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## **NUBOSIDAD VARIABLE: CARMEN MARTIN GAITE AND WOMEN'S WORDS**

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**C**armen Martín Gaité (Salamanca, 1925), one of Spain's most respected women writers, has won the "Café Gijón" prize for *El balneario* (1954), the Nadal for *Entre visillos* (1957), and the Premio Nacional de Literatura for *El cuarto de atrás* (1978). *Ritmo lento* (1962) was the runner-up for the international Biblioteca Breve Prize, won that year by Vargas Llosa. *Retahílas* (1974) was recognized by the Premio de la Crítica. Her historical works, *El proceso de Macanaz* (1970) and *Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España* (1972; an expanded, popularized version of her doctoral dissertation) were praised by critics, and *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* received the Premio Anagrama de Ensayo as well as being named "Libro de Oro 1987" by the Spanish Booksellers Guild because of its enormous popular success (seven editions in less than six months). Martín Gaité participated in an international conference at Yale in 1979, spent a semester (Fall 1980) at Barnard College in New York, another at Vassar (Fall 1983), and in 1987, became the first Spanish woman elected as an honorary fellow of the Modern Language Association, one of only four Spaniards so distinguished (honorary fellows include approximately seventy world authors, considered by literary scholars of the MLA to be the most significant).<sup>1</sup>

Throughout her career, Martín Gaité voices women's concerns and the vast majority of her works concern women: only *Ritmo lento* has a male protagonist, and he — perhaps significantly — is unable to function in normal society, ending in a mental institution. So prevalent are women in her short fiction that her authorial "Prólogo" noted that the *Cuentos completos* might have been more appropriately entitled "Cuentos de mujeres" (9). Plot is minimal,

tenuous in her works; action is less important than presentation and characterization, usually accomplished via women's words redolent of orality. Women's words as speaker, writer and interlocutor-respondent are rarely displaced from center stage.

*Nubosidad variable* (1992) is Martín Gaité's first long novel in fourteen years. Like *El cuarto de atrás* (the initial result of her reactions to the death of Franco late in 1975), evoking the social, economic and cultural ambient of the Franco years from a specifically feminine viewpoint, her latest novel is situated in the present (the moment of writing, circa 1990). Martín Gaité's focus privileges recollections of the educational ambient for girls, their readings, and the restrictive patriarchal values governing feminine socialization. Complementing the twin retrospective narratives of the two feminine protagonists is *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, a social history of the 1940s and 1950s from a female perspective, emphasizing the double standard, de facto relegation of women to home or convent, the phallogentric values dominating education, the workplace, and other aspects of public life.<sup>2</sup> As in *Usos amorosos del dieciocho*, the study of male-female relationships, courtship and erotic rituals, and the theme of heterosexual love receive preferential emphasis. The essay collection, *Desde la ventana* (1987), characterizes the situation of Spanish women as "ventanera," i.e., confined to prison-like enclosures from which they contemplate life largely as spectators. The title implies views from a specifically feminine space (window, balcony). Inspired by Martín Gaité's reading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), as explained in the authorial introduction (9-12), the essays question "si las mujeres tienen un modo particular de escribir" (9 and passim). Martín Gaité relates how her encounter with Woolf as interlocutor (reader) led her to "preguntarme por las posibles peculiaridades del discurso femenino" (12). The fruits of that meditation are patent in *Nubosidad variable* with its specific textual representations of various peculiar, intimate or "domestic" and usually feminine registers of discourse, several of these involving the special, private meanings attached to words and phrases by persons in close relationships (lovers, parent-child, friends). Just such a private discourse characterized the adolescent friendship of the two protagonists of *Nubosidad variable*, a mutual knowledge and comprehension wherein "bastaba con simples alusiones, con echar mano de un lenguaje común que reflejaba gustos, bromas y emociones comunes" (57). Sofía begins rebuilding that common discourse of shared tastes and emotions by repeating Mariana's ironic, metafictional uses of "comparsas" (cf. 80, 81), referring to certain "code words" used with her daughter Encarna as "otro de nuestras trabalenguas surrealistas" (84).

