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Parody, Popular Culture, and the Narrative of Javier Tomeo

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PARODY, POPULAR CULTURE, AND THE NARRATIVE OF JAVIER TOMEO

by

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A thesis submitted to the
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This thesis entitled:
Parody, Popular Culture, and the Narrative of Javier Tomeo
written by Mark W. Pleiss
has been approved for the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the abovementioned discipline.
My thesis sketches a constellation of parodic works within the contemporary Spanish author Javier Tomeo's (1932-2013) immense literary universe. These novels include *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* (1990), *Preparativos de viaje* (1996), *La noche del lobo* (2006), *Constructores de monstruos* (2013), *El cazador de leones* (1987), and *Los amantes de silicona* (2008). It is my contention that the Aragonese author repeatedly incorporates and reconfigures the conventions of genres and sub-genres of popular literature and film in order to critique the proliferation of mass culture in Spain during his career as a writer. My heretofore unexplored theoretical model describes the structural and thematic roles of parody in Tomeo's novelistic discourse, and it suggests that parody figures prominently in the author's fiction from the late 1980s until 2013.

My study is organized into four chapters, in which I study how Tomeo parodies specific genres and sub-genres of popular fiction. My introduction describes the author's precarious place in contemporary Spanish literature, and it reviews theory and criticism by the leading experts on parody. My first analytical chapter studies the parody of two crime fiction sub-genres, the classic detective novel and the spy novel, in *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* and *Preparativos de viaje*. My second chapter studies the parody of werewolf narratives and Frankenstein narratives in *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos*. Finally, my third chapter looks at the ironic revision of sentimental and erotic romance novels in *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de silicona*. In doing so, I propose
that parody structures Tomeo’s fiction, and that it also serves two thematic purposes. First, the author uses parody to subvert the optimistic and reaffirming worldviews commonly found in popular culture. Second, the author uses parody to criticize readers and writers of popular genre literature and film. Parody allows Tomeo to express his misgivings toward the growing influence of mass culture inside and outside of Spain, and it also allows him to project a unique image of the contemporary human condition as defined by absurdity, abnormality, and loneliness.
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Introduction:

Parody, Popular Culture, and the Narrative of Javier Tomeo

Mi pretensión es que la literatura es para reflexionar al lector sobre los problemas de ciertos momentos. No me interesan los libros de consumo barato. La literatura es algo sagrado.

Javier Tomeo

With twenty-nine novels, thirteen collections of short stories, four works of theater, and a children’s book, Javier Tomeo (Quicena, 1932-2013) will be remembered as one of Spain’s most prolific authors during the twentieth century. Tomeo published Constructores de monstruos only two months before his death in June 2013, and it stands as his final contribution to a publishing career that has spanned more than five decades. He collected a variety of awards throughout his career; these include the Gold Medal for Letters in Aragón, El Premio de Novela Corta Ciudad de Barbastro, and a nomination for the Nobel Prize. His novels have been adapted for prestigious theaters across Europe, and they also have been translated into more than fifteen languages. Despite his editorial success, Tomeo continues to be ignored by those in charge of Spain’s major literary awards, and he has not received the extensive criticism afforded to writers with similar artistic visions.

My dissertation contends that Tomeo uses parody in order to respond to the proliferation of popular culture in Spain during his career as a writer. I argue that the author uses parody to undermine the optimistic and idealized projections of social reality found in popular fiction and to project an alternative narrative world that defines the contemporary human condition in terms of absurdity, abnormality, and loneliness. I will argue that the author repeatedly structures his novels around the parody of at least four major conventions in three genres and six sub-genres of popular literature and film.
Through the careful textual analysis of six novels, I will demonstrate the ways in which Tomeo subverts the assumptions and worldviews of the classic detective novel, the spy novel, werewolf narratives, Frankenstein narratives, sentimental romance fiction, and erotic romance fiction. Parody will be understood as the construction of humorous incongruities between conventions and expectations. As we will see, I propose a definition of parody as a narrative form that is frequently directed against naïve forms of mimesis. It is important to note that this conception of parody is not designed to offer a conclusive definition of the term, but it does provide a useful tool for analyzing Tomeo’s narrative in a way that is consistent both with traditional understandings of the concept and with some of its most recent conceptualizations in criticism and theory.

**Tomeo’s Career and His Place in Contemporary Spanish Literature**

Javier Tomeo has long been considered a literary outsider who does not fit comfortably among his contemporaries. The Aragonese author began his career in the 1950s and 60s by writing pulp fiction at Editorial Bruguera in Barcelona, one of Spain’s most well-known publishers of popular literature and comics during the decades following the Spanish Civil War. Writing adventure, horror, and westerns with the pseudonym Franz Keller, Tomeo learned the formulas that he would later parody under his own name. His preference for narrative forms that distort mimetic representation led early critical accounts of our author’s fiction to place him alongside experimental Spanish literary movements from the late 1960s and 70s. Unlike the dominant literary trends of the 1950s and early 1960s, which purportedly offered objective depictions of social reality, Tomeo is identified with writers whose narrative techniques mirrored the tendencies of Latin
American “Boom” novelists as well as the topics and styles of William Faulkner and Franz Kafka (Soldevila Durante 325-26). Among the most notable Spanish writers were Luis Martín-Santos, Juan and Luis Goytisolo, Miguel Delibes, Carmen Martín Gaite, Esther Tusquets, and Juan Benet. Each author represents his or her own unique literary universe, but they are frequently aligned due to their shared preferences for diegetic narration over story, direct social commentaries that criticize the policies of the Franco government, and an impulse to create webs of abstruse literary references. Tomeo’s age and his rejection of mimetic representation invite associations between him and the dominant literary program of these decades, but it is important to note that Tomeo does not fit comfortably among the writers listed above. His use of language demonstrates a strict adhesion to simplicity and clarity, qualities that have little in common with the winding syntaxes of novels such as Benet’s *Volverás a Region* (1968), Delibes’ *Parábola de un náufrago* (1969) and Juan Goytisolo’s *Juan sin Tierra* (1975). Tomeo’s fiction systematically rejects the Baroque language and cultural elitism practiced by his contemporaries and celebrates a minimalist economy in which every word demonstrates adeptness and agility in matching language concisely to thought.

Moreover, Tomeo uses parody differently than the other “experimental” writers with whom he is often associated. For one critic, parody was employed in the 1960s and 70s by writers who challenged realist modes of representation and the official doctrines of the Franco dictatorship (Sobejano-Morán 39). A defining feature of the experimental novels of the 1960s and 70s is their acerbic critiques of the policies, structures, and mythical conceptions of the Spanish past that informed Franco’s official discourses. In *Tiempo de silencio*, for example, Jo Labanyi argues that Martín-Santos uses parody to desacralize José
Ortega y Gasset, an intellectual who developed the myth of national destiny that Franco would later use to legitimize the politics of the Nationalist party (*Myth 24*). Juan and Luis Goytisolo employ parodic imitation in order to attack the dictatorship’s policies regarding proper sexual conduct, its visions of national history, and its propagation of Catholic morality. Carmen Martín Gaite and Esther Tusquets also frequently use parody in order to critique reading materials for young women and children such as fairy tales, behavior manuals, and the *novela rosa*.

Tomeo’s use of parody demonstrates the same interest in formal innovation that is shared by his contemporaries and likewise provides a critical formulation of social reality, but he does not engage in the same politics as the Goytisolos, Martín-Santos, or Martín Gaite. His works dramatize the cruelty and paranoia of people who suffer at the hands of those who abuse their power, which invites readers to make allegorical connections on the social and political realities of his day, but the Aragonese’s narrative texts do not directly refer to Spanish daily life or the Franco dictatorship. His preference for caricature and ambiguity allows his fiction to transcend national borders and to reveal his larger vision of the contemporary human condition, one that he believes to be defined by absurdity, abnormality, and loneliness.

His literary career takes off with the publication of *Amado monstruo* (1984) and its subsequent theatrical adaptation in the Parisian Theatre National de la Colline in 1989. After these achievements, he writes tirelessly and pens seventeen literary works (novels, collections of short stories, and plays) in the following ten years. By the late 1980s, publishing houses are translating and distributing his fiction worldwide, theaters both inside and outside of Spain bring his works to the stage, and the Portuguese film director
Pedro Costa adapts *El crimen del Cine Oriente* (1995) to the big screen in 1997. The attention that Tomeo enjoys during this period helps to drastically change the trajectory of a writer who had previously enjoyed little critical interest or editorial success. The most thorough bibliography of Tomeo’s narrative production to date, titled *Javier Tomeo*, was published in the wake of an international colloquium dedicated to him and shows that he had already published eight novels before achieving stardom with *Amado monstruo*. The most prominent of these novels was *El unicornio* (1971), which won the Premio de Novela Corta Ciudad de Barbastro, and *El castillo de la carta cifrada* (1979), which was one of his few early works to be translated into English.

**Historical, Cultural, and Economic Influences Surrounding Tomeo’s Career**

The author’s emergence as a major figure on the Spanish and European literary scenes is the product of the talent and discipline that he exhibited during the 1980s, but it must be recognized that his success is also due to important processes of cultural evolution which had accompanied his development as a writer. Tomeo gains critical attention and editorial success during a period of social “normalization” that has been called “the most accelerated, deep-seated social, economic and cultural transformation in Spanish history” (de Riquer i Permanyer 259). In sharp contrast to the isolation, lack of education, poverty, and economic austerity that marked the 1940s and 50s, the subsequent three decades bear witness to dramatic concentrations of international investments, consumerism, and mass culture on the Iberian Peninsula (Tortella 364-65). Sebastian Balfour expresses the consensus among historians, economists, and cultural theorists when he writes that economic growth during this period transformed Spanish society by promoting processes
of cultural modernization that had been stalled since the end of the II Spanish Republic. The country came to be dominated by the industry and service sectors, which allowed the middle class to burgeon and its consumer market to explode (Balfour 269).

The speed with which Spain entered a new economy of domestic and foreign goods is demonstrated by the sudden surge in consumer products. In 1960 only one percent of Spanish households had television sets, but by 1969 that number had jumped to 62% (Balfour 270). The number of car owners increased from 500,000 (one car for every fifty-five inhabitants) in 1960 to over 3,300,000 (one for every nine) in 1974 (de Riquer i Permanyer 265). In little more than two decades, Spain had completely evolved from an economically isolated totalitarian nation into a fully integrated capitalist market with a democratic government and an economy of hungry consumers who were ready to buy things and ideas that previously had been unavailable. Christine Henseler writes that the economic boom of the 1980s drove the publishing industry to undergo a “facelift” in order to elevate its status as an industry that was integrated into the global economy (150). She points to the interest of publishing houses in creating book series as a way of curbing prices for consumers, the incorporation of book reviews and criticism into the events of the daily newspaper, and the development of prizes and contracts in order to attract new literary talent as three of the most important factors that led Spain to becoming the fifth-largest publisher in the world (150-53).

By the same token, Antonio Sánchez argues that the sudden appearance of mass-produced consumer goods stimulated the dissemination of progressive ideas through a world of mass culture that became increasingly visible in Spanish daily life. The wave of “new” products and ideas, which had already begun in 1959, helped to smooth over the
modernization process and the transition from dictatorship to democracy (Sánchez 20). Spain's cultural evolution also stimulated ways of creating art that were more in line with Tomeo's particular artistic style. Paying little attention to Modernist divisions between high and low culture, writers, directors, and artists moved away from the restrictive models and ideologies of Modernist esthetics and looked to popular culture for motivation. Tomeo and a long list of other writers that include Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Rosa Montero, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Gabriela Bustelo, and Andrés Trapiello, among many others, produced artistic forms that exchanged local tastes and old sensibilities for designs that sought out mass appeal and success in the market.

The country's entrance into a capitalist economy demanded a type of novel that could accommodate a wider reading public interested in original authors and compelling storylines laced with drama, intrigue, and scandal. Teresa M. Vilarós explains that cultural normalization brought about dramatic changes to the way that literature was written and read on the Iberian Peninsula. Not only did detective fiction, horror, romance, and science fiction become more widely produced and disseminated because of changes to the country's economic policies, but authors who had previously identified themselves as creators of high literature such as Lourdes Ortiz, Jesús Ferrero, and Almudena Grandes began borrowing the schemas, formulas, and devices of “low” literary genres in order to capitalize on the trend that had swept across the publishing world (Vilarós 219). Vilarós develops the concept in a later article, where she argues that the consumption of detective fiction, romance novels, science fiction and horror novels in supermarkets, retail stores, and El Corte Inglés helped to bridge the transition from dictatorship to democracy. With their emphasis on the recuperation of normalcy, she argues, these kinds of texts helped
Spaniards to forget about the past and live in the present, much like consumers from other European nations.

