as the poet called him, was a polymorphic fiend, simultaneously "cruel y compasivo; leal y traicionero: un verdadero monstruo" (105). As the protagonist confesses, Shakespeare's monstrous talents have enslaved the narrator's admiration. Just as the existence of these multifaceted beings connoted a complexity of personality so too their deaths (physical, psychical, ethical, aesthetic) are complex and concomitant. *Laberinto*'s poet is not an exception.

The last chapter of "Otro tiempo..." finds the protagonist without previous warning residing in an insane asylum, which he ignominiously refers to as a "vomitorium" (149). Befriended by a fellow malcontent, the poet witnesses the unnerving agony of a tisc woman and the dehumanized smile of the *de facto* mortician and just as devastatingly, the poet suffers the memories of Teresa. In fact, the resurgent memory of *Laberinto*'s female protagonist galvanizes the escape plan for the narrator. However, before the narrator executes his physical exit, his life's other passion manifests itself: "Quisiera escribir una carta a no sé
quien; una larga carta llena de perdones y de lágrimas” (158). This will to write accomplishes two functions for the narrator: redemption and art.

With the letter the narrator hopes to accomplish a personal reconciliation and a return to his art; yet true to Laberinto’s ambiguous narrative form this desire stays unfulfilled. Instead, aware of the impossibility of recapturing the spirit of the past, and also its inherent imperfection, the narrator returns to the escape plan he began to nurture at the end of chapter thirteen. Stimulated by the horrors of the present and the maternal memory of Teresa, the narrator embarks on the final voyage inward: "me aterro, me encorvo, me hundo…un punto lejano, un nombre, lo que amé, lo que temo, lo que espero… ¡Un punto lejano! […] Caigo, caigo partido en dos por un golpe de hacha/-¡Frío, frío, frío …! ¡Qué espantoso frío!" (160). This terrifying chill closes the second act of Laberinto, and with these words the reader witnesses (first person experience) the poet’s death thoughts. However, this suicide does not end the novel.

**The Rest is Silence**

The final act of Laberinto is divided into four separate movements, which nevertheless are not independent of each other. With "Después..." the narrative comes full circle, and the action returns to the questions posited in the epigraph opening the labyrinth. The first movement of the last chapter deals with the question of the hereafter from the perspective of the poet’s wake. In much the same way as the Chilean María Luisa Bombal treats death as an interstitial experience for Ana María in La amortajada (1938), Labrador Ruiz’s protagonist wonders about his being after death. However, while both novels deal with the
respective protagonist’s experiences of their wake and burial, Bombal’s anti-heroine reflects on her past life while the Laberinto’s protagonist ponders the possibilities of the afterlife.

The first scene of "Después..." finds the protagonist fully conscious of being dead. This new moment in the protagonist’s existence discloses his persistent malcontent, although he has not resigned his vocation as a writer, enthusiastically anticipating the prospects of recounting the "historia de mi entierro y mi velatorio" (164). This zeal of the poet is rooted in part by the liberation afforded by death:

¡Muerte me has dado una flor!-me complacerán las humedades tímidas que destruyen los primeros tejidos, las pupas que comienzan a estallar [...] pero, en fin, mirarme todo sería mi éxito. Magnífico difunto sin tener que incorporarme a una hora fija ¡que bien me hallara en la actitud que siempre gusté en la vida! (165)

As this passage makes clear, the poet's position towards death is that it is both a reward and a thing of beauty. In this capacity, the putrification of the body, analogous with the decay of a prior existence which for the poet has been a constant torment, is cathartic. As has been the case in other episodes in Laberinto, death is an ally for the poet, a means to an end and the possibility not afforded in life. In particular, death's potential is twofold: not only a deliverance from a previous torment but also the opportunity of separating from his body. By this I mean that the physical distancing from himself, which he has been laboring towards throughout the novel in the form of philosophical reflections, is attained through death. If we are to understand that part of the poet’s plight has been his
imprisonment within his body, then the gazing upon his magnificent corpse in death becomes a triumph.

The poet’s gaze once again gains in importance because it is this exteriorization which provides the reader with a window into the protagonist’s present state of mind. What’s more, it is this exterior gaze of the poet which functions as his own eulogy from which the reader learns that he was a devout humanist:

Aquí yace un poeta: un hombre de vasos capilares [...] es decir, hombre de emoción delicada, vehicular y transitoria: hombre de extremada sensibilidad y fina percepción; hombre-caverna de imágenes, prisionero de un claro de luna y del paisajillo de musgo de unos ojos verdes. (165-66)

The immediate literary reference is self-evident. The poet is a man of flesh and blood, or as Unamuno put it a man "de carne y hueso, el que nace, sufre y muere —sobre todo muere" (Sentimiento 7). As the protagonist makes an inventory of himself, the reader is given a succinct recapitalization and recapitulation. He embodies a collection of oppositions, all at once intuitive and grotesque, subjected to the romantic capriciousness of love. Further elucidating part of the poet’s anguished existence is his state of alienation, non-communication, and injustice. The poet is clear on this point, he has been a contradictory figure whose aesthetic projects have reduced him to accept his fundamental paradox, his egomaniacal drive or as he puts it "ser nada y quererlo ser todo" (166). Laberinto’s protagonist experiences this aesthetic failure as an injustice suffered as a life-long torment. Furthering the iniquity is the poet’s self-
perceived underappreciation, which has had the effect of casting him as a societal pariah.

Part of the poet’s confession is the recognition of his contradictory nature. This paradoxical quality explains the persistence of love as an Existential project in death. Having experienced first-hand the fallacy of love, the poet’s insistent invocation of Teresa only contributes to enable his bad faith. However, within the vacillation of his spiritual appraisal of his self, two other constants remain: the fragmentation of his experiencing "I" and the insidious virtue of writing: "¡Que oficio el de escribir! Sigue uno pegado a él como una lapa. Sífilis, decían los enterados. He aquí la sífilis que no acaba" (173). By asserting that writing is both vocation and sickness, the poet in effect associates writing as a masochistic activity, much in the same vein as love has been for him his entire life.

This perspective on writing coincides with Unamuno’s assessment of art, wherein "En el arte, en efecto, buscamos un remedio de eterización […] se aquieta un momento el espíritu, y descansa […] ya que no se le cure la congoja" (Sentimiento 177). In short, the vision Laberinto’s poet has been building up to this point, exposes the masochistic quality of his existence, which implicates him in the evolution of his own misery. Although this may appear paradoxical to the reader, it does in fact coincide entirely with the poet’s own confessions.

The final act of Laberinto is actually a return of sorts; a return to the epigraph which synthesizes, with one compound question, the crux of Laberinto. The victor is the "monstruo" (179) within, now witnessing the entombment of the
poet. However, this creature answers to his own inner voice, which finds itself scandalized by the poet’s ignominious demise:

Interrogo al hombre de allá dentro, al hombre que todavía es el otro hombre que está dentro de mí, y declara que no considera eso un escándalo [...] Después de todo, agrega ¿qué es la verdad, y el amor, y el renombre, y el buen parecer, y todas las otras cosas? No sigo transcribiendo lo que ha dicho [...] extraigo de cualquier parte con la fruición de un hurto limpio, las páginas amarillentas de mi novela de después… (179)

The aposiopesis closes the novel and with it the question concerning truth, love, fame, and decorum has been rhetorically answered. The preceding pages of the novel have been the retort, which have absurdly returned to the inquiry. This circularity of the text coupled with the refusal to continue transcribing the other voice’s words reveals that the novel has been an exercise in skepticism and perspectivism. The Existential key centers on the final confession of the victorious monster; the novel has culminated in "un hurto limpio" which is in my assessment the usurping of the innocuous reading process of a text. By this I mean that Laberinto’s sudden breaking off in the midst of a sentence is the explicit inability and unwillingness to proceed with the narrative as the text has revealed its own subjectivity. In doing so, the novel one last time defers the final responsibility of significance onto the reader, a devastating Existential (re)turn of self-consciousness.

With the interment of the poet, the reader is encircled in the novel’s desire to implicate the reading process into the materialization of the narrative. Seemingly a piece of Avant-Garde fiction from the protagonist’s point of view, Laberinto also offers a case study in Existentialist reflexivity. Labrador Ruiz
deplores the bankruptcy of humanity and its progeny: the anonymous individual. *Laberinto* unveils the inherent contradictions of life, and explores the virtues of death as an authentic project of the will. The poet’s story, taken as a metatextual commentary on the tragic sense of life, implies that authentic existence is subjective, enigmatic, concomittent, ephemeral and ultimately the charge of the individual. Like the anti-heroines we will encounter in María Luisa Bombal’s texts, *Laberinto*’s protagonist becomes a culprit of his own individuality. In the words of Ramos, that individuality is measurable in the choices made and the actions undertaken, because: "cada acto concreto y real, por ejemplo del pensar o del querer, lleva en sí el tohum y la particular esencia de la personalidad de que procede" (133). In this sense, *Laberinto*’s death tolls, the oremus of the last scene, echo the realization of man’s freedom, what Jean-Paul Sartre posited many years later, that "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (15), and in the case of Labrador Ruiz’s anonymous protagonist, what he wills himself to be.
Chapter III:

Sibi Dedita: María Luisa Bombal, Raconteur of Ambiguity

El amor es como una espada de salvación: que nos aleja de la nada; constituye el alimento que nos nutre con el ser, y nos permite así sobrevivir; es como una "nueva e intensa existencia" del orden subjetivo-

Clarence Finlayson

The oppressed has only one solution: to deny the harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is made to exclude him, to prove that he is a man and that he is free by revolting against the tyrants-

Simone de Beauvoir

María Luisa Bombal's *La última niebla* (1934) and *La amortajada* (1938), though separated by four years, have been published and read in conjunction since the latter decades of the 20th century. Much of Bombal criticism can be divided, succinctly, into two groups: those who concentrate on feminist readings, focusing on its intimist qualities, and the surrealist apologists who find in the Chilean's work paradigmatic Avant-Garde approaches. For the most part, Bombal critics highlighted these structural, thematic, and aesthetic fields. In my reading, both narratives engage questions concerning the signifying limitations of the Existential self in a phallocentric milieu. What’s more, these novels deal with the very existence of the self, unmasking the ethical problematic implicit in this line of questioning.

The views I shall develop have their point of origin in the destabilizing poetics of the Avant-Garde, what Guillermo de Torre called the "nuevo espíritu mundial de descentralización" (*Vanguardia* 23). These deconstructive visions of incredulity permeate the structure and form of Bombal’s novels. Furthermore, the narrative complexities of Bombal’s novels compel me to analyze them sequentially and in doing so I will consider how these narratives counteract
bourgeoisie determinism. The protagonists of both novels are to be held accountable for the perpetuation of their anguish. In *Niebla* the protagonist’s sadomasochism is a symptom of her freedom. Since the husband, Daniel (and for that matter the entire novel’s cast of characters), is at the mercy of the anonymous narrator, her power of subjectivity dominates the entire configuration of the story. A similar point can be made about *Amortajada*, in which Ana María’s sisyphistic malevolence is revealed to have sustained and transfigured her.

**A Nameless Shrug**

*Niebla* stages the tragic life of an anonymous protagonist. Bombal’s novel recounts the anti-heroine’s frustrated existence in a loveless marriage and the ambiguous liaison with a similarly anonymous lover. Bombal's protagonists are Existential anti-heroine's because they lack traditional Romantic qualities of heroism, selflessness, and righteousness. In fact, they are continuously anguished and resist these essentialist labels in favor of their own desires, bordering the limits of malice, sadism, and masochism with the ultimate goal of prioritizing themselves. They are Existentialist in that these anti-heroines are sensitive to the contradictory quality of the societal duties imposed on them, and thus choose to resist them through sensual projects which are inclined towards what Camus called absurdism, that is they celebrate the aforementioned "absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest)" (23).
In her feminist reading, Lucia Guerra-Cunningham has taken *Niebla* to be the fictionalization of "la dualidad indisoluble de los anhelos interiores de la protagonista y las normas convencionales de la sociedad que previenen la satisfacción de dichos anhelos" (*Narrativa* 47). Marjorie Agosín explains that within this loveless marriage the protagonist engages in "una especie de aventura romántica imaginaria en busca del amor perfecto" (*Desterradas* 28). This romantic adventure privies the reader to the emotional torment and persecution experienced by the protagonist at the hands of her sadistic husband, Daniel, who paradoxically, catalyzes her Existential inwardness. This reflexivity differentiates itself from the phallocentric nationalist narratives of the first decades of the twentieth century, immerse in the societal and political transformations of the era.

Guerra-Cunningham has also called attention to how in Bombal’s novels "se pone énfasis en la interioridad de la protagonista en una situación alienada de lo social" (*Narrativa* 39). The ensuing interrogatories, both emotive and worrisome, speak clearly of the protagonist’s nascent Existential sensitivity, her process of becoming aware of the inauthenticity of her bourgeoisie being. Strangely enough (possibly not given Bombal's propensity for transgressing narrative expectations) Daniel’s misanthropist misogyny functions as a generative force, the first in a string of signifying inversions palpable in Bombal's two novels.

Lacking the traditional internal structure of the "novela de la tierra" so dominant in the first decades of the 20th century, the Chilean’s narrative, which
for Agosin constitutes a "novela de personaje evolutiva" (Desterradas 26), is divided into two unnumbered chapters. The first "chapter," subdivided into five scenes, opens with the arrival of the anonymous narrator and Daniel, at the latter's hacienda. The inauspicious setting, choke full of ominous weather symbolism is further aggravated by Daniel's similar hostility. At this time, the reader immediately becomes aware of the marital misfortune which has cast the narrator as the unwanted proxy spouse for Daniel:

Hacía apenas un año efectuaba el mismo trayecto con su primera mujer; aquella muchacha huraña y flaca a quien adoraba, y que debiera morir tan inesperadamente tres meses después. Pero ahora, ahora hay algo como de recelo en la mirada con que me envuelve de pies a cabeza. Es la mirada hostil con la que de costumbre acoge siempre a todo extranjero. (9)

The scene captures not only the animosity that affects the narrator but also the resentment that pushes the drama and the protagonist to find refuge in her own thoughts. This antagonistic relationship synthesizes the antipathy between husband and wife, that allows Bombal to give utmost importance to not only "la mera narrativa de los hechos, sino a la íntima, secreta historia de las inquietudes y motivos que los provocaran ser o les impidieran ser" (Entrevista 5). As the narrator informs us, her marriage within the family casts an ironic tone on the estrangement perpetuated by Daniel's gaze. This disaffection is the result of the exceeding familiarity of Daniel with his cousin.

A clear example of this alienation between the newlyweds is his focalization on her as "extranjero," as a stranger, predicated upon the uncanny repulsion felt towards her evidenced when Daniel tells his new bride "te miro y pienso que te conozco demasiado..." (9). Mariana Sandez has read this
distancing by Daniel through a Freudian lens, explaining that Daniel's attitude towards his wife causes a "desdoblamiento" which has led "los críticos a abordar el tema de la mujer alienada, la mujer neurótica o esquizofrénica y el sentimiento de extranjerismo o extrañamiento en la obra de María Luisa Bombal" (23).

Daniel's sociopathic projection of his misery, the "recelo" with which he views the protagonist is the displacement of the pain felt for his first wife. The wariness, distrust and all around disdain for her are aggravated by the mere presence of the protagonist. However, what can not be overlooked is the role of the nameless narrator in the configuration of Daniel's character. It is through her gaze that Daniel comes into focus for, in fact, it is she who introduces her husband to the reader and simultaneously diagnoses his misogynistic pathology. In this sense, my interpretation differs from Carmelo Urza's position which sustains that "we perceive the protagonists as women who do not control their lives and whose existences are firmly tied to that of their husbands who, allied with society, become the external alienating force" (96).

The position to be emphasized is that Daniel (for that case the entire narrative) is at the mercy of the anonymous protagonist, insofar as it is her subjectivity which dominates. This detail is important because it entrusts a degree of authority to what has traditionally been read as a defenseless and neurotic character. Thomas Bente has gone so far as to judge the entirety of Bombal's female personalities as "shallow, frivolous, and fatuous, characters incapable of self-realization and fulfillment- which they are, almost without exception" (103). I disagree. I argue that the narrator's limited autonomy is made
evident early on in the novel and becomes embodied by the disdainful shrug she
gives during an exchange with Daniel: "¿Te hubiera gustado ser una solterona
arrugada, que teje para los pobres de la hacienda? / Me encojo de hombros. / —
Ese es el porvenir que aguarda a tus hermanas [...]" (10). While her husband
attempts to cast himself as her hero and redeemer, the protagonist confesses
that she is aware of his charade. Her own words are clear:

No me hacen ya el menor efecto las frases cáusticas con que me
turbaba no hace aún quince días [...] compruebo con sorpresa que
sus sarcasmos no hacen sino revolverse contra él mismo. Está
lúvido y parece sufrir [...] le miro extrañada. Tardo un segundo en
comprender que está llorando. Me aparto de él, tratando de
persuadirme de que la actitud más discreta está en fingir una
absoluta ignorancia de su dolor. Pero en mi fuero interno algo me
dice que ésta es también la actitud más cómoda. (11)

Niebla’s narrator, here, redefines passivity. Revealing herself to be dynamically
aware of Daniel’s torment and of the fallacy of his antagonistic behavior, the
nameless narrator also reveals her own private indifference and disdain toward
Daniel. This transformation in her attitude towards Daniel has been immediate.
His grief elicits a self-preservation drive in her, not a nurturing mechanism. In
fact, she has now estranged Daniel and establishes a distance with him, in the
same manner as he objectified and disparaged her. This new perspective on the
narrator’s attitude toward her husband would seem to contradict the author who
in an interview with Agosín states that her female protagonists are "sentimentales
y abnegadas" and sumissively reclusive, given to "vivir -o no vivir- calladamente
sus decepciones, deseos y pasiones" (Entrevista 6).

This scene has gone neglected by the critics who have failed to see that
her imperative agent, the narrator's internal superego, is made explicit with the
reference to "fuero interno." This inner magistrate, to use a term in keeping with the legal terminology here, explains her behavior using two justifications. First, her indifference is proper etiquette, as discreetness is in order as her husband’s masculinity is exposed and vulnerable. Secondly, the narrator’s self-preservation drive renders unfeasible the reaching out to Daniel. This behavioral catatonia for her functions as an evasive maneuver to alleviate the awkwardness she felt at Daniel’s expression of grief.

We are thus witnessing a self-preservation mechanism in her which shows self-serving solidarity and not sympathy for Daniel's grief. This emphasis on her Existential lucidity, taken here to mean her awareness to Daniel's overt instigations, recasts Niebla’s narrator as simultaneously victim and victimizer. The contemptuous shrug to Daniel’s early emotional blitzkrieg is the embodiment of her expressive indifference. And although critics such as Bente read this to signify her "infantile, shallow, narcissistic, and pococurante" (105) behavior, I am compelled to reconsider the central character's bodily gesture to symbolize her Existential self-preoccupation and her understanding of Daniel's insincerity.

**Death Becomes Her**

Scene two of *Niebla* begins with the symbolic and foreshadowing encounter of the protagonist with death personified. A young girl’s wake, which the narrator attends, produces an ontological crisis, which Guerra-Cunningham interprets as a return to a primordial state: "la muerte produce en la protagonista una sensación de terror que la induce a internarse en el bosque, símbolo de la naturaleza vital" (*Narrativa* 54). For the protagonist the dead girl appears
imprisoned within the coffin. The novel’s narrative fragmentation affords the reader no prefacing information about the imprisoned girl and the circumstances which have led to her death or the narrator’s place within the wake. However, what the dead girl comes to symbolize and foretell is the transparent existence of the narrator. As the protagonist describes the scene at the wake, the young girl is entombed behind a glass window, from which the narrator contemplates the young girl's expressionless face and her own reflection. This experience elicits one solitary word, "silencio" (12).

The echoing silence, however, does not pacify but rather exasperates the narrator. The silence of the dead girl in conjunction with the unnerving silence of the forest, in which the narrator has sought refuge, combines to agitate the protagonist’s already troubled existence. The silence of death, the stillness of the forest and the omnipresent mist which has shrouded her, awakens her to a "peligro oculto" (12). Consciousness affects the narrator as an onslaught to which she responds with a self-affirming interjection:

-¡Yo existo, yo existo-digo en voz alta-y soy bella y feliz! Sí, ¡feliz!, la felicidad no es más que tener un cuerpo joven y esbelto y ágil. No obstante, desde hace mucho, flota en mí una turbia inquietud. Cierta noche, mientras dormía, vislumbré algo, algo que era tal vez su causa. Una vez despierta, traté en vano de recordarlo. Noche a noche he tratado, también en vano, de volver a encontrar el mismo sueño. (12)

This ontological interjection, based on her superfluous beauty, is followed immediately by the skepticism which begins to penetrate the narrator. Interestingly deconstructive is the use of dream as contestation for her discontent. It is within the dream that the narrator discovers the "cause" of
unhappiness, which at once becomes elusive. Urza has associated these surrealist moments with the protagonist's "greatest alienation and irreality" (97). However, I would add that the distillation of reality added to the fantastic energize her self-understanding, in other words, the surrealistic episodes are also the moments Existential realization.

In *Niebla*, the narrator finds in dreams and the paranormal mist a palliative and generative mechanism to reach out to her repressed self. The brief moment of ontological crisis brought on by her confrontation with her body's ephemeral nature is of importance because it underscores the narrator's active discontent with her present state. As Finlayson has explained "la plenitud de la vida, poseída con todas sus posibilidades suprime casi el temor de la muerte que adviene como un visitante largamente esperado" (*Actitud* 81). In this direction, I argue that the anonymous woman employs her desires to mitigate that initial encounter with death. Likewise, Elisa Mayorga has called attention to the narrator's imagination (e.g., her dreams) as the "*instrumento reparador* (sic) de esa realidad adversa" (15). In this capacity, as Urza has highlighted, the mist and her escapades work "to isolate the women protagonists from a distorted external reality" and also "represent a ‘poetic externalization’ of each woman's interior emotional state" (92). To these critical perspectives I add that the surrealistic imagery functions as a triple instrument of self-preservation, sensual realization, and active resistance against her discontent, where her imagination is a dynamic act of engagement.
Immediately following the encounter with her mortality, the narrator and the adulterous sister-in-law Regina cross paths. Regina is a kindred spirit and a potential doppelgänger of the nameless narrator because of the "violencia interior" (13) which drives her rejoicing in her romantic liaisons. It is worth mentioning that an analogous vivacity is characteristic of the nameless narrator, whose reddish mane is described as "seda fulgurante" and as, simultaneously radiating a "guerrero"-like aura (13). In this capacity, Regina thus symbolizes the potentiality against the surrender of the narrator, whose hair has begun to lose "ese leve tinte rojo que les comunicaba un extraño fulgor" (13). And so the resignation of her will to pleasurable fulfillment which the narrator explicitly confesses is gradually faded by her marriage to Daniel is offset by the explicit eroticism of the bath which closes scene two:

Parece que me hubieran vertido fuego dentro de las venas. Salgo del jardín, huyo [...] Entonces me quito las ropas, todas, hasta que mi carne se tiñe del mismo resplandor que flota entre los árboles. Y así, desnuda y dorada, me sumerjo en el estanque. (14)

The encounter with Regina and her lover has transfigured the narrator. As Sandez has noted it is Regina "quien promueve, sin querer y sin saber, en la narradora, el cambio que va de la pasividad a la actividad" (25). The discovery of Regina's affair inspires her to revisit the inauthentic life she is entrapped in and the corrosion of her vivaciousness. As the passage above shows, vis-à-vis her dulled existence and Regina’s lust of life, the narrator’s first response is flight. However, within the pond the narrator displaces her anguish. Metaphorically, the pond scene is cathartic, both cleansing the narrator of her putrefaction and facilitating the cathecting of her libidinal energy. And although Urza sustains that
the passive narrator "does not develop her individual potential through conflictive action, but rather evades this option through fantasy, thus accentuating her alienation" (93), I counter that this form of escapism is a projection of the narrator's will to engage life, which revels in the pleasure of her body through a therapeutic immersion of the senses.

**The Enigmatic F(r)iend**

In scene five, which closes the first chapter of *Niebla*, the protagonist has arrived at an unnamed city and has brought with her the constant, mounting affliction with which she has become synonymous. This scene is intended to accentuate the protagonist's labyrinthine existence; the narrative representation of the protagonist's state of mind, in which she literally feels herself confined in a prison. However, in this city/maze/prison she inexplicably experiences pain instead of, it becomes masochism. The narrator confesses that she finds quiet enjoyment in her new surroundings, which project into a "sonrisa cansada" (17). This new duplicitous state of being for the narrator also has psychosomatic consequences, causing her insomnia, shortness of breath and anemia. Added to these ailments, the bourgeoisie life at her mother-in-law's home triggers a proleptic moment in which her life's inconsequential existence is made clear. This epiphany compels the narrator to consider the distinct possibilities available to counter her stifling existence. Here the anti-heroine ponders death's ethical virtues:

Vago al azar, cruzo avenidas y sigo andando. No me siento capaz de huir. De huir, ¿cómo, adónde? La muerte me parece una aventura más accesible que la huida. De morir, sí, me siento
capaz. Es muy posible desear morir porque se ama demasiado la vida. (18)

The narrator's physical ailments have thrust her onto the city streets as a means of appeasement. Walking endlessly within a maze of avenues, buildings and the ubiquitous mist, the narrator expounds on the possibilities available to her to counteract the decrepit existence and the sorrow of her impending lost beauty. To this end, as Sandez has highlighted "estas mujeres encuentran en la posibilidad de una muerte física el escape que les permitiría, idealmente, afirmar su existencia" (22). However, I emphasize, here, that the narrator speaks of the virtues of death as an authentic means of affronting her anguish, which does not denote that she is dealing with a suicidal urge. Firstly, the narrator rejects any projects of flight. Fleeing her existence is impracticable because she has neither a method nor a means for such a task. However, if the narrator understands that evasion is not an option then her propagation of death and her encounter with the enigmatic lover take on new signification.

Death is no longer an end, but in the words of the narrator "una aventura."

This adventure connotes a continuation of existence by other means and also a new evolution of the passion for life. As the narrator explains, her discontent is mitigated by the drive to live, a lust of life suffocated by her marriage to Daniel. However, for an instant, death (the possibility as understood by the protagonist) becomes the evolution of the drive towards life, a potential ally in the quest for fulfillment. In this capacity, death signifies regeneration and implicitly freedom.

In this deconstructive direction, the episode with the "enigmático amigo" (21) grows in ethical importance, because here again the narrator redefines the
ambiguous as authentic. The narrator's foray into an adulterous encounter with the stranger, although cloaked in the novel's paradigmatic narrative ambiguity, nevertheless constitutes an adventure into life. And while Guerra-Cunningham has read this as passive escapism because "le resultaba difícil modificar su situación a través de acciones concretas y tangibles" (Narrativa 29-30), I read the episode with the stranger as a generative relenting of her passions. In this direction, Finlayson has also found that emotions, in his case he focuses on love, connote creation: "Hay en la naturaleza del amor una paradoja existencial. El ente en su raíz dinámica o activa tiende a prolongarse, a darse. El ente creado consigue a través del amor su complemento de posibilidad" (Notas 245). Insofar as the protagonist's imagination becomes a dynamic act of wishfulfillment, this engagement becomes for the anonymous woman her "complemento de posibilidad," as Finlayson puts it. And as she finds fullfiment in these confrontations with her desires, Niebla's fantastical imagery constitutes "acciones concretas y tangibles" for the protagonist.64

A fundamental detail I want to highlight is that the one indisputable certainty in this scene is that the stranger is not Daniel. As the narrator describes the stranger, the reader is afforded a clear picture of the dream-lover, which makes evident the distinction between the two. The narrator's lover is a young, vigorously thin dark-skinned man with clear eyes. Daniel is portrayed as an enormous blond man with a propensity to one day "ser jorobado" (10). This detail grows in importance because it divorces the concepts of love, passion, marriage, and fulfillment.
As the narrator’s behavior with the enigmatic friend connotes, her lascivious engagement is the displacement of her desire for sensual fulfillment and not a projection of her tireless search for a perfect love, which critics such as Agosín and Turek have viewed as the centripetal force of the novel. In fact Turek dismissively summarizes the novel as simply the voyage "de la juventud a la vejez de una mujer que busca el amor" (59). However, in exploring her dormant sexuality, the narrator relents to her Existential id, following the moral behavior of her choice, not conforming to the normative ethical behavior expected of a monogamous wife. This emphasis on her choosing herself obliterates the imaginary confines of marriage as the only socially acceptable space in which woman can achieve completion. The protagonist narrates the action in the following manner, as an anticipated encounter:

De él se desprende un vago pero envolvente calor. Y es rápido, violento, definitivo. Comprendo que lo esperaba y que le voy a seguir como sea, donde sea. Le echo los brazos al cuello y él entonces me besa, sin que por entre sus pestañas las pupilas luminosas cesen de mirarme. (19)

Here the narrator takes the initiative. It is she who engages him. This audacity on her part reveals her as the initiator of the encounter via the symbolic act of her roping in the stranger. Her choosing to actively interact with the stranger challenges her characterization as passive agent; the narrative action places the onus on her as instigator of the episode, remembering that she knew herself to have been waiting on him and that she had determined, beforehand: "le voy a seguir como sea, donde sea." This commitment to allow the affair to play out until
its final consequences is emblematic of the proactive role of the protagonist in the pursuit of her sexuality.

This first strangers in the dark episode, taking into account that both characters are anonymous, can be described as an effort to renegotiate the limits of reality while emphasizing the intoxicatingly reinvigorating effects of living dangerously. In this scene the central issues are the narrator’s yielding to her inner voice. The conflation of her yielding to her desires and the fact that she chooses to realize herself away from the normative space of marriage constitutes the phases of the narrator’s momentary encounter with her authentic self. Her proactive attitude jeopardizes Guerra-Cunningham’s assertion that “restringida al espacio cerrado del hogar y sin poseer el impulso necesario para romper los limites físicos y existenciales que la sociedad de la época asignaba a la mujer, la heroína opta por la pasividad” (Narrativa 51). This momentary authenticity is further evidence of the narrator’s preoccupation with herself, as she does not and wishes not to reveal her happiness to her apathetic husband.

**Ten Years Later**

Chapter two, although equal in length to the first half of the novel, is exponentially more fragmented and consists of twenty-three variously lengthened scenes. The point of departure begins on the eve of the narrator’s ten year wedding anniversary and the occasion elicits the narrator’s Existential affirmation: "¡Qué importa que mi cuerpo se marchite, si conoció el amor! Y qué importa que los años pasen, todos iguales. Yo tuve una hermosa aventura, una vez…” (22). This life affirming indifference expounded with the anaphoric use of
"qué importa" represents the narrator's defiant standpoint vis-à-vis life's parsimonious decay. What's more, in the substantiation of her being, the narrator goes so far as to separate from her body, as it is the body which has known "el amor." Yet the narrator's adulterous adventure, which helps to sustain her existence, once again transfigures the very idea of love.