During the fourteen-year interval since publication of *El cuarto de atrás*, that enormously successful work appeared in English translation (*The Back Room*, trans. Helen Lane [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983]) and was the subject of more critical studies during the decade from 1978-1988 than

any other novel by a contemporary Spanish woman author (Brown 1991, 86). Martín Gaité's early novel of feminine enclosure in a provincial city in postwar Spain, *Entre visillos*, appeared in English translation as *Behind the Curtains* (1990), while the author was preparing scripts for television series on the life of Saint Theresa and translations of works by Rilke, Svevo, Flaubert, William Carlos Williams, and Emily Bronte (making it less than coincidental that references to *Wuthering Heights* — in its Spanish translation as *Cumbres borrascosas* — proliferate in *Nubosidad variable*). As in her two latest novels, literary theory, the functions of memory, the importance of the listener/reader (interlocutor), the art of narrative and the nature of language — especially conversational language — are explored in *El cuento de nunca acabar* (1982).

Martín Gaité is hardly a militant feminist; indeed, she strove in *La búsqueda de interlocutor* to differentiate herself from "las mujeres liberadas" (95-101). Similarly, she expresses reservations concerning much feminist criticism (which she read extensively during stays in New York) in *Desde la ventana* (13-16). What troubles her is not the aim of these writings so much as a perceived rigidity, codification, and dogmatic tendency, alien to her own more personal, spontaneous, intimate and conversational style. Nevertheless, her constant descriptive, subjective recreations of the repressive education of girls and the restrictive patriarchal codes circumscribing women clearly identify her with "consciousness-raising" writing. Martín Gaité's concerns are essentially gynocentric, with clear notes of protest in her early work — protest against economic and social injustices as well as other inequities victimizing women, especially the limitation of educational opportunities and career or employment alternatives. Her fiction is largely presentational, replicating situations in which Spanish women found themselves because of official policies

del Gobierno y de la Iglesia, aliados en su empeño de reforzar el vínculo matrimonial exaltando sus excelencias y ventajas. Mediante préstamos a la nupcialidad y los famosos subsidios y leyes de protección a las familias numerosas... el programa de recuperación de la familia estaba principalmente basado en una renuncia por parte de las jóvenes españolas a sus veleidades de emancipación. (*Usos* 52)

From early works portraying widespread devaluation of women to later ones clearly satirizing phallocentrism, this writer has been and continues to be a consistent, rational, moderate advocate for women's issues.

*Las ataduras* (1960) examines women's limited options in the Franco era from the perspective of the relatively "liberated" daughter of a teacher who escapes her smothering provincial existence to study in Madrid, becoming involved with a French intellectual with whom she runs away to Paris, soon finding herself the unwed mother of two, condemned to the same dull domesticity she fled, but without the security that marriage (and the support of her own family) might have provided. The novelette's title ironically underscores the

bonds circumscribing women, invisible but real ones which persist even when the more perceptible ones (such as matrimony and living in the paternal home) are cast off.

*Retahílas*, usually studied from perspectives foregrounding language, memory, and the narrative art per se, reiterates the author's interest in the feminine condition and her preoccupation with the destruction wrought by passing time. Employing the perspective of a mature, educated, well-traveled woman, separated from her husband, the novel proper probes the potential for human communication (it is the story of a dialogue, or more exactly, extended parallel monologues, reconstructing the past, with a major sub-theme being the marginalization of women who opt out of marriage, regardless of the reasons). Ricardo Gullón explained it thus:

Una historia, dos, múltiples historias se cruzan, se entretejen, son la trama y son los entes que la tejen... Dos series de retahílas alternan: largos monólogos cruzados y complementarios... cada personaje es emisor y receptor del mensaje del otro, y a la vez del propio, de lo que está diciendo para poner lo dicho frente a sí y conocerse mejor. (75)

Given the situation of Sofía in *Nubosidad variable*, estranged from her husband since her youngest daughter's birth more than two decades before, many observations concerning *Retahílas* are valid for the latest novel. "Enclosure" of characters within the formats of letter or diary (*Nubosidad variable*) and internal monologue (*Fragmentos de interior*) accentuates solitude and frustrated communication. Such is the coherence and consistency of Martín Gaité's fictional world that remarks inspired by various other novels often aptly describe *Nubosidad variable*. Eulalia's bored solitude in *Retahílas*, her hunger for dialogue (a link to Martín Gaité's emphasis on the interlocutor as well as to Sofía's situation in *Nubosidad variable*), and the paucity of interlocutors available eloquently attest to the ostracizing of the nonconforming female in Francoist society.