Spain’s evolution into a consumer-driven economy cultivated the perfect environment for writers like Tomeo to gain new readerships, but it also created an increasingly commercialized market in which authors of purportedly high literary merit had to compete with so-called lighter, less discriminating literatures that used conventions from popular genres in order to attract mass appeal. As Labanyi has suggested, writers looked to the same crime formulas, horror films, and romance novels that were commonly found in popular fiction in order target readers and engage them emotionally (“Narrative” 153). While scores of authors have profited from these changes, others have met them with hostility. Respected Spanish writers such as Juan Goytisolo and Juan Bonilla continue to blast editors and publishing houses for remaining more interested and invested in sales than in aesthetic quality. They believe that the standardization and internationalization of the publishing industry have driven editors to be concerned with sales rather than intellectual standards. Their criticisms continue to set off heated debates regarding the place of literature, both “light” and “serious,” in the contemporary Spanish market.

Toward a Definition of Popular Fiction

Tomeo’s prolific literary output is similar to that of “popular” writers, but his novels do not take part in the system of exchange between readers and authors that defines popular literature and popular culture. General agreement among critics is that popular fiction represents one dimension of a larger field of popular entertainment and leisure activities known as popular culture. Popular culture refers to a mainstream economy of
products that are designed to transcend local preferences in order to produce pleasure and instantaneous gratification for the largest possible number of consumers. Raymond F. Betts understands popular culture as an industry of mass-produced forms of entertainment. For this theorist, the creation, distribution, and inevitable disposal of all things popular constitute the logic of an international system of profitability that yields economic success for large corporations and personal stardom to those individuals who are capable of creating works with mass appeal. Pointing to J.K. Rowling’s more than $1 billion earnings in 2012, Betts believes that measurements of popular culture can only be fathomed in terms of the millions, billions, and even trillions of dollars, products, and images that are disseminated to consumers on a daily basis (1-7).

Popular fiction acts as a sub-category of popular culture and is inevitably bound to the same principles of pleasure and gratification that define other forms of popular entertainment such as film and television. Ken Gelder separates the world of literature from the world of popular fiction by discussing a number of criteria. He points out that “authors” and “artists” are said to produce literature while “craftsmen” are more commonly considered to produce popular fiction. Readers of popular literature, he continues, read quickly and “horizontally,” whereas readers of literature read “vertically,” carefully, and skeptically in order to question the words, concepts, and beliefs that are in front of them. It is a paradigm that separates ambitious literary works from “low” and “light” genres of popular culture due to authorial aversion to generic literary conventions and preferences for creating critical and “entangled” visions of reality (Gelder 13-14). Gelder also signals to the complexity of the reading operations that both narrative worlds demand. Whereas “literature” invites us to read and reread a single work in order to extract new and
surprising information in each encounter with the text, works of “popular fiction” or “popular literature” seek to achieve an emotional response that is anticipated by the reader. The murderer being apprehended, the death of the monster, the lovers overcoming all odds, and the safe arrival back to the home planet become the defining features of these works and the primary moments that are remembered. The rest of the text is often forgotten, and the reader is lead to consume a new work in a compulsive cycle of buying, reading, and discarding.¹

The generic convention acts as one of popular fiction’s most important tools in its quest to establish a consumable image in the market. Despite its age, Fredric Jameson’s “Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre” continues to be influential among theorists of popular fiction and culture because it isolates the standard practices of several common literary genres. Jameson understands genres as “essentially contracts between a writer and his readers,” which carried out through the careful employment of recognizable literary conventions (“Magical” 135). For this theorist, the literary convention takes the place of the face-to-face gestures and context that represent everyday language use between speakers by limiting possibilities and establishing expectations regarding the nature of what is being communicated. Without these particular codes or markings, a reader is unable to contextualize and interpret the information in a coherent way. The easily identifiable problems, characters, and plots that are common to certain genres allow readers to make sense of the way that the scenarios are unfolding in relation to other stories in a similar mold.

By accepting the premises of generic conventions, the reader takes part in an unspoken agreement with the author that assumes that the world operates in a way that is
somehow consistent with how it is being portrayed in the fiction. Whether the world really does or does not comply with these specific pretexts is another question entirely, but the fantasy depends upon the reader’s acceptance of a tragic, comedic, or utopian view of the world in order for the text to resonate and create cultural meaning. In the case of genre fiction, Jameson argues that popular literature serves to repeatedly offer visions of the world that seek to calm fears and anxieties on a personal and social level. He refers to this process as “the ritual celebration of the renewal of the social order” in order to describe popular fiction’s “utopian” sense of optimism in the institutions, practices and common sense of our society (“Reification” 142). The same formulation receives treatment in his more recent work, *Archaeologies of the Future*, which investigates the systems of belief that are found throughout the historical development of the science fiction genre. Jameson asserts that critics must separate the world of science fiction from works of high literature because of the former’s investment in wish fulfillment, gross depictions of otherness, and the production of fantasy utopias for readers (*Archaeologies* 283).

Walter Nash’s *Language in Popular Culture* has proposed a similar understanding of the uses and functions of standardized conventions in literature. He argues that popular literature offers a large number of genres, motifs, and devices in order to conventionalize language and to reduce the number of possibilities that may take place within a given work. Any reader who picks up a horror story already knows that vampires cannot go out during the day and that werewolves die from a silver bullet, but both are central ingredients to formulas that are easy to recognize. In the case of crime fiction, readers already know that characters who are assigned the prestigious role of detective will possess a superior intellectual and deductive ability that will drive long, thought-out explanations of criminal
acts until a conclusion is finally arrived at in the final pages. Authors offer different styles and variations on each formula, but it is important to remember that popular fiction emphasizes reduction and limitation because of its role as a purveyor of stimulation. Loyal to its responsibilities as a commodity in the market, genre fiction upholds its unspoken agreements with mass readerships that compensate for the foreseeable emotional responses that are afforded to them by the conventions, characters, and clichés of the newest installments of familiar bestselling genres.

Nash also recognizes that the constraints of popular fiction are both linguistic and social. He posits that there exists a careful "grooming of assumptions" that is ideological in the sense that popular fiction possesses a particular manner of thinking that registers with a particular social class, race, and/or gender of readers. Rather than providing problematic and entangled visions of social reality, these types of novelistic conventions seek to pacify and mitigate:

No [popular] story ever suggests that life is devoid of purpose or meaning, that destinies are random, that human beings are capriciously swayed by forces they can neither understand nor control, that at the heart of their relationships is the pathos, the despair, of realizing that one person can never "know" another, that lovers must always be untrue, that the bridegroom at length turns away from the bride. (Nash 22)

Behind the conventions of any mass-produced product lies the promise of a reaffirming worldview that seeks to calm personal and social apprehensions regarding disorder, violence, and desolation. Nash describes romance fiction in a similar vein, writing that "marriage, the family, and the ethos of the home" represent the prevailing wisdom of a
literary genre that “entails a pervading view of woman’s role in society, her place in human relationships, and the aspirations that may be regarded as legitimate and desirable” (22).

In the case of the thriller or action story, a genre that is predominately directed to male readers, a sense of pleasure arises from the hero’s constant “winning through,” an experience in which a reader is taught that any problem, if it is big enough, has a solution and that technology, even with all of its benefits, will always fail to match the power and mental agility of a hardworking man (Nash 69). The thriller is a genre that assuages masculine anxieties by allowing its readers to fulfill their greatest fantasies concerning fast cars, attractive women, and a variety of narrow getaways. Readers do not waste time thinking about whether the secret agent, rogue cop, international man of intrigue, or good-guy-gone-bad is or is not truly fulfilled by his heart-stopping antics.

Tomeo’s fiction establishes a relationship with the world of popular culture that manifests his interest in parodying the artistic materials considered part of a tradition of “low” cultural forms. Borrowing from the genres, conventions, and literary languages that inform the economy of exchange inherent in popular fiction, his novels demonstrate a profound knowledge of the dramatic products that have been categorized and diffused into the popular imagination through bookstores, supermarkets, and shopping centers both in and beyond Spanish borders. However, it is important to examine the role of generic conventions in his prose and to question whether they are doing the work that has originally been assigned to them. The laboratory of Dr. Frankenstein, the futuristic universe, and the lovers’ bedroom are all common places and clichés that appear in his novels and serve to conjure up familiar narrative universes, but readers notice that these popular conventions are used to create humorous collisions between form and content that
frustrate the ways that particular genres are supposed to play out for their readers. The motor of Tomeo’s fictional discourse is parody, a narrative technique that moves his works from a single point of conceptual engagement into an original narrative terrain with an original economy of language, conventions, and expectations.

In interviews, Tomeo admits that his works begin with a simple premise that eventually fades away as the plotline moves in a variety of concentric circles. By using conventions from genres and subgenres of popular fiction, Tomeo sets into motion a narrative line in the minds of his readers that is based upon the expectations established by the forms that he employs. The actual content of the work, however, does not match the perceived way in which the story should unfold and creates moments of humorous incongruity in which the reader is invited to see the distance between what is supposed to happen and what is actually taking place. The systematic discord between form and content frustrates readerly expectations and sends his antagonists and heroes into unexplored novelistic terrains where they must negotiate their way through any number of stylistic variations of narrative formulas that generate suspense, romantic complications, horror, and futuristic exploration. His is a way of producing literature that openly recognizes the importance of legibility in the construction of a novel, but it does so without abandoning a tradition of artistic production that seeks to play with the relationship between creativity and recycled narrative forms.

The History and Evolution of Parody as a Literary Concept

The key role of parody in Tomeo’s narrative demands an understanding of its place in literature. The history of parody is a story of misunderstandings and heated debates
regarding the nature of its imitative operations and its potential for social critique. Parody has been criticized for being destructive, burlesque, and a defender of the status quo. Its emphasis on recycling outdated literary materials competes with Romantic traditions of creativity and authorship, and the word continues to appear in court for its participation in crimes of intellectual property, slander, and defamation. Postmodernism has embraced parody for its emphasis on self-reflexivity and artifice, but the term continues to be impugned for being a less prestigious imitation of another work and for calling attention to the derivative status of all literary forms. Unlike mimetic or “realist” modes of esthetic representation that conceal the mechanisms of fictional narration and its relationship to other textual traditions and conventions, parody foregrounds its own narrative procedures and those of other texts in order to create original literary works that may dialogue with or destroy the antecedents to which they refer.

Common definitions of parody exhibit the ways in which the word’s daily usage has undermined the complexity of its textual operations. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* provide restrictive definitions of the concept that forward its status as an irrefutably lightweight artistic form. While *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describes parody as, respectively, “a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule,” *The Oxford English Dictionary* posits parody as “an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.” The first definition suggests that a parody represents the salient feature of an entire literary work, whereas the second definition widens the scope by identifying parody as any type of humorous imitation of recognizable artistic materials. In both cases the point of parody is to impose some form of humor, comic
effect, or ridicule. Neither of the definitions makes room for parodies to show reverence toward the works that they are imitating, nor do they recognize the possibility that parody might create works of high literary merit. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* include a second description of parody as “a feeble or ridiculous imitation” and as “an imitation of a version of something that falls far short of the real thing; a travesty.” Whereas the previous definitions of parody make no claims regarding the status or position of parody in the arts, the second ones clearly point to the pejorative nature of the term. Parody is not only “feeble” and “ridiculous,” it is a form that “falls short” when compared to something else.

Etymologists have also struggled to present a clear conceptualization of parody because from among the first people to create and interpret ironic imitation, the poets, playwrights, and philosophers of Ancient Greece used several words that are translated today as “parody.” Fred W. Householder Jr. traces parody back to “parodia,” first used in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which he translates as “a poem of moderate length, in epic meter, using epic vocabulary, and treating a light, satirical, or mock-heroic subject” (3). The earliest surviving attestation of this form, *Batrachomyomachia* (*The Battle of Frogs and Mice*), from the seventh century B.C.E., is normally understood today as a Homeric mock epic, and it is commonly cited as one of the first instances of parody because it pits the drama and form of Homeric epics against low and trivial subject matter (Householder 3). Householder writes that early forms of parody were most likely recited by wandering bards who would play to audiences after the recitation of Homeric epics. He believes that parody, in its origin, possessed tremendous popular appeal, and that the Greeks held contests and prizes for mock epics both in Athens and Eretria (3-4).
Householder describes another definition of parody when he connects “parodia” to “parodos” and the plural “parodoi,” which describe an “imitation singer” or “singing in imitation.” He believes that these words contrast with the concept of an “original singer,” which signals parody’s function as an imitator of previous works (8). In a later study of parody’s etymology, F.J. Lelievre tracks the roots of the word back to “parode,” which means “singing after the style of an original but with a difference” (72). He also recognizes that “ode” or “song” is coupled with the prefix “para,” which paradoxically describes both nearness and opposition (66). In this sense, Lelievre suggests that there is nothing in the etymology of parody to suggest that a parody must be critical of the work that it is imitating. A parody may show respect toward its antecedent just as easily as it may ridicule it. Householder makes a similar point when he argues that Aristophanes parodied Euripides because he was a great admirer of his work and that mock-epics such as *The Battle of Frogs and Mice* direct their subversive content to social life in Athens and not to Homer’s works themselves.