_Niebla_’s anti-heroine bears the destructive brunt of time through the memory of her authentic self. The memory of the enigmatic friend, which I consider to be her authentic self, is sufficient enough to redefine the signification of love, because what the narrator calls "amor" is in fact the passion of an adulterous affair. This illicit liaison not only consoles her solitude, it fuels her need to write, even when the desire to express her state of mind falls pray to her own hand. However, it is the letter she writes to her lover in scene two, which reveals her sensual conceptualization of love:

Me levanto, enciendo a hurtadillas una lámpara y escribo: -"He conocido el perfume de tu hombro y desde ese día soy tuya. Te deseo. Me pasaría la vida tendida, esperando que vinieras a apretar contra mi cuerpo tu cuerpo fuerte y conocedor del mío, como si fuera su dueño desde siempre. Me separo de tu abrazo y todo el día me persigue el recuerdo de cuando me suspendo a tu cuello y suspiro sobre tu boca". Escribo y rompo. (23)

The reader is afforded a vision of love that has little to do with sentimentality or decorum, but rather witnesses the manifestation of the narrator's salaciousness in a written confession. Agosín has also highlighted the constitutional importance of the letters, which "representa un intento de salir del hermetismo mental en que la narradora se encuentra sometida," to which she adds a second function "la capacidad de narrar una realidad exterior y de captar lo inmediato al contar algo"
While I agree with Agosín’s reading of the function of letters as a space for the narrator’s realization, I find that the central emphasis here is on her desire and her corporality. The scene pays special attention to the physical nature of their rendezvous and the primal longing for the stranger. The letter constructs her desiring subjectivity firstly as an olfactory response which in turn becomes tactual and then textual. The narrator can perceive the scent of her lover, and then feel the texture of his body.

These physical phenomenon relived on paper are subsequently destroyed by the narrator. This final destruction of the letter by the narrator is the symbolic recognition by the protagonist of the illicitness of her affairs and implicitly the impossibility of such an existence. In other words, by destroying the letter the narrator acknowledges that the permanence of her authentic self, read here as her embellishing in her sensuality is not viable. Her happiness, however, is attainable on a momentary basis and is the product of her creative power. The ambiguity of the affair does not diminish the palliative affectivity of her memories but rather reveals the narrator as the mastermind of her happiness. By this I mean that her authenticity, attainable in intervals, lay within her means. Furthermore, and the point must be reiterated, she actively pursues this authenticity, spurred on by and in spite of the indifference of the world around her.

As a means of exploring those intervals of genuine being, the narrator conceives an interstitial reality, returning to the same cathartic pool of chapter one. This retreat inwardly begins by constructing a sensorial world which
decelerates the perception of time, accentuates her visual perception, and shelters her in a space devoid of sound. This self-inflicted solitude allows her to summon her stranger and more importantly, affect the sensorial experience of the gardener’s son, Andrés. Confronted with the encroachment of reality onto her reality, the protagonist resorts to interrogating the intruder "-Lo viste, Andrés, lo viste? / Sí, señora, lo vi -asintió tranquilamente el muchacho" (26). The preterit mood of "asentir" is not coincidental. Not only is it explicitly employed to express Andrés's concurrence, but also its root conveys the idea of a shared sensorial experience. Andrés and the narrator "sienten," they feel the anonymous lover's presence. This exchange can not be overlooked, as the narrator’s power of creation has inundated the interior boundaries of herself, to transgress into the reality of another. The point I insist on is the explicit self-gratifying agenda of the narrator, whose generative powers proliferate to god-like magnitude.

**Daniel as Medium**

Scene twelve provides a striking example of the narrator’s subjectivity as evidence of her vitality. The episode in question showcases the narrator’s egocentric behavior and more importantly her manipulation of Daniel. Her apathetic husband becomes the medium by which the protagonist falls into a trance state of Existential lucidity. The scene is intended to emphasize the narrator’s sexuality and to neutralize the fading memory of her enigmatic lover, or as Agosín explains it, as a means to "romper el silencio" (43). Once again the narrator resorts to a letter and in the process re-interprets the concept of fidelity:

Yo nunca te he engañado. Es cierto que, durante todo el verano, entre Daniel y yo se ha vuelto a anudar con frecuencia ese feroz
This letter becomes a written confession by the narrator who explains the motivation behind her sexual encounters with her husband but falls into an explicit exercise of bad faith. In the process of expounding on the inconsequential nature of her revived affair with her husband, the narrator dissociates the concept of fidelity with the physical act of betrayal. As the narrator argues, what she and her husband have engaged in does not constitute infidelity as her emotional loyalty to her lover is unequivocal. However, this line of reasoning is a double edged sword, for if infidelity is to be understood as viable only in its psychical state, then her liaisons with the stranger constitutes an overt case of disloyalty to her husband as her transgressions are physical and emotional. Nevertheless, by heeding to her inner voice she has proven loyal to her self. What the letter comes to signify is the protagonist's bad faith vis-à-vis her lover and her husband but not herself, as she has continued to prioritize her own desire above all.

Although the letter represents her attempts at minimizing the impact of the renewed bond with Daniel, the narrator also reveals the deeper motivation behind her behavior. It is these mid afternoon sexcapades that galvanize her Existential nirvana. By this I mean that these trysts elicit her to visualize the consequences of humanity’s belligerent political praxis:

Imaginaba hombres avanzando penosamente por carreteras polvorientas, soldados desplegando estrategias en llanuras cuya tierra hirviente debía requebrarles la suela de las botas. Veía ciudades duramente castigadas por el implacable estío, ciudades
de calles vacías, establecimientos cerrados, como si el alma se les hubiera escapado y no quedara de ellas sino el esqueleto, todo alquitrán, derritiéndose al sol. (31)

The narrator’s vision echoes with the Existential consciousness of the spiritual bankruptcy of humanity. The economic and climatic references in conjunction with the explicit war symbols paint a stark reality of the world on the brink. These contemporary allusions infuse a social dimension to the so called passivity and naïveté of the protagonist. The ethical preoccupations evolve, succinctly, from the pain of the soldiers to depict the progressive decay of the metropolis.

The narrator’s visualization of the decaying city functions to establish a relationship between the ethical choices of humanity and the ensuing punitive desolation. The city is described as soulless and skeletal, an overt personification to connect action (drought with war) and effect (decay). The other side of this allegorical correlation is that it demystifies existence. By this I mean that the disintegration of the city is a direct consequence of humanity's choice, and nothing else. By envisioning the ravages of war, framed within the symbiotic relationship between humanity and its choices, the narrator is communicating a vividly Existential premise, wherein man is defined by his action, or to put it differently action dictates existence. What's more, these existentially charged images are committed to paper, remembering that this entire section represents the letter to her estranged lover. In this vein, the letter helps to refute her external disassociation which has been interpreted as passivity by the critics and constitutes the manifestation of her ability, willingness, and freedom of expression.
(De)MISTifications

The disintegration of the narrator's "happiness" begins shortly after her bad faith letter to her lover in scene twelve. Following a ritualistic burning in the garden, the suffocating smoke and smell educe another dream-state, which up to this point in the novel had have served as reflexive backdrops. In this particular sequence, the narrator interprets the dream as her lover’s interpellation of her, in which case she feels the need to venture out at night. The ensuing exchange with Daniel becomes the downward turning point for the protagonist: "¿A dónde vas? /-me ahogo, necesito caminar…No me mires así: ¿Acaso no he salido otras veces, a esta misma hora?" to which the husband retorts "¡Estás loca! Debes haber soñado. Nunca ha sucedido algo semejante…” (31-32).

This dialogue represents Niebla’s Existential peripetia. From this moment forward, the quiet solitude of her lover’s memory, in which the narrator found solace, is shattered. Her ontological crisis is exacerbated by the reductionist rational of the husband, for whom the episode was a residual effect of too much wine, and the untimely death of Andrés, the only accomplice who had attested to the existence of the stranger in the narrator’s life. The narrative speed from this moment on becomes dizzyingly frenetic, in an overt attempt to reproduce the Existential distress of the protagonist. However, this particular predicament is not rooted in the narrator’s naïveté, on the contrary it is a symptom of her authenticity: "bien sé ahora que los seres, las cosas, los días, no me son soportables sino vistos a través del estado de vida que me crea mi passion" (35). As the narrator confesses, her passion "creates" her existence, gives reason to
her daily life, meaning that she is the catalyst to her realization. However, in an overt act of bad faith, the narrator questions her own Existential self-sufficiency.

The moment which opens the door to her absurd pursuit of "truth" presents itself with Regina’s attempted suicide. This aborted suicide galvanizes the narrator in two ways: one will have her reflect on her own behavior in relation to Regina's life and the other will push her to verify the existence of her lover. In both cases, the narrator will be confronted by her own subjectivity, which forces her into a decision. Under the pretext of Regina's attempted suicide the narrator returns to the enigmatic city. Once there, her response to Regina is a combination of apathy and resentment:

Comprendo, comprendo y, sin embargo, no llego a conmoverme. ¡Egoísta, egoísta!, me digo, pero algo en mí rechaza el improperio. En realidad, no me siento culpable de no conmoverme. ¿No soy yo, acaso, más miserable que Regina? (37-38)

The narrator’s indifference to Regina’s plight differs from that of Felipe, Regina's husband, as his is indicative of injured pride and wronged sense of "decoro" (37). Conversely, the protagonist's anger is fueled by jealousy. As the interrogatory connotes, it is the narrator who has suffered more than the lascivious sister-in-law. For the protagonist, Regina's suicidal discontent is the confirmation of love, or as the narrator states the "consecuencia de amor" (38). The protagonist's initial reply is defeatist, feeling herself to be for the first time "desdichada, que he sido siempre horrible y totalmente desdichada" (38). Yet even this thought becomes ephemeral, as the narrator's inconformity propels her to resist the temptation of resigning her one source of content.
The narrator immediately undertakes the task of pursuing her lover's existence by locating the house in which she experienced the zenith of her sensual realization. However, this voyage towards the true nature of her affair with the anonymous lover becomes the futile pursuit of substantiation outside herself. On this tragic endeavor, the mist which had been a safe haven and facilitator thus far in the novel now becomes an adversary because as the narrator explains "la niebla, con su barrera de humo,prohibe toda visión directa de los seres y de las cosas, incita a aislarse dentro de sí mismo" (39). As this passage suggests, the mist is attempting to dissuade the narrator, to incite her back inwardly, to a state which throughout the narrative has proven to be her moments of utmost gratification.

For her part Guerra-Cunningham, along with other critics, has concluded that the mist in *Niebla* has been the metaphor for evasion, which nevertheless "no constituye una verdadera respuesta para la existencia femenina," to which she adds "las heroínas llegan a un momento de anagnórisis en el cual se le hace evidente la futilidad del ensueño y el aislamiento" (40). However, given the previous passage from Bombal's novel, the mist's function is to encompass the geometric opposite of Guerra-Cunningham's assertion. The mist has been the space of the narrator's disillusionment, which means it represents the critical moments of recognition. And although Agosín has interpreted the protagonist as the embodiment of "la búsqueda fallida del amor como medio de afirmar su identidad" (*Aproximaciones* 190), I argue that with *Niebla* the narrator recognizes not the futility of her isolation but rather the folly of negating the self-realization
that solitude provided. In this direction, the mist's signifying power is two-fold: on the one hand, its presence incites the protagonist's banal existence, facilitating her foray inwardly and on the other, it mistifies/demystifies the narrator's hypocritical pursuit of an external validation.

In the closing scenes of *Niebla*, the narrator finds herself on the threshold. Having been unable to confirm the existence of her lover and faced with the descent into despair of Regina, the protagonist's apathy evolves into outright abhorrence. The crux of the narrator's hatred remains the envy of Regina's full experience of love, its bittersweet quality of which the narrator feels herself deprived. Exasperating the narrator's ire is Regina's indeterminate suffering, her ambivalent calling out and reproach of her lover, the vacillation between asking for death and begging for life, so she might see him once again. This induces her one and only suicidal urge.

**Necessary Finitude**

The denouement of the novel recharges the concepts of life, death, love, and authenticity within Existential parameters. Yet the critical assessment of *Niebla*'s final scene has been less than kind, consistently interpreting it as corresponding to the narrator's ultimate submission. Guerra-Cunningham has said that the final mist underscores "el desenlace trágico de una existencia femenina condenada irrevocablemente a una muerte en vida bajo un sistema social que ha aniquilado la realización de sus impulsos vitales" (*Narrativa* 66-67). For her part, Sandez has made a similar reading: "La niebla representa entonces la muerte en vida de la mujer sofocada por los deseos reprimidos" (25).67 These
readings have, of course, stood the test of time. However, this line of interpretation, which I find to be reductionist, is attributable to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of "the fore-conception of completion," which the polish theorist explains thus:

The fore-conception of completion that guides all our understanding is, then, always specific in content. Not only is an immanent unity of meaning guiding the reader assumed, but his understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning which proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said […] The anticipation of completion, then, contains not only this formal element that a text should fully express its meaning, but also that what it says should be the whole truth. (294)

The convergence of interpretations vis-à-vis Niebla’s finale points to a failure on the part of the critics. These readings overlook the absence of "an immanent unity of meaning" in the novel, as for one, the surrealist imagery that dominates the text is a lyrically biased expression of the protagonist’s state of mind. And so, when these critics praise the novel’s gynocentric reproach of the patriarchal system, they are projecting a reader prejudice which an overtly skewed novel like Niebla can only partially sustain, as the narrative itself has never been willing to provide "the whole truth," as Gadamer puts it. What these critics have failed to remember is Niebla’s full commitment to its ambiguous subjectivity. To further move this idea forward let me first address the narrator’s attempted suicide.68

The weight of Regina’s disheartening behavior coupled with the inability to locate her lover’s house has left the narrator at an Existential crossroads, demanding of her a choice. The scene plays out like a melodramatic cliffhanger, suspended between the final two sections of the novel:
En el preciso instante en que voy saliendo, una ambulancia entra al hospital. Me aprieto contra la pared, para dejarla pasar, mientras algunas voces resuenan bajo la bóveda del portón... "Un muchacho, lo arrolló un automóvil...". El hecho de lanzarse bajo las ruedas de un vehículo requiere una especie de inconsciencia. Cerraré los ojos y trataré de no pensar durante un segundo.

Dos manos que me parecen brutales me atraen vigorosamente hacia atrás. Una tromba de viento y de estrépito se escurre delante de mí. Tambaleo y me apoyo contra el pecho del imprudente que ha creído salvarme. (42)

The narrator has chosen to end her life. Yet suicide escapes the narrator thanks to Daniel’s reflexes, whose action speaks of the unpredictability and arbitrariness with which he has conducted himself throughout the novel. This act does not represent the redemption of his character as hero as the narrator ridicules him as "imprudente." Nor is Daniel’s act a symbolic reassertion of his chivalrous masculinity. It is the perpetuation of the semiconscious apathy which has characterized him throughout. I would argue then that the narrator’s failed suicide is neither the proverbial hand of fate nor Daniel’s willful objectification of the protagonist. Rather this aborted suicide is the fictionalization of life’s contingency and her absurd reality of being. The trust of this interpretation is based on the decidedly unromantic evolution of the action. Secondly, the immediate reaction of the narrator to the events shatters any aura of rationality attributable to the action and the reader witnesses an abrupt change of direction in the narrator’s thoughts:

Me asalta la visión de mi cuerpo desnudo y extendido sobre una mesa en la Morgue. Carnes mustias y pegadas a un estrecho esqueleto, un vientre sumido entre las caderas... El suicidio de una mujer casi vieja, ¡qué cosa repugnante e inútil! (42)
Within the space of a few lines, the narrator’s perspective on suicide has been transformed. What the narrative is recreating is the frenetic pace of the narrator’s state of mind. And at this juncture, the narrator views suicide to be a futile gesticulation akin to Daniel’s impotent obtuse behaviour. This rapid change of perspective is an Existential confrontation to life’s contingency, which Simone de Beauvoir explains as the assertion of the individual’s will. Beauvoir explains this confrontationalism as the utmost manifestation of individualism which nevertheless must continuously account for "the contingent facticity of existence, that is, of taking the given, which, at the start, is there (sic) without any reason" (156). The anonymous protagonist faced with the absurdities of life, the disillusionment of love, and the impossibility of death reacts instantaneously as capricious as life.

This position of the protagonist is first and foremost symbolic of the novel’s Existential vision of life which fictionalizes the protagonist’s sporadic moments of self-realization as never ending struggles against inauthenticity. The recognition that her encounters with the lover constitute a momentary conquest, recalls Beauvoir’s position which puts forth that "whatever one may do, one never realizes anything but a limited work, like existence itself which tries to establish itself through that work" (158). In this vein, Niebla through its overt subjectivity has communicated its own Existential position and uncovered the protagonist’s active role. And so, the quiet acquiescence which the narrator envisions for herself is to be taken with a grain of salt, considering the ambiguous and ever changing opinions of the protagonist. In fact this new
passivity could be similar to what Beauvoir calls failure, meaning a new challenge: "and, so that he may assert his will, man is even obliged to stir up in the world the outrage he does not want" (157). However, what closes the novel and remains is the final mist, the metaphor of indeterminacy, wish-fulfillment and potentiality par excellence.

In this direction, taking into consideration that within the space of a few lines, the protagonist experiences various Existential moods, the reductionist reading of her submission does not hold. Also taking into account that the novel in its entirety has been an exegetical exercise in surrealist imagery, what does become feasible vis-à-vis the novel’s closure is synthesized by the same Guerra-Cunningham whom earlier had underscored Niebla’s defeatism. Now, however, she concludes that Bombal’s text:

Se limita a expresar sus sentimientos y sensaciones en un proceso de auto-narración o confesión íntima […] el lector ficticio recibe asumiendo el papel de un testigo que desconoce los elementos en los cuales está inserta la realidad […] frente a este microcosmos subjetivo, el lector constantemente duda y reinterpreta sus detalles ambiguos. (Narrativa 70)

I concur. Having undressed the ominous mythology of love through the Regina affair and at the same time redressed the curative qualities of fantasy and desire, the final mist settles in to enigmatically and indefinitely displace any interpretive closer. The facticity of the mist and the privileging of the narrator’s perspective throughout, makes her final words suspect at best, and as Turek reminds us: "por esto, no sabemos si debemos creer todo lo que "ella" nos dice […] todo es especulación" (60-61). This manifestation of the poetics of ambiguity fosters
interpretive responsibility, a similar project encouraged by Maria Luisa Bombal's second novel *La amortajada*.

**Shroudedness**

The importance of the reader and the reading experience are equally felt in *Amortajada*. The performative actions elicited by the very fragmentation of the narration creates ontological gaps which are filled by the reader. In the process of communicating an individual's state, *Amortajada* connects, like *Niebla*, with two Existential concepts: the permeability of objective reality and the subjective multiplication of the self. To these thematic centers, Catherine Boyle adds that Bombal's narrative preocupation was wound up by "the unbearably ill defined place she occupied in her society, which she was not able through identification with other women or similar experiences, to define," to which Boyle concludes "She does not write the attempt to move out of it, nor strategies for defiance, merely the being" (32).

In exploring the (possible) agency of the protagonist, *Amortajada* chronicles the phases of her individuality, through the account of Ana María's wake and burial. As the protagonist lies in an interstitial space between life and death, surrounded by the people who have affected her, the reader is privy to her recollections and the ensuing reflections concerning distinct experiences of her life. These reflexive moments reveal an existence in constant struggle (crisis), confronted everywhere by the individuality stifling ethics of conformity and decorum. Hernán Vidal highlights the societal implications representatively embedded in Bombal's novel, and explains this in the following fashion: "el orden
burgués desconoce la rica multiplicidad de los modos de ser de la personalidad humana. Sólo integra en su seno con totalidad de derechos a aquellos seres que se allanan a cumplir con sus criterios" (137-8). What Vidal is shedding light on are the corrosive projects of assimilation which reduce humanity to "la categoría de objetos sin vida" (138).

Structurally, Bombal’s second novel adheres to Niebla’s transgressive narrative configuration, with no traditional chapters to speak of, nor linear process of narration. Instead, the novel is divided, in my estimation, into three acts, each with a varying number of scenes. Naomi Lindstrom has summarized the narrative techniques Amortajada makes use of, and explains that chief among these are "el monólogo interior, la representación del habla de los personajes, el resumen por parte del narrador de lo que pasa en el interior de los personajes, y las muchas variantes que pueden existir" (147). Lindstrom pays special attention to the assortment of characters which represent a constant "discurso evasivo, enigmático u oculto"(147).

Act one opens with the omniscient third person narrator introducing the equally anonymous, at this point, protagonist Ana María. Bombal has described the relationship between these to characters as "una mujer que contempla a otra mujer y siente compasión por lo que le ocurrió en la vida y sólo comprende en la muerte" (qtd. in Boyle: 29). However, no indication is given throughout the novel which substantiates this assertion by the author. I mention this point at present because the anonymity of this omniscient narrator is total and this unintelligibility adds to the poetics of ambiguity which are sustained throughout the text.
Furthermore, this characterization of the third person narrator furthers the distance between itself and the protagonist. This distance accentuates the novel's enigmatic narration, as the reader is left to ponder the scope and depth of the narrator's familiarity with Ana María.

As the scene begins to unfold, the third person narrator begins to describe an awakening. As the narrator informs us, the protagonist begins to open her eyes, a metaphoric gesture meant to express her heightened state of awareness and underscore a previous obtuse state. Although the protagonist does not literally "open" her eyes, as this would have caused a scene of pandemonium, she does begin to see the people at her wake and more importantly she senses their presence. By opening the novel in this fashion, the narrative transmits two ideas, awakening, and resensitization. This opening scene, also implicitly points to the very process of Ana María's metamorphosis, which in effect is the problematic the novel will chronicle. As Guerra-Cunningham has explained, this process of transformation is undertaken using "el motivo del viaje" (Función 126). In other words, Bombal's novel stages the phases of Ana María's awakening as a voyage inwardly. 69

Scene two of this chapter finds the narrator, now in full omniscient mode, describing the life of the protagonist. Her children are described as impetuous and mildly sadistic, taking pleasure in "sus hijos, que parecían no querer reconocerle ya ningún derecho a vivir" (96). One further biographical note of importance is the mention of the Araucana nanny, Zoila. Although her appearance is in reality sporadic and a cameo at best, her character, we are told,
was primary caretaker of the protagonist. This point grows in importance because the protagonist is shown to be a *defacto* orphan, immediately creating the idea of abandonment, isolation, and solitude. In fact the mother's indifference, who "lista para subir al coche, de viaje a la ciudad, desprendíasela enérgicamente de las polleras a las que ella se aferraba llorando" (96), sheds light on the parental alienation lived by the protagonist which will be replayed with different characters throughout her life.

This initial abandonment of the mother presumably explains the subsequent apathy of the protagonist vis-à-vis other relationships she cultivates, but in fact, I read this abandonment episode as one of the first manifestations of poetic ambiguity which destabilizes the omniscient narrator's credibility. By this I mean that the novel uses the protagonist's history, not as justification for her existence but as a demystification of the determinist weight of her childhood experiences. This is due, in part, because the alienation lived by Ana María in her adult life can not be attributable to an absence of affection, since we are told that Zoila was a constant companion, ever-present she "le acunaba la pena en los brazos" (96). And although Donna Cece has read *Amortajada* as "el aislamiento como causa de alineación y falta de comunicación" (41), I add that Ana María's estrangement is to be understood elsewhere. These first episodes begin to expose the dynamic place of the protagonist in the estrangement of her life, and more importantly the choices she makes which reveal themselves as the dominant factors in the progression of her life. Scene two ends with the protagonist becoming aware of approaching horses, which brings with them,
Ricardo, the *efant terrible* who arouses so many bizarre emotions in the protagonist. With the arrival of Ricardo, Ana María becomes the narrator.

"Te recuerdo" as Dialogue

Through the overt narration of the protagonist, who remains unnamed at this point, Ricardo is cast as a sadistic demigod. This portrait of Ricardo comes to us as a memory. Ricardo becomes a hybrid persona, drenched in mythological symbology, blending the affective powers of Orpheus\(^70\) and the shadowy quality of Erebus\(^71\):

Era él quien infundía vida a ciertas ramas secas que al tocarlas se agitaban frenéticas, convertidas en aquellos terroríficos "caballos del diablo", él quien, por la noche, empezaba a encender los ojos de los búhos, quien ordenaba salir a las ratas y ratones. (99)

The protagonist creates this portrait of Ricardo's phantasmagoric powers of affectation through her gaze. It is the protagonist who sees Ricardo and in so doing conjures him as the interminable torment, who is nevertheless seductive. Ricardo is simultaneously a force of nature and a force upon the nature, affecting everything surrounding him, eliciting fear and fascinacion. What I would like to underscore is that she mediates the Ricardo character's existence through her "te recuerdo" mantra, establishing a dialogue between the two which functions as a working through process. Lindstrom reads these dialogues as reflexivity, as Ana María's "confesionalismo," from which "le sería posible empezar un cuestionamiento de su status" (150).

The protagonist's apostrophic use of "te recuerdo" used for the first time in scene four, and "¿recuerdas?" in scene six give life to Ricardo. And the life which the narrator breathes into Ricardo is meant to establish his primal magnetism
which becomes a corrosive agent in Ana María. A clear example of this seductive quality of Ricardo is the episode of the bat hunt. Ricardo’s irreverent hunt causes the impromptu swooning of his aunt and more importantly incures the wrath of his father, who inturn humiliates him before the entire estancia. Ricardo’s self-preservation drive thrust him into the wilderness, in which he shelters himself, returning a sweltering beast-man, a centripetal force:

Traías el torso semidesnudo, los cabellos revueltos y los pómulos encendidos por dos chapas rojizas. / –"Agua" –ordenaste. Yo no atiné sino a mirarte aterrorizada [...] Me arrimé a ti. Todo tu cuerpo despedía calor, era una brasa. Guiada por un singular deseo acercé a tu brazo la extremidad de mis dedos siempre helados [...] Tu carne quemaba. (101-02)

As Ana María explains, Ricardo is a terrifying and a transfixing figure, nevertheless the narrator is shown to be the instigator, as it is her "deseo" which conquers her initial apprehension of Ricardo. It is she who engages him. Ana María makes Ricardo the object of her desire, and as Barbara F. Ichiishi has noted "The object of desire always seems to elude the desiring subject, in a potentially endless process which appears to be emblematic of the human condition" (23). Ricardo’s return from exile finds him transformed, a man forges through fire, yet this fire also exerts a transformative power on the narrator. Ricardo’s burning body attracts the narrator’s cold hand, a distinct use of the concept of magnetism, wherein two elemental opposites attract, however here the results are destructive. This affinity of the narrator with Ricardo foreshadows the unhappy consequence of their impending liason. In a similar manner as cold is consumed by fire, so too will Ana María’s affair with Ricardo become a consuming addiction.
The fruition and consequences of the initial physical attraction between the narrator and Ricardo transpires in scenes eight and nine of the first chapter. Ricardo has once again returned home, like in the scene cited previously. This second return by Ricardo accomplishes two goals. Firstly, it reiterates the journey leitmotif of *Amortajada*. And secondly, the journey theme associates Ricardo’s domain with the hypaethral, the primordial, and the city, while the Ana María moves within the confines of the home, the domestic, and the suburban. This creates separate spaces for Ana María and Ricardo. However, the protagonist’s memories become a journey which examines these confines and transgresses them. In fact, the liaison with Ricardo is the second such transgression of the narrator’s interior drive outwardly, the first having been her touching of the young Ricardo in the previously commented scene.

The second displacement of her sensual (also sexual) desire, once again shows the protagonist’s exerting her will within the sphere of Ricardo’s world. The episode transpires in his primordial space symbolized by the grove:

Y entonces, ¿recuerdas?, me aferré desesperadamente a ti murmurando «Ven», gimiendo «No me dejes»; y las palabras «Siempre» y «Nunca». Esa noche me entregué a ti, nada más que por sentirte ciñéndome la cintura [...] Tú me hallabas fría porque nunca lograste que compartiera tu frenesí, porque me colmaba el olor a oscuro clavel silvestre de tu beso. (104)

Like their first physical encounter, the protagonist initiates the action. In fact, it is she through her imperatives which command and direct Ricardo. The protagonist’s apostrophic commands are followed by adverbial mandates as well, which coupled with her desire to *feel* him afford a picture of an individual ultimately concerned with herself. For Cece, Ana María’s complete egocentric
investment means that "la sensualidad es más importante para la protagonista que las normas sociales" (43). As Ana María recounts the events, she has given herself (in reality she has possessed him) simply because her will to being mandates his physical presence. This is made implicit through the adverbial phrase "nada más que" which creates a restrictive clause meant to emphasize Ana María's desire, the object of her desire and the function that object will carry out, in this case "ceñir" against her body. She is objectifying Ricardo, not acquiescing to his need to assert his masculinity. In fact, her lover misinterprets her unresponsiveness to his "frenesi" in large part because she is immersed (preoccupied) with her own state of desire, which is beyond his domain or understanding.

As the protagonist explains, the lascivious rendezvous lasted three years. However, after Ricardo has broken off the affair, Ana María recalls the rhetorical questions which more than completing the story of star crossed lovers reveals the protagonist's masochistic propensities: "Aquel brusco, aquel cobardé abandono tuyo, ¿respondió a una orden perentoria de tus padres o a alguna rebeldía de tu impetuoso carácter? No sé. Nunca lo supe" (104). Ana María's questioning does not represent the melodramatic laments of a scorned lover but rather the intuitive affirmations about the nature of Ricardo's character. And while Vidal reads the scene as emblematic of the Bombalian anti-heroine being "abúlicas, neuróticas, esquizofrénicas, mujeres enajenadas de la vivencia normal de su ser enfrentado a la realidad circundante" (51), I would counter that in fact, Ana María is fully conscious of of the nature of Ricardo's desertion.
Her questions afford the most likely possibilities, either his acquiescing to parental orders, his "impetuoso carácter" or cowardice. And while for Ichiishi, the protagonist's romantic anguish is symptomatic of how "woman is destined to remain physically and emotionally unsatisfied in a world of men" (18), I find that for Ana María pain becomes her *raison d'être*. And although the anti-heroine confesses to having contemplated suicide (which she also admits to not having the fortitude to commit), her agony smooths the moment of anagnorisis: Ana María is carrying Ricardo's child.

The pregnancy for the protagonist shrouds her to a point of analgetic complecency. Furthermore, Ana María's internal transformation project outwardly, her surroundings become more vivid and she revels in her present state:

> Deseos absurdos y frívolos me asediaban de golpe, sin razón y tan furiosamente, que se trocaban en angustiosa necesidad [...] Así vivía golosa de olores, de color, de sabores [...] Recuerdo. Me sentía como protegida por una red de pereza, de indiferencia; invulnerable, tranquila para todo lo que no fuera los pequeños hechos cotidianos: el subsistir, el dormir, el comer. (107)

Ana María's pregnancy makes possible her "indiferencia," which I read as evidence of self-sufficiency. Ana María is no longer paralyzed by heart break; rather she finds solice in the mundane. As Cece has shown "las consecuencias sociales no afectan a Ana María durante la espera del hijo de Ricardo porque ella goza la sensualidad su estado" (42). Added to this state of tranquility, Ana María finds another activity to sustain and counter her initial anguish. Her daily rituals of crying function therapeutically and her body becomes the means for catharsis. Here again, the protagonist exposes herself as a dynamic character,
engaged in her existence and not simply at the mercy of exterior forces. However, as I judge the novel to be completely engaged with an Existentialist vision of the world in which humanity is in constant states of transformations, Ana María's contentment ends. Death makes itself present once again, and through a chance misstep, the protagonist loses her child.  