In essays and novels, Martín Gaité examines influences of official Francoist policy, the press, and economic factors in producing a feminine mentality adapted to the endless *noviazgos* (averaging eight years), to life as an unpaid servant, and to considering matrimony as the exclusive goal and sole justification of womanly existence. A focal motif for both essays and fiction is the effect of readings, the role of literary models and prescribed texts upon Spanish women in the Franco era, given her belief (expressed in an interview with Marie-Lise Gazarian Gautier) that "[l]a mujer siempre resulta estar más marcada que el hombre por los modelos literarios de conducta" (31). Woman's role as reader and as writer dominates *Nubosidad variable* and contributes much of the novel's *intrahistoria*, the background of growing up female under the traditionalist, phallogentric Franco regime. From the vantage point of the present, the two protagonists/narrative voices reconstruct three decades of

personal and collective women's history and women's readings, readings which often privileged women's writings. Educated to consider marriage and maternity as God-given missions, victims of an inexorable double standard and rigid, Victorian morality, denied access to contraceptives and divorce, Spanish women lost their civil rights upon marriage, being legally reduced to the status of wards of their husbands. Married women existed as permanent minors unless and until widowhood restored some legal options. Palley concludes that "In nearly all [of Mart n Gait e's first six novels] there is a harsh criticism of the role of woman in postwar Spain, of her condition of oppressed minority" (107).

Mart n Gait e foregrounds women's voices as speaker and/or writer, and stresses their roles as readers, evoking not only her own wide-ranging readings but official texts and popular publications aimed at feminine indoctrination. Reading, discussions, and attempted imitation of literary models (through dress, speech or efforts to write similar works) form decisive parts of growing-up in *Nubosidad variable*. Ruth El Saffar cites Mart n Gait e's evocation of the repressive education of girls via intertexts in *El cuarto de atr s* and earlier works, commenting that "What the novels of Mart n Gait e make clear is that the escape into fiction is no escape at all.... [her] novels and stories are filled with women caught in the failure of their erotic fantasies" (188-189). *Nubosidad variable* demonstrates the failures of the *novela rosa* and similar literary models as paradigms for Spanish women's lives. Referring to literary, cinematographic and musical intertexts in *El cuarto de atr s*, Ord oñez terms them "a successful attempt to at once preserve attractive aspects of a traditional female literary culture and to break out of bondage from its more restrictive features" (176). The number and variety of literary, musical and cinematographic intertexts in *Nubosidad variable* exercise a similar function. The large percentage of intertexts of foreign origin attests to attempts to "break out of bondage" at the same time it documents the inundation of Spanish culture and the Spanish economy by imports in ever-increasing proportion.

The intertexts in *Nubosidad variable* range from Emily Bronte to Natalia Ginzburg, from Per Abat (transcriber of the *Poema de Mio Cid*) to Roland Barthes' *Le plaisir du texte*, and include "Sleeping Beauty," the Bible, Bécquer, *Alice in Wonderland*, "Cinderella," Valle-Inclán, *Robinson Crusoe*, Bataille, Patricia Highsmith, *Don Quijote*, Jorge Manrique, *Peter Pan*, Sherlock Holmes, *Anna Karenina*, Katherine Mansfield, Garcilaso, Petrarch, Dar o, Antonio and Manuel Machado, Eça de Queiroz, Pessoa, Jules Verne, Poe's "The Raven," Andersen, Stevenson, Perrault, Salgarí, Kafka, Rabindranath Tagore, Simone de Beauvoir, *Nada*<sup>3</sup> and others. Allusions to music (The Beatles, "Perfidia," Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, Edith Piaff, Vivaldi), painting, and movies (*Casablanca*, Mastroianni, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe) add variety to the intertextual fabric. Entire chapters have literary or metafictional themes: Chapter XIV (entitled "Resonancias literarias") is self-referential and reflexive; Chapter XV, "El trastero de Encarna," recalls a difficult summer spent visiting

hostile in-laws when Sofia devoted herself largely to inventing stories for her elder daughter, Encarna, then about eight.