Simon Dentith contributes another important historical investigation of parody that outlines the development of the concept from antiquity to the twentieth century. He argues that the contemporary resurgence of parody is an effect of critical interest in the writings of Russian formalists during the 1960s and 70s, as well as in debates among postmodern theorists in the 1980s and 90s. Dentith suggests that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and V.N. Volosinov offered the first major step in the recuperation of parody; the Russian theorists’ understanding of parody as a way of undermining official discourses countered arguments by critics such as John Jump, whose 1972 book had relegated parody to a minor disreputable aspect of the burlesque. In “Discourse and the Novel,” Bakhtin describes
parody as a type of language that writers employ in order to incorporate and reconfigure official discourses in a critical way. He sees novelistic language as a conflict between centripetal forces that try to unite language as a static and monolithic system of communication and centrifugal forces that try to decentralize and destroy homogeneity. Hegemonic discourses represent some of the centripetal forces that limit the possibilities of language while a series of subversive, “extraterrestrial” languages present a “different language” that attacks monolithic utterances and creates a new, hybrid form (Bakhtin 297-305). The “second language” is parody, a textual force with the ability to undermine discourses that are linked to authority and power.

Dentith also recognizes the debate between Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson during the 1980s as one of the most influential moments in the history of parody. Hutcheon’s The Politics of Postmodernism (1989) uses parody to respond to neo-conservative understandings of postmodernism that have been forwarded by theorists such as Jameson. By contrast, his “Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984) comments on the erasure of difference between high art and low art in late-capitalist, postmodern societies. Jameson argues there that the critical distance that Modernist art had traditionally established from popular culture and the market has given way to a “postmodern” esthetic form that shamelessly accepts its own status as a commodity in late-capitalist economies. Within this theoretical framework, the use of parody to subvert and satirize unique literary styles disappears, and pastiche becomes the dominant literary mode. He defines pastiche as “blank parody” and as a “statue with blind eyeballs” because it is an artistic form that maintains an indifferent attitude toward the past and the present (“Postmodernism” 17). Pastiche helps Jameson to highlight the imitation of dead forms in
postmodern art that, he believes, to symbolize the endless circulation of capital in advanced societies. For this Marxist theorist, the logic of pastiche is complicit with the hegemony of a mass culture industry that seeks to “normalize” cultural production according to generic ideological models that control consumers both socially and psychologically.

In her rebuttal to Jameson, Hutcheon maintains that it is parody and not pastiche that illuminates the realities of the postmodern condition. She believes that Jameson confuses the historical concept of postmodernity with the esthetic movement of postmodernism. While Hutcheon does recognize that the two are inextricably related, her purpose is to demonstrate that parody is a function of postmodern art that allows it to achieve a critical distance from the hegemony of the late capitalist economy. She observes that complicity and critique are fundamental to the criticism expounded in postmodern art of the logic of late capitalism: “[Postmodernism] is not so much what Jameson sees as a systematic form of capitalism as the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, without relinquishing the power to or will to intervene in it critically” (The Politics 27). The “critical and complicit” nature of postmodern parody allows artists to isolate and identify the dominant features of the late-capitalist market while simultaneously reminding us of their own participation within the system that they critique. Hutcheon writes that the self-reflexivity of postmodern parody and a general willingness to acknowledge its identity as a commodity allows it to “use and abuse” the “general conventions” of mass-produced cultural forms from the inside and thus politicize their forms of representation (The Politics 8).

More recent formulations of parody have shied away from categorizing the term as a mode or genre and have instead applied the concept to a wide range of textual
procedures that dialogue with other works in relationships that may be described as critical, complicit, or completely ambivalent. Margaret A. Rose's *Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche* draws from her earlier scholarship on parody and she defines the term there as “the comic reworking of preformed material” (5). She emphasizes that parodies create new works by appropriating the object of critique into their own original structure. Hers is a theory of parody that takes into account the term’s historical relationship with the carnivalesque and the burlesque, but Rose is quick to point out that parody has had a decidedly longer history and should not be confused with either of the aforementioned terms. She has no trouble admitting that parody may serve as one of many humorous instruments that help to develop the *topoi* of a comedic world turned upside down, but she insists that parody represents a specific textual operation that directs its thrust away from naïve conceptions of mimesis.

Rose’s insistence on humor constitutes an important feature of parody in my investigation. As we remember, parody will be understood as the creation of humorous incongruities between conventions and expectations. Humor is central to parody because the two concepts operate via the same basic principles. Both humor and parody depend upon the subversion of an audience’s expectations. By presenting something that is recognizable or commonly understood, X, a comedian can comically reconfigure it and present it as something new and incongruous, Y. In the case of parody, one text develops a narrative line that invokes the expectations of a previous narrative line in order to comically invert it. Both Rose and Juan Carlos Pueo insist upon parody’s relationship to humor. Pueo writes that it is impossible to deny the comic relationship between a parodic text and its antecedent because parody depends upon the convocation of a previous text in
order to establish a comical contrast between the two in a way that provokes laughter (117). By establishing opposing narrative syntaxes that eventually converge and produce a comic effect, Robert Chambers (2010) and Rose (1993) suggest that parodies create “bangs” and “collisions” between antagonistic literary forms: “In parody the comic incongruity may contrast the original text with its new form or context by the comic means of contrasting the serious with the absurd as well as the high with the low, or the ancient with the modern, the pious with the impious, and so on” (Rose, Parody 33). Without the collision, a parody cannot establish the critical distance that it needs in order to develop its opposing discourse.

One of the difficulties that theorists have had when describing the critical aspects of parody is its inherent double standard. Hutcheon’s seminal 1985 work on parody continues to influence the ways in which scholars have dealt with the term’s many contradictory and paradoxical features. She defines parody as “imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” and uses the definition to separate her understanding of postmodern parody from eighteenth century notions of humor, wit, and ridicule (A Theory 6). She argues that theorists have placed too much emphasis on parody’s critical aspects rather than understanding the ways in which it may serve to demonstrate allegiance toward an antecedent. Hutcheon maintains that a parody is neither inherently critical nor deferential toward the text that it is parodying and points to works by Miguel de Cervantes, Henry Fielding, Byron, James Joyce, and Jorge Luis Borges, as well as a variety of popular texts in order to stress that a parody may exercise several relationships with its target text or discourse. A parody may be reverent, ambiguous, and/or openly critical of the texts that it is imitating. She concludes
that parody is both critical of and complicit with its antecedent and serves as a place of ridicule and homage.  

Despite the influence that Hutcheon’s theories of parody continue to exert, both Dentith and Seymour Benjamin Chatman have critiqued her theory of parody. Chatman claims that she overemphasizes parody’s complicit relationship with its target and diminishes a spirit of ridicule and critique that is essential to its function in literature. His study is indebted to the work of Gerard Genette, whose *Palimpsests* represents another crucial investigation of parody. Looking to delineate among the similar concepts of parody, pastiche, and satire, Genette provides definitions that distinguish the function of each term. For Genette, parody represents one of several operations between a hypertext (parodic text) and a hypotext (original work). Parody is thus a general category that describes four different operations: strict parody, burlesque travesty, pastiche, and satiric pastiche (Chatman 16-24). Chatman uses the Genette’s terminology in order to assert that Hutcheon’s understanding of parody is too broad, and that it saturates the term to the point that it loses its utility. He backs up his argument by claiming that a parody can be directed toward a society rather than toward the hypertext. Dentith makes a similar argument when he states that a parody “can have its polemic directed to the world rather than the preceding text” (18). Referencing the critique of the Modern era found in T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” he maintains that the imitation of style, conventions, and language frequently serves as a vehicle for larger criticisms about social reality.

In making these arguments, both Chatman and Dentith succeed in reaffirming the critical and polemic nature of parodic forms, but they are also guilty of committing the same crime that they attribute to Hutcheon. Understanding parody as a delivery vehicle for...
social criticism can be a risky move for theorists because it blurs distinctions between parody and satire. Traditionally, the two terms have been understood as separate, but related, entities. Whereas parody is a textual operation that depends upon the imitation and inversion of recognizable textual materials, satire is more commonly understood as the direct critique of social reality. Both concepts are similar in that they represent double-coded language that must be evaluated and interpreted, but both must be considered as separate terms in order to distinguish between two distinct artistic techniques.

My understanding of parody as humorous incongruities between conventions and expectations refers to a textual process that only parody can describe. As we will see, Tomeo incorporates the conventions, genres, and languages of popular fiction into his texts. However, we will also notice that the overarching vision of social reality that is presented in these works counters the assumptions of the genres that he is parodying. In this sense, Tomeo critiques social reality, but these critiques are always mediated through conversations with other texts. Rather than simply providing commentary on the habits of a corrupt society in the form of satire, Tomeo infiltrates the logic of popular literary forms, rewires their content, and forces them to reveal truths about the world that they would otherwise never reveal. Pueo expresses this particular critical function of parody in general when he writes, “El efecto de la parodia (al menos, el efecto pretendido) no es sólo poner en cuestión el texto al que se refiere, sino todo lo que hay tras él. Un texto no acoge sólo una visión del mundo, sino una manera de representar ese mundo, y ambas se encuentran inextricablemente unidas” (112-13). The ability of parody to target more than just the text to which it is referring helps to describe how Tomeo’s novels usurp and subvert the visions of reality that specific popular literary genres seek to authorize. In the case of crime fiction,
for example, novels such as *El testamento discutido de Gastón Puyparlier* (1990) and *Preparativos de viaje* (1991) call upon the conventions of the classic detective novel and the hard-boiled genre in order to setup “collisions” between form and content that question the basic narrative premises of these novelistic worlds. Absurd dialogues and tangential anecdotes are a few of the parodic devices that Tomeo uses in order to frustrate the expectations of this novelistic form and subvert crime fiction’s standard dedication to reason, deduction, and order. Similarly, *El Cazador de leones* (1989) and *Los amantes de silicona* (2008) ridicules the conventions and clichés of popular romance and erotic romance novels.

**The Place of Parody in Criticism on Tomeo**

Despite compelling evidence regarding the primacy of parody in Tomeo’s narrative, comprehensive analyses of this topic have been almost completely absent from critical insights into Tomeo’s fiction. Evaluations of Tomeo’s prose during the last fifteen years have either focused on the author’s use of postmodern themes and topoi in order to place him among his contemporaries or on the author’s interest in deformation and monstrosity, which places him in an alternate tradition of Spanish and European literature. For critics of these two groups, Tomeo can be understood as an author of his time who expresses the problematic implications of the postmodern condition that are found in Spain and beyond its borders. In the only book-length academic study of Tomeo’s fiction to date, Ramón Acín’s *Aproximación a la narrativa de Javier Tomeo* lays down the argument that Tomeo “practica una especie de novela acumulativa puesto que, en realidad, todas sus obras son la adición y acumulación de varias anécdotas que se enroscan sobre sí mismas en continua
prolongación” (62). For Acín, Tomeo’s novelistic corpus amasses literary references that continuously dialogue with one another. He argues that the author's preference for intertextuality and interdiscursivity, that is, the systematic incorporation of repeating textual and social referents, foregrounds the sense of solitude and hyper-reality common to post-industrial, postmodern societies. Acín also applies Jean-Francois Lyotard’s conception of postmodernism to argue that Tomeo’s works form part of a larger social and artistic movement in which the novel serves as a “reflection” of skeptical attitudes toward grand narratives and “conocimientos analítico-referenciales que hasta el momento habían sido eje del conocimiento y de la existencia” (Aproximación 17).