**The Eternally Recurrent Skeptic**

The return of the omniscient narrator sheds new light on Ana María's story. In fact, from this point forward the reader is afforded the first person perspectives of individuals that have an intimate relationship with the protagonist and can provide a distinct picture of her life. For Lindstrom this omniscient narrator "se muestra dispuesto a analizar la actuación de los personajes dada la circunstancia de su propia incapacidad de autoanálisis y autocomprensión" (150). However, as I have shown, Ana María has been intensely aware of her existence, even in life and much more intensely in her interstitial state. Both states of consciousness jeopardize the passivity typically attributed to her. This idea is confirmed when the omniscient narrator, who critics such as Lindstrom have read as dispassionate and detached, testifies to Ana María's new insight into Ricardo's inauthentic existence after their separation.

The narrator informs us that as Ricardo silently gazes on Ana María's shrouded being, she in turn comes to perceive in her tormentor's silence her presence:

¿Era preciso morir para saber ciertas cosas? Ahora comprende también que en el corazón y en los sentidos de aquel hombre ella había hincado sus raíces; que jamás, aunque a menudo lo creyera, estuvo enteramente sola; que jamás, aunque a menudo lo pensara,
fue realmente olvidada […] ¡Ah, Dios mío, Dios mío! ¿Es preciso morir para saber? (112)

The importance of the passage above resides in the innovative use of death as agent. Myrna Solotorevsky has explained this as "la muerte, configurada en este texto como una experiencia enriquecedora, corresponde en su primera etapa a un peregrinaje" (250). In a similar fashion as death signifying end has been opened in *Amortajada*, by Ana María's interstitial state of being, so too has its exegetical quality. Death is the facilitator of the protagonist's attunement and perception of distinct realities. Through death Ana María realizes that her solitude was experienced by Ricardo as an unconscious void and that his abandonment was coupled in him by her recurrent memory.

*Amortajada* conflates death, life, and consciousness as a means of staging Ana María's authentication. Guerra-Cunningham has read this transformation as the protagonist's transcendence from "lo concreto inmediato y penetra en un cosmos que hasta entonces sólo había visto levemente" (*Función* 125). And while Guerra-Cunningham bases her reading on the overabundance of mystic imagery, I would like to draw attention to the transgressive signifying effect of death, which reveals Ana María as an influential figure. Other interpellating voices appear which depict Ana María as an active agent. And although these voices, difficult to differentiate from Ana María's but also impossible to attribute to her, function as guides for the protagonist and the reader, they also afford comments, information and sensations not always available from the protagonist's perspective alone.
The episode between Ana María and her sister, Alicia, is another example of proliferation of perspectives which are emblematic of Amortajada’s polysemic quality. With Alicia, the protagonist’s position on death, religion and God take center stage. As the narrator explains, the shrouded woman’s sister cuts a solemn, circumspect figure which Ana María feels compelled to address:

¿Dónde creerás que estoy? ¿Rindiendo cuentas al Dios terrible a quien ofreces día a día la brutalidad de tu marido, el incendio de tus aserraderos, y hasta la pérdida de tu único hijo? [...] Alicia, no. Estoy aquí, disgregándome bien apegada a la tierra. Y me pregunto si veré algún día la cara de tu Dios. (114)

Ana María’s direct address to Alicia exemplifies her religious incredulity. Much of Ana María’s subsequent soliloquy portrays her agnosticism as liminally atheist. For the protagonist, God is cast in much the same way as Ricardo, a capricious sadist, at worst and at best an indifferent voyeur.

The narrative importance of Alicia resides in her function as counterweight to Ana María’s character. Ana María explains that both sister’s experience with God run through a similar catholic school upbringing. And for Alicia, her adherence to the righteous path of societal conformity (recalling that she would fall asleep completing her rosary) is rewarded with the brutality of her husband and the loss of her son. Conversely, since this early age, Ana María preferred her passion. It is worth recalling that she would gaze and take pleasure in the vicarious experience of the newlywed fervor of the couple in the house adjacent to their convent. This episode functions to counter position the experiences of two lives from a moralist perspective. If Alicia’s devotion and Ana María’s agnosticism are similarly rewarded with pain, then this episode represents the
Existential affirmation of a silent God. Furthermore, this scene emphasizes the absurdity of existence, free from transcendental principles of God and justice.

Further evidence of Amortajada's problematic/reflection on God is symbolized by Ana María’s skepticism. Part of this skepticism is expressed by Ana María as a distancing or disownment on her part. As she lets us know, this is not her god, the god Ana María is describing is entirely "tu Dios," referring to Alicia, naturally. As the previous passage shows, Ana María's vision of God is that of an apathetic despot. Yet, her growing awareness of other ontic spheres only deepens her distrust of Alicia's God. However, the silence of her sister's God does not annihilate its presence completely. In fact, the effect is the opposite, and as Ana María recollects for her:

¡Dios me parecía tan lejano, y tan severo! Hablo del Dios que me imponía la religión, porque bien pueda que exista otro: un Dios más secreto y más comprensivo, el Dios que a menudo me hiciera presentir Zoila. (115)

What this episode shows is Ana María in full Existentialist mode. Ana María's skepticism which bordered on the blasphemous has come full circle. The initial indictment on the very idea of God, which was equally silent for the pious sister and the rebellious one, is resolved through a pantheist affirmation. The silent void of God is filled by the acceptance of the ineffable. This irresolvable question of a higher being opens the door back to the potentialities of death.

Ana María's thoughts return to the concept of the permanence of death. And more specifically, Ana María concerns herself with death not as the finitude of life, but as its possible continuations. A fascination shared by Bombal herself, who in an interview admitted that "la muerte me aterra, me da una curiosidad
inmensa. Creo que lo peor sería descubrir que detrás de la muerte no hay nada. Sería tan terrible como creer que todo termina con la muerte" (qtd. in Boyle: 30).

In a similar fashion, death both fascinates and terrorizes Ana María's consciousness. She expresses these concerns in the following manner: "Y puede, puede así, que las muertes no sean todas iguales. Puede que hasta después de la muerte todos sigamos distintos caminos" (116). What Ana María reveals here is that at the heart of her preoccupations remains the unnerving certainty of the unknowable which is saturating her present state of being. The use of the indicative present of "poder" is shrouded in the paradigmatic ambiguity which veils both potentiality and doubt in Ana María’s thoughts. This enunciation, which is directed at her sister, is Ana María’s hesitance in full bloom, her struggling with the diverse contingencies awaiting her in death.

It can not be overlooked that Ana María’s thoughts are presented in real time and at real speed. The reader is witnessing the Existential re-evaluation of the protagonist as it occurs, and the metamorphosis results in the realization of skepticism. In fact a clear example of that new understanding of the unknowable is her plea to Alicia to continue her prayers:

Pero reza, Alicia, reza. Me gusta ver rezar, tú lo sabes. ¡Qué no daría, sin embargo, mi pobre Alicia, porque te fuera concedida en tierra una partícula de la felicidad que te está reservada en tu cielo! Me duele tu palidez, tu tristeza. Hasta tus cabellos parecen habértelos desteñido las penas. (117)

Ana María, reconciled with her awareness of existence being an indecipherable puzzle, or at worst a conundrum, resolves to hoping for her sister’s happiness. And while as Lindstrom has explained, to categorize Bombal’s work as a
denouncement of the patriarchial system is excessive, the novel does contain a "fuerte elemento de mostración de una sociedad limitada, represiva y monótona" (148). In this vein, the protagonist’s misencounter with Alicia's god, that is to say its absence and, or apathy, showcases Ana María's altruistic reconciliation with the unknowable. This episode, which encompasses only one chapter, portrays the parallel suffering of two individuals of similar education, religious and societal status. In the process Ana María's dialogue with her sister questions not only the bourgeoisie existence choosen by Alicia in good faith, but also reveals that the protagonist reneged her nascent sensuality, with similarly devastating results.

**Intercalated Mirrors**

The 1948 English edition of *Amortajada*, which appeared under the title of *The Shrouded Woman*, was translated by the own author. Although Naomi Lindstrom in the foreword to the 1995 edition assures us that "the English version does not represent a drastic departure from the Spanish original" (ix), in the English edition Bombal intercalates the story of the love-triangle Luís, Elena and Luz-Margarita. The most important character is Elena because she is the irreverent projection, of the anonymous anti-heroine of *Niebla* and Ana María, who herself remained anonymous until scene nineteen of chapter one.

Like the aforementioned protagonists, Elena is burdened by the presence of a parasitical man, whose ethical gaze, in the form of obsessiveness, attempts to sequester her libidinal drives. However, Luís’s insistent projection of his ethical superego stimulates Elena’s defiance: "What does it matter losing one’s reputation, the support of a husband or the respect of a stupid family. The one
really important thing is to save one’s heart” (181). For Elena, the imperative becomes staying true to the self, forsaking society’s judgments, a partner’s approval, or the acceptance of family. Such resignation of society casts her as a pariah, an uncanny stranger, dangerous due to her incendiary sensual powers which are doubly mercurial. In this sense, Elena embodies part of what Vidal understands to be Bombal’s treatment of the Medusa myth:

En el tratamiento de María Luisa Bombal la Medusa aborda dos deseos simultáneos y contradictores entre sí: mantener su identidad de Gorgona ejerciendo sus poderes sobrenaturales para fascinar y destruir a cuanto hombre se cruzase en su camino. Secretamente también espera la llegada de un hombre que destruya el influjo que las fuerzas cósmicas tienen sobre ella, la domeñe y la reduzca a su individualidad de ser mortal, capaz de amor y fecundidad. (55-56)

However, Elena does not desire to be domesticated. In fact she casts a perplexingly clear picture of inconformity. Elena exemplifies the ethical burden of her impetuousness, that is to say, her societal exile to a life of nomadic drifting and unkind words which "will always pursue her" (182). In fact, Ana María understands that Elena's unyielding individuality extracts a "tribute." The point which can not be missed here is the importance of intentionality and choice in the Elena character. As Ana María explains, Elena’s self is not the burden, it is the duty extracted by her chosen way of life which causes an "aislamiento," the consequence of two opposing wills: "entre la conciencia y el deseo de exteriorizar esa conciencia" (Cece 41). The consciousness of that choice is expressed by Elena herself when she recognizes the personal importance of saving "one’s heart" but more so by her obligation to her freedom. In other words,
she willfully pays for her freedom through exile and slander, instead of relinquishing her authentic self through conformity.  

If the point I argue is that the Elena character is a continuation of Ana María, then Luis is the reflection of the Ricardo character. Ana María's perspective on Luis sheds light on Ricardo's enigmatic silence, remembering that up to this point in the novel Ricardo has not uttered a single word. Their self-righteous sadism compels me to read these individuals as doubles. Part of that self-righteousness manifests itself in Luis under the pretext of conformity. For Luis this submissiveness is exacerbated by his indecisiveness: "Oh Luis, Luis—it isn't that I blame you!—All men are cowards and it is natural that you too should have looked for an easy quiet life," to which a little further on Ana María adds, "I don't know, Luis, but I have the conviction you will have to pay later for those moments of real life your lack of moral courage caused you to elude" (181-82). The picture Ana María paints of Luis's behavior is full of Existential bravado. Luis, and as I am arguing Ricardo, are escapists whose masculine performance of morality, as neither one resolves to follow their own inner voices, is revealed to be a willing act of inauthenticity.

As Ana María affirms the eluding of "those moments of real life" which Luis renounced will, like Elena's conviction to her authentic self, extract a price. For Luis, the price paid is twofold: firstly, the agonizing repression of Elena's memory. Secondly, and in an ode to the Sysiphus legend, Luis's punishment becomes the repetitive life with Luz-Margarita, whose apathetic existence "will remain, repeating over and over: / ‘What a scandal! [...] God should punish girls
who are not born like me—pretty, sweet, rich, and destined to marry the men they love" (182). The price paid for Luis’s chosen path in life is in effect the very life he chooses, a corrosive existence next to a woman who represents the continuation and reaffirmation of the repression of individuality and by extension the apologia for the inauthentic. However, unlike the Camusian anti-hero, Luis will not ever find solace in his existence.75

Another character which provides Ana María the occasion to reflect is Fernando, her long suffering confidant. His story is presented in scenes twenty-three through twenty-seven of chapter one, and in fact it is his narration which strategically closes the chapter, highlighting his exegetical importance. This relationship signifies Ana María's firsts steps outside her station, and as Lindstrom explains "al entrar en esta relación con Fernando, Ana María se parece a la clásica adultera en el sentido de que intenta suplir la falta de una intercomunicación satisfactoria en su matrimonio y rompe con el pacto de lealtad que por convención observa la pareja" (150). And while this affair remains non-physical, it does represent a rupture, as Fernando symbolizes a departure from the other male characters: Luis, Ricardo, and Antonio, Ana María’s husband. The break with the other male characters in Amortajada is both physical and intellectual, but not philosophical.

Ana María’s confidant is described as swarthy and sickly, and in a symbolic gesture meant to emphasize decay, Fernando is older. As the other men in the protagonist's life are depicted as young, vivacious and white, Fernando's depictions makes him their geometric opposite. Fernando represents
the vestiges of the old decimononic order, in fact, he is described as having a "desagradable inteligencia, altanera y positiva" (120), alluding explicitly to the rampant positivism of the late nineteenth century of which he is the emblem. However, Fernando's effectiveness goes beyond his being the narrative ballast to the other male characters of Amortajada, it is with Fernando that the reader is afforded a new perspective of Ana María: her unapologetic sadism. It is with Fernando's story that we first explicitly witness "que fue ella quien siempre lo llamó e hizo todas las decisiones con respecto a la forma que tomaría el diálogo, estableciéndose así una relación de tirana y esclavo al nivel del discurso" (Lindstrom 152).

Fernando's story is expectedly tragic; he is a widower, whose wife commits suicide, in large measure due to a silent malcontent, which Fernando had intuited when he remembered "haberla sorprendido mirándome fijamente como si me estuviera viendo por primera vez" (121). This misfortune in his own romantic affairs, in his estimation, makes him a kindred spirit to Ana María who dutifully finds such a comparison offensive. However, Fernando’s appreciation of Ana María goes beyond loving contemplation. With Fernando, Ana María's philosophical sensibility becomes explicit, which he employs to justify his devotion to her:

No se mueva. ¡Ay, qué silencio! El aire parece de cristal. En tardes como ésta me da miedo hasta de pestañear. ¿Sabe uno acaso dónde terminan los gestos? ¡Tal vez si levanto la mano, provoque en otros mundos la trizadura de una estrella! Sí, te admiraba y te comprendía. (123)
The self-confessed admiration of Fernando is fostered by the quiet intellect of Ana María, who here speaks of parallel universes and the symbiotic relationship between minute gestures and tantamount effects. Ana María’s reluctance to "pestañear" brings to mind what the American meteorologist Edward Lorenz in the 1960s called the butterfly effect. These cosmological preoccupations speak of Ana María’s attonement with the intrarelationships which cultivate (perpetuate) the organizing systems encasing her world. This heightened sense of awareness illustrates the ambivalent quality of Ana María’s character as she is despotic in her own right.76

Ana María’s own cruelty is exemplified by her unapologetic hatred of Fernando’s quiet companionship. In this direction, Ana María's sadism would appear to give credence to Boyle's claim that "María Luisa Bombal explored the world of the woman complicit in her marginalization" (37). Fernando's unnerving passivity, which to a degree mirrors her own disposition in her marriage to Antonio, brings forth a physical repulsion. As the omniscient narrator explains, Fernando's confessed apathy next to his dead wife gives Ana María the occasion to firstly "odiarlo" and then "detestarlo" (121); however she can not free herself from his enabling complicity. The simultaneous understanding of each other's role fosters the symbiotic relationship between Ana María's vicious inclinations and Fernando’s masochism.

Interestingly, this masochism in Fernando is not simply his deriving of pleasure, or the tendency to derive pleasure, from being rebuffed by Ana María. Fernando also houses the capability of hate. Blurring the tenacious lines between
his need to possess Ana María and that desire’s control of him: "Pero no sabías hasta dónde era capaz de llegar mi egoísmo. Tal vez de sé tu muerte, Ana María. El día quema horas, minutos, segundos" (131). Fernando’s confesión reveals his spiritual deterioration into a quasi-homicidal urge. The preoccupation with decay is transmitted through the overt presence of time. As so much like the day burns away hours, minutes, and seconds, so too does Fernando’s love becomes nefarious and all consuming. The chapter’s closing confession shows that Fernando is a paradoxical figure who simultaneously longed for Ana María's misfortunes, as a means to sustain his own project of existence but also as the retribution for her rejection.

(Mis)construing Gaze

The second chapter of Bombal’s novel deals primarily with Ana María's relationship with Antonio. The omniscient narrator dominates in this section of the novel, with Ana María’s point of view appearing sporadically and Antonio reduced to cameo roles. As a character, Antonio dominates through presence and discourse as we can "hear" his thoughts and exchanges with Ana María, a departure from Ricardo, who remains silent. However, in this capacity as gazing object, Antonio’s symbolic importance is tantaumont, because it is his misconstruing gaze which stimulates the events which transpire between the two.

Antonio is a voyeur because he first becomes entranced by Ana María’s outwardly figure, and more importantly her stoic beauty. However, during his year-long vigil of Ana María’s quiet knitting, in which Antonio contemplates her through a bedroom window, he confuses her smile as a good omen. What
transpires next between Ana María and Antonio is an implicit dialogue between the two. However, Antonio's explicit confesses, in which the passage time only emboldened him, are filtered first through Ana María and presented by the omniscient narrator:

aopen del invierno acortó los días, cobró audacia y fue a apoyar la frente contra los vidrios, y que, largo rato, desde la oscuridad de la noche, solía abismarse en la contemplación de la lámpara [...] y de aquella muchacha silenciosa que tejía extendida en una larga mecedora de paja. A menudo, como si lo presintiera allí agazapado tras la oscuridad, ella levantaba los ojos y sonreía distraídamente, al azar [...] Enamorado ya, perdidamente, continuó a pesar de todo, gozando de esa sonrisa que no iba dirigida a él... (133)

The passage above is Ana María's retelling of Antonio's recollection of those endless nights of vigile, through the voice of the third person narrator. Ana María anticipates Antonio's version of their meeting and sheds light on Antonio's initial misrecognition. From her vantage point, Antonio is an intruder whose limited vision can not decipher the rage behind the enigmatic smile, which she confesses "no iba dirigida a él."

The immediate reference to Ana María's quiet rage is the Odyssey's Penelope character, initially alluded to in scene sixteen of chapter one. Ichiishi has read this mythological allusion as a direct reference to "an activity which in western culture has been associated with femininity, knitting here expresses the repressed desire of Ana Maria" (21). However, Bombal's anti-heroine divorces the character from the faithful, devoted wife archetype associated with Homer's epic, instead infusing her persona with quiet rage. In Ana María’s case, the reinvention of the Penelope prototype exposes the smoldering quality of her personality, which finds in knitting an outlet for her pain, which is therapeutic and
Secondly, in this scene, Antonio functions as Ricardo’s alter ego, with one apparent difference, he loves Ana María. However, Antonio’s subsequent behavior will disenchant not only Ana María, as Antonio’s frivolous personality is unmasked, but at the same time, Antonio’s callousness will be the disillusionment and demystification of the myth of love.

The earliest indication of Antonio’s charade is the oft commented third scene, in which Ana María’s reflection in the pond is shattered by her husband’s burlesque throwing of a rock:

Riendo siempre, Antonio agitó el brazo para lanzar con violencia un guijarro que allá abajo fue a herir a su desposada en plena frente. Miles de culebras fosforescentes estallaron en el estanque y el paisaje que había dentro se retorció, y se rompió. Recuerda. Asiéndose de la balaustrada de hierro forjado, había cerrado los ojos, conmovida por un miedo pueril. /–«El fin del mundo. Así ha de ser. Lo he visto». (135)

Critics such as Ichiishi and Agosín have viewed Antonio’s behavior as sadistic. For Agosín "El mundo que evoca Ana María, aquel mundo de sueños de la infancia, es destrozado por su marido Antonio cuando tira esa piedra en el estanque; desde entonces, ella no puede rearmarse" (Aproximaciones 193). I would point out that the scene is more indicative of Antonio's veiled sadism and hypocritical understanding of love, because Ana María's inability to "rearmarse," as Agosín states, her fragmentation began much earlier in the novel. What is undeniable is that Antonio, like the other male characters in Amortajada, is an obstacle (emblem) of inauthentic masculinity for Ana María.

The aforementioned scene is prefaced employing labyrinthine imagery, Ana María is lost within a maze; the asphyxiating city where Antonio has taken
her shortly after their wedding. Within the dynamic of the suffocating city, Antonio’s love, paradoxically, becomes torturous for Ana María. As this scene makes explicit, Ana María sees her disintegration at the hands of Antonio, which is symbolic of the destruction to come. Here Antonio is revealed to be a sadistic tormentor, laughing and purposely striking Ana María’s reflection on the forehead. The verb “recordar” in both indicative and imperative moods is obscurely significant because it reflects Ana María’s actions of remembering and also commands Antonio to return to that painful time for the protagonist. That moment for Ana María induced both a private and a collective revelation. Not only does she fear for her own well-being but also Antonio’s behavior elicits her eschatological vision evidenced by the explosion of contorted figures. Here again, her companion provokes Ana María’s conflicted sentiments, which shows her to be sadomasochistically attuned to her surroundings.

The point is not immaterial; Ana María’s torment does not elicit quixotic passivity but rather vivid pictures of her despotic reality. Further indication of this sadomasochism in Ana María is exemplified in her reaction to Antonio’s frenetic sexuality:

¡El placer! ¡Con que era eso el placer! ¡Ese estremecimiento, ese inmenso aletazo y ese recaer unidos en la misma vergüenza! ¡Pobre Antonio, qué extrañeza la suya ante el rechazo casi inmediato! Nunca supo que noche tras noche, la enloquecida niña que estrechaba en sus brazos, apretando los dientes con ira intentaba conjurar el urgente escalofrío. (134)

These declarations by the omniscient narrator are remarkable because they highlight Ana María ambiguous projects of existence. Even when her sexual pleasures are indulged, she nevertheless cannot reconcile her self-inflicted
demands, reducing her to a constant state of malcontent and resistance. Ana María experiences a sense of shame and immediately after rejects Antonio. This contradictory behavior is indicative of her Existential ambivalence which can not find relief in only the physical because she is searching out validation outside the physical, an external justification to what can only be reconciled internally. The key term which encapsulates the protagonist’s impasse is the ambiguously used "conjurar."

All at once this verb signifies confrontation, supplication, and resistance, all qualitative characteristics of Ana María’s. What the verb also reveals is Ana María's performativity, she is purposely exploiting Antonio to (angrily) conjure her moment of gratification. However, Ana María is immediately returned to a previous state of unrest because of the intentionality of her performance. She can not achieve self-realization because the moment of "urgente escalofrío" is just that and nothing more. And since the sexuality that Antonio can provide is not the true desire she wants to achieve, she is in effect sabotaging her happiness because she is pursuing dissimilar projects of existence.

The charade becomes unsustainable and Ana María’s own thoughts are clear: "¿cómo volver sobre una mentira? ¿Cómo decir que se había casado por despecho? Sí Antonio..." (137). This exchange counter positions the perspective of Ana María and her dialogue with Antonio, all of which is mitigated by the omniscient narrator. Here Ana María is returning to the moment of Antonio’s wedding proposal. In this scene the omniscient narrator exposes the motives of Ana María’s acquiescence: the spite which has sustained the charade of
marriage. The "Sí Antonio..." represents her consent to marrying Antonio, but the syntactical positioning of Ana María's response also substantiates the omniscient narrators assertions concerning her motivation. It is as if she is agreeing to Antonio's proposal and acknowledging the malice which pushed her into marriage. And although the omniscient narrator also discloses that Ana María had longed for men who would represent geometric opposites, either "el tirano" or "el ser anodino," her choice to enter into a marriage with a man who represents neither speaks volumes of Ana María's malicious readiness to enable her torment.

Further evidence of the protagonist's involvement in the sustainment of her lifestyle is made clear in the subsequent decision to "love" Antonio. This epiphany unravels upon her return to the city. Ana María's new disposition towards her husband is greeted by his indifference. Compounding the protagonist's frustrations is the inability to rekindle Antonio's initial ardour through her sexuality. Antonio's distancing is unmasked as wounded masculinity and the moment of recognition for Ana María is staged innocuously:

Fue una mañana [...] desde el cuarto de baño consideraba a través de la puerta medio abierta, el dormitorio en desorden, cuando Antonio entró inesperadamente de vuelta de la caza. Creyéndose solo [...] su bota tropezó con una chinela de cuero azul/ Y entonces, oh entonces –ella vio y nunca pudo olvidarlo–, brutalmente, con rabia, casi, la arrojó lejos de sí de un puntapié. / Y en un segundo, en ese breve segundo se produjo en ella el brusco despertar a una verdad, verdad que llevó tal vez adentro desde mucho y esquivaba mirar de frente. Comprendió que ella no era, no había sido sino una de las múltiples pasiones de Antonio. (141)

Antonio's actions are an unambiguous indication of his frivolity. In fact, his superficiality culminates in the numerous illicit affairs which inturn fuel his rage
towards Ana María. This projection is exasperated in part by her return to her father’s hacienda but is more indicative of his injured male ego. And as Vidal has explained "Ana María observa que su marido ya se ha petrificado detrás de la máscara de la inflexibilidad masculina" (132). Two points merit attention concerning Vidal's reading: first, Ana María is conscious of Antonio's transformation and the abovementioned episode serves to confirm her suspicions. Secondly, Antonio's cruelty is a mindful choice, a "máscara" as Vidal states, he chooses to deploy to mend the injury caused by his wife's initial indifference. In this last scene, Antonio's marital discontent goes on to manifest itself in a single act of brutality projected onto the blue sandal, used here in an explicit metonymic capacity to represent the shrouded woman.

Unbeknownst to Antonio, however, is the presence of Ana María's gaze. From her inconspicuous vantage point, the nature of Antonio’s true self reveals, firstly the aforementioned hostility and more importantly the one-dimentiality of his masculinity. He is nourished by a constant libidinal need, which in this very instant reveals to Ana María her expendable and insignificant role. However, and this point is central to grasping Ana María’s culpability and implication in the evolution of her life, Antonio’s egocentric nature is not a complete revelation for Ana María. As the narrator informs us, Ana María had intuited this self-serving characteristic in her husband. This inner voice which she ignores charges her for bad faith. This self-escapism, which has enabled Antonio’s cruelty, implicates her in the inauthentic existence she has engaged.
In this respect, Ana María’s accountability shows her as an active participant in her own anguished existence. Hence, the much commented pronouncement in scene eight, most often analyzed for its feminist quality, becomes rhetorical in nature. Rhetorical because of its evident oratory projection, rhetorical because of the vacuousness of the question, taken the events which have transpired, Ana María has answered the question beforehand. The question is gratuitous as the previous experiences of Ana María have shown the subjectivity of love, marriage, and conformity and her active role in the evolution of her existence:

¿Por qué, por qué la naturaleza de la mujer ha de ser tal que tenga que ser siempre un hombre el eje de su vida? Los hombres, ellos, logran poner su pasión en otras cosas. Pero el destino de las mujeres es remover una pena de amor en una casa ordenada, ante una tapicería inconclusa. (142)

The self-evident quality of the question, that is to say that neither nature nor the destiny of woman is defined vis-à-vis man, has been made explicit by Ana María’s freedom to engage Ricardo, torment Fernando and exploit Antonio's sexual naiveté and hypocrisy. The point to be made is that in each case, it is the sensation and experience which is being sought, not the man. With Ricardo, Ana María experiments with what she perceives to be love, Fernando is the masochistic target of her rage, and Antonio is the medium for her renewed sexuality. At each step, as Amortajada has shown, Ana María has been conscious of these relationships and the deeper motives which compel her. In fact as she chooses to remain with Antonio in full awareness of his narcissism
and infidelities, these dialogues between the people at her wake reveal, \textit{ex post facto}, Ana María’s active participation in the sustainment of inauthenticity.

Further indicative of Ana María’s continuation of her own misery is exemplified in scene ten, the infamous episode with the lawyer. Having come to the resolution of separating from Antonio, the protagonist returns to the city in a furor, prepared to confront her husband’s indiscriminate demeanor with her violence. She arrives at the aforementioned lawyer’s home, in the early morning hours, and is immediately confronted with the judgmental gaze of societal norm, as voiced by the attorney:

\begin{quote}
- No, esto no debe hacerse, Ana María, piense que Antonio es el padre de sus hijos; piense que hay medidas que una señora no puede tomar sin rebajarse. Tal vez sus propios hijos la criticarían más adelante. Por lo demás qué le puede importar a usted esa infeliz mujer a quien más seguro va a pesarle dentro de muy poco la imprudencia que está cometiendo... (144)
\end{quote}

The lawyer’s dissuasive argument is based on three premises: the marriage, societal duty, and the triviality of indiscretion. The first appeal is to Ana María’s obligations as a wife and mother. Antonio’s position as father is meant to soften the weight of his adulterous behavior, a means to justify his indiscretions via the meritorious family he has taken part in creating. Dually, the invocation of Ana María’s position as legitimate wife is meant to mitigate the pain and humiliation of her husband’s affair by finding refuge in the sanctity of marriage. However, as the lawyer makes clear, her right to indignation at her husband, is only so if she upholds the union and does not attempt to destroy it.

As the lawyer explains, such steps of separation constitute a "rebajarse," understood here in two spacial capacities: firstly, as a descending movement into
the shameful realm of the other woman and secondly, as a downward progression from the highly regarded institution of marriage. In this vein, such a displacement away from marriage forfeits the protection of legitimacy implicit in union between husband and wife. What the lawyer ultimately attempts to circumvent is the ostracization of Ana María. Still, the lawyer’s words are persuasive deterents, not deterministic mandates. The burden of action still rests with Ana María, who once confronted by Antonio, unleashes a torrent of insults and reprimands, which elicit his: "¡Y cuánto me quieres! Dime, ¿por qué, por qué?" (145).

In final instance, Ana María commits Existential suicide, choosing to negate her desire to separate from Antonio, and falling back into an inauthentic state of being. In essence she commits to death, because as Finlayson explains "aguantar la vida en los momentos tristes, con resignación, entereza y hombría, es signo de valor" (Suicidio 272). In this direction, Ana María acts in a manner that constitutes the geometric opposite of what the Chilean philosopher is promulgating, she lacks the fortitude to see her separation through to the end, knowing fully of Antonio’s hypocrisy and the vacuity of the lawyer's arguments.

Given all the above, I would argue that Ana María’s behavior in the novel represents the consequences of her choices. As Boyle has noted "She understands that little by little she was complicit in the strangling of the most vital part of herself. And how she enjoyed her suffering for love because that was the passion through which she fed the strength to remain where she was" (39). In principal, Boyle’s assestment of Ana María’s state of consciousness is accurate.
But because in my estimation her complicity is attributable to her betrayal of herself, and not simply the submission to quiet romantic suffering, Ana María's sadism is symptomatic of her freedom. Ana María is a willing collaborator in the charade of her marriage, in full knowledge of Antonio's infidelities. In fact the absurdity of her choice to continuously consent has astounded even her husband. However, as Amortajada has up to this point consisted of a sequence of evolutions, epiphanies, and displacements, another such transformation is not unexpected for Ana María. This new project for the protagonist is fueled by hate. However, this venture into hate is not a self-destructive force, but rather a rejuvenating energy for Ana María.