The unity and continuity of Martín Gaité's work, the repetition of specific themes and techniques, suffice to fit *Nubosidad variable* seamlessly into the overall oeuvre. The novelist's longest fictional work to date contrasts wifely obscurity with the career of a brilliant psychiatrist as former school friends meet after thirty years of separation. The re-encounter leaves both deeply affected, jolting them into extensive, confessional writing as a means of plumbing their own feelings and motivations, reconstructing their lost friendship, and recreating times past. Via the notebooks of Sofia Montalvo (the wife) and letters written by Mariana León (the psychiatrist), Martín Gaité constructs variations on the narrative situation of *Retahilas* and *El cuarto de atrás*. In these three most recent novels major characters alternate as "speakers" (or writers), moving between several time planes as they recreate the past, via patterns of free association as one memory connects to or arouses another.

"Un día libertad" (1953), Martín Gaité's earliest short story, anticipates techniques of the mature writer in employing a variant of the *monodíálogo*, a "dialogue" in which the sole character plays both roles.<sup>4</sup> Given the fact that only one character appears, the narrative might be termed a variant of the internal monologue, attempted communication in the absence of the interlocutor (letter, diary, etc.). A worker who has abandoned the monotonous routine of his job returns home to inform his wife, who is not there. The imaginary conversation incorporates his projections of reactions by the woman he knows so well, leading to a decision that he cannot afford his newly acquired freedom. Comparable anticipation of the interlocutor's response occurs frequently in *Nubosidad variable*, as both Sofia and Mariana imagine the other's reactions.

Several Martín Gaité short stories employ contrasting pairs of women: parallelism and contrast of two feminine characters appears in "La chica de abajo" (1953), wherein a lower-class provincial girl is spurned by her upper-class playmate, and "Los informes" (1954) in which a destitute servant girl is denied a job by a callous society matron. An almost identical situation occurs in "La tata" (1958) where a virtuous, hard-working young nanny is oppressed and exploited by a nasty, shallow, wealthy young matron. Similarly, in "La conciencia tranquila" (1956), a poor, young, single, slum mother whose mortally ill daughter dies en route to the hospital contrasts with the doctor's superficial, selfish, materialistic fiancée. Several pages of *Usos amorosos de la postguerra* document official prejudice against the poor, victims of war's destruction and the stagnant economy as well as their own misery, living in ruins, "aprovechando ansiosamente una sola habitación para albergarse cuatro o cinco familias, buscando refugio en sótanos o cuevas de tierra y durmiendo en repugnante mescolanza de sexos y edades" (according to an uncirculated government report cited by the novelist, 93). Official sources criticized the activities and dress of the poor, associating poverty with incipient rebellion and

subversiveness and declaring slums off-limits for "right-thinking" citizens (94-96). Martín Gaité's sympathetic treatment of desperate, poverty-stricken women was not without risk, therefore, given "la animadversión, que nunca depuso el gobierno del general Franco, hacia el proletariado, aquella masa «en que se ceba la tuberculosis»" (94).

"Un alto en el camino" (1958) sketches a different contrast as two sisters meet in a Paris railway station during a train-stop. Their encounter temporarily reunites the relatively liberated working woman, live-in lover of a younger French man, and her sister, the unemployed victim of an abusive marriage. Although a self-sacrificing stepmother whose conduct is above reproach, she is continually humiliated by her husband and has no concept of her own rights or self-worth. Yet another contrasting pair of women appears in "Ya ni me acuerdo" (1962) as a film-maker recalls the sweet, witty, intelligent provincial schoolteacher with whom he spent an enchanting day and began to fall in love. His first-person reminiscences juxtapose her with his beautiful but vacuous, uninformed and unintelligent companion from Madrid. Ricardo Gullón's description of parallel constructions in *Retahílas* might well describe pairing techniques in these stories: La simetría en la presentación del material la determina el material mismo: las voces alternan para mantener la dualidad presentativa" (81). Such also is the case of *Nubosidad variable*.