Acín’s interpretation of Tomeo’s literary works is consistent with Francisco Javier Higüerο’s understanding of the author’s prose. Drawing from the theoretical teachings of Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, Higüero continues Acín’s postmodern approach by pointing out that the organizational dimensions of his novels lack any notion of beginning, middle, or end. He posits that the “rhizomatic” structure that Tomeo employs in novels such as Bestiario produces “great discursive instability” and “a marked multidimensional movement” (“La desterritorialización” 72). The unpredictable inertia of Tomeo’s discourse, he contends, not only represents a narrative form that contradicts any type of unity between place, time, and action but also serves to create an atmosphere in which his characters can create subversive, multi-dimensional identities that act as an “arma arrojadiza” against the implementation of oppressive social orders (“Duplicidad” 210). Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones, on the other hand, has placed the concept of the sublime at the center of Tomeo’s narrative in order to show that his characters dramatize the suffering of subjects who never achieve a tangible identity in postmodern, late-
capitalist societies: “estos personajes no aciertan a instalarse, a pesar de sus esfuerzos, en ninguna de sus identidades porque éstas no se manifiestan como formas dadas y completas que puedan ser usadas e intercambiadas” (Precariedad 35).\textsuperscript{11} Gómez López-Quiñones joins Labanyi and Bradley S. Epps in placing Tomeo among writers such as Enrique Vila-Matas, Albert Sánchez Piñol, and Arturo Pérez-Reverte, who develop their publishing careers in the wake of Spain’s transition to democracy.\textsuperscript{12} Others have understood Tomeo much differently. Rather than placing the author alongside writers associated with postmodernism, María Ángeles Cabré refers to Tomeo as one of the “raros más raros” of contemporary Spanish narrative (8). Referencing Tomeo’s “singular” and “heterodoxical” style, she concludes that “no sólo resulta tarea hercúlea emparentarlo con alguno de sus padres generacionales, sino que sus discípulos brillan por su ausencia” (8). She further presents Tomeo as a writer with a limited literary heritage due to his interest in deformation, expressionism, and monstrosity. As do many other critics, she identifies Franz Kafka as his most important influence. María Arnedo’s doctoral thesis on Tomeo also celebrates the author’s identity as an outsider by suggesting that his novels use “freakiness” and “otherness” as points of enunciation from which a series of social outsiders can develop their discourses of irrationality, insanity, and absurdity. She notes that the author’s style has little in common with the writers of his day, but that his interest in anti-realist devices such as deformation, the grotesque, and the esperpento esthetic all possess an artistic vision of the world that is similar to that of Valle-Inclán and Goya. She also names a wide range of American and European writers such as Albert Camus, Kafka, Carson McCullers, and even Sigmund Freud as other possible influences and affiliates.
Tomeo’s interest in parody places him alongside a variety of other authors from the 1980s and 90s who incorporate and deform popular literary conventions in their novels. In one of his earlier articles, Gómez López-Quiñones places Tomeo alongside Rosa Montero, Almudena Grandes, Cristina Fernández-Cubas, Enrique Vila-Matas, Pablo Tusset, Marcos Ordóñez, and Andrés Trapiello as a group of writers who are committed to the production of literary works that break unspoken agreements with readers of popular genre fiction: “Estas obras refuerzan algunos de los presupuestos genéricos con los que el lector puede estar familiarizado y simultáneamente rechazan otros; respaldan ciertas expectativas de lectura y frustran otras. Leer estas novelas implica identificar un determinado género literario y asistir simultáneamente a su deformación” (“La península” 53). We may also add a number of other writers and works to the list, which include Quim Monzó and his grotesque parody of erotic fiction in La magnitud de la tragedia (1989), Gabriela Bustelo’s parodic remake of detective novels in Veo veo (1996) and science fiction in Planeta hembra (2001), and Jorge Martínez Reverte’s Julio Gálvez series. Eduardo Mendoza also continues to stand out for his parodic trilogy. El misterio de la cripta embrujada (1979), El laberinto de las aceitunas (1982), and La aventura del tocador de mujeres (2002) represent three of the most notable works of parody in contemporary Spanish literature. I will study Mendoza’s use of parody in the first chapter in order to compare and contrast the ways that he and Tomeo provide similar artistic visions of the detective novel, even though Mendoza has received much more critical attention.

Chapter Outlines
Selecting a corpus from Tomeo’s immense collection of works provides a variety of challenges. Firstly, he is both a novelist and a well-known writer of short stories, flash fiction, theater, and several works that defy literary classification. I focus my study on his novelistic discourse because it is there that parody appears in its most coherent form. My corpus is a collection of narrative fiction that represents the clearest examples of parody within his immense literary universe. As we will see, Tomeo’s fiction frequently borrows from at least three popular genres in order to derail the expectations that these narrative forms systematically create for readers. In Chapter 1, I will analyze *El testamento discutido* de Gastón Puypulier (1990) and *Preparativos de viaje* (1986) in order to highlight the parodic relationship that these works establish with the classic detective novel and spy fiction. My analysis of both texts will reveal how Tomeo uses parody to undermine the reaffirming assumptions toward rationality that are commonly found in crime fiction, and I will show how the author uses parody to suggest that truth, and our methods of arriving at truth, are always susceptible to personal biases and other forms of subjectivity.

In Chapter 2, I will explore Tomeo’s relationship with the horror genre in *La noche del lobo* (2006) and *Constructores de monstruos* (2013). The first of the two novels enters the terrain of the werewolf sub-genre of horror by exploring the psychology of a man who believes that he is a lycanthrope, or a person who turns into a werewolf during a full moon. The second novel develops around two characters who spend a year trying to create a monster like Frankenstein. Rather than examining the fear produced by the appearance of a monster, *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos* explore the monster within and highlight the prevalence of abnormality, anxiety, and fear in everyday life.
Chapter 3 will investigate the ways that Tomeo’s fiction parodies two sub-genres of romance fiction in *El cazador de lones* (1987) and *Los amantes de silicona* (2008). The first novel features a male protagonist who tries to seduce a woman over the phone by telling her that he is a lion hunter. The second novel tells the story of two characters who have fallen out of love and a pair of blowup sex dolls who are more capable of profound interaction than their human counterparts. The genre of popular romance fiction traditionally depends upon the development of a romantic relationship that ends with a happy ending wherein the heroine and the hero unite. Both of the novels that I will study in this chapter humorously recreate the primary conventions of the sentimental and erotic sub-genres of popular fiction, but Tomeo’s use of parody undermines these conventions and sends the stories into uncharted narrative terrains that explore the human inability to establish profound relationships and to communicate in meaningful ways.

Notes

1 In *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction* (2012), David Glover and Scott McCracken explain that popular literature is “based upon a limited number of forms or genres of narrative pleasure, such as suspense, romantic complications, bodily horror or
futuristic speculation” (2). The editors of this collection of essays use theorists from the field of cultural studies in order to take a different approach toward popular fiction from that of Gelder and Walter Nash, who is cited below. Reiterating the arguments that McCracken lays out in *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction, The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction* explores the social history of popular fiction and its readers. These investigations represent important contributions to the field of cultural criticism, but they do not help to reveal either Tomeo’s vision and critique of popular culture or his critical vision of social reality.

2 Jameson notes, however, that the best science fiction creates a relationship with a given social order that allows us to fantasize about its change and thereby differentiates it from other genres and sub-genres of popular fiction, and justifies his investigation of this particular genre.

3 Acín has described Tomeo’s pattern in this way: “Por lo general, un personaje o un par de personajes reprimidos, fantasiosos, solitarios, confusos, anormales o deformes y, tal vez, incluso monstruosos, hablan del entorno—cerrado—y de lo cotidiano. Personajes, cuidado, que pareciendo normales juegan a cazar leones, a cantar boleros, sentirse licántropos” (“Javier Tomeo” 18-19). What Acín does not note is that these “lion hunters,” “bolero singers,” and “werewolves” each represent “types” that respectively appear in adventure novels, romance novels, and the horror genre.

4 Hutcheon frequently depends upon her concept of historiographic metafiction in order to pit parody against pastiche. She uses the term to describe literary works that critically reflect upon the nature of the past by problematizing the conventions of historic narration that are used in the present. By identifying self-reflexivity in what she deems
“postmodern narrative,” she can (and does) argue that Jameson misses the ironic intention of parody and thus misidentifies the term as pastiche.

5 Hutcheon ignores the role of humor in parody, and humor has also been a point of contention among other theorists.

6 Like Pueo and Rose, I frequently borrow language from Wolfgang’s Iser’s theory of reader involvement. I depend upon the understanding of parody as a double-coded language that a reader must interpret in order to comprehend its intended meaning.

7 Chambers emphasizes that parody is an artistic form that purposefully opens itself to a variety of interpretations. He argues that parodies do not only bang contrasting materials together, but they also “bind and blend” them in order to create original literary works (83).

8 It is worth noting that Householder, Lelievre, and others had also made similar points about parody’s potential for expressing reverence prior to Hutcheon’s work.

9 Parábolas y monstruos de Javier Tomeo (1999) and Javier Tomeo. Homenatge/Homenaje, Cuadernos de estudio y cultura (2006) are publicity materials and do not constitute extended criticisms of his works.

10 In most cases, Higuero argues, Tomeo’s novels explore existentialist topics and universal human concerns, but La rebelión de los rábanos acts as a departure from this pattern because it comments on social reality (“Declive” 2005).

11 Mihai Lacob, José María Pozuelo Yvancos, and Isabelle Reck comprise three other influential voices among the critics who have taken a postmodern approach. Lacob, for example, investigates the role of postmodernism, monstrosity, and the “visión deformada” of Tomeo’s characters (210). Pozuelo Yvancos comments on the sense of solitude and
disconnection in Tomeo’s early novels, and Reck argues that Tomeo uses media and communication technologies such as telephones, the Internet, and television in order to highlight the spectralized nature of communication in today’s postmodern society. Marta E. Alisent argues that Tomeo’s fiction seeks to comment on social reality, while Nina L. Molinaro takes a different approach. She writes that Tomeo’s novels are not interested in providing coherent commentaries about the material reality of daily life in Spain; Tomeo instead “critiques social organization by foregrounding the psychological dissonances of human existence” (135).

12 Despite the concerted critical interest in postmodernism and deformation in Tomeo’s prose, parody has not played a major role in any investigation thus far of this writer. This is not to say, however, that parody has been completely absent. Anthony Percival’s reading of La agonía de Proserpina points to the parody of high and low forms that takes place in the novel, but it is not the central focus of his study. In a 2010 article, Acín mentions that parody is one of the author’s “analytical tools” (“Javier Tomeo” 17). Hans Felten has alluded to humorous clashes between form and content without recognizing it as parody, and Molinaro has understood La agonía de Proserpina as “a parody of human interaction” (136).
Chapter 1

Impossible Mysteries: Parody, Crime Fiction, and Absurdity in *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* and *Preparativos de viaje*

My introduction presented the argument that Tomeo repeatedly uses parody in order to undermine the reaffirming worldviews commonly found in popular literature and to project an alternative narrative reality defined by absurdity, abnormality, and loneliness. The first chapter of my dissertation focuses on the first of these effects by studying the author’s parodies of crime fiction. The genre is important for Tomeo because he has a long-standing relationship with crime. As the inside covers of his books indicate, the Aragonese studied law and criminology at the Universitat de Barcelona. This particular piece of biographical knowledge has served as a popular point of departure for the influential critical analyses of Tomeo’s prose that have been forwarded by Acín, Elisa Martínez Salizar, Darío Villanueva, and Vania Maire Fivaz. For these commentators and many others, Tomeo uses his background in criminology in order to create a unique form of literature that is primarily concerned with the exploration of psychological dissonance and pathological human behavior. It is undeniable that his interest in the scientific study of the criminal mind represents a fundamental aspect of his narrative, but this interpretation has drawn attention away from the formal considerations of the author’s prose that evince his interest in undermining fictitious depictions of law and order that regularly appear in popular literature. In two of his novels, Tomeo incorporates and reconfigures the conventions of crime fiction sub-genres based in reason, logic, and deduction in order to create alternative textual realities that invite readers to imagine a world that cannot be understood through rational thought or action. Parody calls attention to the sinister, irrational, and chaotic
aspects of daily life that are not commonly found in mass culture, and Tomeo uses it to suggest that truth, and our methods of arriving at truth, may never be uncovered in an environment that lacks structure or coherency.

This chapter will study the ways in which *El discutido testamento de Gastón Puyparlier* (1990) and *Preparativos de viaje* (1986)\(^1\) parody the structures, characters, and conventions of the classic detective novel and spy fiction in order to create original narrative designs that frustrate the conventions and simplistic worldviews of both crime fiction sub-genres. The first novel, *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier*, employs the framework of classic detective fiction and invites its audience to undergo a perplexing hermeneutic exercise that involves the life, death, and generous inheritance of a wealthy aristocrat. Rather than creating an enigma that can be solved through the precise use of ratiocination, the novel manipulates the conventions of the crime fiction sub-genre and projects a frustrating textual reality that reveals the dubious nature of human thought and the failure of social institutions to impose law and order upon the chaos of the social world. *Preparativos de viaje*, on the other hand, borrows the structure and conventions of popular spy narratives that are traditionally designed to produce satisfactory depictions of human action and agency. Contrary to popular variations of the formula, however, Tomeo’s novel produces a frustrating reality in which the hero is unable to accomplish his mission or overcome the challenges that he faces. By reading both texts together, I will show how the Aragonese author mocks the fantasies of crime fiction and creates original artistic worlds that declare the omnipresence of absurdity, confusion, and disorder, as well as the impossibility of human reason and agency to ever dispel these.\(^2\)
My discussion of the confluence of parody and crime fiction represents a new interpretation of Tomeo’s work, as the critical consensus is that his fiction lacks coherent plot structures, and that he uses a non-linear pattern of writing that moves in a series of concentric circles. In *Constructores de monstruos*, Tomeo claims that his novels “carecen de argumento” and develop around “artistic automatisms” (8). Ramón Acín and other critics routinely emphasize that the author’s fiction departs from an absurd anecdote or idea that is slowly developed through a series of dialogues that gradually move the work away from any sense of realism (Acín 75). My research suggests that Tomeo also models his fiction on the conventions and structures of sub-genres from popular literature.