*Damnatio Memoriae*

The final two scenes I will comment place Ana María face to face with the furthermost challenges she faced in life: her passions and her spirituality. These come in the form of Antonio and father Carlos. With regards to her husband, Ana María first is confronted by the absurdity of her hate for Antonio. This conflict has contradictory consequences. Here Ana María begins to perceive that the internal rage, perculating underneath, was the parasidic union which sustained her. The peripetia comes at the moment of Ana María's perception of a single, miniscule wrinkle behind Antonio's ear (146), in other words she has finally recognized the proverbial kink in his armor of masculinity. The Existential distancing away from her addiction is not accomplished through a displacement or a repression but rather through purging:

No. No lo odia. Pero tampoco lo ama. Y he aquí que al dejar de amarlo y de odiarlo siente deshacerse el último nudo de su
estructura vital. Nada le importa ya. Es como si no tuviera ya razón de ser ni ella ni su pasado. Un gran hastío la cerca, se siente tambalear hacia atrás. ¡Oh esta súbita rebeldía! Este deseo que la atormenta de incorporarse gimiendo: "¡Quiero vivir. Devuélvanme, devuélvanme mi odio!" (147)

For Ana María this closing step of separation is a conflictive experience. The protagonist realizes that the emotional energy which had for so long been a centripetal force joining her to Antonio, had been her own creation. This new consciousness of her central role in sustaining that emotional void, the embracing of the nothing between them propels Ana María to wish for a previous state of ignorance. Here again the galvanizing agent becomes death, and more precisely Antonio’s mortality.

The scene plays out as an Existential anagnorisis: "Dios mío, ¿aquello es posible? ¿Antonio no es inviolable? No. Antonio no es inviolable" (146). Antonio’s impermeability is unraveled; Antonio is rendered fallible and human. This demystification exposes Ana María’s hypocritic existence because her everpresent adversary, the very organizing principle in life, has fallen from grace. Ana María’s Existential catharsis begins at the same moment as the erasure of Antonio’s demigod status via the vivacity of death. And while Vidal has understood this final confrontation with her husband as realization that her hate was "la actitud vengativa de una mente poseída por el instinto destructor de signo femenino" (133), I read Antonio’s decent into humanity as the ascention of Ana María’s authentic self, her recognition of the absurdity of her hate, but more importantly the permeability of Antonio, petit-bourgeois and emblem of masculinity.
Interment

The third chapter of Amortajada brings us to the entombment of Ana María, and a final confrontation with her inconformist spirituality. The confrontation with father Carlos is staged as a scholastic debate, pitting the faithful and the nonbeliever. Through the dialogue between the shrouded woman and father Carlos, the reader is informed of Ana María's precocious sagacity, which naturally left the nuns confounded. The lucidity of her comments is matched by the propensity towards rebelliousness. In fact, Ana María skepticism is manifest early on, particularly in Ana María’s vision of paradise which differs greatly from the churches:

Dije que no me importaría en absoluto no ir al Cielo porque me parecía un lugar bastante aburrido […] –Bueno, hija, y dime, ¿cómo te gustaría que fuera el Cielo? […]–Me gustaría que fuera lo mismo que es esta tierra […] Y me gustaría también que mi primo Ricardo estuviera siempre conmigo, y se nos diera permiso para dormir de vez en cuando por las noches en el bosque, allí donde el césped es verdadero terciopelo. (155-56)

Ana María’s vision of paradise is at once geocentric and deeply rooted in her own pleasures. In short, Ana María is confessing an adherence to the proverbial carpe diem mentality. The protagonist’s utopia is shaped by her experiences with nature and with her cousin, in sum substantiating a Existential vision of fulfillment which is self-sustaining and tangible. As father Carlos attests this utopic project became a life long obsession: "¡El Paraíso Terrenal, Ana María! Tu vida entera no fue sino la búsqueda ansiosa de ese jardín" (156). The importance of this exchange is that it highlights Ana María’s individuality; her spirit of nonconformity
and her continual rejection and/or conscious dissatisfaction with father Carlos's heaven, which Ana María saw as "bastante aburrido."

This dialectic between the shrouded woman and the priest is indication of Ana María’s nascent consciousness of the absurdity of theocentric universe imposed on her. As Ana María’s argument puts forth the disjunction between the earthly and the divine is exasperated by the demands of the latter on the former. Ana María’s disposition then becomes imperturbable, projecting the same apathetic pedantry back onto the idea of god which had through the figures of father Carlos and the Superior Mother chastised her inconformity. The shrouded woman’s nonchalance is perfectly captured in her retort to father Carlos concerning her relationship to his god: "–¡Bueno, ésta sí que es soberbia! ¿Así es que pretendes que Dios venga a ti, sin tú molestarte en dar un paso hacia él? " to which she coldly replies "/– ¿Por qué no?" (158).

Ana María’s response to father Carlos’s indignation is representative of her defiant skepticism. The cold retort substantiations the presence of an audacious spirit which would not wager her fulfillment on the promises of an apathetic god, but also finds no hesitancy, nor contradiction, in enlisting said god in the realization of her happiness. In this capacity, I agree with Boyle’s position that "María Luisa Bombal explored the world of the woman complicit in her marginalization" (37), in so far as that marginalization represents her individuality. And as these exchanges between father Carlos and Ana María ultimately expose, her thomasian spirit was irreverent to the very end. 77
Unquestionably pieces of Avant-Garde fiction albeit from a disassociated individual's point of view, *Niebla* and *Amortajada*, also function as case studies in Existential sadomasochism. Here Bombal reveals the exasperation with bourgeoise double standards and explores the state of consciousness of victim and victimizer. In retrospect, the critic's presumption that these anti-heroines are "characters incapable of self-realization and fulfillment," because they replicate the "male-dominated, bourgeois society of Chile, and one assumes Spanish America in general, in the 1930's" (Bente 103) is predictable. However, Bombal's anti-heroines revel and thrive in their malcontent and are shown to have been keenly aware of their actions. Both anti-heroines permeate their bourgeoise order through their passions, showing themselves to be active tyrants of nonconformity.
Chapter IV: The Burden of Anonymity: Spiritual Toxics in Graciliano Ramos’s Angústia

A experiência de que os mortos caem, enquanto nós continuamos [...] é, no fundo, um sentimento da propulsividade de nossa vontade e desejo vital—Vicente Ferreira da Silva78

Anonymity, as the most absolute expression for the impersonal, the irresponsible, the unrepentant, is a fundamental source of modern demoralization—Søren Kierkegaard79

Chaos is the governing principle of Graciliano Ramos’s Angústia (1936).80 Graciliano’s text subscribes to chaos as a narrative phenomenon that encapsulates the dynamic processes and rhythms of the protagonist’s state of mind.81 Alfredo Bosi explains the chaotic form of the novel in the following manner: "O livro avança com a rapidez do objeto que cai: sempre mais velozmente e mais pesadamente rumo à morte e ao nada. Estamos no limite entre o romance de tensão critica e o romance intimista" (456).82 Angústia’s implacable narrative velocity creates an Existential vortex which on one hand expresses Luís da Silva’s sense of alienation and on the other leaves the reader with a sense of vertigo and uncertainty. As Otto Maria Carpeaux puts it "o leitor perde-se no romance para esquecer o seu mundo, mas reencontra-se lá, reconhecendo que o seu próprio mundo está chamando a desaparecer" (225). To accomplish this, Graciliano’s novel brings into play chaos as (dis)order for the purposes of unburdening, through memory, the yoke of anonymity as a poisonous agent in da Silva’s existence and justifying murder as a manifestation of his authentic self.83 In other words, murder becomes both regenerative and a viable project of existence. In this vein, I would argue that embedded within
Angústia’s narrative lay the unromantic seeds of Existential accountability. For Luís da Silva the sacrifice of his adversary becomes the necessary death which invigorates his life, a clear example of the protagonist exerting his will to being.

In keeping with the chaotic theme, the ensuing comments on Graciliano’s novel will be presented successively, following the novel’s narrative evolution. While this analytical approach could have its perils, it will allow me to outline the interpersonal toxicosis of the narrator/protagonist in real time. In doing so, I focus on spontaneous episodes in Angústia which express the protagonist's Existential hyperconsciousness. And while Ronald M. Harmon finds that the novel's structure "reflete a estrutura da sociedade que condicionou o protagonista" (67), I, however, find that da Silva's chaotic story reveals his Existential resentment at that "sociedade" which has alienated him but which he desires and participates in enthusiastically. The protagonist's Existential resentment jeopardizes the reductionist label assigned to da Silva by critics such as Mary L. Daniel, for whom "the meandering, patchwork mixture of recall and on-going narration of recent events is the product of a deranged mind" (174).84

In da Silva’s case, the common dynamics of chaos theory take the form of recurrent childhood memories in the sertão, the toxicity of his milieu and the consciousness of his inconsequentiality. And while critics have read the texts as an indictment of the protagonist’s past, as a means of justifying his present malcontent, I in turn find that through Luís da Silva’s memories Angústia is the Existentialist demystification of his present through the substantiation of his free will. That freewill is presented as real time stream of consciousness, which as
Ana Luiza Silva Camarani has noticed are "técnicas vanguardistas como o monologo interior e a fragmentação do tempo," which configure an oniric state which is simultaneously "empastado, nevoento, noturno" (67).

This organized mayhem of Graciliano's novel is reminiscent of the dice used by the anonymous poet of Labrador Ruiz's *Laberinto*. The spontaneity of stories, characters, time sequences, and locales bring to mind the same method of poetic creation of the poet of *Laberinto*. Interestingly, the capricious exposition of *Angústia* has been read, by both admirers and detractors, as schizophrenic—Juan Carlos Orrego Arismendi for instance describes the novel as "la minuciosa crónica de la lenta edificación de una locura" (74). Others such as José Koser, Lemos de Oliveira, and Bosi have found an Existential fingerprint in Graciliano's text. In fact, Bosi goes so far as to state that *Angústia* is a "romance existencialista avant la lettre" (455).85

In *Angústia's* anticipatory Existentialism, the reader witnesses a cumulative confession whose effect is the prioritization of small details in their arbitrary manifestation, what Koser calls "una especie de diario mental" (73).86 This apotheosis of the minute functions as a butterfly effect, in which the minuscule events in the everyday life of the protagonist escalate his Existential anguish. In fact, as Maria das Graças de Moraes Augusto has explained the effect on da Silva "diante da irracionalidade do mundo" (11) is passive rancor. The butterfly metaphor is likewise indicative of the metamorphosis the reader witnesses in Luís da Silva. Depending on the reader's perspective, this
transformation into murderer can be read as the descent into homicidal madness or the triumph of da Silva's will to being, his affirmation.

*Angústia* can be summarized as the story of a jilted lover, a "modern revenge tragedy, subject no doubt, to various psychological and sociological interpretations" (Lemos de Oliveira 87). The novel's forty unnumbered chapters are overpopulated with abject characters; this backdrop creates the despondent context from which Luís da Silva, an anonymous John Doe, begins to recollect his life. After his romantic involvement with his neighbor's daughter, Marina, becomes undone, da Silva's disillusionment suffers a quickening which spirals into an apparent murderous act. I say apparent because of the subjective nature of da Silva's descent into homicidal action, which as I have mentioned previously has been read as unclear exploits of his mind. The introduction of Julião Tavares, the bourgeois antagonist, only functions to hasten Luís's hypersensitivity.

Luís endures a nauseating reality of existing in a catatonic sense and his sickness appears to evolve into a violent psychosomatic burden. Interestingly, the narrative begins in mid flight (or descent as it were), as Luís awakens from a feverish stupor. The entire novel plays as a dream sequence, as Luís da Silva's "mundo de sonho angustiado" (Camarani 67). He now is a self-confessed infected man needing to unburden himself, which he begins to do with the Dostoevskiesque narration of his thoughts.

**Luís da Silva e sua Filosofia**

The action of *Angústia* picks up *in medias res* but another possible reading is that we are introduced to Luís's story at its closure; as Daniel has
suggested "the work 'ends' shortly before it 'begins'" (174). This option arises from the protagonist's illness at the end of the novel, which the implicit reader is made aware of immediately. In this vein of thought, at least two perspectives are evident. One would consist of the explication of his anguished thoughts in real time, hence the present tense narration and the proliferation of events as they appear to the protagonist. Another point of view, given the protagonist's recuperative state, is that we are vis-à-vis the recollections of Luís da Silva, presented using the inner monologue to "mantém o tom de tensão e mal-estar que sensibiliza- e talvez choque-o leitor" (Harmon 68). In either case, we have an ambiguously biased narrator, whose thoughts and actions are to be approached as the über-sensitized mental diary of a malcontent.91

The protagonist, who at this moment is anonymous, begins by addressing the narratee.92 In this overt apostrophic exposition, the confessional tone of the novel is established and we (the audience both real/implicit) learn that the narrator has been convalescing, describing his illness as an enigmatic experience bordering the realms of nightmares, dreams, the phantasmagorical, and all spaces in-between. The protagonist furthers this introduction by framing his existence as being corroded by the putrid elements which are brutal parasitic agents:

Há criaturas que não suporto. Os vagabundos, por exemplo. Parece-me que eles cresceram muito, e, aproximando-se de mim, não vão gomer peditórios: vão gritar, exigir, tomar-me qualquer coisa. Certos lugares que me davam prazer tornaram-se odiosos. Passo diante de uma livraria, olho com desgosto as vitrinas, tenho a impressão de que se acham ali pessoas exibindo títulos e preços nos rostos, vendendo-se. É uma espécie de prostituição. (7)
This passage paints the bleakness of the protagonist’s life. Moraes Augusto explains that this desolate scenario is exasperated by the "impossibilidade de estabelecer entre ele e estas coisas uma relação que não seja de 'estranheza" (34). For the Brazilian critic this impasse for Luís is evidence of the alienation, "estranheza" as she puts it, turned into a state of abjection. This malcontent indeed originates in the repulsive incommunication of the protagonist, whose surroundings are methodically corroding his existence, both physical and psychical. For Francisco Caetano Lopes Jr. this slow deterioration unmaska da Silva's "carácter voyeur y perverso" (55). However, while I concur that da Silva's fixation on gazing does heighten his anguish; the outright repulsion he feels begins inwardly and is symptomatic of a previous transformation.

Luís’s predicament is two-fold "não e só estrangeiro a si mesmo, mas também ao mundo" (Moraes Augusto 47). Luís's own words allude to this, as he confesses that "certos lugares que me davam prazer tornaram-se odiosos." This new state of revulsion also applies to what Luís calls "os vagabundos," which he perceives as proliferating. Their thriving numbers have an asphyxiating effect on Luís, whose ensuing claustrophobia is lived as parasitic decay. The narrator not only suffers the presence of these "vagabundos," but they also exert a physical toll on him; and if we are to accept the protagonist's version of his being, this has not always been the case.

The transformation is due, in part, to the advent of bad faith projects Luís perceives in the faces of the people in the bookstore. The artificiality on display alluded to by the reference to "títulos e preços nos rostos," leads Luís to relate
this parading with prostitution. In doing so, the analogy Luís creates between the fallacy of his milieu, the pedantry of his fellow men and his psychosomatic anguish speaks of a deeper Existential problematic to his discontent, which goes beyond a moral outrage. By likening the "pessoas" in the bookstore to prostitutes, Luís is speaking of a debasement of the individual due to the pressures of societal projects which articulate status in economic and professional terms.

The proliferation of abject figures pushes da Silva inwardly, to find refuge in his isolation. He attempts to counter the Existential disarticulation through writing; however, even here he suffers further fragmentation. Within the abject confines of his apartment, the protagonist turns to an anagram. However, the game becomes a reflection of the disintegrating state of da Silva and with the name Marina, the reader can witness the protagonist intellectualize the relationships which suffocate him. Lopes has read this scene as follows: "Marina es el nombre que inaugura todo un proceso de asociación de palabras [...] Marina es el espejo donde Luís da Silva se mira para entenderse en el ‘abismo’ en una reflexión (doble) sin fin" (53). In fact, the words he forms with the letters are meant to be explicative, implicitly informing the readership of the thoughts revolving within:

Em duas horas escrevo uma palavra: Marina. Depois, aproveitando letras deste nome, arranco coisa, absurdas: ar, mar, rima, arma, ira, amar. Uns vinte nomes. Quando não consigo formar combinações novas traço rabiscos que representam uma espada, uma lira, uma cabeça de mulher e outros disparates. Penso em indivíduos e em objetos que não têm relação com os desenhos: processos, orçamentos, o diretor, o secretário, políticos, sujeitos remediados que me desprezam porque sou um pobre-diabo. Tipos bestas. (8)
This passage is insightful because within these few lines Luís crafts an eidetic mental photograph, running the gambit from the elemental to warfare images. In effect, Luís takes the readers on a journey inwardly, beginning with the elements traveling through art to arrive at the two strongest human emotions: "ira, amar."

With this sequence of words, which he will reproduce again in the same chapter, Luís envisions the antagonistic relationships in his world. By arranging them in binaries, the narrator is visualizing poetry as a weapon and associating love and hate, these two being nearly one and the same. What the anagram reveals is that for Luís the difference between the two passions, the imaginary dichotomy between the two, can be as precarious as a rearrangement of letters. Da Silva's play of words, a free association, does not separate the emotion of love and hate, but rather implies that it is their projection and interpretation which distinguishes the two.

The pathological importance of the words is substantiated by the refusal on Luís's part to deteriorate into an incomprehensible language. The narrator is producing comprehensible words with a chaotic underlining dynamic as diatomic opposites (e.g., ar/mar, etc.) evidence of a self-conscious intellect. And in spite of Luís's statements to the contrary, these words, which become figures and evolve back into his unspoken thoughts, are connected, they are not "disparates." Luís's anagrams do in fact fashion a picture which can be described as a pastiche of modern life as experienced by the enigmatic narrator. It is worth recalling that Harmon has highlighted the importance of the narrator here, as "tudo que o leitor vê e sente é uma função da fragmentada observação e dos doentios valores
dele" (68). I agree in principal with Harmon's take on da Silva; however, I find that da Silva's ethical ailing is symptomatic of a transformation in the protagonist, not simply of a state of illness or his emergent dementia.

The appearances of the sword, the lyre, and the decapitated woman function as an overt retooling of the Orpheus myth with Marina taking the place of the mythological poet. The proximity of these mythical symbols casts Marina as a beguiling woman capable of affecting her surroundings, which she absolutely will. Immediately, the ensuing images change direction to encompass the bourgeoisie that deride Luís because he is "um pobre-diabo."

Furthermore, what the implicit reader is afforded is a mercurial opening scene meant to create a sympathetic audience, a bad faith project designed to divert the judgmental gaze away from Luís and toward the brutalizing society which is contriving against him. However, the intricate manipulations of Marina's name, the appearance of the Orphic icons, and the societal references actually portray a complex intellectual mind in full control of his creative powers. In general, what this episode reveals is the sophisticated projection of Luís's "mundo indefinido e solitario" (Camarani 71), his "supraconciencia" (Koser 77), and also the weight of his anonymity which have pushed him to participate in what the Brazilian philosopher Vicente Ferreira da Silva calls "a ocultação do ser" (Reflexões 29).

**Na fazenda de ninguém ou Pra quê mentir?**

Ferreira da Silva develops the notion of "ocultação do ser" in *Ensaios filosóficos* (1948), in which the Brazilian philosopher also writes extensively on
death, art, and history. Also worth mentioning is that Ferreira da Silva studies the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and the Argentine philosopher Francisco Romero in this text. Ferreira da Silva understands that the individual is above all else a negotiable being, within whom freedom and transformations are in constant flux:

Sendo a lei capital do nosso ser a liberdade, sendo o homem liberdade, tudo quanto de uma forma ou de outra possa ofuscar ou empobrecer a experiência e o sentido dessa lei íntima, deve ser considerado como falseamento o ocultação do ser, como escravidão e heteronomia. (Reflexões 29)

As Ferreira da Silva explains, "nosso ser" is freedom. In this direction, projects which divert that cardinal truth of the individual's subjective freedom, according to Ferreira da Silva constitute an evasion, which he relates to slavery. Interestingly, he also relates this avoidance technique with heteronymy, which is understood here as the subjugation to the law of another. Ferreira da Silva's use of the concept of heteronymy is important in understanding Luís da Silva because Angústia's protagonist consciously attempts to portray his existence as subjugated to predetermined laws. I find this to be vital because Luís da Silva is consciously attempting to frame his crime as the manifestation of principles dictated to him, by socioeconomic and hereditary factors. In fact, the deterministic and naturalist vision of himself, which Luís da Silva offers the readership is also symptomatic of what Ferreira da Silva calls "ocultação do ser," because as he explains, since humanity is free "o homem não pode ter um ser fixo e terminado [...] portanto, toda compreensão do real que o reduz a uma coisa já dada ou produzida, e uma infidelidade e uma ocultação do ser" (Reflexões 30).
In *Angústia*, the protagonist recognizes his solitude; he begins to become aware of a signifying void, an imaginary vacuum which places the burden of his existence squarely on his shoulders. In fact, Luís da Silva is fully aware of his "unfinished" quality, to follow Ferreira da Silva, which becomes manifest as his illness. As a means to placate that Existential anxiety of autonomy, Graciliano's novel appears to displace the protagonist's anguish through the socioeconomic and familial determinism which affect Luís da Silva's (mis)fortunes.

As a challenge to the sociological weight highlighted by the narrator, I stake da Silva's bad faith as a projection of his cynical denial of his free will. The Existential story infected by socio-economic circumstances (justifications) is in fact indicative of *Angústia*'s "infidelidade," unconsciously denounced by Luís da Silva's confessions. In exploring the fragmentation of one man's wretched existence, Graciliano’s novel is ultimately concerned with manifesting of how the individual is bound by no other power than that of choice.97 Luís da Silva's experience of anguish, repulsion, and crisis are all signs that he understands his Existential presence in a dehumanizing construct. In my view, da Silva’s bad faith is simultaneously accusative, explicative, but ultimately a dystopian discourse of positivity as man is revealed to be the sum of his actions and not the equivalent of his surroundings.

Luís’s first recollection of his childhood, the grandfather's fazenda, deepens the commitment to his cynical consciousness, an eternally recurrent theme in the novel. In fact, da Silva will repeatedly return to his childhood throughout the text in a circular maneuver of denial. Melo Miranda explains that
these memories intensify Luís here and now: "A rememoração da opulência do passado familiar acentua a decadência no presente" (34). These operate firstly as a means to explain his sense of failure and inadequacy, which as he implies is a direct consequence of the economic fall of his entire family. In doing so the memories function as an exercise in expiation, while explaining his literary affinities which are also hereditary and paradigmatic of da Silva personality:

Volto a ser criança, revejo a figura de meu avô, Trajano Pereira de Aquino Cavalcante e Silva, que alcancei velhíssimo. Os negócios na fazenda andavam mal. E meu pai, reduzido a Camilo Pereira da Silva, ficava dias inteiros manzanzando numa rede armada nos esteios do copiar [...] lendo o Carlos Magno, sonhando com a vitória do partido que padre Inácio chefiava. Dez ou doze reses, arrepiadas no carrapato e na varejeira [...] O cupim devorava os mourões do curral e as linhas da casa [...] Um carro de bois apodrecia debaixo das catungueiras sem folhas. Tinhram amarrado no pescoço da cachorra Moqueca um rosário de sabugos de milho queimados. (11)

This passage is brazenly honest. Luís’s grandfather is a paradoxical figure of symbolic importance for the narrator’s bad faith project. The sheer size of his name contrasts with the decrepit figure he casts and appears as an exercise in contradiction meant to encapsulate Luís’s conflicted legacy. The grandfather is characterized as an archetype of the 19th century slave-owning elite in Brazil. This exposition of decadence is furthered by Luís’s memories of his father, who is an impoverished petit bourgeois, an overt chivalric allusion, idling away the hours with stories of chivalry and dreams of failed political adventures. In fact, Luís clearly expresses this idea of devaluation through the verbal use of "reduzir," refering to his father as "reduzido a Camilo Pereira da Silva." The escapist quality of Luís’s memories recreate the family’s downward spiral by
rapidly bisecting and crisscrossing images of decadence, literary and historical figures, and economic atrophy. The final insult to Luís da Silva's family comes in the form of the "cachorra Moqueca," an abject image of sacrilegious decay.

Luís attempted evasion is more blatant in the description of the fazenda. The description of both grandfather and father coupled with the purification of the livestock are intended to appeal to the reader's sense of humanity. Johnson finds that this is a socially charged aspect to Graciliano's novel, which "gives voice to the inarticulate and the disposed who are brutalized by the climate and the social structure" (129). In addition, Luís's memory endeavors to frame his existence as a dysfunctional victim yet Luís's readiness to craft this liminal scene is indicative of an Existential awareness of the intersubjectivity of his world, especially given his implicit indictment of the father's lethargy and idle literary affinities. In fact, Angústia is a manifestation of Luís's Existential karma, meaning his actions accounts for his aporetic dilemma and not vice versa. The brutality of the protagonist's hyperrealist narrative world unveils, through his grotesque reflection, how Luís is the dominant variable in his life. Luís's memoirs are "heteronomia" fictionalized an attempt by the protagonist to escape his complete and profound sense of responsibility by subordinating his existence to the law of another.

Immediately following Luís's foray to his grandfather's fazenda, he flashbacks to a small nordestino town. This scene is vital because in the recollection process da Silva admits that his memory is a convoluted creation. Here Angústia's anti-hero acknowledges to the ambiguity of memory and secondly, to
the fact that death is a ubiquitous and torturous childhood reality. As Harmon has explained that the text is subordinated "completemente na primeira pessoa por Luís da Silva," and that "o livro todo está sujeito a essa perspectiva" (68), Luís acknowledges that his childhood is a self-serving construct:

Vejo a figura sinista de seu Evaristo enforcado e os homens que iam para a cadeia amarrados de cordas. Lembro-me de um fato, de outro fato anterior ou posterior ao primeiro, mas os dois vêm juntos. E os tipos que evoco não têm relevo. Tudo empastado, confuso. Em seguida os dois acontecimentos se distanciam e entre eles nascem outros acontecimentos que vão crescendo até me darem sofrível noção de realidade. As feições das pessoas ganham nitidez. De toda aquela vida havia no meu espírito vagos indícios. Saíram da entorpecimento recordações que a imaginação completou. (15)

Luís da Silva's memories are full of ominous figures, and in fact the hanging body of seu Evaristo and the men being led to prison foreshadow the protagonist's own murderous actions. However, as these memories are all "empastado, confuse," the text is framing the events in oneiric terms, substantiating Camarani's take on Angústia in which the text's inner workings create an "angustiante oscilação entre a realidade do presente e as sombras do passado que formam um mundo à parte [...] um pesadelo que se repete no texto, incansavelmente" (64). Camarani goes on to consider Graciliano's novel as a schizo-narrative in which Julião Tavares's death is but a feverish dream of the protagonist. In this capacity, Luís's murderous rage is a wish fulfilment projection of a past memory in which that memory is undressed as a subjective construct of the protagonist.

In principle, I concur with Camarani's reading that Luís's confession, that his past is a continuation of a creative urge. Furthermore, I view that presence of
seu Evaristo, casts doubts on the existence of the murder of Julião. In fact, by framing his story as an ambiguous declaration of guilt, Luís indirectly shows how his present is driven by deep seeded envy. Luís da Silva decides to remedy his envy by confronting his diametric opposite, Julião Tavares. Also what can not go unnoticed in this episode is that the protagonist recognizes that his past does not weigh him down; as Luís puts it "de toda aquela vida havia no meu espírito vagos indícios," meaning that the antihero knows himself to be bound by choice.

Julião symbolizes the protagonist's lost status and subsequently becomes the focus for the projection of Luís's jealousy. Underpinning Luís's resentment is his Existential prostitution, recalling that Luís "é um pequeno funcionário público mandado por um chefe insensível e escreve artigos [...] de acordo com as encomendações dos que lhe pagam" (Harmon 68). To this sense of inauthenticity are added Tavares's status as a poet, womanizer, and representative of the capitalist elite of Maceió. In this direction, Julião is cast as Luís's negative dopplegänger, the wealthy lothario Luís could have been had the landowning fazendeiros not lost their socioeconomic dominance. Chapter four captures Luís's rage toward Julião's social class. The burial of Camilo da Silva, Luís's father, and the subsequent pillaging of the grandfather's fazenda by the family's creditors exemplify Luís's nascent anonymity. Luís captures this sense of irrelevance when he recalls that "ninguém me viu," to which he adds "Que iria fazer por aí à toa, miúdo, tão miúdo que ninguém me via?" (17-18). As this question makes evident, Luís is increasingly aware of his expendable status as a
scion of the decadent *fazendeiro* class, and his father’s death becomes a torturous experience:

Padre Inácio e os outros sumiram-se. E os homens batiam os pés com força, levavam, as mercadorias, levavam os móveis, nem me olhavam [...] Que estaria fazendo a alma de Camilo Pereira da Silva? Provavelmente rondava a casa, entrava pela portas fechadas, olhava as prateleiras vazias. As outra almas mais antigas, Trajano, seu Evaristo, sinha Germana, não me atemorizavam; mas aquela, tão próxima, ainda agarrada ao corpo, dava-me tremuras. (18-19)

Camarani has highlighted that "da insignificancia do homem" (70), is a major motif of Graciliano’s novel, and this passage makes that point clear. The creditors arrive as a swarm of parasites, devouring the vestiges of Luís’s social class. The protagonist’s portrayal of these brutes brings to mind Julião because of the analogies these characters share, these being simultaneously bombastic, wealthy, vulgar, and beastly; as Luís remembers they had "cigarro no bico" (18), an explicit allusion of their beastly degradation. In addition, David J. Viera has explained that the animal imagery is employed to capture "the antagonism which exists among groups in an urban milieu" (380), although in this sense the antagonism is not restricted to the city.

During the tumult, Luís had noticed father Inácio and the family friend’s absence, as da Silva put it they had "sumiram-se." This verbal use is not arbitrary as it is an explicit reference to the family’s abandonment by those closest to the da Silva clan. The use of the verb "sumir," which literally means to evade and escape, also functions as an indictment to the invincibility of the church and the other members of the *fazendeiro* class during the looting of Trajano’s plantation. This episode becomes fundamentally important because it is intended to clarify
Luís's ambivalent religious stance and the loathing of the class he belonged to which would eventually comprise the hordes of emigrants to the city. The father's burial not only is explicative in nature, but also exemplifies the paradoxical quality of Luís's existence, which is at once fueled by envy of the capitalist middle class (creditors), enraged by the church's indifference (padre Inácio), and tormented by the end of his socially dominant caste.