Likewise significant in both Martín Gaité's brief fiction and long novels is the series of aging, undervalued women who view themselves as mere appendages of others (the wife of X, mother of Y). Such a figure appears in "Un alto en el camino," cited above, and "Tarde de tedio" (1970), in which a bored and lonely doctor's wife visiting the beauty salon briefly ventures beyond the ordinary by trying streaks in her hair. As this woman who supposedly lacks nothing reflects that she has nothing that is truly hers, her depression resembles that of the heroine of "Retirada" (1974). A mother's thoughts following an outing with her two young daughters are couched in extended military metaphors (retreat in defeat). Discouraged, dissatisfied, self-deprecating, unappreciated and bored, she exhibits a frame of mind not too different from Sofía's at the beginning of *Nubosidad variable*.

Sofía's low sense of self-worth is compounded by her timidity and the trepidation with which she faces the frequent necessity of dealing with the irate neighbor from downstairs as their plumbing continues to leak through the ceiling of the apartment below:

La depresión que se me acentuó a raíz de la reforma del cuarto de baño — aunque ya la venía padeciendo de mucho más atrás en modalidad de desgana generalizada — le ha debido dar [al marido] pretexto últimamente para hablar de mí como «la pobra Sofía», dejando traslucir mi edad crítica y mi incapacidad de adaptación al medio. (82)

The "edad crítica," an allusion to impending menopause, heralds Martín

Gaite's concern for the aging, rejected "sex objects" cast aside in favor of younger, showier substitutes (examples include plump, drunken Daniela — Chapter V — and Sofía herself; another is Gregorio's wife: "La mujer de Gregorio es hija de un financiero, le lleva cinco años y aluden a ella como «la pobre Fefa». Se separaron cuando volvió él de Nueva York, donde estuvo ampliando conocimientos más o menos por cuenta del suegro" [78]). Sofía's husband Eduardo wastes no opportunity to patronize and humiliate her: "Siempre, bajo este tipo de comentarios, late una alusión más o menos velada a que la que no reúne condiciones como ama de casa soy yo. Es un tema que ya viene de antiguo y que se recrudece ante mi rechazo a organizar parties y fiestas" (73). Sofía is guilty of being a product of her education and socialization, and fails to change rapidly enough, leading Eduardo to insist that she requires psychoanalysis: "Contigo, Sofía, hay que tomar una determinación. Espero que colabores" (113). Sofía's minor phobias are deemed pathological, although her dislikes (e.g., official documents, 112-113; constantly being judged, 116) are far from incomprehensible. Disconcerted when Sofía responds to his prodding by attending a party, Eduardo takes to the bushes with his current companion, a sexy, red-haired television personality.

Themes of quotidian routine, monotonous and trivial repetition, unrelieved domesticity and enclosure constitute frequent ingredients of Martín Gaité's fiction, although *Nubosidad variable* also takes note of passing time and changing realities for women. Martín Gaité repeatedly depicts lonely, alienated, urban characters (usually female), involved in bad or deteriorating relationships, often a collapsing marriage. Lack of communication, attendant emotional disorders or trauma, and possibly abnormal psychological states intersect with the character's relationships as the novelist weaves between realism and fantasy, employing dreams, hallucinations and surrealistic techniques to communicate her characters' alienation. Palley's study of the role of dreams in *El balneario* and *El cuarto de atrás*, where they function to maintain the ambiguity essential to the fantastic narrative takes passing note of the "wish-fulfillment" dreams of David in *Ritmo lento* (Palley 107). Martín Gaité's prologue to her *Cuentos completos* calls attention to the gap between dreams and what one accomplishes, the world of dreams and that of reality (8). The numerous dreams in *Nubosidad variable* include Sofía's initial dream of re-encounter with Mariana, a wish-fulfillment dream that proves prophetic the following day. Mariana dreams (usually of her paramours), and Sofía's final dream or hallucination in which she identifies with her deceased mother is truly a narrative tour-de-force. Martín Gaité's prologue to *Desde la ventana* (17-18) describes what may be the origin of Sofía's dream: the novelist's own repetitive dreams of her dead mother, more fully elaborated in the "Apéndice arbitrario" subtitled "De su ventana a la mía" (112-117). This dream in particular connects with two major motifs of *Nubosidad variable*, the concept of "secret" communication (words or phrases with special meaning for initiates) and the ludic

nature of writing. In Martín Gaité's dream, she was attempting to communicate via coded mirror flashes from her window to her mother's in some imprecise place and time: "Se trataba de una especie de código secreto, de un **juego** que ella había estado mucho tiempo tratándome de enseñar" (113-114; emphasis mine). She experienced intense pleasure not only in communicating with the afterworld but "en haber aprendido a mandarle el mensaje de aquella forma tan divertida y tan rara, que además era un **secreto** enseñado por ella y que nadie más que nosotras dos podía compartir" (114; emphasis mine).