**Parody and Crime Fiction**

The ironic reconfiguration of two recognizable sub-genres of crime fiction offers a clear example of what Hutcheon calls the “complicitous critique” of parody (*The Politics* 2). Even though parodies are frequently considered to be satirical or acerbic depictions of previous literary works, genres, and styles, Hutcheon and many others have argued that parodies share a largely ambiguous relationship with the texts that they incorporate. If a parody is to function properly, it must appropriate the object of critique into its original structure and thereby call attention to its conventions. *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* employs recognizable conventions from the classic detective novel that include the mystery, the detective-narrator, the parade of witnesses, the discernment of clues, and the resolution or denouement. Likewise, *Preparativos de viaje* uses specific conventions from spy fiction: the mission, the spy-narrator, the investigation, the hunted man, and the final showdown. The presence of these conventions allows Tomeo to organize the narrative
development in both works in a way that is legible for readers, and it also allows the novels to create a relationship with the tradition of crime fiction novels that has been recycled by writers from a wide range of historical and cultural backgrounds.

Unlike conventional contributions to popular culture, however, Tomeo’s parodic works of crime fiction always maintain a sense of ironic distance from the characters and clichés that they appropriate. Both of the novels that I will study in the present chapter differ from their textual antecedents because they employ a series of narrative techniques that have been used by parodists for centuries. Rose suggests that parody appears through the creation of “collisions” between “the serious and the absurd as well as the high with the low, or the ancient with the modern, the pious with the impious, and so on” (Parody 33).

The presence of incongruous elements within an otherwise recognizable literary structure disrupts the traditional development of the narrative form that is being imitated and establishes a unique and frustrating economy between conventions and expectations. El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier and Preparativos de viaje produce original experiences for readers by playing the serious and dramatic conventions of crime fiction against a collection of absurd scenarios and ridiculous characters which fail to emulate the standards of the two sub-genres. Moreover, both of these novels employ other incompatible elements such as exaggeration, repetition, and self-reflexivity in order to frustrate readerly expectations and to signal to the reader that the narrative scenario cannot be deciphered and understood via the traditional reading patterns of the sub-genres that are being parodied.

The presence of humor and irony undermines the conventions of the classic detective novel and spy fiction, and it also creates an original narrative that is skeptical
concerning naïve forms of mimesis and the potentially reductive visions of reality targeted towards readers. The “inextricable” relationship between a text and its worldview allows Tomeo’s crime fiction parodies to extend the author’s criticism beyond the textual world and to provide coherent commentaries regarding the nature of social reality. In this sense, parody allows for the production of more “realistic” stories because it does not idealize reality and instead shows the lack of congruity between fiction and reality.

The relationship between a popular text and the specific worldview that it projects for readers is crucial to understanding Tomeo’s parodies of crime fiction because both of his novels critique the simplistic understandings of social reality found within the classic detective novel and spy fiction. As I will subsequently argue, classic detective fiction projects and presupposes an idealized view of reality in which crime takes place in more-or-less safe world, and every crime that appears may be studied and remedied through the careful use of ratiocination and deduction. The parody of literary conventions associated with this formula allows Tomeo, in El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier, to ridicule the processes by which the human mind is said to be capable of arriving at a single, objective conclusion of moral, ethical, and legal significance. The reconfiguration of recognizable literary materials enables the novel to project an alternative textual reality that calls attention to the limits of reason and objectivity and undermines the sub-genre’s reassuring depiction of society and its many institutions. Preparativos de viaje, by contrast, targets the reaffirming portrayals of human thought and action that appear in the spy fiction sub-genre. Rather than celebrating human agency, the novel uses parody to project a frustrating textual reality in which the thoughts and actions of the protagonist do not produce any type of meaning or victory over the sinister forces operating inside of the
fictional world. Both novels question the idea that can be understood or conquered through deductive thought, reason, and action, and they gesture toward a critical and self-reflexive form of fiction that seeks to foreground the prevalence of irrationality and absurdity.

Finally, it is crucial to note the role of humor in Tomeo’s parodies of crime fiction. Humor is a basic ingredient of ironic imitation because it signals that we have understood the incongruity created between a parody and its target. Rather than being frustrated by the contradiction posed by the confluence of serious and absurd material, humor allows readers to adopt a sense of ironic distance before the skeptical worldviews that parodies often project. In the case of crime fiction parodies, especially the ones that we will see in Tomeo’s novels, the series of comical effects invites us to consider the idea that we may live in a corrupt and possibly specious system of morality, but it does so without inciting dangerous urges in readers. This particular aspect of parody is important to any consideration of the Aragonese’s prose because it separates him from other writers with whom he is frequently compared. Critics and commentators frequently align Tomeo with writers such as Kafka, Borges, and even playwrights associated with the Theater of the Absurd such as Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, but the effect of parody allows Tomeo’s audience to laugh, rather than cry, at the many tragic realities he invites us to comprehend.

**Parody and Crime Fiction in Spain**

By using parody to signal the aspects of reality that may not fit into the conventions and formulas of crime fiction, Tomeo takes part in larger conversations on the Iberian Peninsula surrounding the place and function of parody in crime fiction. Of all the
theorists to treat parody in Spanish crime fiction, Joan Ramón Resina has offered the most detailed theoretical model. He argues that parody is a narrative device that writers have used for centuries in order to foreground the structural configurations of realist narrative forms, and that Spanish writers and artists after Franco’s dictatorship employ parody in order to demonstrate their frustrations with the proliferation of conventionalized structures within Spanish culture (227). In this sense, parody serves as a vehicle to express larger complaints about the reproducibility of genres such as crime fiction, and it may also echo broader concerns about Spain’s participation in an international literary market that values standardization and uniformity over ingenuity and craftsmanship (Resina 227). Resina identifies several authors who employ parody to a number of formal and ideological ends. He argues that Manuel Vázquez Montalbán has relied on parody in his more recent novels, *Sabotaje olímpico* (1993) and *Roldán, ni vivo ni muerto* (1994), in order to “revelar aspectos de la realidad que escapan al modelo literario” (229). Other writers, such as Jaume Fuster, Juan Marsé, and Antonio Muñoz Molina, have produced novels that carnivalize both the structures of crime fiction and the social realities in which they appear. For these authors, parody represents a discursive strategy for critiquing certain social and political institutions that developed in the wake of Spain’s transition from a dictatorship to democracy (Resina 229).

Of all the Spanish writers to be recognized as parodists of crime fiction, Eduardo Mendoza continues to receive the bulk of critical attention for the parodic detective trilogy that includes *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (1978), *El laberinto de las aceitunas* (1982), and *Las aventuras del tocador de mujeres* (2001). Even though Tomeo has not amassed the same critical attention as Mendoza, the Aragonese author shares the Barcelonan’s interest
in parodying popular narrative forms. David Knutson argues that *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* and *El laberinto de las aceitunas* parody the classic detective sub-genre and the hardboiled sub-genre of crime fiction. For this critic, Mendoza’s use of parody represents the beginning of a narrative formula that the author sustains throughout his novelistic production:

Una fórmula o un género particular sirve como núcleo a cada una de estas obras, y la nueva novela incorpora la gramática estructural de su fórmula. No obstante, las obras de Mendoza no sólo asumen una estructura sino que también intentan ensanchar sus posibilidades. Examinando estas obras desde la perspectiva de la parodia, hay que considerar las diferencias entre ellas y las expectativas inspiradas por la referencia al género en cuestión, porque allí está la innovación y la distancia crítica. (34)

Mendoza incorporates into his novels a collection of genres such as gangster fiction and the romance novel in order to establish specific expectations that become humorously frustrated throughout the development of the story. The difference between the parodic work and its antecedent allows for the construction of new literary forms that poke fun at a previous literary style while also creating an original literary work with its own notable artistic features.

Parodic novels by Tomeo and Mendoza offer several similarities, but some key differences explain the relative obscurity of the first and the overwhelming editorial success of the second. Tomeo spent his life writing in the same city as Mendoza and other successful crime writers such as Vázquez Montalbán and Andreu Martín, but he showed no interest in painting the soiled alleyways and undulating rooftops of Catalonia’s city center.
Tomeo rarely encodes recognizable social referents into his prose and instead sets his stories in imaginary worlds and highly stylized locations in the past, present, and future. This is not to say, however, that his writing is devoid of social commentary. Whereas Mendoza uses parody as a vehicle for satire, and to call attention to the senselessness, absurdity, and immorality of Spanish social and political institutions after the fall of the Franco dictatorship, the form of parody that appears throughout Tomeo’s *oeuvre* transcends national borders and enables the critique of universal aspects of the human condition. The absurd, irrational nature of human existence lies at the center of our author’s crime fiction parodies and systematically annuls any of the genre’s conventional statements regarding the potential for reason to operate as a vehicle for the eminent victory of truth and order over chaos.

**History, Terminology, and Variations of the Crime Fiction Formula**

In order to clarify the terminology that will be employed throughout this investigation, I here provide a brief explanation of what is meant by the terms “classic detective novel” and “spy fiction.” John G. Cawelti explains that crime fiction may be divided into two archetypal formulas that suggest a fundamental human desire to produce a series of mental and physical challenges in order to resolve them. The first of the two crime genre variations, the classic detective formula, embodies the archetype of mystery and places some form of intellectual puzzle before the reader that he or she is invited to solve alongside a fictional character (Cawelti 42). Cawelti writes that the mystery storyline continues to appeal to audiences because it possesses an “underlying moral fantasy” in which every problem has a “desirable and rational solution” (43). Martin Priestman, along
with several others, has noted that Oedipus’ investigation of the death of his successor, King Lauis, is one of the first examples of the classic detective formula because it places the protagonist in the same position as the detective who must solve a mystery before the killer strikes again (7). Unfortunately for Oedipus, his search for the truth only reveals that he is in fact the killer, and the myth thus offers a surprise ending, which writers of experimental detective fiction such as Borges and Alain Robbe-Grillet will emulate during the 20th century.

Scholars continue to debate the earliest roots of the classic detective formula, but a general consensus indicates that one of Tomeo’s favorite writers, Edgar Allan Poe, is the inventor of the classic detective story. Poe’s three most famous contributions to the crime formula are “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842), and “The Purloined Letter” (1845), and some commentators also include “The Gold Bug” (1843) and “Thou Art the Man” (1844). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Agatha Christie are among the most famous writers to succeed Poe, and during the 1920s and 30s each helped to create what has been called the Golden Age of detective fiction. During this period, the classic detective novel exploded in popularity and received a variety of different names that continue to circulate and highlight the sub-genre’s many recognizable features. Priestman writes that the term “mystery novel” emphasizes the puzzle element of the form, while the tongue-and-cheek term “whodunit” focuses on the novel’s interest in eventually identifying the perpetrator of a crime. Other critics label it as the “classic” or “golden age” novel, which refers to both the period in which it appeared and its status as the first of many sub-genres to come. The term “detective fiction” is also popular, but Priestman notes that this is an ambiguous term because it may either mean
fiction that is detective in nature or fiction that features a detective (3). We will continue to refer to *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* as a parody of a “mystery novel” and/or “classic detective fiction” because the story focuses on a mystery and because the task of the reader and the detective, at least theoretically, is to resolve that mystery through detection.

The second of Tomeo’s novels that I study here parodies a strand of crime writing which became popular in the wake of World War II and during the Cold War, the spy novel. Unlike the classic detective formula, which embodies the mystery archetype, Cawelti suggests that spy novels have their roots in the adventure archetype because their central fantasy evolves around a hero as he or she overcomes a series of obstacles and dangers in order to accomplish some type of important mission (39). According to this theorist, the adventure archetype is the oldest and most appealing of all story types, and it has been cultivated in some form or another by almost every human society (40). This is not to say, however, that adventure stories are completely different from mystery stories. Cawelti observes that enigmas are central to the adventure archetype, and the common storyline of this archetype also features the machinations of some type of villain (40). The earliest adventure stories are Romances about knights, damsels, and dragons but these common stories have given way to newer and more specific cultural situations such as the problem of crime and the activity of espionage. Despite their many variations in content, stories that employ the adventure archetype feature a character on some kind of mission who must defeat an enemy after overcoming a series of mental and physical challenges.