The father's passing is the second experience of death for Luís, following seu Evaristo's terrifying figure. However, he does not experience grief, but rather admits that "na verdade chorava por causa de xícara de café de Rosenda" (18). What his father's death elicits is a different kind of fear, or "tremuras" (19) as Luís describes it. This psychosomatic anguish is remembered by Luís as having its origin in his father's recent passing. However, Luís's physical anguish is rooted in his being the uncanny reflection of the father. By this I mean that Luís's likeness with the father, remembering the literary affinities and the laissez-faire attitude, elicit in the protagonist the fear of his own mortality. It is worth remembering that Ferreira da Silva has explained that death is a collective experience to the extent that "a morte do próximo é o acontecimento que nos deixa nas mãos os despojos do que foi uma vida, uma pessoa" (*Meditação* 27).

Luís's dread is rooted in familiarity, a familiarity that rings too close to the protagonist's self, because Camilo's death is also the symbolic passing of the comforts of the *fazendeiro* caste. In addition, the father's death is the vicarious confrontation with mortality which affects Luís's being causing him to loathe the inhuman vultures which descended on the carcasses of Trajano's *fazenda*. The
totality of these recollections embodies Luís's reflections on what Ferreira da Silva calls the mystery of the dead: "a morte não é um problema, no sentido de um fato objetivável" (Meditação 28). The point to be made is that Luís is attempting to understand his existence. The memories of childhood, do not only uncover a brutal upbringing, but also represent the protagonist's efforts to reconcile the omnipresent death, decay, and anguish which have obsessed him. After this inwardly turn, Luís turns his gaze outward, to visualize present day Maceió.

As boas famílias ou Conversa de botequim

I have chosen to describe Luís’s wanderings through the city as visualization because of his constant preoccupation with gazing. George D. Schade has interpreted the city as a hostile space "where apparently man cannot cope with the diseases of the body and soul as readily as in the country, for he has lost sight of those elemental natural forces which a people living close to the soil instinctively understand" (394). However, as Luís's recollections have made apparent, his rural upbringing was a place of violence, death, and terror. In fact, Luís’s voyeurism reflects the degree to which his being is a projection of memory, interpretation, and self-reflection. In other words, Luís is what he thinks of himself, an insignificant subhuman, failed in love, life and in art. Secondly, da Silva’s realization of the existence of an external gaze directly influences that self-portrait.

Luís’s socioeconomic cartography of Maceió reveals his enormous inferiority complex. For Koser "su desprecio de si mismo, constituyen la esencia
de este mecanismo de diferenciación" (76). And as Luís believes himself different, the societal diagram of Maceió reveals the infrastructural niches which in turn further antagonize the protagonist. These factions, grouped for the most part in Luís’s mind by vocation, conspire to alienate him, a fraternity of exclusivity inaccessible to da Silva:

Há o grupo dos médicos, o dos advogados, o dos comerciantes, o dos funcionários públicos, o dos literatos. Certos indivíduos pertencem a mais de um grupo, outros circulam, procurando familiaridades proveitosas. Naquele espaço de dez metros formam-se várias sociedades com caracteres perfeitamente definidos, muito distanciadas. A mesa a que me sinto fica ao pé da vitrina dos cigarros. É um lugar incômodo: as pessoas que entram e as que saem empurram-me as pernas. Contudo não poderia sentar-me dois passos adiante porque às seis horas da tarde estão lá os desembargadores. E agradável observar aquela gente. Com uma despesa de dois tostões, passo ali uma hora, encolhido junto à porta, distraído-me. (23)

The space which Luís is describing is the café frequented by him as a space of respite. The enjoyment of contemplating the "grupos" is based in part on the array of microcosms which develop in such close proximities. The emphasis on the close immediacy in which these groups operate heightens the implicit sense of estrangement for Luís, as these are spaces within physical reach, but light years removed in societal terms due to the exclusivity of these clusters. And as Harmon has explained, this is emblematic of "sua conscientização e revolta" (69).100 The proximity of the city’s bourgeoisie is so pronounced that these physically affect Luís as they walk over him as they come and go from the café. From his uncomfortable position within the macrocosm of the café, Luís’s invincibility is doubly incensed by the aforementioned trampling and his status as a pariah symbolically confirmed by the inaccessible table a mere "dois passos"
from Luís. Paradoxically, his space of alienation is "agradável" and serves to entertain him. In other words, the café is a space of cynical enjoyment for Luís.

From the scene within the café, Luís moves on to speak of Moisés, a leftist intellectual with whom da Silva sustains an ambivalent admiration. The exchange between the protagonist and Moisés unearths another level of Luís's resentment, which is manifest in his explicit anti-Semitism. Luís's racism, overlooked completely by the critics, is elaborated using archetypes. In *Angústia* Moisés is depicted as the paradigmatic Jewish creditor, to whom Luís is indebted. By employing Moisés as a low-intensity Brazilian Shylock, the novel not only uses him as stock character in which, strangely enough, the protagonist confides; but also unveils the racism which enables Luís's inauthentic self. The character of Moisés speaks volumes as to Luís's resentful state, which is a cauldron of contradictions. In this capacity, Luís's anti-Semitism is a frightening sign of his escapist alienation, and the failure by the protagonist to "own" his present state of economic anguish. This prejudiced attitude is exemplified in the politically charged conversations with Moisés:

"Agora Moisés está contando as perseguições aos judeus, na Europa. Lembro-me do tio dele e digo comigo que provavelmente a narração é exagerada. Se Moisés não fosse inteligente, com certeza muitos daqueles fatos não existiriam. Sofrimentos. Iniquidades./- Aqui há tanto disso! Mas somos fatalistas, estamos habituados e não temos imaginação como vocês. (25)"

This passage is shockingly revealing of Luís's displaced frustration. By implying that the anti-Semitism in Europe is an exaggerated "narração," the protagonist is suggesting that concepts such as history, suffering, and injustice are intellectual constructs. In Existential terminology, Luís is acknowledging the signifying
vacuum of nothingness by attributing to Moisés "queles fatos." In this direction, Luís’s anti-Semitic sentiment is both a critical encounter with the problematic of history as text and speaks of the subsequent representational problem of his own atrocities. In the end, Luís glibly acknowledges an analogous brutality in his reality; however, he attributes that state of misery to a collective fatalism but then turns quickly to touch upon to other reasons behind the collective abjection surrounding him: custom and lack of imagination. The Existentialist importance of the final two assertions by Luís resides in the fact that here the protagonist is recognizing, albeit dismissively, the constructiveness of that social brutality.

By admitting that the permanence of suffering and injustice is a learned behavior, Luís is experiencing an Existentialist flirtation with accountability. In fact that simple statement by Luís is echoed in Ferreira da Silva's work when the Brazilian philosopher states that "tôda vida decai em hábito, e todo recobrar-se do hábito é uma esperança no caminho da verdade: aqui, centra-se o sentido da aventura que, despojando o homem de sua crosta habitual, o põe em condições de se propor novos caminhos" (Reflexões 33). The similarity between the two perspectives is noteworthy because much like Ferreira da Silva (years later), Luís is momentarily recognizing that the apathy which surrounds him is a sign of that "hábito." Inevitably, the protagonist can not (refuses to) sustain that Existentialist position and falls back to an escapist rationale when he pedantically attributes the absence of resistance to the viciousness surrounding him to a lack of imagination.
Immediately, Luís da Silva changes the focus of the conversation and returns to his childhood in the sertão for the purpose of narrating a story to Moisés, who listens with indifference. The story itself is not centrally important; what is of consequence is that once again, as has become the common narrative dynamic of the entire novel, skepticism infects Luís's memories, to the extent that there is a blurring of the imaginary lines between reality and fiction, or as he puts it, "difícilmente poderia distinguir a realidade à ficção," to which he adds "as leituras auxiliam-me, atiçam-me o sentimento. Mas a verdade é que o pessoal da nossa casa sofria pouco" (27).

Two points can not be underestimated. First, the most obvious: his memories are unsettling even for Luís. The encroachment of his literary tendencies into the realms of memory and reality, as well as his identity for that matter, becomes self-evident. Moraes Augusto makes a similar point when she explains that "a literatura não é um esquecimento," but rather literature is "o tormento do homem consciente" (71). Second, by admitting to the infringement of literature on his recollections, both the abject histories which Luís has been narrating to gain the empathy of the readership (both implied reader and narratee) and to a greater degree explicate his sociopathic behavior are implied to be fictionalized themselves. What's more, and this point is to be taken with a grain of salt, Luís states that life at his grandfather’s fazenda was void of suffering, "a verdade é que o pessoal da nossa casa sofria pouco" (27). While this declaration by da Silva is to be accepted as a narrative caveat, it nevertheless represents a moment of refutation.
The hyperrealist decay, poverty, that is to say the proverbial fall from grace experienced by the da Silva clan is momentarily destabilized by the protagonist. Luís inadvertently creates a moment for self-reflection in the narrative, further cultivating doubt about the strength of his entire story. From this moment on, we have been exposed to the incessant uncertainty which characterizes da Silva completely, and as Melo Miranda has put it, to his excesses, the "acumulo e superposição de imagens e figuras desconexas, justaposição especular de micronarrativas embaixadas," and to the "reiteração obsessiva de elementos análogos" (32).

**Luís da Silva e João Ninguém**

Luís, suffice it to say, is a complex personality. However, much of that complexity is attributable to his paradoxical behavior; at once a moralist and a decadent, timid and violent. He can be said to be the spirit of contradiction incarnated, and as Camarani has noted "oscilando entre seus dois mundos, ora atraído pelo sexo, ora sentindo-se culpado já que o considera um elemento de degradação" (66). A perfect example of da Silva’s eternally conflicting personality is palpable in chapter eight, when he berates books, and implicitly literature in general, because these promote the narratee’s quixotic endeavors: "Os livros idiotas animam a gente. Se não fossem eles, nem sei quem se atreveria a começar. Esse que eu lia debaixo da mangueira, saltando páginas, era bem safado" (31). Obviously, this tirade is ironic because firstly, Luís’s existence is sustained through his work as a writer and secondly, the written word is the first great love of Luís’s life. What’s more, on many occasions throughout the novel,
the protagonist will become aesthetically incensed by the piracy of words and their parading as poetry. This lyrical indignation will be coupled by moral outbursts which ultimately uncover deeper seeded insecurities. The first appearance of Marina is a case in point of these contrasting emotions within Luís. As he is confronted by her youth and vivacity da Silva explodes:

- Lambisgóia! [...] Notei, notei positivamente que ela me observava. Encabulei. Sou tímido: quando me vejo diante de senhoras, emburro digo besteiras. Trinta e cinco anos, funcionário público, homem de ocupações marcadas pelo regulamento. O Estado não me paga para eu olhar as pernas das garotas. E aquilo era uma garota. Além de tudo sei que sou feio. Perfeitamente, tenho espelho em casa. Os olhos baços, a boca muito grande, o nariz grosso[...] Fiquei ali até que escureceu e a mulherinha deu o fora. (32)

As we can see it is the young girl's painted nails, an innocuous detail, which sets off Luís's moral alarm. Further exasperating the protagonist’s quiet afternoon of reading is Marina’s audacious stare, of which Luís becomes aware. Da Silva’s initial contempt for Marina is made explicit by his characterization of her as a provocateur, a "Lambisgóia." Taking into account that this is the first encounter between Luís and Marina, his casting her as an instigator (more accurately as a gossiper) places her in a position of responsibility, albeit prematurely. This initial disdain is followed by repeated use of diminutives, a clear attempt to denigrate her, in his mind at least. While this accusation on the part of Luís may appear to be an anachronism, it is in fact further indication of his constant project of denial. As has been the case with his childhood memories da Silva's characterization of Marina exposes his continued attempts to displace his own
prejudices onto others and the judgmental gaze he projects back unto Marina, even at this first encounter.

As the passage makes evident, Luís’s preliminary rage against the brazen young girl is followed almost immediately by a deep sense of shame. This awkwardness stimulates a self-portrait by da Silva which is not flattering. Luís begins by describing his sense of ineptness exasperated by his timid disposition. Overtly, Luís sees himself as a recluse with limited social skills. In fact, women in general elicit a regression in Luís, pulling him back to a state of stupor and incompetence to the point of him babbling "besteiras." The self-deprecation does not stop here as Luís goes on to recognize what he considers to be his own unattractive features. However this self-deprecation can be read as a ploy to obscure his being by securing sympathetic spectators through his own abjection. Nonetheless, this self-portrait also informs us of other details about his life which casts him closely to the other brethren of Existentialist anti-heroes. As is the case with Dostoevski’s Underground Man, and after Graciliano, Onetti’s Linacero, Sartre’s Roquentin and Camus’s Meursault, Luís da Silva is part of a fraternity of discontent; middle-aged public servants, recluses with frustrated artistic inclinations.¹⁰²

As this self-depiction also shows, Luís is a passive masochist, marked by a need for "regulamento." Yet this need for restraint is undone by his desire to possess the object which causes him the most moral outrage. In this pursuit of that forbidden object Luís willingly participates in a masquerade, which increases his ever-present obsession with the material. Here again, Luís falls back into a
project of heteronomy, engaging the most reprehensible qualities of the frivolous bourgeoisie he covets. Inescapably, Luís's obsession with the material pushes him to live outside his resources, as a means to appease Marina.

Shortly after his "meeting" with Marina, Luís thinks back on the previous evening's exchange with his editor, in which they discussed the need and implicit virtue of a strong government, an assertion which coincides with his own need for discipline: "E o que eu digo, doutor. Um governo duro. E que reconheça os valores. Considerava-me um valor, valor miúdo, uma espécie de niquel social, mas enfim valor" (36). Da Silva elongates the significance of "valor;" here he employs the term to encompass the concepts of merit and material worth, albeit from a minimalist perspective. This self-deprecation functions to humble him as an individual within a societal structure, but also affirms his limited virtues, much like his less than flattering self-portrait in chapter eight.

The other connotation of "valor" refers to Luís's ethical positions, which as he has informed us are of the strictest order. However, da Silva's moral codes of behavior are the source of his torment, as he is constantly conflicted by libidinal desires. In fact, this torment becomes psychosomatic, the root of Luís's insomnia:

Não pude dormir: os cabelos de fogo, os olhos e especialmente as pernas da vizinha começaram a bulir comigo. Aquilo devia ser uma pimenta. Passei a noite imaginando cenas terríveis com ela. No outro dia levantei-me aperreado. Quando me aparecem esses acessos, fico assim uma semana, calado, murcho, pensando em safadezas. (36-7)

As the passage shows, for Luís, Marina's hair is synecdochic of her passion, a clear image meant to depict her as a caldron of sensuality. In this direction,
Marina is symbolically quartered by Luís’s objectifying gaze. In an explicitly sexual image, Marina’s legs ensnaring Luís. Yet this sexuality, his own libidinal impulses are “terríveis” for him. Such is the intensity of Luís’s tormenting thoughts of Marina that he is reduced to a state of abjection, worn down by the burden of repressing his lascivious urges, having to silence the “safadezas” which draw him to her. This insomniac scene represents, as Kozer has succinctly explained "un hombre que vive en un mundo cerrado y de angustiosa irrealidad en el que, paradójicamente, encuentra [...] la disminución y desintegración ulterior de la personalidad" (74-5).

The protagonist’s impasse, remembering that the contrasting urges he feels debilitate him, is aggravated by two antagonistic forces. These forces, according to Melo Miranda, cause the protagonist to "dobra-se sobre si mesma, desencadeando um movimento oscilatório de aproximação e distanciamento da realidade circundante" (34-5). On the one hand, Luís is scandalized by the vulgar materialism driving the people around him. On the other, the omnipresent sexuality which compels his thoughts has awakened a gnawing sensation. Luís describes this feeling as a "rato" which only temporality desists in "roer-me" (34). Evident of this antagonistic phenomenon, which is emblematic of Luís’s behavior and affectively influential in his day to day, is the scene with Marina and Dona Mercedes, a woman given to narcissism:

- D. Mercedes estava hoje chamando a atenção de todo o mundo na Igreja do Rosário. Vestido cor de cinza com vivos encarnados, luvas cor de cinza, bolsa encarnada, chapéu encarnado e sapatos encarnados. Você gosta do encarnado? D. Mercedes é uma espanhola madura da vizinhança, amigada em segredo com uma
Marina’s admiration for Dona Mercedes is based, in part, on the latter’s material regality, which according to Marina confer to the Spaniard a movie star-like quality. The moral antagonism between Dona Mercedes and Luís is underpinned by the latent sexuality of Dona Mercedes’s character. This sexuality is implicit in the libidinal significance of the colors she wears, and the illegitimate relationship which supports her affluent lifestyle. The repeated focus of the red colors she wears suggests a passionate individual and according to Luís, Dona Mercedes's behavior says much about the Spaniard’s amoral egocentrism as does Marina’s admiration. For Luís, Marina’s defense of Dona Mercedes is indicative of her spiritual imprudence and the absence of sound judgment. Yet she remains his obsession, rooted in the resentment he feels for her audaciousness. As Koser has noticed that resentment turned degeneration is due to "que, en el fondo, el personaje central no se logra separar emocionalmente del mundo colectivo" (79); I would add that Luís's anguish is fueled not so much by his inability to separate from that collective but rather a conscious refusal to detach from that materialistic caste.

As these scenes have shown, Luís’s perplexity is aggravated by the ambivalent impulses which compel him toward Marina. What’s more, da Silva is fully aware of the seeming incompatibility between the two: "Para o diabo. Aqui me preocupando com aquela burra! [...] Acaba na Rua da Lama, sangrando na pedra-lipes. Vamos deixar de besteira, seu Luís. Um homem é um homem" (41). Luís’s hostility toward Marina is evident, and this resentment appears as an inner
dialogue. The arguments against Marina are her materialism and frivolousness. Da Silva is also tormented by her vanity and romantic tendencies which are prone to manifest themselves as lethargy. Her fate is apparent to Luís; her useless characteristics are without redemption, and she, like other narcissistic women of the world, will be sentenced to a life on the street.

However, what will capture the attention of the alert critic are the similarities between himself and his description of Marina. In fact, Luís’s diatribe against Marina is an obvious example of self-loathing and blatant machismo. The bewilderment he feels is taken to be a sign of weakness, which he callously rebukes: "vamos deixar de besteira, seu Luís. Um homem é um homem." In this vein, Luís’s moral indignation with Marina is shown to be a projection of his own repressed desires for worldly materials and his own repressed sexuality. This explains the analogous antipathy he fosters for the sexual and economic freedom of Dona Mercedes. What can not be overlooked is the hypocrisy of Luís’s behavior, which will consistently throughout the novel showcase his judgmental gaze to the point of hysteria. As evidence of his high morality, the protagonist will insist on his reactionary personality, on his behavior being the result of the worldly provocations of the amoral groups surrounding him; however, this rationalization will be undone by his own recollections.

**Marina é Mulher indigesta**

Given the chaotic order of *Angústia*, and the fact that the narrative is exclusively presented from the protagonist’s perspective, it is not surprising that Marina is at the mercy of Luís. Not only is she a captive of his prescriptive
narrative power, a mark for his obsessive voyeurism, but she is also confined by his moralist barometer. Due to this subjugated position of Marina, we need to appreciate the bias of her behavior as the feverish projection of Luís’s own prejudices, as Del Barco explains "Marina no es la que es, sino la que él necesita que sea" (104). Thus, as Marina is perpetually filtered through Luís’s intense memories, her perilous self-preservationism, which Lemos de Oliveira condemns her for and goes so far as to label her "worthless" (77), must be understood as being a manifestation of da Silva’s point of view, exclusively.¹⁰³

Although the entire novel hinges on Marina’s character, she is in fact peripheral in the sense that she affects the life of Luís but her appearances are limited in the text. In these appearances, she is portrayed as a survivor and a malcontent. Marina is resourceful and motivated, determined to succeed in a new city. This will to transcend her social status is underpinned by an inconformity with her legacy and the expectations of her family. In this vein, Marina adopts a similar position as Luís, an individual driven by a desire for self-realization against a societal structure built to suppress them both to anonymity. Here again, Angústia employs a character in a mirror role, from which the protagonist begins to reflect on his behavior, exploiting always "Luís’s point of view, which is, to say the least, a very partial one" (Lemos de Oliveira 72).

Marina is mentioned immediately in the opening pages of the novel, where Luís introduces himself and initiates the attack against his milieu. And while she appears sporadically (fragmentarily), we do not formally encounter her until the garden scene of chapter nine. Similarly, Marina’s family is not formally introduced
until chapter twelve, where the audience is informed that she is a nordestina, her electrician father Seu Ramalho being described as a "sujeito calado, sério, asmático" (48) with the physical appearance of a hunchback. The mother Dona Adélia is not explicitly depicted, but she does appear to be a woman determined to have her daughter better her station in life.

In fact, Dona Adélia’s shadow remains throughout the novel in the archetypical protective, nurturing role. This is important because in the three novels which I have discussed thus far, Dona Adélia’s character is the only maternal figure to appear explicitly, remembering that in Laberinto’s the readers (explicit/implicit) know nothing of the anonymous poet or of Teresa’s family and that Bombal’s anti-heroines are left motherless from an early age. The idea of Marina having a typical family structure counterbalances the orphanhood against which Teresa, the anonymous wife and Ana María struggled. Furthermore, Marina is unlike Bombal’s anti-heroines, who constituted part of the bourgeoisie and suffered the weight of expectations of their middle-class environments. In this vein, Angústia’s anti-heroine suffers, like Teresa, economic hardships which stimulate projects of self-preservation and socioeconomic transcendence. This social inconformity in both Teresa and Marina will see them resort to prostitution. In Marina’s case, a passive form of prostitution, with Luís and then Julião, making use of her physical attributes in order to achieve her goals.

Dona Adélia’s character is portrayed as a caring mother, a hard-working woman who does not want to profit from her daughter’s youth, but rather wants her to be self-sufficient. In fact, it is Dona Adélia who approaches da Silva with
the intentions of having Marina enter into the licit workforce, as she views her daughter’s idle existence as a precursor to trouble. Dona Adélia’s clairvoyance is substantiated by Luís’s ravenous thoughts upon seeing Marina in the garden once again. Here, da Silva’s thoughts fragment her body and he is obsessed by what he perceives to be her blatant exhibitionism. Marina’s performance educes in Luís animalistic feelings which border on the homicidal and the cannibalistic. Through great effort, da Silva is able to quiet "O rato" which "roía-me por dentro" (56). What I would emphasize is that Luís is exercising restraint, a sign of his ability to control his actions, a point which can not be underappreciated. This momentary reprieve allows Luís to give Marina the news of the job he has secured for her at Dona Adélia’s request. Although the exchange is extended, it is worth mentioning because we observe the internal dynamic between the paramours:

The first striking impression from the exchange between Marina and Luís is the implicit lack of communication between mother and daughter. Dona Adélia’s request to Luís is interpreted negatively by Marina, an attempt on her mother’s part to rid herself of Marina. Secondly, Luís paints a stark economic picture of the city, a metropolis in a state of financial darkness, an unequivocal reference to the global meltdown of the 1930s, and as Viera has noticed, the novel as a whole functions in this manner, able to capture the "crumbling social system on the psychological breakdown of Luís da Silva" (379). However, Marina’s response to da Silva’s job offer is dismissive, a rejection by her due to the unattractive objectification she expects to suffer. Yet the work itself is not the issue, but the lack of profitability. What I mean to emphasize is that Marina resists the job because of the remunerative imbalance for what she understands as low intensity prostitution. Marina’s attitude is not well received and Luís’s subsequent indignation at what he perceives to be her ungrateful rebuff quickly returns to a primal urge to possess her. This renewed brutality is set off by a seemingly inoffensive contact, which nevertheless explodes into a frenzy which both Luís and Marina interpret as a sickness, or in the words of Marina a "doidice."

The previous desires to consume Marina return with a vengeance and become inherent in Luís’s ravenous biting. His lascivious yearning to devour her is interrupted by da Silva’s sexual vertigo and the anxiety of Dona Adélia’s presence. The immediate aftermath of the incident is indicative of Luís’s contrasting egocentrism and self-righteousness. I am referring to the sense of accomplishment and shame da Silva experiences at the conquest of Marina and
her subsequent sobbing. For Luís this display of emotion is Marina’s "prova de inocência" (60), proof positive of her moral acceptability. However, Luís’s incompatible emotions about the incident in the garden highlight da Silva’s repressed sexuality in full disagreement with his moral superego. Luís’s reaction to the situation reveals how his fixation on Marina’s sensuality and the feelings of shame this elicits projects da Silva’s humanity. In exploring Luís’s conflicted behavior, this scene is ultimately concerned with drawing out the permeability of morality. By this I mean that although da Silva is a solemn defender of decency, he is not infallible and in fact rejoices in the lapses into his desires. I read this behavior as indicative of Luís’s sadistic consciousness, a full-fledged embodiment of his desire for self-realization, a symptom of his ability to dictate his actions, not vice versa.

With the introduction of Julião Tavares into Marina’s life, her disposition toward Luís changes completely. She becomes distant yet non-confrontational. Exacerbating the entire situation is the economic predicament Luís’s has forced upon himself by attempting to satisfy Marina. The irony of his financial strain lay in the self-perpetuation involved. Da Silva is the main architect of his downfall, as the artificiality of his intentions is undone as quickly as his economic means. Thus, when he tersely interjects that to "Escolher marido por dinheiro. Que miséria! Não há pior espécie de prostituição" (83), the implied reader is left to ponder what the ethical difference is between Marina’s prostitution and Luís’s role as a sexually repressed whoremonger. This paradox is exacerbated taking
into consideration that as has been explicit through the text, da Silva has been actively buying Marina's favor.

Marina’s ensuing aloofness further vexes Luís, because she has behaved in a manner that could only be described as ambivalently chaotic, as she continues to imprison him with her "gatimanhos" (83), that is to say her obvious exhibitionism. Yet Luís intuits Marina's alienation and still da Silva sustains the charade between the two. This obsessive masochism of Luís pushes him to resorts to spying, an explicit mark of his voyeurism:

Não tornamos a falar em casamento. Creio que ela procedeu assim por hábito. Ou talvez quisesse pagar os objetos que tinham esgotado a minha fortuna. Mas ia-se distanciando, e eu não podia agarrá-la. Às vezes ficava trombuda, aparentando gravidade. As distrações eram constantes, aquele modo de se descansar, abrir a boca e olhar por cima da cabeça da gente. Isto me amarrava e atenazava. Presumo que a intenção dela era desembaraçar-se de mim lentamente, ou desembaraçar-se ela própria do costume que havia adquirido. A tarde eram aqueles manejos, mas pela manhã, quando eu saía para a repartição, plantava os cotovelos na janela e enxeria-se com Julião Tavares. Uma vez por semana eu largava o serviço antes do meio-dia, só para pegá-los. (83)

From this passage the self-denial and avoidance ploys undertaken by Luís and Marina is obvious. While da Silva attributes this ostrich effect to habit and etiquette, the refusal to confront the truth by both protagonists is emblematic of the low-intensity bad faith each one practices, or as Ferreira da Silva might have called it "uma identidade asfixiante e estéril" (Reflexões 31). This becomes a trademark tactic of both to embellish in an inert victimization; the end result being a displacement of responsibility for the continuation of a relationship built on convenience and false pretenses. The deeper preoccupation for Luís remains monetary, a quixotesque hope of recuperating "minha fortuna," a gross
hyperbole for the economic means which where at best limited, and certainly far from being describable as a fortune.

As the passage shows, Marina attempts to liberate herself from Luís in a roundabout way. Through disinterest and remoteness Marina averts a direct confrontation with Luís. However, the transparency of her emancipation project is visible immediately to da Silva, who understands the connotation behind the "abrir a boca e olhar por cima da cabeça da gente." Moreover, the undeniable goal of distancing herself from him is immediately perceived to be a performance, in which Luís voluntarily participates since he confesses to not being able to "agarrá-la." The charade initiated by Marina and perpetuated by da Silva takes on a detective quality in which an implicit symbiotic relationship springs for Luís. The cloak and dagger game of avoidance sustains his masochism, becoming a necessary stimulant in a lethargic existence for da Silva.

Luís’s lucidity and his willingness to prolong the anguish of Marina’s betray reveal an individual fully conscious of the vitality explicitly embedded in the pain he experiences. In this direction, the verbal use of "desembaraçar-se" is not arbitrary as it connotes both liberation and a purging. Likewise, the action elicited by the verb alludes to Marina’s future abortion. Interestingly, da Silva’s refusal to confront Marina sets in motion a different coping mechanism, built on his voyeurism:

Pouco a pouco nos fomos distanciando, um mês, depois éramos inimigos. A princípio houve brigas, reconciliações desajeitadas, conversas azedas com D. Adélia. Tempo perdido. Marina estava realmente com a cabeça virada para Julião Tavares. Comecei a passar trombudo pela calçada, remoendo a decepção, que procurei recalcar. (87)
The rupture with Marina is complete, to the degree that in Luís’s eyes they are now adversaries. Her egocentrism does not permit any reconciliation and Luís is acutely aware of their estrangement, or as he expresses it Marina’s attention is completely turned towards Julião. At this time, Luís's voyeurism has facilitated his greatest sense of injustice and he appeals to a transient way of life, becoming in the process an Existential flâneur, cursing his despondent being. Yet underpinning his wanderings is da Silva's refusal to confront his own narcissism, that is to say his having behaved (freely) as a conspirator against his ego (i.e., masculinity, contentment). Accentuating the rupture between the two is Marina's sentence into anonymity, literally, as she is condemned to textual silence, reappearing briefly in chapter thirty-five, after her abortion of Julião's child. After her confrontation with the protagonist, in which Luís finally lashes out at her as "-Puta!" (168), Marina vanishes permanently.

**Julião Tavares, o filho do alfaiate**

Julião Tavares is at once Luís da Silva’s antagonist and foil, and the adversary becomes the insignia of the nauseating toxicosis the protagonist believes to be conniving against him. In this manner, Julião is a grotesque figure in Luís's imaginary, a Graciliano archetype which Carpeaux describes as "monstros, revoltados, caçados, nostálgicos da morte" (224). Added to that inhibiting debauchery which da Silva believes is devitalizing him, the immediate conflict between the two is predicated on the possession of Marina. A derivational quarrel between the two is exacerbated by Luís’s resent of Julião’s vulgar transparency:
A cólera engasgava-me [...] Canalha. Meses atrás se entalara num processo de defloramento, de que se tinha livrado graças ao dinheiro do pai. Com o olho guloso em cima das mulheres bonitas, estava mesmo precisando uma surra. E um cachorro daquele fazia versos, era poeta. (72)

These characteristics make Tavares the negative doppelgänger of da Silva. Tavares symbolizes a bankrupt morality, which can through economic venues evade culpability, and still Julião's greed is insatiable. As the passage suggests, Luís's sense of outrage is also fueled by a thirst for justice, and the final acrimonious transgression (iniquity) is Tavares's vulgarization of art. Furthermore, recalling Luís's poetic aspirations and his religiously handicapped attempts at womanizing, the root of his frustration can be pinpointed to Julião's rapacity which is given to dandyism, and Luís envy of that very existence denied to him.

Da Silva’s ill will toward Tavares is evident immediately in Angústia: without prelude the narratee is informed that Julião has been at the center of Luís's "apoquentações" (11). However, the figure of the adversary (in much the same way as Marina) disappears abruptly and becomes sporadically visible through the next eight chapters. This silencing of Tavares keeps to the chaotic scheme of Angústia, inexplicably juxtaposing various realities to blur the diegetic lines between dream, sickness, murder, and reality.