Identical notes sound in Mariana's evocation of her re-encounter with Sofía and the latter's intertextual allusion to a shared, secret axiom of adolescence, "La sorpresa es una liebre blanco," which later recurs as a leitmotif of their writings: "Me quedé desconcertada, ya tenías tú, como siempre, las riendas del juego en tus manos, las claves del acertijo. Te miré y estabas sonriendo. ¿Qué querías decir?" (31). Both the ludic nature of Sofía's reference and the secret, cabalistic character of their intimate discourse are unmistakable. Similarly, when Mariana begins her first letter to Sofía she observes, "no he olvidado el ritual a que siempre nos ateníamos" (20) — the rules of the game, corresponding with Huizinga's definition of play as a "voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding" (28).

The pleasure Sofía and Mariana experience as writers and readers should be understood in light of Martín Gaité's dictum (in *La búsqueda de interlocutor*) that "nunca lo escrito sin personal deleite puede llegar a deleitar a nadie" (24). Unlike the 18th Century **deleitar enseñando**, Martín Gaité advocates **deleitar deleitando[se]**. Huizinga's remark that play is "accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is «different» from «ordinary life»" (28) holds equal validity for this concept of literature. The pleasure of the text, shared by both interlocutors, impels Mariana to exact a promise from Sofía before leaving: "te pedí que por favor escribieras, que te pusieras a escribir sobre lo que te diera la gana, pero enseguida, esa misma noche al llegar a casa, no podía dejarte desaparecer sin que me lo prometieras" (32).

Sofía's desire to find Mariana again and the growth of comparable sentiments in Mariana which become almost obsessive exemplify "la búsqueda de interlocutor," which Elizabeth Ordóñez has identified as central to the existence of *El cuarto de atrás*, as well as to other works by this author. "Without the entrance of an interlocutor figure, the text would remain frozen at the end of the introductory chapter" (Ordóñez 174). Martín Gaité emphasizes the interlocutor, not only in her essays, but an interview with Alicia Ramos: "la escritura es como un sucedáneo de la conversación... Para mí lo más importante es el interlocutor [...] Siempre pienso en él cuando escribo" (123). Sofía and Mariana share this trait with their creator, not merely thinking of the Other/interlocutor at the moment of writing, but needing to imagine the Other's reactions and to visualize the room or physical circumstance in which the

missive will be read. The "implied reader" exercises a power to elicit texts as well as determining aspects of tone and discourse. Brown points out that "[t]he man in black [in *El cuarto de atrás*] is a consummate interlocutor. Using his considerable resources, including pharmacological as well as intellectual inducements to speech, he elicits and shapes the woman writer's recollections" (84).

Martín Gaité's "novelistic practice corroborates her theory of the primacy of the speech act, for her characters consistently reveal themselves not through acting but through talking" (Welles 197), an opinion confirmed by Manuel Durán who observes that in *Retahílas* "la reconstrucción de la realidad se lleva a cabo a través del diálogo. Es la conversación la que aviva la memoria y la obliga a escudriñar por todas partes hasta reunir todas las piezas del rompecabezas" (131). Primacy of the speech act and the quest for the ideal interlocutor acquire such urgency for Sofía as to become her top priority, displacing from her mind her disintegrating marriage and her son's troubling, unknown sexual preferences. Precisely because of that "primacy of the speech act," perhaps, Martín Gaité excels not only in depicting the crucial role of the interlocutor but in depicting women's speech, in her sensitive observations of special domestic lexicon and the varying registers of women's discourse.