Today spy fiction is considered a sub-genre of crime fiction because it shares many characteristics with detective fiction. David Seed explains that both of these sub-genres
prioritize investigation, the action in both takes place outside the law, and the plot “progresses from apparently disparate fragments toward a more complete account of action” (233). The movement in the spy novel from confusion to clarity and chaos to order is similar to the movement in the classic detective formula from deduction to resolution. Both sub-genres inherently produce satisfying answers concerning issues of major social and political importance, but theorists and fans of spy fiction frequently emphasize that its content and its structural configuration borrow greatly from a different crime fiction sub-genre, the hardboiled novel. The hardboiled novel became popular in the North American journal *The Black Mask* during the 1920s. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett are commonly known as the fathers of this third type of crime fiction, which demonstrates several differences from the detective formula produced by Poe, Doyle, and Christie. Unlike the detecting savants in mystery novels, the hardboiled variation features tough-guy detectives who do not enjoy any distance from the crimes that they are investigating. Like a spy, the hardboiled detective is always caught in the middle of a dangerous scenario and must risk life and limb in order to resolve the mystery and unmask the villain. Readers of both sub-genres will also notice similarities in the superior intellectual capacities of the two kinds of characters, their tough talk, their interest in sex, and their frequent need to find time for a drink.

**The Conventions of the Classic Detective Formula**

In order to understand the parody that appears in *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier*, the reader must be familiar with the formal conventions of the classic detective novel. The story always begins with the introduction of a mystery involving a crime of major social importance, such as a murder or kidnapping. The reader then tries to
come to his or her own conclusions, as the detective investigates a collection of clues and speaks with a group of witnesses who usually give conflicting testimonies regarding the events in question. Theorists of the genre insist that crimes in detective fiction are always proportionate to the elaborate parade of mystification and inquiry that the story must generate. Cawelti writes that “the crime must be a major one with the potential for complex ramifications but the victim cannot be mourned or the possible complexities of the situation allowed to draw our attention away from the detective and his investigation” (81). These considerations are important because the first humorous manipulation of the classic detective novel takes place in Tomeo’s novel with the introduction of the crime. Rather than providing a scenario of great legal importance, the novel presents a mystery surrounding a dispute over a will. The matter may seem simple, but the ramifications are complex, the investigation is exhausting, and it is suggested that someone may have been trying to kill the deceased. Each of these factors builds upon other clichés of the sub-genre, such as the use of a romanticized location in France, an argument over a large inheritance, and a string of dead aristocrats, all of which produce a sense of intrigue common to the classic detective formula. Parody, however, allows for the constant sense of confusion and misdirection that leads the narrator and the reader to make difficult decisions regarding the events that led to the death of Gastón de Puyparlier.

The second parodic variation that we will see in the novel is the appearance of a narrator who plays the role of the detective. The figure of the classic detective acts as the hero of the mystery sub-genre because he or she is the only character who can read the clues and codes that are necessary in order to make sense of the mystery and catch the criminal. The classic detective figure always represents a paradigm of reason, clarity, and
self-confidence. He or she rarely doubts that every bit of information can be comprehended. Unlike traditional classic detective stories, the narrator who appears in *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* is not necessarily a detective, but the character serves the same narrative function because he presents all of the information that the reader needs to know in order to understand the nature of the crime which has taken place, and he also deduces a number of conclusions from each of the witnesses and clues presented. This observation is critical to Tomeo’s novel and to the detective sub-genre because any good mystery depends upon the willingness of its protagonist and its audience to undertake a hermeneutic exercise in which bits of conflicting information lead us to discover the truth behind the mystery or problem that is proposed at the outset. George N. Dove suggests that the success of a classic detective novel depends upon the complexity of the “game-type” puzzle that it creates, which attracts the interest of the detective and the reader and keeps them moving through the story (19).

Stephen Knight writes that the clue-puzzle in classic detective fiction must present the readers and the protagonist with the illusion of having an opportunity to solve the mystery using only their basic mental faculties. The author must play fair with his or her readers by presenting them with each clue that the detective sees, which then allows readers to develop a friendly rivalry with the detective (Knight 79). For this reason, Charles J. Rzepka, among other critics, has emphasized that the mystery puzzle must be designed in a way that is generally compatible with the rules of modern science and the physical universe in which we live (18). He argues that the detective sub-genre assumes that the world can be adequately interpreted by the “inferring of conclusions from empirical evidence” (16). Like the classic detective novel, *El discutido testamento de Gastón de*
Puyparlier invites its readers to infer a variety of conclusions from testimonies and physical pieces of evidence. However, each piece of evidence fails to provide a trustworthy record of the events in question, and together they lead the reader to subjective and arbitrary conclusions that demonstrate the limits of reason in a world that is always subject to the ambivalent nature of the human mind.

The third convention that we will see in Tomeo’s novel is the parade of witnesses. Cawelti writes that Poe invented this technique, and that it is a formal procedure in which a group of average citizens are presented in quasi-documentary fashion and relate a series of confusing facts meant to disorient the reader and lead to his or her inevitable frustration (85). He explains that the witnesses’ testimonies are always short, concise, and they never divert the reader’s attention away from the events surrounding the crime that has taken place. In the case of Poe’s detective stories, the parade of witnesses appears through a series of interviews published in the daily newspaper. The characters identify themselves, their professions, and their experiences without ever allowing the possible complexities of the situation to draw our attention away from the investigation. No indication is given that the witnesses are untrustworthy, and it is therefore assumed that they are providing information that can then be used in order to solve the crime.

Formality represents an important aspect of the parade of witnesses because Cawelti and Tzvetan Todorov stress that the classic detective novel must never take readers on any type of tangent that might distract them from the story of the crime. For Todorov, any work of classic detective fiction features two story lines: the story of the crime (first story), which took place in the past, and the investigation of the crime (second story), which takes place in the present (46). The first story is largely absent in any given
novel while the second, the story of the detection, focuses on the events surrounding the mystery in order to explain what had actually taken place. It is of fundamental importance, writes Todorov, that the conventions of the second story do not call attention to themselves. They must be completely transparent in order to provide a clear and coherent picture of the crime (Todorov 47). Tomeo’s novel parodies this convention because the story frequently becomes bogged down by ridiculous witnesses who draw attention to themselves rather than to the events surrounding the mystery that occurred in the past.

Hidden inside of each testimony lies the fourth convention that Tomeo parodies in his novel, clues. As Rzepka has pointed out, clues lead readers to arrive at conclusions based on empirical evidence, which permits us to understand the event in question (18). For this critic and others, clues act as “metonymical signs” that point directly back to the killer or the crime committed (Rzepka 18-19). Clues are never revealed to encode more than one meaning, which allows us to assume that they are trustworthy bits of information that can always be approached rationally. Sometimes clues appear as pieces of physical evidence, such as the drop of blood on a jacket, the crooked nail on a doorframe, or the mysterious odor, but other times clues are hidden inside of the testimonies supplied by witnesses. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” for example, the substantial pieces of information lie in the incomprehensible language that each of the seven witnesses overhears during the gruesome murders of Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter. Confusion surrounds the origin of the killer’s native language until the final pages when it is revealed that the mysterious sounds did not come from a human but from an orangutan that had escaped and ended the victims’ lives. The pivotal piece of evidence usually exists
somewhere in the testimonies that the witnesses provide, but this is never clear until the detective eventually points it out to the reader.

The final pages of any good classic detective novel comprise the fifth convention of the classic detective novel, the denouement, which has two goals: to provide a tidy explanation of the clues and testimonies in question and to allow the detective, along with the audience, to comprehend the mystery. Knight and Franco Moretti have been especially interested in the ways in which the sub-genre's anticipated conclusion provides the signature feeling of reassurance that is common to crime fiction and popular fiction as a whole. In offering a solution to the mystery behind a crime, Moretti believes that detective fiction transmits a reality in which logic and reason always bring about a satisfactory resolution to a problem (144). Rather than recognizing that any truth is the product of infinite causal factors, detective fiction promulgates the idea that we live in a world in which every effect has a single and unmistakable cause that can be traced, isolated, and punished (Moretti 144). The sub-genre of classic detective fiction projects a politically conservative ideology that combats the presence of chaos and propagates the idea that we live in a safe social environment. As we will subsequently see, El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier undermines this very ideal and also casts doubt on the ways in which subjective testimonies can lead to sensible conclusions in any important legal matter.

The Case of the Blind Man: Parody and the Mystery Formula in El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier

*testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* tells the fictional story of an unimportant legal matter which is played out by a cast of ridiculous characters in France
during the 1800s. On its surface, the novel offers a quasi-courtroom drama in which the reader is invited to adopt the position of a fictional judge who has to make a final decision about a confusing case involving the death of a wealthy landowner. The mental operations that the reader must perform throughout the novel, however, are not those of judgement. Like the reader of a mystery novel, he or she must play the role of a detective and try to understand the information that appears through the work. The novel parodies the conventions of the mystery novel in order to expose the ways in which truth, and our methods for arriving at it, is always subject to mediation and to absurd and irrational human interests that are themselves cruel, arbitrary, and inherently self-serving. Rather than advocating for the human mind as capable of arriving at sensible and satisfactory conclusions about the world around us, the novel creates an alternative narrative reality that calls attention to the ways in which truth is the product of multiple causal factors and does not represent a single, coherent understanding of any event.

Like many of Tomeo’s novels, *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* has received a limited amount of critical attention. Commentators have primarily focused on the motifs of vision and blindness as *topoi* that appear throughout Tomeo’s novelistic discourse, or on the author’s interest in sociology. José Enrique Serrano Asenjo argues that myopia is a fundamental theme in this novel and extends to several of Tomeo’s texts. Firstly, he proposes that the author develops the idea of vision in order to dramatize our inability to see the true nature of the world around us. Secondly, he argues that blindness prohibits Tomeo’s characters from acknowledging the terrifying realities of the human condition (365). Darío Villanueva also studies the topic of vision, but he adds that the structure of the novel represents a “potential departure” from Tomeo’s common formulas.
“in his search for new novelistic materials” (349). This critic suggests that the novel borrows from the world of crime fiction, but Villanueva does not explore the specific ways in which it does so. Instead, he sides with critics who view this and other texts as examples of Tomeo’s interest in “penetrating the field of criminology” (349). Nora Catelli writes that the novel demonstrates the “skill” of Agatha Christie and the “playfulness” of Ou-Li-Po (qtd. in Rodríguez, Gascón, and Castro 52). Her comment is suggestive because it gestures toward Tomeo’s interest in blending the materials of crime fiction with anti-realist narrative forms, but the brevity of her review prevents her from exploring this topic in detail.

As in any work of classic detective fiction, Tomeo’s novel begins with a mystery that involves a crime. The legal matter in question concerns the death of Gastón de Puyparlier, a wealthy landowner who passed away on the 13th of October, 1874, at the age of 74. Just before his death, Puyparlier dictated his will to a notary, Arístides Rousellín, who wrote down the dying man’s wish to declare Dominique Vernier the sole heir to his considerable fortune. During the last months of his life, Puyparlier had maintained a short romance with Vernier, who was forty-four years younger than her lover. Sadly, the young French woman from Minestrone is struck dead in the street by a landau shortly after receiving Puyparlier’s inheritance. Vernier’s sister Federica then inherits the money, but Gastón’s nephew Armando, who is described as the classic black sheep of the family, refutes the validity of the will. He argues that the document should be considered invalid, and that the money should be given to him as the last surviving heir because Gastón was unable to see the piece of paper that he signed due to his declining physical and emotional state. Moreover, Armando Puyparlier and his attorneys argue that Rousellín broke the law because he did
not accurately record the dying man’s final wishes. The novel offers a recreation and a thorough investigation of the events that led up to the alleged criminal act. The reader is asked to analyze each bit of evidence alongside the narrator and to decide whether Gastón de Puyparlier could actually see the will that was in front of him during his final hours. In doing so, the reader will conclude whether Armando Puyparlier or Federica Vernier should receive the money and whether any type of crime was actually committed.

Readers familiar with the classic mystery formula will recognize a variety of clichés from this sub-genre of crime fiction such as the use of a romanticized location in France, a dispute over a generous inheritance, and the death of an aristocrat, as I mentioned earlier, but the mystery does not necessarily revolve around a serious legal matter. The amassedment of recognizable elements from a mystery novel sets the expectation that the case will eventually turn out to be a crime of major importance, but the novel breaks this rule of the sub-genre by paying a disproportionate amount of attention to a trivial legal dispute that lacks any major social ramifications. The parodic incongruity between form and content creates a humorous tone and a sense of ironic distance from the story’s overblown sense of intrigue, and it also invites the reader to wonder how truth can ever be ascertained in questions of significance when it cannot even be found in a case as trivial as a dispute over a will.