Julião’s initial character void is unequivocally addressed in his formal introduction in chapter ten. In this chapter the readers learn that Tavares is the scion of a wealthy merchant family. The Tavares family fortune is built on their success as wholesale grocers, real estate magnates, and influential members of
society. Up to this point Luís’s disdain for Julião is rooted in a personal amorous vendetta. However with the elaboration of Tavares’s character, da Silva’s discontent is deepened to evolve into a hatred for the entire social class Tavares’s family represents. The formal introduction of Julião sheds light on the underpinning dynamics between the two, which attempts to account for Luís’s homicidal anguish:

Foi por aquele tempo que Julião Tavares deu para aparecer aqui em casa. Lembram-se dele. Os jornais andaram a elogiá-lo, mas disseram mentira. Julião Tavares não tinha nenhuma das qualidades que lhe atribuíram. Era um sujeito gordo, vermelho, risonho, patriota, falador e escrevedor. No relógio oficial, nos cafés e noutros lugares frequentados cumprimentava-me da longe, fingindo superioridade. (42)

This scene alludes to an invasion of privacy by Julião as the core of Luís’s ire. Julião has transgressed his intimate spaces (casa→cafés→Marina) and he has begun to be irritatingly ubiquitous, an offense da Silva will not look upon kindly. Interestingly, Luís’s portrayal of Tavares also conveys a sense of uncanny familiarity. The apostrophic use of "lembram-se dele" not only directly interpellates the narratee, but also suggests that Julião constitutes a shared acquaintance. In this direction, Luís is directly involving the narratee in an indirect act of conspiracy, because Julião Tavares is a common acquaintance, an ever-present celebrity in the "jornais." This scene also becomes an explicit attempt on Luís’s part to appeal to the reader’s sense of familiarity, comradeship, and inequality.

Part of da Silva’s rage is not directly attributed to Julião, but rather it is a corollary to the bad faith practices of the media. As Luís explains, these media
outlets "disseram mentira." Exasperating the role of the praise bestowed upon Tavares, are the specific physical and personality characteristics which make of Julião an insufferable figure for him. Prominent among Julião's irritating qualities are his chauvinism, his bombastic pedantry, and his interests in writing, all of which are perceived by Luís to manifest a sense of "superioridade" by Julião. Nevertheless, Julião's perceived arrogance not only enrages Luís but it also intimidates him and his cohorts. The figure of Julião emasculates da Silva and his friends through the power of his economic status, his literary accolades, and sexual prowess. In fact Tavares's aura permeates the group's senses, his very smell eliciting mental and emotional sickness in the entire group:

Ficávamos enjoados com as lorotas dele. Não podíamos ser amigos. Em primeiro lugar o homem era bacharel, o que nos distanciava. Pimentel, forte na palavra escrita, anulava-se diante de Julião Tavares. Moisés, apesar de falar cinco línguas, emudecia. Eu, que viajei muito e sei que há doutores quartaus, metia também a viola no saco. (46-47)

The group's nausea is symptomatic of the difference between themselves and Julião; as Kozer has highlighted "su complejo de inferioridad y su desprecio de si mismo, constituyen la esencia de este mecanismo de diferenciación" (76). What Luís is explicitly demarcating is the alienation they experience because of the socioeconomic schism between the affluent collective which Tavares represents and the disenfranchised majority da Silva embodies. This antagonism is also articulated using masculinity to highlight the impotence felt by da Silva and his companions resulting from the mere presence of Julião. As Luís explains, each member's virtues are neutralized by Tavares, transforming the group into the very "doutores quartaus" da Silva mentions.
Invariably this sense of estrangement and denigration blisters into homicidal thoughts for Luís. And compounding the overt envy and antipathy, the prominent irritating quality of Julião is the hypocrisy of his existence: "Comecei a odiar Julião Tavares [...]/- Canalha! [...] E rangia os dentes, arrumava os papéis tremendo de raiva. Tudo nele era postiço, tudo dos outros" (48). As da Silva explains, aggravating the obvious romantic confrontation between the two is the insincerity of Julião's patriotic sanctimoniousness. All these traits of Tavares in Luís's mind discredit Julião completely and in fact convict him for his brazen "falta de vergonha" (48).

The relentless insistence that Julião is a "canalha" and that Marina is lost to him, become recurrent leitmotifs throughout the text. The dynamic return to these two points drives the novel. To these Angústia insists on Luís’s sense of alienation and toxicoses as an end result of the corrosiveness in his day to day. Towards the midway point in the novel, Luís revisits this acerbic environment, exposing the deeper Existentialist roots of his malcontent:

Como certos acontecimentos insignificantes tomam vulto, perturbam a gente! Vamos andando sem nada ver. O mundo é empastado e nevoento. Súbito uma coisa entre mil nos desperta a atenção e nos acompanha. Não sei se com os outros se dá o mesmo. Comigo é assim. Caminho como um cego [...] As pessoas vão para os seus negócios, nem se voltam, e eu me considero um sujeito mal-educado. Tenho a impressão de que estou cercado de inimigos, e como caminho devagar, noto que os outros têm demasiada pressa em pisar-me os pés e bater-me nos calcanharês. Quanto mais me vejo rodeado mais me isolo e entristeço. Quero recolher-me, afastar-me daqueles estranhos que não compreendo, ouvir o Currupaco, ler, escrever. A multidão é hostil e terrivel. (123)
The decomposition of Luís is the amalgamation of an interior crisis and an exterior torment. This sense of confliction functions as a warning sign, foreshadowing (and pressing onward towards) an imminent moment of action, a flashpoint. To this is added the exterior forces which are precipitated by the indifferent metropolis, represented by the anonymous multitude stampeding mercilessly. The images are explicit; with the first lines of the passage, Luís is describing the metamorphosis, his Existential nirvana which is affecting his worldly perceptions. For the protagonist this spontaneous consciousness, in which he can recognize that the world is "empastado e nevoento," in short ambiguous, insulates him completely. The degree of Luís’s transformation make him acutely aware of the dehumanized collective which conspire to "pisar-me os pés e bater-me nos calcanharês."

After the initial awakening to this unsettling sensation, Luís is on the defensive. A complete rupture has aggravated da Silva's world to the point that he perceives the multitude to be "inimigos." And while this antagonism borders on passive victimization, an incommunicable existence, what the reader learns is that the terribly hostile "multidão" compel Luís to appeal to reading and writing. And while for critics like Del Barco this signals the protagonist's attempt to recapture "la irrecuperable inocencia del hombre del interior transferido a un medio hostil-la ciudad- y allí ahogado" (104), I find that Luís is attempting to counteract his anguished existence. And while in the conflation of inner crisis and external persecution, da Silva's confession communicates the phases of his transformation into a homicidal voyeur, I also find that at the core of the change
is da Silva’s inconformity with the status quo. The Existential anagnorisis Luís describes shows how the inhumanity which is barraging his world elicits a desire to placate his ensuing anguish; to put it another way, Luís finds it necessary to engage his discontent and defeat it.

Chief amongst da Silva's behaviors to mitigate his continuing Existential deterioration is passive voyeurism. From Luís's constant gazing of Marina, Julião, and the asphyxiating decaying masses he derives a masochistic gratification. In fact, as da Silva becomes more involved in the act of contemplating the people in his life, the experience becomes a symbiotic game of denial. This game of evasions brings a sense of purpose for the protagonist:

O que me encantava eram aqueles modos de garota estabanada, as palavras soltas à toa, pedaços de cantigas, o gluglu da espuma e a mijada sonora [...] Pois tudo isso desapareceu. Fazia algum tempo que os rumores familiares se vinham atenuando, mas naquele dia tudo se tornou claro, a suspeita que tive na rua se confirmou [...] Queria que ela me iludisse, jurasse que não havia acontecido nada. Mordi as mãos para não gritar. Afastei-me, como um bêbedo. Mas o ventre disforme continuava a perseguir-me. Era-me necessário falar, ir ao café, libertar-me da obsessão, do ódio que me enchia. (128-29)

As Luís tells us, he derived pleasure in the most visceral and absurd qualities of Marina. Here da Silva creates an impressionist picture of gratification, her purposeless words, and splintered ballad, culminating with the sonorous echoes of her bodily functions. What Luís is confessing to is that with Marina's absurd humanity he achieved the most sublime moments of content. Interestingly, this is one of the few moments where Marina escapes his demonizing gaze, however, just as abruptly there is a vehement turn in direction.
The protagonist's thoughts on his paradise lost are clear. And paradoxically it is the very pleasure of gazing Marina which quickens his disenchantment by revealing her "betrayal". The betrayal I am referring to is Marina's pregnancy, which as an act of life signifies the death of the dubious engagement between da Silva and Marina. Interestingly, Luís desires to be deceived, as he states "queria que ela me iludisse," a momentary lapse of weakness which could mean his hesitant readiness to accept her betrayal. However, his awareness of her disloyalty and the longing for a previous state of ignorance, which impulsively project into a muffled scream, only work to signal his burgeoning homicidal rage. At this point, Angústia's diegetic pace is quickening, an explicit sense of propulsion is fostered heading to a liminal moment of reckoning for da Silva. The idea of inevitability is captured by the protagonist’s conviction that "Julião Tavares devia morrer" (133). This, like the toxicosis experienced on the streets by Luís leads him to an Existential epiphany which carries the connotation of revenge, and self-affirmation. Luís explains this new found sense of purpose as an all-consuming psychosomatic twinge, a "prego" which "atravessava os miolos […] Dor terrível, uma idéia que inutilizava as outras idéias. Julião Tavares devia morrer" (133).

Sonho febril, Para me livrar do mal

The epigraph which opens this chapter captures the central role played by death in Angústia; in particular, the demise of the adversary. As Ferreira da Silva asserts "a experiência de que os mortos caem, enquanto nós continuamos a evoluir no tempo que para nós continua, é, no fundo, um sentimento da
propulsividade de nossa vontade e desejo vital," to which the Brazilian philosopher concludes that the awareness of another's passing "vai projetando novos tempos e novos horizontes para o nosso comportamento vital" (Meditação 27). The murder of Julião Tavares, Angústia resident villain, is simultaneously an execution, a manifestation of justice, and the staging of a suicide. What's more, that necessary death of Julião becomes as Ferreira da Silva describes the projection of Luís's "comportamento vital," in other words his Existential assertion of being. Viera has read the murder of Julião as an act of vindication because "in Luís da Silva's mind crime and justice, good and evil are relative. Justice becomes arbitrary, and crime takes on a positive value" (379). However, in Luís's case, redemption becomes a self-serving exercise of the imagination. The scene begins with Luís once again cursing his anonymity, after the final disillusionment with Marina:

Pensei em gritar, avisá-lo de que havia perigo, mas o grito morreu-me na garganta. Não grito: habituei-me a falar baixinho na presença dos chefes. Era preciso que alguma coisa prevenisse Julião Tavares e o afastasse dali. Ao mesmo tempo encolerizei-me por ele estar pejando o caminho, a desafiar-me. Então eu não era nada? (181)

The climax of Angústia is nearing and the protagonist is torn between two forces which have dominated his thoughts throughout the text: fight or flight. What the reader witnesses explicitly is that Luís is conscious of the liminal moment which is approaching, or as he puts it the "perigo" which is looming. Interestingly, Luís is once again defeated by his sense of inferiority, yet the presence of Julião is a confrontation to his right to exist, which da Silva equates with his masculinity. So when the protagonist posits the question "-um homem, percebe? Um homem"
(182) to his adversary, the implicit reader is once again reminded that the underpinning anonymity, and the inconsequentiality his being "nada," provoke him to affirm his existence (project his rage) onto Julião. The murder, then, plays out simultaneously as an execution with cathartic qualities:

Retirei a corda do bolso e em alguns saltos, silenciosos como os das onças de José Baía, estava ao pé de Julião Tavares. Tudo isto é absurdo, é incrível, mas realizou-se naturalmente. A corda enlaçou o pescoço do homem, e as minhas mãos apertadas afastaram-se [...] A obsessão ia desaparecer. Tive um deslumbramento. O homenzinho da repartição e do jornal não era eu. Esta convicção afastou qualquer receio de perigo. Uma alegria enorme encheu-me. (182-83)

Luís is narrating the stages of his metamorphosis into an existent individual. This evolution/affirmation of his self is intellectualized by his synecdochic narration of the action, or as he explains "minhas mãos apertadas afastaram-se." Also worth mentioning is that Luís proceeds methodically, slowly and silently removing the cord from his pocket, and while the entire scene is "absurdo" to him, it is nevertheless a comfortable realization for him, an act which he engages "naturalmente." Furthermore, as Luís confesses, Julião's death ruptures the negative correlation between them, to a degree that Tavares's dying coincides with Luís's decrescendoing obsession. The consequence of Julião's murder is so profound that it causes an estrangement in Luís. In fact, this alienation from his "old" self is a rejection of the "O homenzinho" which throughout Angústia had been a burden. Now this act of death creates a wave of euphoria which will permit him to liberate and embrace his authentic self, an absurd individual, or as Ferreira da Silva understands it "o homem subterrâneo, o homem essencial para quem duas vezes dois pode ser cinco" (Reflexões 35).
Expectedly, given the mercurial quality of *Angústia*, Luís can not sustain this state of bliss, since he is absurd but not deranged. This is due in part to his awareness of the severity of his acts. Likewise, Melo Miranda has found that Luís da Silva is fully conscious of his actions, a crime which functions as "elemento deflagrador do processo da escrita porque, para ele, convergem as contradições indissolúveis de um eu estilhaçado, [...] para de certa forma justificar, do ponto de vista do criminoso, o ato praticado" (33-4).\(^{105}\) This criminal consciousness is evident in the early stages of Luís's plans to murder Julião and manifest themselves anew when he is overtaken by a need to flee: "Apesar de não sentir medo, percebia que era urgente retirar-me" (184).\(^{106}\) The protagonist resorts to staging his actions as suicide, driven in part by the memory of Seu Evaristo and Cirilo de Engracia, a *nordestino* bandit who suffered a similar demise:


The first connotation of this suicide is that it represents the projection of not only the *cangaceiro* mentioned in the passage, but also of the murder of Seu Evaristo, a scene which became a lasting memory for Luís. However, given the pervasive struggle Luís sustains with his Christian morality, another subtext beckons; Luís's remake of the suicide of Judas Iscariot. The analogy created by Luís's memories between Julião and Judas Iscariot is not too unexpected recalling that
Graciliano’s novel is full of biblical allusions, such as we witness during Luís's confrontation with Marina. On two separate occasions Luís reprimands Marina’s materialism and frail decency by recasting scriptures from the old and the new testaments, particularly in chapter nine when he reminds Marina that "nem só de smoking vive o homem" (38), an overt reference to Deuteronomy 8:2-3 and Luke 4:4. 107 This particular biblical reference, transformed by Luís, functions as a sign of the moralistic anguish which has functioned as a constant irritating presence in da Silva's day to day existence.

Further indication of the pervasiveness of religious symbols and Christian morality in Angústia are made apparent toward the latter chapters of the novel. One such example is especially interesting, recalling Luís’s explicit anti-Semitism, because during an expressly complicated moment of Existential anonymity da Silva refers to himself as a "judeu errante" (191). 108 Add to this the protagonist’s constant ethical outrage; and we become aware that Luís's own Judeo-Christian condition is a constant adversary. Taking these examples, I would argue that the explicit recasting of Judas's suicide via the murder of Julião is the culmination of the Existential preoccupation with ethical behavior in Angústia. In this vein, Tavares’s murder is the vulgarization of the emblematic biblical story of betrayal, justice, and redemption.

To put it differently, Luís perceives Julião’s treachery, disloyal to the authentic morality/aesthetic which the protagonist has expressed throughout the text. 109 As such, his death represents a righteous act of retribution and redemption for Luís, whom after laboring literally and metaphorically with the
weight of Julião's death, has found a level of reprieve, concluding his night's work with a simple gesture of content: "bem." What Luís has accomplished is the deliverance of his being through the death of a Judas, and in the process staged a suicide which "acts" out against his sense of inferiority, injustice, and anonymity. But even this new liberation is unsustainable, and upon his return home the burden of his actions transforms him into the very object of despise, as he negates culpability, attributing the night's events to his feverish imagination: "Não fui eu. Escrevo, invento mentiras sem dificuldade. Mas as minhas mãos são fracas, e nunca realizo o que imagino" (208).

The final monologue which closes the novel is a metaphor for Luís's sickness. This disease presents itself through Luís's agitated ramblings and comes across as a virtuoso soliloquy of free association, sustained irrational tensions and as Lemos de Oliveira has shown, it is "phenomenological in the modern philosophical sense; that is, it is an analysis of consciousness by way of a direct description of images or phenomena as the mind intuits them" (71). Furthermore, Angústia is a "modern revenge tragedy" (Lemos de Oliveira 87) and a crimino logical casestudy, the Existential anthropometry of Luís da Silva in which he intellectualizes the root of his anonymity and possible avenues for restitution. Undeniably, Graciliano's text has a distinct spacial fingerprint, Luís da Silva's malcontent as manifest through confrontation with himself and his world. Likewise, the protagonist's authoritative project is explicit; an Existential seduction intended to lure us into da Silva's own bad faith project.¹¹⁰
These palpable discursive postures, in conjunction with the text's chaotic, intimist structure, confirm Bosi's position; *Angústia* as Existential literature *avant la lettre*. However, I believe that Graciliano's own words, given the polysemic quality of the narrative best capture the novel's essentialism. In a newspaper editorial from 1921, under the pseudonym of J. Calixto, Graciliano expressed his humanist position in the following manner:

Sou assim uma espécie de vendedor ambulante de sabão para a pele, de ungüentos para feridas, de pomadas para calos. Talvez não encontres virtude em meus medicamentos. Pode ser que os calos de tua consciência continuem duros e não sintas melhora na sarna que porventura tenhas na alma, doença que não te desejo. (qtd. in Moraes Augusto 49)

Given the novel's irritating quality, as the reading of Graciliano's text is an unsettling experience, I find that the passage above exemplifies the principal Existentialist quality of *Angústia* perfectly. The novel is the metaphoric "sabão" for humanity's multiple ills (*i.e.*, *feridas*, *calos de consciência*, *sarna da alma*). The brutality of Graciliano’s hyperrealist narrative world unveils through the grotesque reflection of one man’s existence, his own power of autonomy. Although da Silva negates his freedom, we can not avoid discerning the paradoxically destructive potential of the all consuming will to being.
Chapter V:

Uncanny Periphery: An Interlude

The human being who does not wish to belong to the mass
must merely cease being comfortable with himself;
let him follow his conscience which shouts at him: "Be yourself!"
-Nietzsche

The paradox of a conclusion to this comparative study of Existentialism
does not escape me. Given that a conclusion implies a finished product, we can
understand how, in effect, to conclude a study of Existentialism without engaging
the 1940s is rather anti-climatic. Since I have insisted (following the critical
footprint of Kaufmann, et. al.) that Existentialism crystallized in the 1940s, a
formal analysis of the Latin American contribution during this decade is
necessary. To remedy this sense of inadequacy I feel the need to approach this
chapter as an interlude. It is worth recalling that "Uncanny Periphery" set out to
substantiate the anticipatory presence of Latin American Existentialism and in
doing so I favored texts from the 1930s. However, a comprehensive study of
Latin American Existentialism, encompassing both decades, would necessarily
spotlight the Existentialist boom of the 1940s.

This secondary project will take into consideration (to mention only a few
possibilities) the narratives of the Costa Rican José Marín Cañas’s *Pedro Arnáez*
(1942), the Brazilian Clarice Lispector’s *Perto do coração selvagem* (1941), and
the Colombian Clemente Airó’s *Yugo de niebla* (1948). In addition, the
philosophical texts of Francisco Romero, Moisés Vincenzi, and Eduardo Nicol
would be of further interest to this future study. I find it also imperative to include
the critical texts of Luigi Pareyson’s *El existencialismo, espejo de la conciencia*
contemporânea (1948) and Sabino Alonso-Fueyo’s *Existencialismo y existencialistas* (1949). And so, understanding the comparative quality of my dissertation, and the necessary continuation into the 1940s, it becomes immediately apparent that this chapter is in fact an interlude.

One of the most striking features about the critical reception of Latin American Existentialism is that it has rarely been viewed as anything other than mimetic tributary. It is worth restating that throughout this dissertation only one critic, Alfredo Bosi, recognized the palpable presence of a "romance existencialista avant la lettre" (455). And while Bosi is specifically referring to Graciliano Ramos’s *Angústia*, I have demonstrated how this critical assessment of the *nordestino*’s text applies to the rest of the narratives addressed in my dissertation. In fact, the significant narrative transformations in the Latin American novel, which Donald Shaw has situated in the 1940s—and recalling that for him "los años 30 vieron tan sólo un fenómeno significativo: la llegada de la novela indianista moderna" (19)—cannot be understood without taking into consideration the aesthetic and ethical contributions of the Existentialist narratives studied here.¹¹³

Indeed, through my analysis of *Laberinto de sí mismo*, the novels of María Luisa Bombal and the aforementioned *Angústia*, it becomes apparent that these narratives are very much involved with humanist issues, which run the gambit from the ontological (*i.e.*, how does the self exist?), the metaphysical (*i.e.*, what are my essences?), and ultimately the ethical (*i.e.*, what are the consequences of my behavior?). To these humanist questions must be added the narrative
innovations, born of the historical Avant-Garde, and employed masterfully by these authors to convey a sense of aporetic discomfort.

Interestingly, this humanist questioning prevalent in all the novels I address in my study, brings to mind to Freud's theory of civilization, as evidenced in his *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). And though never included in the canon of Existentialism, Freud's text is undeniably a treatise on disenfranchised humanity, and therefore reveals itself to be an exponent of anthropological philosophy. Indeed, the Austrian psychiatrist pays special attention to the individual's tendency to seek out self-determinism and implicitly searches out a correlative effect: content.¹¹⁴ To quote Freud, humanity's primary concern "can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so" (25).

If we consider that the Latin American narratives studied here respond to an individual malcontent, then we can understand that the anxiety about an inconsequential existence drives each protagonist to search out new (ad)ventures; in other words the central characters endure a will toward self-realization, or in Freudian terms the protagonists of these novels seek out an "oceanic feeling" (*Civilization* 21). The effect of this anxiety, which spurs them on, plays out as a quest narrative in the novels of Labrador Ruiz, Bombal, and Graciliano.

As we have seen, the protagonist of *Laberinto* presents an acute aesthetic crisis, which evolves into an obsession with redefining his role as an artist. Indeed, Labrador Ruiz's novel can be understood as forming part of the
Künstlerroman tradition, marking the text as the portrait of an artist as Existentialist man. However, unlike the German version, which shows the evolution of the artist from early childhood into adulthood, Labrador Ruiz’s Existentialist artist is a case-study which stresses the immediacy of the crisis. In the text, the Existentialist predicament is intimately connected to his own conceptualization of art, love, and death. For instance, Labrador Ruiz’s text articulates the phases of artistic creation by employing the colloquy of the three pencils. These in turn give access to the poet’s innovative arbitrariness veiling the chaotic methodology of a purposively voracious reader. Subsequently, the text dramatizes the poet’s confrontation with love as a specular experience with an existentially conscious personality, his equal artistically and ideologically. In fact, Teresa becomes the unbearable reflection of the protagonist because her profound sensibility reveals that she, unlike the poet, has achieved a level of muted reckoning. In this sense, it is revealing to consider Piñera Lleira’s take on art as synchronic vortex:

El arte conlleva la tremenda paradoja de ser aquello que a la vez acerca al hombre más a sí mismo y lo aleja más de sí propio. Y tal vez si en esta tensión descomunal radique la enigmática condición de tal quehacer humano, pues el arte se nos manifiesta siempre como lo que, a la vez, realiza e irrealiza lo humano. El arte, con efecto, es la actividad o el quehacer propio del hombre con el cual éste consigue dar la expresión más acabada y decisiva de su ser radical. (5-6)

Indeed, Teresa represents the uncanny recognition of this creative contradiction, which is brutal for the poet. She is able to achieve, in a manifestation of her egocentrism, her "ser radical" which permits moments of self-realization and clarity vis-à-vis the poet, and which further catalyzes the protagonist onward. In
fact, Teresa’s unbearable image proves to be the fuse which coerces the protagonist toward his most confrontational Existentialist moments, recognizing the fallacy of his performative masks, and the virtues in surrendering to his inner demons. Almost inevitable, the protagonist decides to realize his authentic poetic voice by annihilating the inauthentic reflection he has encountered with Teresa and the condemned man.\textsuperscript{115} This is put into motion by condemning that reflection to silence, which the poet carries out in the metaphoric suicide which both closes and opens \textit{Laberinto}.

With Bombal's novels, the Existential focus is exclusively ethical, although the lyrical quality of her novels is undeniable. As I have argued, in Bombal's novels, the use of sensuality, adultery, memory, and ambiguity generates a masochistic space of fulfillment. Both \textit{La última niebla} and \textit{La amortajada} as intimate projects of intellectualization reveal that centripetal desire, in which the anti-heroine is prioritized, and is a constitutive force. Following the Existentialism of Clarence Finlayson which undressed love as an "orden subjetivo" (\textit{Notas} 246), and which promotes confrontation with life, I illustrate how the behavior of each novel's protagonist implicates them as victimizer.

The anonymous woman in \textit{La última niebla} and Ana María in \textit{La amortajada} are complicit desiring subjects, and the novels function as mental memoirs revealing both to have been Existential malcontents. Nevertheless, much like their male counterparts, these anti-heroines are not isolated cases of hysteria, but rather form part of a larger sorority of restlessness. If we consider Elena Grau Lleveria's explanation of "purposeful" women of the turn of the
century in *Las Olvidadas* (2008), then we can understand that like Existentialism, the narrative forerunners of Bombal's anti-heroines are found in:

[Que] las protagonistas de las novelas (que) son "voluntaristas," es decir, intentan moldear su situación personal a su gusto por medio de actos de voluntad propia e intentan superar los modelos de comportamiento que les son asignados en tanto que mujeres. Es por ello que se sienten marginales, que se quieren marginales, no desean una transformación social ni se interesan en negociar con un orden preestablecido, ya que sólo en esta diferencia autoasignada pueden encontrar el espacio imaginario que les permite crear una subjetividad. (245)

One of the many areas in which these characters have been reductively misunderstood is in their so-called abject victimization. In the case of the anonymous narrator of Bombal's first novel, she rejects her banal existence as a proxy second wife and actively seeks out a distinct reality, fully committed to this endeavor, until she allows its deterioration by pursuing an external "proof." With the help of an Existentialist third-person narrator, who becomes complicit in the novel's consistent skepticism, Ana María is revealed to have been an egocentric desiring being, time and again affronting the essentialist foundations of her religion, her sensuality, and the normative demands of her patronizing bourgeois milieu. Bombal's novels fictionalize an intellectualized form of desire to create a sensual consciousness which conveys Existential engagement and a cynical resistance. In the process, the reader witnesses the subjective agency in both anti-heroines, a distinct understanding of these characters otherwise understood as passive objects of despair.

In my view, Graciliano Ramos's *Angústia* is the preeminent synthesis of both aesthetic and ethical problematics in Existentialist form. Although critics
such as Lemos de Oliveira, Melo Miranda, and Viera have labeled Luís da Silva a self-deprecating sociopath, at its core, the novel provides the reader access to the protagonist's overt struggles with his freedom, the ubiquitous presence of death and his growing sense of alienation predicated on an exacerbating realization of anonymity and inconsequentiality. However, I analyzed significant incongruities in Luís da Silva's overt authorial projects of self-justification, to show how Ferreira da Silva's concept of "ocultação do ser" succinctly captures the protagonist's own slipperiness.

In fact, Angústia dramatizes a revenge tragedy through Existentialist parameters, meaning that Luís struggles with the consequences of his actions. To put it differently, da Silva chooses himself, privileging in the act of murder his right to exist, then enacts the consequences of his choice. The novel engages in a narrative seduction because a basic contradiction is at work: although Luís is repulsed by the ethical bankruptcy which surrounds him, he nevertheless longs to be recognized. Although impotent vis-à-vis Julião Tavares's world, he desires it; Luís da Silva covets Julião's amoral libertine life-style, sucrose poetic success and most of all Julião's economic tranquility.

Luís's envy and resentment are, because of the specific socioeconomic roots, a sign of his Existentialist hyperconsciousness. This hyperconsciousness is further evidenced by his incessant (ir)rationalization, the obsessive recollections of his past and present which show him to be struggling with his deep sense of self-culpability. And although Luís would have the readership accept his victimization as justification for the figurative silencing of Marina and
the literal death of Julião, *Angústia* ultimately unveils the Existentialist position that "the destiny of man is placed within himself" (Sartre, *Existentialism* 35). I have argued that Luís's explicit essentialist and naturalist confession is symptomatic of that responsibility; in other words, Luís is conscious of his freedom and acts out accordingly.

Underpinning the narrative seduction carried out in the text is Luís's awareness that his existence is chaotic and absurd. He is conscious of Marina's materialistic self-preservationism, he envies Julião's bombastic virility, and he acknowledges the ambiguity of his childhood memories. Nevertheless, these contrasting realities, arbitrary, egocentric, and self-governing, spur Luís to engage in a world devoid of logic and to tease out his own purpose. He ultimately does attempt to confront the chaos of his existence by firstly buying Marina's favor, fully conscious of the economic impossibility inherent in his endeavor. Secondly, Luís confronts his torment by avenging his wounded masculinity with Julião's death, in this case making of murder a feverish affirmation of his being, as ethical man and implicitly as an artist as he stages the murder as a suicide. Ultimately, what *Angústia* showcases is a man in search of his faded individuality, who will choose death as a vehicle to express his need to matter. That absurd choice, a revolt against the essentialism he has been employing to justify his actions, gives his life its value.

Labrador Ruiz, Bombal, and Graciliano- varying accordingly the focus of their projects between both ethical problematics and distinct aesthetic consciousnesses-operate under a similar assumption regarding the anti-
essentialism of individuality. In the end, the narratives I have analyzed in my dissertation take up the crisis of the death of rational Man in the twentieth century. Much like Nietzsche’s claim of the death of God in the nineteenth century helped raise suspicions on the supremacy of the positivistic age, the death of rational Man, was also a moment of crisis, returning humanity back to an orphaned individuality, a chaotic irrationality.  

The fictional lives of the protagonists studied in my dissertation define what it means to become aware of that orphanhood. Yet, these novels are much more than a record of artistic impotence (Laberinto), sexist victimization (Bombal), or sociopathic schizoid-paranoia (Angústia). Despite this reductionist viewpoint, upheld by much of the critics, these narratives are distinctly Existentialist in form and content. They all have the ability to capture minute details and the chaotic stimuli which characterize Existentialist self-awareness. In fact the differences between these novels lie in tone and perspective.

In the case of Laberinto, the first-person narrator subordinates what the reader experiences to his own perspective. Labrador Ruiz’s narrative randomly juxtaposes episodes, characters, and dialogues in a purposeful artistic conation. In other words, the reader witnesses the Existentialist processes directed toward poetic "change." Of equal importance is the third-person omniscient narrator in Labrador Ruiz’s novel and in Bombal's texts. This third-person narrator, an innovative contribution of Latin American Existentialist literature, functions as the interlocutor, continuously instigating and interrogating the protagonist's choices. What is important about the third-person perspective is that it sets in motion
(keeps in motion) the protagonist's reflexivity, and acts as a subjective marker of ambiguity.