Interwoven with the need for an interlocutor is the concept of literature as play. The ludic nature of art as enunciated in Ortega's writings on the playful base of all true culture coincides with ideas of his friend the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens*. Martín Gaité (for whom the concept may have filtered through Umberto Eco) proclaims the ludic nature of literature as an end in itself, terming literature "el juego más consolador que se haya inventado nunca" (*La búsqueda de interlocutor*, 25). Sofía and Mariana are fully in accord as they joyfully put pen to paper, oblivious to their worlds crashing about them. The joy of [re]encountering the ideal interlocutor, combined with the pleasure of the text, so thoroughly absorbs them that not even a violent thunderstorm distracts their rapt attention (389-91). Writing in isolation has its therapeutic functions, but real pleasure comes from communication, preferably face-to-face exchange.

Kathleen Glenn's study of *El cuarto de atrás* affirms that:

those who participate in the game of literature **choose** to do so; their playground is the text, which is circumscribed within temporal and spatial limits; and the players, whether they be writers or readers, know that certain rules (conventions) apply in the world of the text, which is a precinct that has its own special reality. (150)

Both Sofía and Mariana recall role-playing as integral to their long-ago friendship; Sofía acted the part of Per Abat and both imitated heroines of books they read and movies they saw.

In *Nubosidad variable*, Sofía reflects upon changes over time in the

meaning of intimate words and phrases as terms that had originally expressed husbandly affection become opprobrium; she and her children employ "code words" (mostly burlesque or disparaging) for neighbors, family associates, and certain projects of their husband/father; Sofía and Mariana had similarly developed a secret language or code of their invention. Martín Gaité depicts other registers of discourse, including that of the old servant; the "hip" (or "progre") young servant girl whose discourse reflects the influx of foreign words resulting from Spain's inundation by foreign cultures and products; Sofía's younger daughter, an airline stewardess, whose more cosmopolitan discourse blends in family "code words"; the argot and obscenity-studded discourse of the counterculture of drugs and homosexuality; and the personal discourse of Mariana, combining concepts derived from her scientific training and psychoanalytic practice with others current in trendy intellectual or social circles. While not limited exclusively to the female and the domestic sphere, these varying registers of discourse belong primarily to a circumscribed realm of intimate, face-to-face usage, emphasizing orality, and employed predominantly by women.

Although one of the two protagonists of *Nubosidad variable* is a psychiatrist, Marcia Welles points out that "In both *Ritmo lento* and *Retahílas* the possibility of any therapeutic benefits from psychoanalysis is dismissed. In *Ritmo lento* the psychiatrist... is manifestly ineffective" (198). Eulalia's critique of psychoanalysis in *Retahílas* identifies two defects: "it is a «talking cure,» and Eulalia claims that the ability to articulate one's problems is already an indication that a curative process has begun.... Neither can it be responsive at acute critical moments" (Welles 199). There is little doubt that Eulalia speaks for the author, which helps to explain Mariana's otherwise rather disconcerting impromptu abandonment of her psychiatric practice (the question of her return is left unresolved by the open-ended narrative). Especially significant in relation to the second caveat, i.e., possible inaccessibility at crucial moments, is the clearly therapeutic role of writing for both Sofía and Mariana; writing, unlike the "talking cure," can be carried on without the presence of the interlocutor. Servodidio indicates the psychoanalytic nature of the exchange between interlocutors in *El cuarto de atrás*: "In a situation reminiscent of analysis, the subject/analysand intentionalizes her recollections through verbalization addressed to the «significant other» whom the stranger/analyst represents through a process of transference. At first she employs verbal sophistries to evade the painful self-reflection" (121). In *Nubosidad variable*, the "verbal sophistries" of Sofía and Mariana comprise self-referential and metafictional strategies.

Likewise therapeutic — especially for Sofía — is the interlocutor relationship established with texts. Her repeated references to her readings and her own role as reader mean that intertextuality looms large in *Nubosidad variable* as in *El cuarto de atrás*, with its allusions to "verses from pop songs... lines from

movies... passages from sentimental novels, pulp magazines, classroom textbooks, and literary classics" (Spires 130). And like the preceding novel, *Nubosidad variable* is a self-referential novel and self-conscious exercise in metafiction. Metafictional imperatives determine that both write as much about writing as about their personal histories. Furthermore, Soffa and Mariana call attention to the presence of fictional artifice in their writings for the other, with self-referentiality appearing numerous times as Martín Gaité subtly underscores the ongoing process of literary genesis and creation. As self-conscious authors, the two comment ironically on the form of their writings. One critic's description of the process of literary creativity in *El cuarto de atrás* applies equally to *Nubosidad variable* which

not only reveals those secret spheres of woman's existence previously absent from literary texts, but even more significantly, confronts us... with a portrait of the artist as woman, simultaneously creator and midwife, bringing forth words and memories and reaffirming her birthright as woman and writer. (Levine 162)

Martín Gaité's depiction of women's special words and memories in *Nubosidad variable* might likewise have inspired this metaphor of literary genesis.