Another important aspect of any classic detective novel is the detective, who also tends to be the narrator within the sub-genre. *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* employs a narrator who plays the role of the detective because he provides the information that is necessary for the reader to understand the mystery, and he also invites the reader to share his perspective while he interprets information from the witnesses and
the lawyers who interrogated them. In order to play the game that the novel proposes, the reader must adopt the position prescribed by a mystery novel and establish a friendly rivalry with the narrator-detective. The reader studies each piece of evidence and tries to arrive at the same conclusions as the narrator and eventually to solve the crime before the fictitious savant does so. Even though experienced readers of the genre will note many of these traditional aspects of the mystery novel, the narrator-detective of Tomeo’s novel represents a parodic variation of this specific literary figure. As we remember, the classic detective figure offers a paradigm of reason, clarity, and self-confidence. He or she never doubts that every piece of information can be completely comprehended.

The narrator in Tomeo’s novel falls comically short of the standard features that define the traditional representation of the discerning detective. From the outset, the novel casts doubt upon the narrator’s intelligence and self-confidence by highlighting his inability to relay correctly the events surrounding the life and death of Puyparlier. Before beginning the investigation, for example, he admits that his task as a narrator is going to be difficult, and he seems to apologize ahead of time for the fact that, “no va a resultar fácil resumir en unas cuantas cuartillas todo cuanto se dijo en el juicio” (13). The narrator’s admission that his job “is not going to be easy” alerts us to the fact that the detective has undertaken a project that may be too big for him, and it also serves as a constant reminder that all of the data has been filtered through the mind of a character who has already made subjective decisions regarding what is and is not important. This realization becomes increasingly clear as the narrator continues by saying that he will “try” to summarize all of the declarations of the witnesses so that the reader “pueda establecer sus propias conclusiones” (13). Unlike the classic detective who perfectly disentangles the mystery and
leads the reader to a verifiable solution, the narrator of this novel apparently seeks to let
the reader arrive at his or her own conclusions. As a method of analysis, it undermines the
sub-genre’s ability to lead the reader to a single, objective understanding of the events in
question, and it suggests that the narrator, our primary source of information in the text,
may not be completely reliable.

In addition to the presentation of a mystery and the interventions of a narrator-
detective, *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* employs a third convention of
crime fiction, the parade of witnesses. Tomeo’s novel organizes the investigation around a
series of witnesses, each of whom provides a testimony regarding the eyesight of
Puyparlier. As we remember from above, the classic detective novel must always create a
clear understanding of the events that lead up to the crime, never diverting our attention
from the mystery. According to the sub-genre, any tangent or useless information should
not be included in the story. The novel parodies the parade of witnesses by employing a
series of incongruous elements that undermine the formality of the sub-genre’s
procedures. First, the witnesses’ names and testimonies frequently reveal that they are
untrustworthy, and their stories about Puyparlier often move into senseless tangents that
have nothing to do with the central question of the novel. The characters’ general inability
to conform to the conventions of the sub-genre foregrounds the arbitrary and subjective
interests of the witnesses, which mirrors the dubious aspects of the narrator, and casts
doubt on the reader’s ability to ever come to a decisive understanding of the events.
Secondly, the parade of witnesses includes a collection of clues that do not lead the reader
to a coherent understanding of Puyparlier’s blindness. Instead, they call attention to the
ways in which human emotions, impulses, and instincts overwhelm the rational understanding of certain events.

We note the first parodic strategy with the presentation of Dr. John Paul Verité, who immediately makes us wonder if he is as truthful as his name implies. The narrator tells us that Armando Puyparlier’s lawyer called Verité to the stand in order to confirm that Gastón’s vision and mental faculties were in decline. Armando’s lawyer wants to argue this, the narrator writes, because it would prove that the degenerated state of his uncle would have made it impossible for him to have read and understood the will that he had dictated to the notary. During his testimony, Dr. Verité revealed that Puyparlier had been suffering from an extreme state of physical decline and that his symptoms were consistent with a first-stage diabetic infection, which is known to cause blindness (16). The narrator then tells us that Vernier’s lawyer refuted the point by arguing that the old man’s auditory ability was not impaired at this moment, and that his eyes surely must have been working fine if his ears were still functioning properly. In forwarding this argument, the narrator deduces, the attorney was trying to make the case that the vision of Puyparlier was not in decline, which would invalidate the will, demonstrate that no crime had been committed, and prove that his client should keep the money.

The narrator then relates that Dr. Verité responded by telling Vernier’s lawyer that diabetes never affects the other senses. The immensity of his revelation becomes mitigated, however, after the doctor admits to having known several diabetics with an auditory ability so acute that they could hear grass grow. The tangent slowly heads into the realm of the absurd when he confirms this idea by making reference to an obscure 18th century German nobleman made famous for his tall tales from the Russian-Turkish war: “[doctor Verité]
comité el error de citar al barón de Munchausen, un famoso personaje que también podía 
oír cómo crecía el césped y la introducción de ese personaje tan exótico y desmesurado 
distrajo ligeramente al juez” (18). The humor in the scene is the result of Dr. Verité’s 
inability to provide a reasonable legal testimony within a professional courtroom setting. 
Rather than recreating a specific moment in the past that pertains to Puyparlier’s ability to 
see, Dr. Verité’s testimony breaks the rules of the sub-genre by diverting the reader’s 
attention to a ridiculous topic that has nothing to do with the central question of the novel 
and by also referring to Baron von Munchausen, who is not a real person but a famous 
character from literature.

A similar tangent is also found in the account of Horace Legrand, an antiquary 
whose “grandeur” has little to do with his “bisoñé de ínfima calidad” (19). Legrand offers a 
firsthand account of the aging Frenchman’s lack of vision when the salesman declares that 
Mr. Puyparlier had to use a thick pair of glasses in order to study the delicate details of the 
candelabra that he was looking at one day at the store. Furthermore, he concludes that 
Puyparlier must have been blind because he did not end up buying the piece, which he 
could have taken home for a “precio irrisorio” (20). Legrand’s willingness to turn his 
testimony into a short sales pitch for his store points to the ways in which personal 
interests play a fundamental part in the discourses of the witnesses, and it also helps to 
show that Puyparlier’s vision may have been in decline. The testimonies of Verité and 
Legrand demonstrate that Puyparlier’s vision may have been impaired by his hypothetical 
diabetes, but the detail may also shed light upon the ways in which the eccentricities of 
witnesses can cloud any true understanding of events. The questionable aspects of the 
characters sustain feelings of doubt regarding the work’s ability to bring the reader to a
coherent understanding of Puyparlier’s vision, and it raises other suspicions about the legitimacy of any type of official decision that attempts to arrive at the truth through forms of knowledge that are mediated by the human mind.

The testimonies also point toward a fourth convention of crime fiction, the clues. As we remember, physical evidence traditionally appears in classic detective fiction as a metonymical sign that may be traced back unequivocally to the criminal or it may contribute to the resolution of the mystery. Tomeo’s work incorporates this convention by providing the reader with a collection of small and sometimes imperceptible clues that speak to Puyparlier’s waning eyesight. The novel parodies the system of deductive reasoning that is found in the classic detective novel by providing physical evidence that does not lead to a much anticipated final solution. Instead, each of the clues returns us to a series of ridiculous scenarios and also leads to moments of reflection surrounding the ways in which logic can become derailed by untrustworthy personalities and their own (mis)understanding of events.

The minute bones of a hake fish comprise one of the many clues that carry out this parodic function. The narrator relates the testimony of René Signoret, a waiter at Les Escargots, who explained that Puyparlier and his girlfriend were regular customers at the dining establishment, and that every Tuesday and Thursday they enjoyed the specialty of the house, snails, as well as an order of hake served in green mustard sauce. During their dinners, Signoret relates that Puyparlier would have his girlfriend remove the spines from the fish before he began to eat it. He also adds that Puyparlier would gaze at her with an “expresión adobada” throughout the dinner (38). Sadly, Vernier does a poor job with the bones one evening, and Puyparlier begins to choke. Once he recovers, he calls her
incompetent, and she responds by calling him a series of cruel names. The waiter concludes by saying that this was the last evening that he saw the two of them together, and that Puyparlier never again ordered hake.

The scene represents a confusing moment for the reader, who may not know exactly how to interpret the couple’s disagreement or the importance of a few tiny bones. The narrator then steps in to deduce an explanation for the scene. Firstly, he comments that Puyparlier’s vision was most likely impaired because he needed his girlfriend to help him remove the bones from the fish. However, it is also possible, Signoret tells us, that he did not need her for this menial task and that he simply enjoyed watching her as she performed the small labor of love. The fact that he stared at her with a hollow look on his face is also significant because it either means that he was in love with her or that he was beginning to experience senility. Rather than leading us to a simple and clear understanding of the events, the clue presents us with two possible and completely contradictory interpretations.

In order to add to the confusion, the narrator points out that the scene may prove to be crucial because it demonstrates that Vernier may not have been as enamored of Puyparlier as he was of her. With this information, the reader is invited to believe that the scene represents a scathing depiction of the woman who was supposed to receive his inheritance. If the reader is to believe that she did not really love Puyparlier, then it is best to conclude that she did not deserve the money in the first place. In this case, Armando should get the money, but this would leave us with a different problem. The original question, of course, is not who deserves the money. The central issue of the novel involves Puyparlier’s ability to see his will during his final hours and whether a crime was
committed during the process of issuing the will. If one concludes that Vernier did not deserve the money because she did not truly love Puyparlier then the reader is rendering a different type of judgment. He or she is making a decision that is not based on reason. Our understanding of Puyparlier’s vision would, in this case, be subject to our own emotional biases toward a woman who may have been pretending to love Puyparlier in order to get his money.

Of all the witnesses to testify, Urbaine Lautrec, a friend and neighbor of Puyparlier, offers one of the most key pieces of information surrounding the acumen and stability of the landowner during the final months of his life and perhaps the most vivid moment of parody in the novel. The narrator recounts that Lautrec was asked by Puyparlier to investigate a possible criminal act in his personal tomato garden. While the two perused each of the plants, Puyparlier revealed to Lautrec that a member of his family had been trying to murder him. He says that his possible assailant and a group of nocturnal marauders were stealing his tomatoes, poisoning them, and placing them in the kitchen to be prepared the next day. When Lautrec studies the footprints of Puyparlier’s assailants in closer detail, he not only discovers that they perfectly match the soles of Puyparlier’s own shoes, but that the supposedly stolen tomatoes still hang on their corresponding vines. Unlike the footprints in detective fiction that traditionally lead us to the killer, the clue leads the reader to what appears to be a character suffering from an extreme case of paranoia.

Lautrec’s story might confirm that the old man’s mental state was anything but healthy, but Puyparlier’s neighbor also adds one more crucial detail. He says that Puyparlier asked him if he could personally milk one of the neighbor’s cows so that he
could be sure that his milk was not poisoned. Even if he trusted his milkmaids, he told Lautrec, he could not be certain that a “mano asesina” was not feeding his own cows some form of poisoned hay that could affect his breakfast. (72). After agreeing to let him to do so, Lautrec relates that Puyparlier had no trouble finding the teats of the cow, and that he milked the animal with an intense look on his face that was not at all akin to that of a blind man (73). Both Puyparlier’s ability to find the teat of a milk cow and his ardent facial expression clearly contradict the argument that Puyparlier was going blind during his final days. However, the situation that Lautrec describes is that of a man who was slowly losing his mind. The footprints lead us to the conclusion that his mental state was deficient, even if his physical eyesight was not. Regardless of these details, however, the intensity of Puyparlier’s gaze invites speculation as to why he felt threatened. The only logical suspect, in this case, would be Armando, the very person who would have inherited the money. The final conclusion regarding Puyparlier’s ability to see, therefore, must take into account that Armando may have been trying to kill his uncle, which would obviously mean that he should not get the money. The problem is that the only other option would be to give the money to Vernier’s sister, who is even less deserving of the money because it appears that Vernier did not truly love Puyparlier. The novel ultimately reveals all of the details necessary to reach a decision, but none of the clues provides a clear understanding of whether the old man’s vision was or was not impaired at the hour of his death. The reader’s decision about Puyparlier’s eyesight depends upon the prejudices that we gradually develop toward the possible recipients of the victim’s inheritance.

Before the novel ends, the reader is reminded that he or she must make a final decision as to whether Puyparlier was or was not able to read the will at the time of his
death. Even though enough information has been given in order to make the decision, the narrator provides one last series of important details that should factor into the conclusion. In the clue-puzzle, the ending is understood to be the denouement in which Dupin, Holmes, or Poirot solves the mystery and reveals the identity of the criminal. The missing pieces that had been kept from the reader are finally revealed, and the social order is maintained thanks to the incomparable intelligence of the detective. *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* parodies this convention of the mystery sub-genre by replacing the long-anticipated announcement of the solution with a series of comical explanations as to why the reader cannot trust any of the witnesses’ testimonies. Readerly expectations are frustrated as the narrator explains that a number of sexual and financial agreements took place previously between all of the witnesses, and it therefore seems that none of the testimonies were reliable and that the entire novel has led us on a comical tour-de-farce of the French countryside.