In contrast, Graciliano's novel allows the protagonist to filter the events of his life and the experience of his existence exclusively in Luís da Silva's own voice, at his own frenetic pace. The absence of a third-person narrator, which moderated the story in the other novels, does not lend authority to Luís da Silva's point of view, as he recognizes the capriciousness of his own appellative discourse. However, *Angústia* represents a vicious step in the *Existentialization* of Latin American literature by shockingly questioning victimization in modern life and by also pushing the novelistic limits of expression, in the process unveiling the dark side of reality, guilt, freedom, and justice.

In summary, this study has attempted to highlight the value of thinking of Latin American Existentialism, in its philosophical form and in its literary expression, beyond its tributary status and treating it as an anticipatory uncanny cultural phenomenon from within the periphery of the Existentialism imaginary. In analyzing the narratives studied here, "Uncanny Periphery" has given priority to the Existentialist texts of Latin American philosophers such as Raimundo de Farias Brito, Samuel Ramos, and Clarence Finlayson, as these thinkers have shown themselves to have been fully committed to investigating Existentialism's leitmotifs. In this vein, Latin American Existentialism took up the problematic of counter-essentialist individuality, the signifying vacuum provided by the idea of humanity's freedom, "a ocultação do ser," authentic existence, and the individual's radical solitude.
Along this Existentialist vein, we can observe that the overarching tendencies in both male and female authors appear, at first, to confirm the influential presence of the other. And if we consider that in Miguel Ángel Virasoro’s *La libertad, la existencia y el ser* (1942) the Argentine philosopher explains that in Existentialism, the experiencing ‘I’ "en su propio existir indubitable, se nos muestra como transitorio, como relativo y condicionado. Debe ser concebido así como pura actividad, pero como actividad delimitada y finita, cercada por la temporalidad" (22), then we can perceive that these novelists articulated a keen awareness of the other and its affect on perceptions of time, collective morality, and mortality in the configuration of the individual’s self-consciousness. In this respect, added to these aforementioned socio-historical and ideological realities, Bombal was consumed by the female condition of existence, which her anti-heroines indisputably resisted through projects of sensual indulgence; and in this respect I view both *La última niebla* and *La amortajada* to be primarily concerned with ethical behavior, employing a highly stylized lyrical prose to convey that problematic. And although critics such as Bente, Boyle, and Fernández have been quick to condemn the immaturity of the protagonists in Bombal’s novels, they have declared themselves, through action, to be fundamentally egocentric survivalists.

Each male novelist represents a distinct challenge and although the texts are separated by only three years, at first glance they seem to be more noticeably different than similar in what they say about the Existentialist artist. Labrador Ruiz celebrates the torment of the artist; the anonymous poet suffers
his artistic calling, and with the ultimate sacrifice, chooses his own aesthetic vision. Graciliano’s novel makes the protagonist, a paradigmatic *poeta malogrado*, a destructive egomaniac, simultaneously manipulative, cowardly and brazen. With Luís da Silva the reader has access, albeit from a highly suspicious point of view, to the psychological effects of resentment, envy and frustrated desire on the existence of a closeted inconsequential artist. However, both texts invariably coincide in that they both fictionalize the merciless, noxious quality of the artistic temperament.

While it is possible to isolate what appears to be explicit Avant-Garde attitudes in these narratives (*i.e.*, the disintegration of normative time/space, the proliferation of ontic realms, lyrical prose) and at the same time Modernist narrative techniques (*i.e.*, stream of consciousness, discontinuous narratives, ambiguous perspectives) it is important to note that the novelists employ these innovations to communicate a dissatisfaction with both an aesthetic and ethical status quo. These narratives dramatize the ever shifting perspectives of the central characters that are searching out a different grasp on human existence. After reading these texts it seems that each novel implies that objectivity, history, memory, love, revenge, and justice are cruel (dangerous) illusions. Indeed, with these novels the central issue is the absence of an overarching meaning in the universe, a liberating chaos which forces the protagonists to negotiate their existence through action, and as the novels have shown, this becomes a harrowing experience.
To conclude, "Uncanny Periphery" challenges the straightforward subordination of Latin American Existentialism by attesting to our variation as a synecdoche of presence. For example, I demonstrated that the disregard for Latin American representatives, such as Romero, Ramos and Astrada, in the anthological studies of prominent critics such as Guillermo de Torre was an analytical oversight as their Existentialist quality is undeniable. Furthermore, these philosophers not only anticipated the canonical Existentialist treatises of Sartre and Camus, they add original contributions to the leitmotifs of Existentialism as is the case with Ramos’s performative interpretation of personalidad and Finlayson’s ethical treatise on the subjective quality of love and the bad faith practice of suicide.

On the literary front, I have shown how the vicious egocentrism of the anonymous poet, Bombal’s anti-heroines, and Luís da Silva dismantle notions of victimization and passivity, placing the burden of existence squarely on the shoulders of the protagonists. The presence of an omniscient third-person narrator, who both destabilizes the protagonist and the reading experience, and in the process antagonizing both, was shown to be an innovation to the canonical Existentialist novel. And while the protagonists were revealed to be responsible for their life, do these texts thereby celebrate humanity’s limitless freedom? No. What these novels put forward, it seems, is that within the individual lies the burden of recognizing the permeability of essentialism and naturalist determinism.
The texts acknowledge that individuality is a constant renegotiation between socioeconomic resistances, personal choice, and creativity. In this vein, the novels signify creativity as a project of self-realization which can be artistic, imaginative, and even violent. By building on the narrative innovations of the historical Avant-Garde, in both concepts and techniques, Latin American Existentialist narratives push the limits of the genre by encroaching on the reader’s imaginary, and in the process forces onto the reader the brutality of a chaotic real. Ultimately, this dissertation disputes that these novelists and philosophers subsisted *outside* the so-called margins of Existentialism and puts forth that the consolidation of Existentialism is incomplete without the contributions and innovations of Latin America. To put it another way, this dissertation has sustained from the onset that Latin American Existentialism, in its philosophical and literary form, is unquestionably uncanny and only marginally peripheral.
Works Cited

Primary Texts

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-----. Cresival. La Habana: Talleres Carasa, 1936.


• María Luisa Bombal


- **Graciliano Ramos**


**General Texts**


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END NOTES

1 Some of the Latin American philosophers which appear in my dissertation might not be as renowned as their European counterparts. I will provide succinct biographical information on the thinkers whose work directly affects my study. Case in point, Raimundo de Farias Brito who was born in São Benedito, in the state of Ceará on July 24, 1862. He studied law at the Faculdade de Direito do Recife, graduating in 1884. After a life in public service, Farias Brito occupied the "Cátedra de Lógica" at the Colégio Pedro II in Rio de Janeiro, until his death in 1917. His most important books are: A filosofia como atividade permanente do espírito (1895); A filosofia moderna (1899); Evolução e relatividade (1905); A verdade como regra das ações (1905); A base física do espírito (1912). The epigraph is taken from Farias Brito's last major work O mundo interior (1914).

2 In part this is due to the critical dominance of novelas de observacion, which are embedded with collective nation-building latinamericanism which has seen the Existentialist novel fall into obscurity. Randal Johnson has seen in this era a literary tendency which he describes in the following manner: "writers have attempted to express or describe the local-that which is unique about Brazilian culture and society" (120). This holds true of the rest of Latin American literatures from the 1930s and 1940s, which were also committed to a new social realism.

3 Military strongmen took power in Argentina (Augustín Justo), Brazil (Getúlio Vargas), Chile (Marmaduke Grove), Guatemala (Jorge Ubico), El Salvador (Max Martínez) and Honduras (Tiburcio Andino). This regressive trend became the earmark of much of Latin America's political history. Consistent in the analysis of Latin America during this era is the evolution of an economic, political and cultural introspection which resulted as an effect of the world depression. Victor Bulmer-Thomas in "Central America in the Inter-War Period" emphasizes that "the complexity of the economy [had] increased...political and social developments since the 1930s [meant] that no government can afford to ignore internal equilibrium" (267). The 1930s and 1940s saw a renewed attempt at autonomy in many countries of Latin America on various social levels including the economic and the cultural. As a result of the collapse and the slow recovery, the governmental infrastructures which promoted a nationalist identity where fostered. Argentina, Brazil and Mexico because of their regional power are metonymic paradigms of the Latin American experience during the first half of the 20th century. In the first few decades of the 20th century Argentina was the prototypical liberal country; an economic/cultural epicenter in Latin America. In 1929, Argentina enjoyed income per head that was five times that of Brazil and Mexico. According to Mauricio Rojas, Argentina could boast of being one of "the world's ten wealthiest nations in terms of per capita income...the distance between Argentina and the rest of Latin America in terms of development and prosperity had grown conspicuously large" (44). However, the world depression produced severe economic repercussions, according to Aldo Ferrer "the policy followed during the depression arose more from a need to find an immediate solution to very serious and urgent problems than from a clear understanding of the compensatory effect of the policy itself" (163). In the face of economic catastrophe Argentine policy permitted a state driven discourse of self interest which became dependent on unbalanced foreign economic alliances. Conversely, the unfavorable economic measures which fostered import substitution and expanded industry significantly favored an authoritarian political system. As Maddison suggests this federal power balance changes once again in 1943, when Juan Peron takes totalitarian-dictator-like power (25). However, the ideology of autonomy and nationalism was palpable since the state building of General José Uriburu, who advocated the establishment of a semi-fascist corporate state. The state became the center of power; cultural sovereignty in the political sphere was advocated and actively cultivated. The nation became patrimony of the government.

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4 In chapter five of his text *The Lettered City*, Rama describes the unraveling of internationalist modernization of Latin America by highlighting that as “the twentieth century arrived, full blown [...] The Mexican Revolution initiated a string of tremors throughout the region- the reflexes of socioeconomic transformations wrought by modernization, the birth struggles of a new political order to accompany those transformations. And those struggles had not yet concluded when the region was overtaken by the international economic crisis of 1929” (74).

5 Jason Wilson in “Spanish American narrative, 1920-1970” (2004), seconds this position when he puts forth that “the new Latin American novel could be equated with the urban novel and was born in 1939 with the Uruguayan Juan Carlos Onetti’s (1904-94) short novella about urban alienation, *El pozo*” (95).

6 Vargas Llosa’s editorial appeared on November 14th, 1968. Carlos Fuentes concurs with this line of thought, finding Onetti’s work to be “la piedra de fundación de nuestra modernidad enajenada y el mas fiel espejo de nuestros hombres ‘grosoro o tímidos’, para los cuales ‘el desinterés, la desdicha sin causa, la aceptación de la soledad’ son como el conocimiento de ‘ciudades inalcanzables’” (28).

7 A partial list of Existentialist based readings of Onetti’s work substantiates my claim: Jaime Concha’s "Conciencia y subjetividad en *El pozo De J.C. Onetti*, Álvaro Cuadra’s "Para una genealogía de la desfasicación en Latinoamérica: *El pozo* de Juan Carlos Onetti", Reyes E. Flores’s "La soledad en *El pozo de Onetti*” and Hugo Méndez Ramirez’s "El narrador alienado en dos obras claves de la narrativa latinoamericana moderna". Dissertations written on the subject are Marilyn R. Frankenthaler's "El existencialismo en la narrativa de Juan Carlos Onetti” (1975) and Michael Anthony Adams's "Juan Carlos Onetti's Pessimistic View of Twentieth Century Man” (1988).

8 Carlos Astrada was born in Córdoba on February 26, 1894. Like Farias Brito, Astrada first studied law, while a student at the National University of Córdoba. However, Astrada's interests quickly turned to philosophy and in 1926 he traveled to the Universities of Cologne and Freiburg and studied under Max Scheler and Edmund Husserl. On his return to Argentina, Astrada began a long career in academia at the Social Institute of the University of Litoral (1933-1934) and later he would be Director of the Institute of Philosophy in the University of Buenos Aires (1948-1956). Astrada's most influential texts are *El juego existencial* (1933), *Idealismo fenomenológico y metafísica existencial* (1936), *La ética formal y los valores* (1938, Premio Nacional de Filosofía 1940), *Ser, humanismo, ‘existencialismo’: una aproximación a Heidegger* (1949), *Existencialismo y crisis de la filosofía* (1952), *La revolución existencialista* (1952), *Humanismo y dialéctica de la libertad* (1960), *Dialéctica y positivismo lógico* (1961) y *Dialéctica e historia* (1969).

9 I will employ the Dostoevski spelling of the Russian’s surname, for the sake of continuity, except when direct quotes vary the spelling.

10 Mikel Dufrenne in “Existentialism and Existentialisms” (1965) substantiates this view and suggests that an investigation into the field of Existentialism necessitates that we "should speak of Existentialisms" (51).

11 The quintessential Sartrean dogma “existence precedes essence” is derived from Martin Heidegger’s “Das ‘Wesen’ des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz” translated by Joan Stambaugh as “the ‘essence’ of *Dasein* lies in its existence” (*Time* 40). This preposition sets in motion Sartre’s ethics of human individuality. In his 1948 defense of Existentialism, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Sartre details the intricate nature of this claim. He explains: “What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself... There is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he
wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence” (15). Sartre is unambiguous here: man is gifted with freedom, responsibility, and accountability.

12 The texts I am referring to are William Barrett’s *Irrational Man* (1950), Walter Kaufmann’s *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1956), and Gordon Marino’s *Basic Writings of Existentialism* (2004).

13 Also see Julián Marias’s aforementioned article on his thoughts on Ortega y Gasset’s contribution to Existentialism, especially pages 186-188.

14 The studies I mention are Francisco Larroyo’s *El existencialismo: sus fuentes y direcciones* (1951) and Manuel Lamana’s *Existencialismo y literatura* (1967). Among Latin American humanist thought of the 1930s, the following texts merits mention: in Argentina Francisco Romero’s “Filosofía de la persona” (1935), Carlos Astrada’s *El juego existencial* (1933) and *Idealismo fenomenológico y metafísica existencial* (1936) and Alejandro Korn’s *Apuntes filosóficos* (1935). In Uruguay Carlos Váz Ferreira’s *Fermentario* (1938) and in Costa Rica, Moisés Vincenzi publishes *El hombre máquina* (1938).

15 In Brazil the impact of the recession was relatively milder than elsewhere in Latin America and growth performance over 1929-38 averaged 4.5% per year (Maddison 27). Nevertheless, the world economic crisis of 1929 precipitated the end of Washington Luís’s presidency and the military coup d’état of October 1930 installed Getúlio Vargas as president of a provisional government. With the failure of the democratic promises of Vargas’s regime, and the increase in political repression, by 1937 an uprising in the northeast of the country becomes the catalyst for the justification of a totalitarian regime. However, on November 10, 1937, Vargas dissolved the congress and issued the proclamation of the *Estado Nôvo*, a state building administration in the fascist vein. Vargas’s authoritarian rule from 1937 to 1945 had many ramifications. First, Vargas sought to modernize Brazil, socially and militarily. The *Estado Nôvo* produced a centralized political machine which endeavored to facilitate economic development and modern organization. Censorship covered all media, with the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda or DIP as the avenue for official information. For Daryle Williams “the regime fully integrated cultural programming into the lexicon and practice of federal power, making Brazilian culture a charge of the state” (15). During the first Vargas regime the issue became the official patronage of the meaning of national identity, which not surprisingly conflicted with the ethnic realities of the economically segregated groups of Brazil. The expanding federal agencies concerned with cultural management reflected the “awareness among politicians, educators, artists, intellectuals and everyday citizens that managing culture could be a powerful weapon in managing Brazilianness” (Williams 53). However, the official discourse of cultural unity was consistently contrasted by minority aesthetic manifestations, specifically the afro-brazilian. In this context cultural production becomes a political weapon of palliative and generative proportions. The socioeconomic histories as represented by Halperín Donghi and Williams point to a common sociopolitical denominator in Latin America which Thomas Skidmore in his work corroborates in relation to the response to the Depression: revisionist political paradigms which emphasize the autochthonous. However, as these historians have elucidated, the cultural space constituting the state run institutions and the individual cultural producer, became a powerful sphere from which to enunciate concepts of identity and control. In contrast to the cultural ideologies of social assimilation to the West prevalent in the previous century in the works of amongst others, Argentine president Domingo Sarmiento and Raimundo Nina Rodrigues in Brazil, the advent of the Depression and the atomic age, spurred a more complex Latin Americanism from that of the 19th century.

16 Jorge J. E. Gracia in *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (1985) also highlights how in philosophical thought after Positivism the founders of Latin American philosophy attempted an anthropological return to humanity. These thinkers were “Deústua in Peru, Caso
and Vasconcelso in Mexico, Korn in Argentina, Vaz Ferreira in Uruguay, and Farias Britio in Brazil” (18-9).

17 See Robert O. Ballou's *The Portable World Bible*, in which Ballou explains that Buddhism’s *Four Noble Truths* equate life and suffering, more precisely “all existence involves suffering” (105). Brito, *et. al* Existentialist thinkers are agreed that to exist is a constant state of suffering and agony.

18 The studies of Existential narratives are extensive when the focus is English language literature and different European literatures. However in the context of Spanish language and Portuguese language literature only the following texts have been produced: Rafael Benítez Claros’s *Existencialismo y picaresca* (1958), Gemma Roberts’s *Temas existenciales en la novela española de postguerra* (1978), Oscar Barrero Pérez’s *La novela existencial española de posguerra* (1987) and Francisco Peñas-Bermejo’s *Poesía existencial española del siglo XX* (1993). With a Latinamerican focus we have José Fernández’s *O existencialismo na ficção brasileira* (1986), and the more recent Martin L. Gibas’s *Existential angst in Mario Benedetti’s Montevideanos* (2004) and Miguel Ángel Náter’s *Los demonios de la duda: teatro existencialista hispanoamericano* (2004). As this inventory illustrates a synchronized reading of Latin American Existential literature has not been conducted.


20 I previously documented the work on Onetti’s novel in the 6th endnote. The work on Sábato is equally extensive: Scott Frame’s “Vanishing Point: The World View of Juan Pablo Castel in *El túnel*”, David García Pérez’s “El planteamiento del ethos trágico de Ernesto Sábato en *El túnel*” and Hannelore Hahn’s “*La Metamorfosis* (Die Verwandlung) de Franz Kafka y *El túnel* de Ernesto Sábato”, Hugo Méndez Ramírez’s “El narrador alienado en dos obras claves de la narrativa latinoamericana moderna” and the previously cited William Nelson’s “Sábato’s *El túnel* and the Existential Novel”.

21 Northrop Frye discusses the operational importance of the poet/storyteller in modern times, as guardians of the self in relation to a collective. Frye explains that the exegetical work of the poet is “not to tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place. He gives you the typical […] you wouldn’t go to *Macbeth* to learn about the history of Scotland-you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he’s gained a kingdom and lost his soul […] we constantly find things in literature that suddenly coordinate and bring into focus a great many such impressions” (*Educated* 63-64). In this vein the poet, a subtype of the hero according to Ross Ridge in chapter four of his aforementioned text, becomes both standard-bearer and interpreter of history.

22 José Asunción Silva’s only novel *De sobremesa* was written from 1887-1896 and first published in 1925, twenty-nine years after his well documented suicide. Manuel Díaz Rodríguez’s *Idolos rotos* is published in 1901.

23 José Olivio Jiménez seconds this assessment: “*De sobremesa*, escrito en forma de diario íntimo, más que una novela, es un libro que hay que leer como el testimonio atormentado pero impecable de aquel "fin de siglo angustioso", como allí lo calificara justamente su autor” (139).

24 Anthony Giddens in *Consequences of Modernity* (1990) contends that the phenomenon of Postmodernity is a “radicalization” (51) born of the reflexivity of Modernity, thus negating the so
called exhaustion of the projects of Modernity. This sentiment continues the evolutionary discourse of Jürgen Habermas in “Modernity versus Postmodernity” (1981) for whom the debate concerning the demise of Modernity’s will towards community is exaggerated as: “Modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative. This revolt is one way to neutralize the standard of both, morality and unity” (5). As Habermas contends Modernity’s temporal awareness points to a continuous intersubjectivity, a constant renegotiation/crisis. For Habermas “Societal Modernization” (13) becomes the incredulous superego of the Enlightenment’s project of Modernity and constitutes its reconfiguration but not its exhaustion. The postmodern in this vein becomes the amendment of Bourgeois modernity, also known as Enlightened Modernity, not the annihilation of the spirit of contestation, rebellion, and dissatisfaction with the status quo which remains at the discursive and inspirational core of the idea of Modernity.


26 Existentialism became a prevalent cultural phenomenon after the end of WWII which extended beyond the historical period most associated with it, permeating different social spaces of art, music, literature, and film, becoming parodied and vulgarized as is the case with much of Woody Allen’s emblematic work such as Annie Hall (1977) and Manhattan (1979). Sander H. Lee’s Eighteen Woody Allen Films Analyzed (2002) scrutinizes Allen’s work for its philosophical qualities. Furthermore, a short film inventory finds in Wild Strawberries (Ingmar Bergman 1962), Falling Down (Joel Schumacher 1993), American Psycho (Mary Harron 2000), The man who wasn’t there (Ethan Cohen 2001), and O homem do ano (José Henrique Fonseca 2003) explicit Existential puzzles.

27 Echoes of Nietzsche’s questioning of knowledge and his interest in the individual. For Walter Kaufmann “his concern was primarily with the individual who is not satisfied with accepted formulas…he tried to strengthen the heritage of the Enlightenment with a profound understanding of the irrational…with psychology” (Portable Nietzsche 15-16). For Nietzsche “truths are illusion about which one has forgotten that this is what they are” (On Truth 47). On culture Nietzsche questions the objectivity of the same: “Where have there ever been autochthonous peoples? What is characteristically Greek is much less the result of any disposition than of adapted institutions and of the language that has been accepted” (Notes 1875, VII 193).

28 To begin to synopsize the Latin American cultural and literary discourses in the 20th century a convincing argument can be made for the continuous thematic of identity, oscillating between Americanist and universalist tendencies. Granted, this cultural identity argument is not the patrimony of the 20th century, since an Americanist impulse can be traced from the earliest days of Latin American independence in the work of Simón Bolívar, Andrés Bello and Juan Batista Alberdi, for whom the central concern need be our own “in the hope of being effective…eliminating from this what seems to be least applicable to the social needs of our country. For it is precisely the satisfaction of these needs which must dictate the contents of our philosophy” (qtd in Zea “Philosophy and Thought in Latin America” 5-6). Now the so called universal tendency corresponds to the constant desire to know and understand the autochthonous vis-à-vis the global framework from which and against which the Latin American has had to define itself (better still been defined). Although even this understanding of universal is problematic for the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges who in a Nietzschean vein professes that “no hay clasificación del universo que no sea arbitraria y conjectural. La razón es muy simple; no sabemos que cosa es el universo” (Obras completas 142-43). Donald Shaw views this will towards the cosmopolitan as representative of a propensity to negotiate a personal space of enunciation within the cacophony of the Occident: “el primero de tal imperativos es, desde luego, el de ir produciendo novelas genuinamente autóctonas que reflejen la situación humana tal como es en América: es decir, buscar lo universal en un contexto específicamente americano” (13). The problematic for the Latin American writers lies in the palpable inferiority complex in relation to
occident. For the Latin Americanist knowing the self meant having a double consciousness of dealing with the European legacy and harnessing the experiences within Latin America. Carlos Alonso assesses this symbiotic relationship in Latin America as a dominant characteristic of the ambivalent cultural rhetoric in Latin America: “the Spanish American text argues strenuously for modernity, while it signals simultaneously in a number of ways its distance” (25-6). Antonio Candido seconds this judgment, as he argues that “se fosse possível estabelecer uma lei de evolução da nossa vida espiritual, poderíamos talvez dizer que tôda ela se rege pela dialética do localismo e do cosmopolitismo...o que temos realizado de mais perfeito...representa os momentos de equilíbrio ideal entre as duas tendências” (131). The debates persist in the 21st Century.

29 The Mexican Leopoldo Zea begins “En torno a una filosofía americana” by questioning the pejorative occidental world view of the existence of a philosophy in the Americas. However, Zea posits that contrary to its being viewed as literature, or as mimetic ethos, it is in fact a pragmatic philosophy which undertakes the interrogatories of Latin American culture in its context: “Este tema es el de la posibilidad o imposibilidad de una Cultura Americana, y como aspecto parcial del mismo, el de la posibilidad o imposibilidad de una Filosofía Americana”. Latin American culture and philosophy are tangible endeavors to pursue, and demand a space of enunciation alongside other universal [read First World] discourses of identity. For Zea an inferiority complex is born in Latin American thought because of the perceived mimicry of foreign concepts. However, to combat this inferiority demands an accountability of our history and our circumstance: “El ser conscientes de nuestras verdaderas relaciones con la Cultura Europea, elimina todo sentimiento de inferioridad, dando lugar a un sentimiento de responsabilidad[...] El hombre americano se sabe heredero de la Cultura Occidental y reclama su puesto en ella”. Zea puts forth that to speak of a culture in Latin America would necessitate the engagement in the universal space of the Existential but with a consciousness of the “circunstancia americana”.

The Bolivian Guillermo Francovich makes a similar argument in his “El humanismo latino-americano” from 1944 is the present state of affairs of Latin America vis-à-vis the chaos in Europe. For Francovich the “porvenir de la cultura en los países latino-americanos” highlights the immediacy of the Latin-American question as an intellectual topic. Francovich begins by constructing a genealogy of Latin American thought, which has taken up specifically the question of culture, its existence and its configuration in Latin America. As Francovich illustrates, the question of Latin-American culture has its advocates for sovereignty as is the case of the Bolivian Franz Tamayo’s Hacia la Creación de una Pedagogía Nacional, de Franz Tamayo (1910) and those which promoter a reconciliation Argentine Ricardo Rojas Eurindia (1924). For the Bolivian philosopher, the cultural emancipation of Latin-America as a whole is conditioned on the expropriation of an autochthonous legacy, through what he calls moral mestizaje, by which he suggests an “auténtica existencia” for Latin-America is possible. For Francovich, a cultural project commencing at ground zero is not feasible, what is viable is the understanding of the Latin-American subject “a sí mismos por sí mismos y no a través de los extranjeros, para de ese modo tener el pleno señorío de su propia conciencia y de su propio ser”. The works cited here are taken from “Proyecto Ensayo Hispanico”. See bibliography for direct links.

30 Henceforth, titles will be shortened to Laberinto for Labrador Ruiz’s novel, Niebla and Amortajada, for Bombal’s texts.

31 Humberto Piñera Llera was born in Cárdenas, Cuba in 1911 and passed away in Houston, Texas in 1986 after twenty-six years in exile. Piñera Llera took his doctorate degree in philosophy from the Universidad de La Habana in 1942. In 1945 he is a founding member of “Grupo filosófico-científico de La Habana”, which became “Sociedad Cubana de Filosofía” in 1948, for whom he was an editor for Revista Cubana de Filosofía (1946-1958). After fleeing the Castro regime, Piñera Llera took a faculty position at New York University in the Department of Spanish


33 Cuban journalist, novelist, essayist, short story writer, and poet, Enrique Labrador Ruiz (1902-1991) received numerous awards for his literary works, including Cuba's prestigious Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1950 for his novel, Sangre ambrienta. Labrador Ruiz was a member of the Academia Cubana de la Lengua and of the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española. <http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cubanHeritage/chc0111/>.


Labrador Ruiz sought political refuge in Spain after the Castro regime took control of Cuba, subsequently he moved to Miami where he lived until his death in 1991.

34 Laberinto became the first part of the Cresival (1936) and Anteo (1939) philosophical novel series for Labrador Ruiz.

35 Reinaldo Sánchez’s Homenaje a Enrique Labrador Ruiz (1981), as the title suggests, revisits the Cuban author’s extensive work. The various texts from Sánchez’s edition shed light on Labrador’s immense contribution and well-deserved place amongst the renovators of the novel in Latin America. Many of the contributions in Sanchez’s text will appear throughout this chapter.

36 Raimundo Lazo seconds this analysis when he states that “la mayor y esencialmente la única revolución estilística en la novela, sobre todo en su estructura y modos de expresión, lo realiza Enrique Labrador Ruiz” (203).

37 This in no way means that Labrador Ruiz's work is solitary, but rather forms part of the alienated individual narratives which begin to emerge from the historical avant-garde era and project into the following decades. See introduction.

38 Sartre provides a succinct definition of mauvaise foi: “To be sure, the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth […] consciousness affects itself with bad faith. There must be an original intention and a project of bad faith” (Being 139-40). The poet protagonist fights against falling into bad faith by confronting himself constantly. Also see my article "Existential(ist) Echoes: Bad Faith Poetics in The Family of Pascual Duarte" (2009), where I discuss bad faith at length.

39 The prologue to Cresival is without pagination. For the purposes of cross referencing I have numbered the prologue i-xi. The following page number references are based on the aforementioned number sequence.

40 Elio AlbaBuffill posits that thematically Labrador Ruiz’s work “proviene más de su admiración por la obra de Franz Kafka y de la repercusión en el pensamiento universal de esos tiempos de las doctrinas de Kierkegaard y del movimiento existencialista francés” (30). However, while placing Labrador Ruiz as a tributary to Kafka and Kierkegaard establishes the philosophical
legacy into which to insert Laberinto, properly speaking Labrador Ruiz’s work anticipates the French by a decade.

41 For his part, Unamuno viewed Niebla as equally tragic, comic, and fantastic. This poetic plurality for Unamuno accounted for its popularity: “¿Por qué esta predilección? ¿Por qué ha prendido en pueblos de otras lenguas antes que otras obras mías esta a que el traductor alemán Otto Buck llamó «novela fantástica» y el norteamericano Warner Pite «novela tragicómica»? Precisamente por la fantasía y por la tragicomedia. Yo no me equivoqué, pues desde un principio supuse –y lo dije– que esta que bauticé de nivola habría de ser mi obra más universalizada” (90).

42 My use of the concept of logotherapy is grounded in the etymology of the word, as the protagonist's confrontation with himself and the Existential renegotiation of the self through the logos, which is to through words, both spoken and written. Both Unamuno's Augusto Pérez and Labrador Ruiz's anonymous narrator engage in in-depth conversations, which appear as dialogues and written memories. In this respect, my use of logotherapy differs from the psychological- anthropological model developed by Viktor Frankl in the late 1930s, which has become the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy: As per the school's website, Logotherapy is to be understood “in the sense of “meaning”; the equally valid translations, “word” or “rational order” are not helpful in explaining the tenets of LTEA. In particular, the logotherapist is not attempting to persuade the client by logical reasoning; rather, they assist the clients in detecting their specific and individual meaning”. Taken from The Viktor Frankl Institute. “Logotherapy.” <http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/logotherapy.html>. A clearly distinctive definition of Logotherapy, from my own, is Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary which defines it as "a highly directive Existential psychotherapy that emphasizes the importance of meaning in the patient's life especially as gained through spiritual values". “Logotherapy.” Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, Inc. 06 Feb. 2009. < http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Logotherapy>.