Not only does Martín Gaité employ parallels and contrasting pairs of characters, but she reiterates certain binary oppositions: city versus village, youth versus age, wealth versus poverty, selfishness versus selflessness, life versus fiction, dream versus reality, those things which occur when one is sleeping as opposed to waking. Various critics have noted other related techniques of a bipolar nature: she "constantly meshes interiors with outside scenarios" (Kronik 49-50); her characters "reenact the eternal dialectic between a sociological determinism, on the one hand, and the sovereignty of the individual, on the other" (Servodidio 117); and "in all of Martín Gaité's production the individual, faced with an oppressive social construct, teeters between rebellion, latent or open, and withdrawal" (Kronik 51). Yet another kind of oppositional balance is noted by Gonzalo Sobejano, "enlaces y desenlaces." Even the title chosen by Thomas expresses binary opposition: "«El callejón sin salida»: Images of Confinement and Freedom in *Ritmo lento*." Similar structural principles are evident in *Nubosidad variable* with its regular alternation of speakers (or writers): the even-numbered chapters comprise Mariana's letters to Sofía and the odd-numbered chapters contain Sofía's compositions, a fusion of self-conscious exercise and confessional epistle.

Differentiating *Nubosidad variable* from earlier works are "new" elements including the up-to-date chronology of the re-encounter and abundant reflections of changes wrought in Spanish life by the liberties of the post-Franco era, the country's participation in the European common market and consequent prosperity, changes which are a two-edged sword, undermining the family structure, subverting traditional values, bring a widespread counter-culture of

drugs, homosexuality, rootlessness, and urban violence. Not only in Mariana's problematic, traumatic relationship with her bisexual paramour and Sofía's visit to her children's apartment awash in alcohol and drugs, but in references to divorces, separations, flagrant adulteries (and victims of these social problems who constitute Mariana's clientele), resound the echoes and attendant new lexicon of changes since the death of Franco and dilution of Spanish language and culture (once jealously protected by the Franco regime and its censorship from foreign elements).

Incidental sociology and historicism notwithstanding, the numerous and varied connections with Martín Gaité's previous works make of *Nubosidad variable* a palimpsest in which traces of earlier writings are woven in and out between the contemporary data. A self-reflexive text which foregrounds the process of its own creation, *Nubosidad variable* is replete with intertexts from the writer's own works as well as others both domestic and imported. Unquestionably, however, the most significant of these are her own previous writings on women's voices and women's listening/reading, woman as creator and as interlocutor, the rescue of women's words from silence.

#### NOTES

1 Cited by Joan L. Brown who quotes the *MLA Newsletter* (Summer 1987), footnote 1, page 89 of *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain: Exiles in the Homeland*.

2 Since only "old maids" (obliged to support themselves) encountered no legal obstacles to working outside the home, Martín Gaité notes that "La educación técnica y profesional de las mujeres quedaba así tarada desde sus mismas raíces por un carácter de provisionalidad o de emergencia.... ¿Cómo iba a alcanzar un nivel profesional aceptable en ningún campo la que [...] tomara aquella formación como un desdichado sucedáneo para el caso de que la suerte le negara la formación de un hogar familiar?" (*Usos amorosos de la postguerra* 46-47).

3 In Chapter IV of *Desde la ventana*, entitled "La chica rara," the attentive reader will note in the discussion of the *novela rosa* of Carmen de Icaza and Concha Linares Becerra (90-91), the Falangist doctrines expounded for feminine consumption by Pilar Primo de River, and allusions to *Nada* and other novels by postwar women writers (89-99), anticipating readings of Sofía and Mariana in *Nubosidad variable* (Chapter XII, 216-217).

4 All stories cited appear in Martín Gaité's *Cuentos completos* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980).

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