43 Laberinto appears during the political unrest of the Gerardo Machado Morales presidency (1925-1933). As the University of Miami’s Cuban Heritage Collection explains: "His presidency ended when, after several years of unrest and increasing opposition, Machado was forced into exile in 1933." < http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cubanHeritage/chc0336/>

44 For a detailed study of the ubiquitous presence of the labyrinth in Latin American literature, see Sarrocchi Carreno, Augusto C. "El Laberinto y la Literatura." Revista signos 31 (1998): 113-124. Sarrocchi’s focus is the use of the labyrinth in Borgean literature; however, he provides a history of its appearance in literature of the Americas.

45 The more obvious uses of the labyrinthine symbol are found in Jorge Luis Borges's work: "un laberinto es una casa labrada para confundir a los hombres; su arquitectura, pródiga en simetrías, está subordinada a ese fin" ("El inmortal"). The Greek symbol is also implicit in Graciliano Ramos's Angústia (1936), Josué Montello O labirinto do espelhos (1952), Octavio Paz’s El laberinto de la soledad (1950) and Gabriel García Márquez's El general en su laberinto (1989).

46 Parsifal is Richard Wagner's last opera composed between 1877–1882. Parsifal is inspired by the Arthurian Romance centered on a knight seeking the Holy Grail. It is comparable to Parzival or Parsifal in Teutonic legend. As Molinero has noted, the protagonist of Labrador Ruiz’s second novel was meant to carry the hero’s name but “un olvido involuntario y la confusion con una medicina lo convierten en Cresival” (43).

47 It is worth mentioning that Borges’s Minotaur in “La casa de Asterión” (1949) is recast in a positive light. In Borges's retelling of the myth, the Asterión (as the Minotaur creature was known in Crete), was a reflexive being. In fact, as the Theseus character attests, Asterion found solice in death and in fact: “no me duele la soledad, porque sé que vive mi redeentor y al fin se levantará
sobre el polvo […] El sol de la mañana reverberó en la espada de bronce. Ya no quedaba ni un vestigio de sangre." - ¿Lo creerás, Ariadna? - dijo Teseo. - El minotauro apenas se defendió."

< http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/cuentos/esp/borges/casade.htm>

48 Naturally, I am referring to the renowned German poet, dramatist and scientist Wolfgang Goethe’s infamous *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). While such character analogies may seem superfluous at first, drawing a thematic and discursive bridge with the Goethean poet and Labrador Ruiz’s *Laberinto* can be critically productive. Key character behavior in *Laberinto* becomes clear within the context of the Cuban’s recasting of the German’s novel. Goethe’s text conceptualizes the artisan of language left only to his craft as a means of safeguarding his sanity and dignity. The relevantly young age of the poet of Labrador Ruiz’s narrative makes me hypothesize that the construction of *Laberinto*’s protagonist as an artist in a struggle with his pain is neither ornamental nor gratuitous. In fact, Labrador Ruiz’s anonymous poet appears to ring true as a modernization of Goethe’s young *Werther*.

49 Goethe’s novel epitomized German *Sturm und Drang* movement (an anti-enlightenment/anti Classism which favored inspiration to reason). *Werther* would inspire future generations of writers in Spain and Latin America because of its morbid romanticism. See Cary J. Davis’s "Goethe and Spain." Hartwig Miscellany (1952) and Paul Patrick Rogers’s "A Note on Bécquer and Clavigo." Hispanic Review 8.1 (1940) for insight on the reverberations of Goethe in the Hispanic letters. Also see the archeological work of Udo Rukser’s *Goethe en el mundo hispánico* (1958). Rukser explains that Goethe’s novel enjoyed immense popularity and proliferation with translations into English, French, and Italian which appeared shortly after the initial publication. The Spanish translation would not appear until 1800, however the positive reception of Goethe’s novel was first attested to not in Spain but in Labrador Ruiz’s native land: “La primera toma de posición con respecto a la obra […] proviene no de España, sino de Cuba, a cuyo importante papel mediador he aludido ya reiteradamente. Allí como en la revista *La Moda*, en 1829 […] Domingo del Monte y Aponte […] El breve artículo se declara sin reservas a favor de la obra y elogia la descripción artística tanto de los personajes como del paisaje, afirmando que se trata de algo nuevo y peculiar […] algunos giros permiten creer que Werther era entonces muy leído en Cuba” (99). In fact, Latin American thinkers’ continued fascination with Goethe’s confessional prose is palpable as early as the first decade of the 20th century, with Alfonso Reyes’s “Sobre la simetría en la estética de Goethe” (1910) and again in 1932’s “Rumbo a Goethe”, which appear in volume XXVI of Reyes’s *Obras Completas*, the Mexican critic praised Goethe’s ability to “poner la totalidad del ser en todos los actos, sin dividir jamais el pensamiento del sentimiento. Para recrearse en el todo, solía decir, hay que descubrir el todo en lo diminuto […] desconfiando siempre de las recetas y dejando que el espíritu se espaciera entre todas las solicitudes del momento: poesía, ciencia, crítica” (94-95).

50 In this capacity, *Laberinto*’s protagonist also differs from both middle aged protagonists in Doestoevski’s *Underground Man* (1864) and Onetti’s *El pozo* (1939), the canonical Existential novels in Europe and Latin American, respectively. A compelling argument could be made to describe Labrador Ruiz’s protagonist as an Existentialist poet as a young man, in the tradition of James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

51 The Real Academia Española defines “peripatético/a” firstly as “que sigue la filosofía o doctrina de Aristóteles” and finally as “ridículo o extravagante en sus dictámenes o máximas”. The contradictory definitions associated with the term characterize Teresa’s behavior throughout. I would place special emphasize on the term’s association with philosophy in general, and given Teresa’s propensity to expound philosophically its use is ambiguously telling of her personality.

52 In Guus Houtzager’s *The Complete Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology* (2003) Actæon “was the son of Aristæus and Autonoë” and because he accidentally saw Artemis bathing naked, “in order
to prevent Actæon spreading the news that he had seen her naked, she changed him into a stag. In this form, Actæon was shortly thereafter torn to pieces by his own hounds" (29).

53 My use of the term differs from the Baudelairian flâneur who: "gazes upon the landscapes of the great city –landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun. He delights in fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertise of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the woman, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed– in a word, he delights in universal life" (10). Clearly Baudelaire’s flâneur is a romantic, removed from the visceral existence which weighs on Labrador Ruiz's protagonist. In contrast to the Baudelairian dandy, Laberinto’s flâneur intake of the city is anguished by the abject decay which surrounds him. In this vein, Sylvia Molloy's take on the Borgean flâneur is more relevant, when she explains that the texts which house these city drifters are "organizados en torno a un yo errante que percibe la ciudad y, en esa percepción, se percibe a sí mismo" (487).

54 The term doppelgänger was coined by Jean Paul Richter in Siebenkäs (1796) in which, for Juan Bargalló Carreté “el desdoblamiento quizás no suponga más que una metáfora de esa antítesis o de esa oposición de contrarios, cada uno de los cuales encuentra en el otro su propio complemento; de lo que resultaría que el desdoblamiento (la aparición de ‘el otro’) no sería más que el reconocimiento de la propia indigencia, del vacío que experimenta el ser en el fondo de sí mismo y de la búsqueda del ‘otro’ para intentar llenarlo; en otras palabras, la aparición del doble sería en último término, la materialización del ansia de vivir frente al ansia de la muerte” (11). The proliferation of narrative doubles is due in large part to its discursive malleability: “Indeed the ‘value’ of the double has seemed to reside in its resistance to definition, in its ‘escapist’ qualities, in the possibility it offers to the individual to imagine his self and reproduce himself in endless ways” (Živković 122). See Lubomir Doležel's "A Semantics for Thematics: The Case of the Double" for the structure of the double in literature and its various functions.

55 Clarence Finlayson was born in Valparaíso, Chile in 1913. Finlayson's philosophical thought is described as centered on "problemáticas existenciales, ontológicas y religiosas, en las que los temas de la angustia, el sentido de la vida humana, la muerte y el amor cobraron particular importancia. Sin embargo, no dejó de lado la oportunidad de reflexionar en torno a las corrientes filosóficas europeas como la fenomenología y el existencialismo".

In 1942 he begins his extensive career in academia at Swarthmore College (USA). From 1943 to 1947, Finlayson is part of the faculty at the Universidad Católica Bolivariana (Bolivia) and Universidad de Antioquia (Colombia). His primary texts are Aristóteles y la filosofía moderna (1936), Analítica de la contemplación (1937), Intuición del ser o experiencia metafísica (1938), Mundo y Dios (1940) and Dios y la filosofía (1945). The epigraph is taken from Finlayson's “Notas fenomenológicas sobre el amor” (1945).

56 Beauvoir The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947). The French philosopher concludes that such a revolt, uncovers the performativity of the oppressor who “camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature” (83).

57 Niebla and Amortajada appeared together for the first time in the Seix Barral edition in 1984. The English translation of Bombal's novel, in its extended form, appeared in the University of Texas Press edition as The House of Mist and the Shrouded Woman (1995). Two unpublished theses approach the Chilean's novels jointly, Roberto L. Lazo's “Naturaleza, escapismo y femenismo en La última niebla y La amortajada de María Luisa Bombal” (1982) and Aurelia Marie Contreras’s "Un análisis comparativo de dos novelas de María Luisa Bombal: La última niebla y La amortajada" (1987). However, the joint análisis of these novels is evident as early as 1941 in Ricardo Latcham's "La última niebla y La amortajada, por María Luisa Bombal", La Nación, 14-XII-1941. Marjorie Agosín has been the most prominent proponent of reading María Luisa
Bombal's work in conjunction. See Agosín's "Aproximaciones a una trilogía en la narrativa de María Luisa Bombal" (1984) and "María Luisa Bombal o el lenguaje alucinado" (1995). Also see Ivette Malverde Disselkoen's "De la última niebla y la amortajada a la brecha" (1989) and Carlos Ferreiro González's "Sensualidad y onirismo: Claves estructurales en la escritura de María Luisa Bombal" (2002).

58 The bibliography of these analytical approaches to Bombal's novels is extensive, and emblematic of the era's aesthetic fingerprint. For example, the earliest critical assessments such as Amado Alonso highlighted the avant-garde attitudes of Bombal's La última niebla in his essay "Aparicion de una novelista" (1936), likewise Arturo Torres-Rioseco's "El nuevo estilo en la novela" (1941). The feminist readings date back to the 1970s with Linda Gould Levine's "María Luisa Bombal from a Feminist Perspective" (1974) and Hernán Vidal María Luisa Bombal: La feminidad enajenada (1976). However, these two perspectives continue to dominate the Bombal readings as evidenced by Marjorie Agosín's "Espacio y Lenguaje Feminocéntrico En Tres Obras De María Luisa Bombal" (1985), Elizabeth Garrels's "Ver y Ser Vista: La Mirada Fálica En La Ultima Niebla" (1991) and Dolores DeLuise's "The Work of the Woman Writer: From Inside to Outside in the Final Mist by Maria Luisa Bombal" (1993). "Contemporary" Surrealist readings include Alberto Rábago's "Elementos Surrealistas En La última niebla" (1981) and Adriana Méndez Rodenas's "El Lenguaje De Los Sueños En La última niebla: La Metáfora Del Eros" (1994) to list a few.

59 Marjorie Agosín has studied the confrontation between the protagonist and the world, underscoring how the anonymous narrator "ordena y como se desliza por el único mundo que para ella es real: el mundo de la mente" (Desterradas 29).

60 As has been well documented Bombal wrote Niebla while at Pablo Neruda's home in the Argentine capital. The Chilean Nobel Laurate was, for his part, working on a collection of poems which became Residencia en la tierra, his ground breaking esoteric surrealist masterpiece. Among the literary legacy which informs Bombal's novels, the own author has been forthcomng: "Mi vida literaria comenzó con el embrujo de Andersen, con el hallazgo de Victoria de Knut Hamsun; con ese imposible del amor: Werther, de Goethe, ese mismo que se iría desdibujando con los años, por su estiramiento y retórica" (qtd. in Guerra-Cunningham Desterradas: 14).

61 For Camus an absurd revolt is a matter of facing this fundamental contradiction and maintaining constant awareness of it. Facing the absurd does not entail suicide, but, on the contrary, allows us to live life to its fullest in a constant situation of unrest: "But I know that in order to keep alive, the absurd cannot be settled. It escapes suicide to the extent that it is simultaneously awareness and rejection of death...That revolt gives life its value" (40).


63 See endnote fifty-two, in chapter I, where I discuss the double in literature.

64 Finlayson suggests that love creates reality: "El amor centraliza en el sujeto las capas ónticas de toda su realidad personal y a ello se debe 'el olvido' de las demás cosas foráneas [...] a medida que se intensifica el amor [...] surgen nuevas y renovadas capas ónticas y metafísicas traídas desde el fondo del amor-creador a su modo- según aquello de que el amor trae nuevo conocimiento" (Notas 244). In Niebla, the protagonist creates through passion.

65 See endnote #36 for a definition of bad faith.
Andrés, the gardener's son, dies in a tragic fishing accident in a scene fourteen of chapter two of *Niebla*.

Magali Fernández holds that the mist is associable with "la parte hostil de la circunstancia que rodea a la protagonista: el silencio, la lluvia, el espacio cerrado de la casa y la oscuridad" (104).

Alexander J. Argyros also conducts an Existential interpretation of a controversial ending. The text in question is Jean-Paul Sartre's 1937 short story, *Le mur*. In "The Wall", Sartre chronicles the story of a Spanish republican political prisoner condemned to execution. The story has been repeatedly criticized for its theatrical ending, in which the protagonist Pablo is momentarily saved from execution by the very attempt to humiliate his captures. However, for Argyros the finale is a virtue: "I am suggesting that it's theatricality, it unabashed fictiveness, is its strength. It's as if "The Wall" were telling the reader that the unlimited futural projection posited by Sartre as the essence of Human-reality's freedom is inimical to fiction" (51).

Guerra-Cunningham references the long literary history of employing the voyage motif as a means of character development. See footnote twelve of "Función y sentido de la muerte en *La amortajada* de María Luisa Bombal" (1978).

John Warden's *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth* (1982) recapitulates various versions of the myth from antiquity to the Renaissance: "Virgil’s is the first surviving account of Orfeu and Euridice which specifically focuses on his failure to recover her entirely" (27). Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942) substantiates that Virgil is the principal source for the modern version of the myth. Orpheus appears in *Georgics* IV: 453-527 and in *Metamorphoses* X: 1-85. He was the greatest musician and poet of Greek myth, and his songs could control nature. He formed part of the Argonauts and his powers were vital in the attainment of the Golden Fleece. As A.N. Marlow explains "it was by his playing that the Symplegadæ or clashing rocks in the Hellespont were fixed in their place...the dragon itself which guarded the golden fleece was lulled to sleep by him" (363).

Ron Leadbetter, describes Erebus as "primordial darkness, the son of Chaos (who was the void from which all things developed, known also as Darkness). According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Erebus was born with Nyx (Night), and was the father of Aether (the bright upper atmosphere) and Hemera (Day). Charon, the ferry-man who took the dead over the rivers of the infernal region, is also said to be the son of Erebus and Nyx".

See introduction pages 16-17, were I discuss the Heideggeran concept of Existential temporality.

All quotes are from the 1995 University of Texas Press Edition.

Ángeles Cardona de Gilbert, in the prologue to Vidal's book finds that the Chilean critic has pinpointed the deeper cultural problems showcased in Bombal's work: "Hernán Vidal atribuye la culpa de conductas desacertadas, de reacciones inconcebibles..., en último extremo, de una clara neurosis colectiva dentro del elemento femenino que nos presenta María Luisa Bombal al orden burgués imperante, lo cual desarrolla la falta de control que el símbolo medusino representa y desemboca en una insana conducta femenina a nivel individual y social" (23).

Albert describes the anti-hero's self-justification in the following manner: "I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (91).
In Ian Stewart’s *Does God Play Dice?* (1989), the British thinker uses a metaphor to explain the hidden order within an absurdly organized universe: "The flapping of a single butterfly's wing today produces a tiny change in the state of the atmosphere. Over a period of time, what the atmosphere actually does diverges from what it would have done. So, in a month's time, a tornado that would have devastated the Indonesian coast doesn't happen. Or maybe one that wasn't going to happen, does" (141).

Naturally, I am referring to the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas's well known "*Do not go gentle into that good night*" (1951): "Do not go gentle into that good night / Old age should burn and rave at close of day / Rage, rage against the dying of the light…". The Academy of American Poets. <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15377>.

Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez in "Vicente Ferreira da Silva: O homem e a sua obra" provides a succinct bibliographical note on the Brazilian philosopher: "nasceu em São Paulo, em 10 de janeiro de 1916 e morreu prematuramente de acidente de automóvel na mesma cidade, em 19 de julho de 1963, aos 47 anos de idade. Formou-se em Direito na Faculdade do Largo de São Francisco, da sua cidade natal, mas nunca exerceu a profissão de advogado, tendo-se dedicado inteiramente à meditação filosófica e à vida acadêmica, atividade que exerceu, aliás, com total desprendimento, através de cursos livres que oferecia no Colégio Livre de Estudos Superiores, que fundou em São Paulo no ano de 1945". The following essay can be assessed at the Archive of Iberian and Latin American Philosophers and Essayists which is part of the Proyecto Ensayo Hispánico. <http://www.ensayistas.org/filosofos/brasil/silva/introd.htm>

Da Silva’s epigraph is taken from “Meditação sôbre a morte” from his text *Ensaios filosóficos* (1948) and centers on the liberating skepticism of the death puzzle, the unknowability of humanity’s one certainty becomes an unexpected ally for man in search of peace: “Esta confiança é contrária ao desafio do conhecimento, é o sentimento esperançoso e tranqüilo que, como o núcleo do nosso ser, se opõe ao terror do aniquilamento” (28). The Brazilian furthers the argument by highlighting the egalitarian quality of death, devoid of hierarchies.

In Kierkegaard’s posthumously published *The Point of View* (1859) the Dane is advocating the reemergence of the individual: “On the other hand, they do not reflect that anonymity would be counteracted in the simplest possible way […] if people would but turn back again to antiquity and learn what it means to be a single individual man, neither more nor less—which surely even an author is too, neither more nor less” (44), this return is the charge of art and philosophy.

In keeping with Brazilian custom, Graciliano Ramos will be referred to by his first name. All subsequent quotes are taken from the 1975 edition published by Livraria Martins Editora, São Paulo.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* (1998) also ascribes to chaos theory as a cultural phenomenon. For Benítez-Rojo, chaos encapsulates the social fabric of the Caribbean which "show themselves within the marginal, the regional, the incoherent, the heterogeneous [...] that coexists with us in our everyday world" (3).

According to Ronald M. Harmon extenuating circumstances could be at the heart of the novel's juggernaut speed: "Graciliano Ramos escreveu *Angústia* entre fins de 1934 e começos de 1936 [...] A prisão de numerosas pessoas consideradas inimigos de Vargas tingiu Graciliano Ramos em março de 1936. Consciente do perigo que corria, Graciliano se apressou a terminar *Angústia* e entregou o manuscrito a datilógrafo na manhã do dia em que ficou preso" (67).

*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the concept of chaos by stipulating that “in general deterministic systems are chaotic systems, even initial states very close to one another will lead in short intervals of time to future states that diverge quickly from one another. Chaos
theory has been developed to provide a wide range of concepts useful for describing the structure of such chaotic systems" (703).

84 Celso Lemos de Oliveira is less judgemental and explains that "the final turn in Anguish comes with Luís da Silva's collapse into delirium [...] Luís is now completely outside clock time; he measures time at all only by a ray of light that moves down a wall, across a narrow bed, some metres of brick, and up another wall. Otherwise there is darkness" (85).

85 For Koser "Angústia, de Graciliano Ramos, es una especie de diario mental, no fechado [sic], escrito en primera persona. Sin duda, es una novela de raigambre existencial por su estilo y por su tónica" (73). Lemos echoes Koser when he states that "Anguish obviously fits in a modern tradition of fiction that we can call Existential." The ancestor (or at least the convenient starting point) for the tradition is Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground (1864). In the line of descent are such works as Jean-Paul Sartre's Nausea and, in the United States, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man" (75).

86 Lemos explains that this is "phenomenological in the modern philosophical sense; that is, it is an analysis of consciousness by way of a direct description of images or phenomena as the mind intuits them" (71).

87 As Lemos explains "he is a kind of Everyman - Graciliano deliberately gave him an "insignificant" name roughly equivalent to Smith" (70).

88 Randal Johnson has highlighted how Graciliano's novel captures a time of "dramatic transformation in Brazilian society and culture," which marked the first decades of the twentieth century, "as processes of industrialization, urbanization and modernization accelerated their inexorable march. In political terms, liberal democracy, implemented imperfectly with the Republic in 1889, saw an early demise with the revolution of 1930, which led to fifteen years of authoritarian rule under Getúlio Vargas" (126).

89 Johnson has made a similar point: "The ramblings of the tortured narrator of Angústia (1936: Anguish) create a Dostoevsky-like atmosphere of crime, guilt and Existential anguish" (129).

90 Noel de Medeiros Rosa (December 11, 1910 - May 4, 1937) was a Brazilian singer/songwriter who infused Afro-Brazilian samba with an urban cynicism, in the process creating with his music ironic social commentaries. José Ramos Tinhorão explains that this was possible because: "Noel Rosa e seu grupo viviam em um tempo em que as classes baixa e média da Cidade, embora já o suficientemente distanciadas, a ponto de não se confundirem, coexistiam, por assim dizer, em uma mesma área urbana [...] essa promiscuidade vitalizadora –desaparecida, principalmente em Copacabana, depois de 1945, com a invasão dos edifícios de apartamentos- permitia aos novos filhos de família, desde as brincadeiras de infância, entrar em contato com os meninos filhos de pobres" (45). Rosa's compositions from the 1920s and 1930s, and which I use as subtitles, synthesize the problematic of each section.

91 Camarani reads the rapid-fire narration as Luís da Silva's exercise of free association: "Através do monologo interior o personagem vai associando as idéias livremente, conforme lhe vem à mente, de acordo com o que vê, ouve e pensa" (67).

92 Angústia in several instances interpalates a narratee, who is addressed directly by the narrator

93 Pablo Del Barco provides a naturalist reading of Luís da Silva, for the critic da Silva "es una consecuencia social; un mal resultado de un mundo en crisis" (103).
Harmon has pointed out that "um passatempo de Luís era fazer anagramas, o fato de que o nome Julião Tavares é um anagrama quase perfeito do nome Getúlio Vargas nos conduz a considerar a intenção ideológica de Angústia em bem outro plano" (70), that is to say, the politically conscious aspect of Graciliano’s novel.

Another possibility is that Marina is seen as a Medusa by Luís, a fearsome seductress he must confront and defeat; however, I believe that the symbols allude more to the Orphic myth.

Ensaiofilosóficos first appeared through the publishing house Progresso in São Paulo in 1948. All subsequent quotes are taken from the 1964 edition of Vicente Ferreira da Silva: Obras Completas, which includes a prologue by Miguel Reale.

Sartre makes a similar point: "the choice is man’s as to whether or not he will accept and nourish the values which his history has developed and passed on to him" (Being 658).

Graciliano is portraying Luís da Silva’s father as a Brazilian Alonso Quijano. Cervantes describes his protagonist in the following fashion: "Es, pues, de saber que este sobredicho hidalgo, los ratos que estaba ocioso, que eran los más del año, se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza, y aun la administración de su hacienda" (86).

Camarani cites Antonio Cândido’s preface to Caetés and O.M. Carpeaux’s preface to Angústia as similar oniric interpretations of Graciliano Ramos’s novels. For Cândido the reader is submerged in “um longo pesadelo” (35, qtd. in Camarani: 63) in the nordestino’s world, while Carpeaux asserts that “os romances de Graciliano Ramos se passam no sonho” (13, qtd. in Camarani: 63).

For Harmon, this self-awareness is applicable to the novel as a whole, as Graciliano’s text showcases "a trágica luta do indivíduo perante as cruéis circunstâncias e vicissitudes da vida [...] portanto, identificar esses romances como obras essencialmente filosóficas e universais" (66).

According to Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa, "Lambisgóia" means "mulher delambida, mexeriqueira, pessoa intrometida" (854).

The protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man fits into the fraternity, except that he is not a public servant. Also, Ellison’s anti-hero, unlike the other Existential anti-heroes I have mentioned, is a societal outcast because of his ethnicity.

Schade continues with this condescending view of Marina, categorizing her "a beautiful but shallow girl" (394).

Bosi recognizes that the world of Luís da Silva, as the protagonist perceives it, is “um meio onde o que não é recalque é safadeza” (455).

Moraes Augusto makes a similar point concerning Julião’s death, emphasizing Luís’s conscious state of mind: “Aqui também e a morte, o elemento conscientizador do indivíduo.
Diante do crime, que termina com a morte de Julia Tavares, Luís da Silva torna-se um homem consciente do abismo intransponível que existe entre ele e o mundo; entre suas aspirações e a incapacidade do mundo em satisfazê-las" (34).

106 As early as chapter thirty-three Luís debates the merits of killing Julião, a sign of a calculative mind: "Que é que me podia acontecer? Ir para a cadeia, ser processado e condenado, perder o emprego, cumprir sentença. A vida na prisão não seria pior que a que eu tinha"(148).

107 In chapter thirty-five, Luís's recrimination of Marina's betrayal falls short and he can only muster part of the biblical verse he wanted to use to scold her brazen amorality: “Bem-aventurados os que têm sede de justiça... E o resto?"(168), this verse is a clear reference to Mark 5:6.

108 The Wandering Jew was condemned to roam the earth for taunting Jesus on the way to crucifixion. Part of this legend is based on Matthew 16:28: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Analogous passages are found in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. See Archer Taylor's "Notes on the Wandering Jew" for a bibliography of the appearances of the Wandering Jew in distinct literatures. Also see W. M. S. Russell and Katharine M. Briggs's "The Legends of Lilith and of the Wandering Jew in Nineteenth-Century Literature" for the origins of these Christian legends. For Russell "the Wandering Jew is, in almost all its forms, the story of the regeneration of a soul, of penitence and a hard long service rendered to humanity" (137).

109 Orrego Arismendi echos a similar position because it is "la voz y las maneras verbosas del gordo lo que el redactor no soporta. La obsesión de da Silva, inofensiva mientras solo anida en su cabeza, rebosa cuando la idea repudiad se materializa en un objeto" (76).

110 Moraes Augusto categorizes Graciliano's work as "fruto de uma reflexão e de um posicionamento ontológico - existencial do homem frente à vida e a morte; o mundo, o individuo e os outros" (10).

111 I am eternally grateful to Dr. Maria das Graças de Moraes Augusto, Professor Associado of Filosofia Antiga at the Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais-UFRJ. Dr. Moraes Augusto provided a copy of her doctoral dissertation shortly before her year long research sabbatical to Greece, in it she collects samples of Graciliano's unedited texts: "Em Palmeira dos Índios, pudemos consultar a coleção completa do jornal "O Índio", semanário editado nesta cidade nos anos de 1921 a 1922 pelo Padre Macedo e cuja redação estava instalada na sala contígua à Sala Paroquial. Graciliano colaborou neste semanário sob diferentes pseudônimos (J. Calixto, Anastácio Anacleto, Lamba, etc.), até o número 14" (80).

112 From Schopenhauer as Educator (1874).

113 Shaw goes on to provide an inventory of texts from the 1940s, citing Borges's Ficciones (1941), Onetti's Para esta noche (1943), and Asturias's El Señor Presidente (1946), among others. Ironically he concludes "parece mentira agora que críticos tan inteligentes como Luis Monguíó y Ángel Flores eligiesen los primeros años de los 50 para quejarse del estancamiento de la novela en Hispanoamérica" (20). I agree wholeheartedly with Shaw's statement.

114 Here Freud argues that humanity through their behavior reveal their underlying propulsive desires, or as he terms it the "programme of the pleasure principal" (25). The inability to sustain the "programme" manifests itself in the individual’s anguished existence. Collectively humanity's aspiration for this "oceanic feeling" (21), points to a will to self-determinism. This truncated want for singularity in a communal setting is precisely what according to Freud is both cause and effect of the discontent in society and the individual.
The connotation is clear; poetry reinvented for the anonymous poet in Labrador Ruiz's novel is curative. This brings to mind Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* who explains that "Art alone can turn those thoughts of disgust at the horror or absurdity of existence" (60).

Among the characters that Grau Lieveria analyzes, which I consider literary precursors, is Rosario from Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo's *La muñeca* (1895) who the Catalan critic explains "no acepta la imposición de Julián que la define en sus terminus y desde su propia perspective. Ella ni se considera mala ni inconsciente ni desalmada y no está dispuesta a dejar en silencio su opinión" (65). Also included are Teresa and Laura from María Enriqueta Camarillo y Roa's *Jirón de mundo* (1918) who are described as "seres hipersen sibles, raros, que rechazan la sociedad materialista en que las ha tocado vivir y buscan refugio en un mundo creado por ellas donde se privilegian los sentimientos de tristeza y de dolor animicos. Ante estos sentimientos, ellos se revisten de una aparente abnegación que realmente no es otra que una de las múltiples máscaras del 'mal de siglo'" (178).

Sartre's ethics of existence is contingent on a first step toward accountability and contrary to the vernacular understanding of consciousness resulting in apathy or catatonic anguish, Sartrean Existentialism in this first phase, promulgates engagement and action: "You have seen that it cannot be regarded as a philosophy of quietism since it defines man by his action; nor as a pessimistic description of man, for no doctrine is more optimistic, the destiny of man is placed within himself. Nor is it an attempt to discourage man from action since it tells him that there is no hope except in his action, and that the one thing which permits him to have life is the deed. Upon this level therefore, what we are considering is an ethic of action and self-commitment" (*Existentialism* 35).

Camus understands that "carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest)" (23).

See Keith Ansell-Pearson's edition of *The Nietzsche Reader* (2006), specifically his section on "The death of God." As Ansell-Pearson explains "the death of God can be interpreted in two senses: it can mean the death of the "symbolic God," that is, the death of the very specific and particular God of Christianity that has held European humanity in bondage for two millennia. It can also mean the death of the God of theologians, philosophers, and some scientists, that is, the "God" that serves as guarantor of order, structure, and purpose in the universe. We think it is clear that for Nietzsche God is now dead for us in both of these senses" (xxxv).

Sartre was also aware of the interdependency of humanity's existence, and emphasized the importance of the other's gaze in the individual's sense of self: "The look which the eyes manifest, no matter what kind of eyes they are, is a pure reference to myself. What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches cracking behind me is... that I am seen. Thus the look is first an intermediary which refers from me to myself. What is the nature of this intermediary? What does being seen mean to me?" (*Being* 347). And further on in his text, Sartre states that "I am-at the very root of my being-the project of assimilating and making an object of the Other. I am the proof of the Other [...] I cannot be in the presence of the Other without being that 'in-the-presence' in the form of having to be it" (474), meaning that the individual's sense of existing is a symbiotic relationship with his surroundings.

Naturally I am employing a variation of Homi Bhabha's notion of "metonymy of presence" from *Locations of Culture* (89, 128). The authors I have commented on in my dissertation constitute a part of a whole: as the term implies, they are representatives of the Existentialist problematic.