The narrator acknowledges the reader’s potential frustration in the closing pages of the novel by once again calling attention to the impossibility of the task that the reader must perform; “Al fin y al cabo, señores,” the narrator declares, “cada cual juzga según sus gustos y sus intereses y las opiniones dependen más de nuestros sentimientos que de nuestra inteligencia, suponiendo, claro está, que lo tengamos” (99). Rather than advocating for our ability to arrive at a coherent conclusion about the events that caused the mystery, the novel signals the impossibility of objective judgments and the role of personal motives in the comprehension of a situation. The novel represents a disheartening portrayal of the ways in which humans cannot correctly interpret even simple legal matters, and it suggests that the idea of a tidy resolution is something that is better left to formula literature.
The Conventions of Spy Fiction

In order to understand the parody of spy fiction in *Preparativos de viaje*, it is necessary to review the conventions of the sub-genre. The first convention that Tomeo parodies in *Preparativos de viaje* is the mission. Like the case that is solved in the classic detective novel, the mission in spy fiction must be of major social importance and its completion or failure most hold some type of serious ramifications for the society in which the narration takes place. Michael Denning writes that spy thrillers can be read as melodramas that use serious language and suspenseful modes of development in order to “transform an incomprehensible political situation into the ethical categories of masculine romance, the battle of hero and villain becoming one between Good and Evil, the forces of light and the forces of darkness” (14). Without a dramatic situation involving matters of life and death, such as nuclear war, international assassinations, or financial exchanges between corporations, the spy thriller would be unable to produce the melodrama that is required to capture the reader’s attention and sustain it until the final pages. *Preparativos de viaje* parodies this aspect of the spy thriller because it sends its protagonist on an unimportant mission, which produces an overwhelming feeling of incongruity between its dramatic language and its trivial subject matter.

The second convention of spy fiction is the hero. The spy hero is similar to the classic detective because he possesses a series of superior analytical abilities that allow him or her to complete the mission. Unlike detectives, however, spies rely upon a collection of outstanding physical qualities that allow them to win out in any situation. The protagonist of *Preparativos de viaje* differs from the traditional spy hero, however, because he is not a professional spy; he is a swivel-chair salesman who takes part in clandestine activity in
order to complete a hypothetical mission abroad. His physical inadequacies systematically fail to meet the standards of the sub-genre, and they frequently invite the reader to wonder whether he will be able to complete the mission at all. Alongside his inability to match the tough-guy characteristics of the conventional spy hero, Murrieta also suffers from an overwhelming sense of unease regarding the people around him. Paranoia is a common characteristic in all spy novels, and it has allowed critics such as Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg to refer to spies as “the ultimate paranoids” (20). Murrieta’s sense of paranoia represents a common feature of this type of character, but his fear is exaggerated in order to invite doubts as to whether he is really trapped in a conspiracy or if the entire plot is a massive delusion. By employing a character who is physically and mentally incapable of playing the role of the hero according to the conventions of a spy novel, Preparativos de viaje undermines the basic function of the secret agent in espionage fiction, which is “to return human agency in a world which seems less and less the product of human action” (Denning 14). Rather than providing fantasies of human agency, Tomeo’s novel invites the reader into a world of paranoia and uncertainty in which everyone has something to hide and nothing can actually be known.

The third convention of spy fiction that the novel parodies is the investigation. Commentators of the sub-genre frequently note that the process of investigation in the spy novel frequently involves a series of obstacles for the protagonist, but the underlying fantasy is that the hero is always able to overcome any challenge, make sense of the enigma, and complete the mission. Unlike the classic detective novel, which allows the protagonist to discern a mystery at a safe distance from the crime, the process of investigation in spy novels features agents who risk life and limb in order to accomplish
their missions (Todorov 47). Bruce Merry emphasizes that the process of investigation in spy fiction frequently employs a “funnel-like” structure that systematically leads the reader and the hero on a linear path toward a climax and the eventual resolution of the story’s central problems (3). For Merry and other theorists, the process of investigation in the spy novel offers a way of producing literature that assures that any threat, fear, or anxiety can be assuaged by the fact that all problems, regardless of their complexity, can be explained and overcome. It avoids any type of uncertainty and seeks to celebrate the renewal of the social order and the human ability to conquer evil as it appears in any number of shapes and forms.

The investigation convention typically depends upon the elaboration of a conspiracy. Jerry Palmer suggests that conspiracies are an essential part of the sub-genre because they represent the dangerous threat that the spy must investigate in order to bring peace to an otherwise safe and orderly society (5). Conspiracies frequently appear as a clandestine plot that is carried out by a madman or an influential private or governmental agency, which seeks to destroy the world or assume control of innocent citizens. The details of the conspiracy, namely who is behind it and why, operate as the overarching enigma that the hero must come to understand, and both the spy and the reader are frequently kept in the dark about some of the details of the plot until the very end. Suspense grows as unexplainable events multiply, and in many cases the spy does not know if he or she can even trust friends, coworkers, or employers (Cawelti and Rosenberg 13). Despite the complications that frequently arise throughout the investigation, however, the investigation of the conspiracy always leads the agent and the reader to a clear understanding of the events and the successful accomplishment of the mission.
Preparativos de viaje frustrates this expectation because each piece of evidence that Luis Murrieta discovers throughout his investigation does the opposite of what it is supposed to do. Rather than slowly leading to a better understanding of his mission, Murrieta’s investigation of the conspiracy in the novel only leads to more questions that invite the protagonist and the reader to wonder whether any type of meaning can ever be discovered.

The fourth convention of spy novels that Tomeo parodies is the hunted man. Even though the spy may not know who is pursuing him or why, any good spy novel is filled with human shadows who keep track of the hero’s every move. Sometimes spies know that they are being watched, other times they are watching someone else, and sometimes they know that the enemy knows that everyone is under surveillance. Spy fiction often employs the hunted man convention in order to raise the level of suspense, but it also indicates that the spy is getting closer to completing the mission because he or she attracts more attention from the villain. Curiously, we will see that the “hunters” who follow Murrieta through the novel are not just any villains but another specific “type” of character from a related sub-genre of crime fiction, the hardboiled novel. Tomeo uses a pair of detectives who may remind the reader of the protagonists from a novel by Chandler or Hammett. Both characters share the occupations and drinking habits of a hardboiled detective, but they lack many of their other traditional features. Moreover, the use of the convention also suggests that Murrieta is getting closer to accomplishing his mission. Unfortunately, the men who pursue the protagonist fail to offer any meaningful explanation as to why they are following Murrieta and, surprisingly, they appear to be trapped in the same incomprehensible situation.
Spy novels frequently end with a fifth and final convention, the showdown between
the hero and the villain. The final confrontation between the bad guy and the hero usually
represents the “climax” in which the conspiracy is finally presented in the “big reveal,” and
the villain is defeated. It is the scene that provides the most important moment of
gratification and satisfaction for the reader because the “bad guy,” who often appears as an
overweight individual or one with a striking physical defect, finally loses to the protagonist.
Alongside the death of the villain, the ultimate victory of the hero contributes to the
restoration of order, and it also demonstrates that the confusion that has led up to the
climactic moment has in fact been part of an enigma that can be understood and a
challenge that can be overcome.

Mission Impossible: Parody, Spy Fiction, and the Search for Benujistán in

Preparativos de viaje

Preparativos de viaje demonstrates the same sense of skepticism toward reason and
deduction that we find in El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier, but it parodies a
second sub-genre of crime fiction, spy fiction, which traditionally serves to produce
fantasies of human reason and agency. Unlike El discutido testamento, however, the enigma
does not develop around a crime but around a conspiracy that the protagonist must
uncover and overcome in order to finish his assigned mission in a foreign country. The
story follows the basic syntax of an espionage novel: it begins with a briefing scene that
introduces the mission and the spy-narrator. It develops around a series of conventions
that include the investigation of a conspiracy and the topic of the hunted man, and it
concludes with a final confrontation between the hero and the antagonist. Unlike
traditional contributions to the genre, however, *Preparativos de viaje* inverts the conventions of spy fiction in order to undermine the sub-genre’s naïve assumption that human thoughts and actions serve as an appropriate vehicle for the comprehension of reality and the victory of order over disorder. Rather than reassuring readers, the novel suggests that truth can never be discovered, and even if it were, it would likely be influenced by the irrational nature of the human mind and by a variety of conspiring external forces that seek to manipulate and control our environment.

Often seen as one of Tomeo’s seminal works, *Preparativos de viaje* has received more critical attention than *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier*. Commentators have repeatedly signaled its affiliation with texts by writers such as Borges and Kafka. Juan Ángel Montes de Neira describes the novel’s engagement with the short fiction of Borges through its creation of a “juego de espejos entre la realidad, la ficción y la metaficción” (155). He argues that Tomeo uses the idea of Benujistán in order to create a fictional space that allows the protagonist to escape from the senselessness of the human condition in which he finds himself trapped (156). Elisa Martínez Salizar suggests that Tomeo’s novel takes part in a larger trend among novelists during the 1970s that sought to avoid social realism and employ anti-mimetic models of representation. For this critic, the text demonstrates an affiliation with the writing of Kafka. Like the short fiction of the Czech, she argues, *Preparativos de viaje* denounces the absolutism and alienation of dictatorship politics, but it does so without using easily identifiable social referents. Instead, the novel invites readers to make allegorical connections between the reality of its protagonist and that of Spanish daily life during the Franco regime (198-200). Finally, Ramón Acín argues that the novel takes part in a larger “postmodern” project that calls attention to the ways in
which the experience of reality can be manipulated and replaced with an inauthentic sense of hyper-reality (Aproximación 16).

Curiously, critical assessments of Preparativos de viaje have not mentioned parody as one of the text’s most basic aspects. It is undeniable that Tomeo’s novel offers several similarities with Borges’ meta-fictional detective stories such as “El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan” because both works employ the conventions of spy fiction against their traditional function, but the two stories differ because Borges’ characters are always able to solve the enigma by perfectly connecting each of the clues presented. As we have already seen in El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier, Tomeo’s novels lack the coherence of Borges’ contributions to crime fiction because they systematically undermine the ability of the human mind to create sense through reason and deduction. A comparison with Kafka also becomes problematic when one takes into account the emotional reactions that Tomeo seeks to elicit in his readership. Kafka constructs mazes that lead his readers to comprehend the motivations behind extreme human actions such as suicide and self-inflicted pain. Tomeo, by contrast, encourages readers to laugh at the absurdity of the human condition. Parody invites readers to adopt a sense of ironic distance from the rigidity and seriousness favored by Borges and Kafka, and it allows his literary works to treat serious subjects in a humorous and playful way.

Preparativos de viaje encodes parody into the opening paragraph by introducing a trivial and unremarkable mission with the melodramatic tone and register that are typical of espionage fiction. The novel maintains the serious language that appears in a briefing scene between a spy and his or her employer, but it creates an alternative textual reality by
featuring a character and an assignment that are humorously incongruous with the traditional expectations of the sub-genre:

Aquel día primero de enero, el Señor Consejero Delegado para la Investigación de Nuevos Mercados (alto, violáceo y siniestro), me encomendó oficialmente la misión de introducir nuestro último modelo de sillón giratorio en el pequeño estado montañoso de Benujistán. (9)

Murrieta is a swivel-chair salesman who has been assigned the task of selling his products in the mysterious foreign country of Benujistán, but he does not narrate the story with the language of a businessman. He is “ordered” to complete a “mission” that will take place in a country with a name and a geography that are similar to the satellite nations of the former Soviet Union. The comic disharmony between form and content posits an otherwise trivial mission as though it were one of the life-and-death scenarios of spy fiction, and it also produces a unique narrative world in which the hero and the reader constantly wonder if any underlying truth exists beneath the enigma that will be explored throughout the novel.

The use of parody destabilizes the otherwise secure reality of spy fiction, and it seems to suggest, from the outset, that even if we were to discover some truth associated with Benujistán, our conclusion would prove to be unimportant.

The parodic confluence of melodramatic language and trivial subject matter also manifests in the narrator of the novel. Preparativos de viaje parodies a second convention of espionage fiction, the spy narrator, by outfitting an unremarkable protagonist with the language, drinking habits, seductive abilities, and tough talk that are characteristic of a secret agent. The incompatibility of his double identity as both a spy and an everyday swivel-chair salesman produces a humorous subterfuge that runs through the text, and it
also serves to frustrate the conventions and expectations of the sub-genre. Like the narrators of the classic detective novel, secret agents frequently relate the events of the story and invite readers to share their perspectives during their process of investigation. Even though many spy narrators struggle with uncertainty and paranoia, it is generally believed that they are trustworthy and will offer a coherent account of their experiences. Tomeo’s novel breaks this rule of spy fiction by employing an untrustworthy narrator with an exaggerated sense of paranoia that constantly invites doubts regarding the veracity of his story and his ability to complete the mission.

The reader is immediately alerted to Murrieta’s shortcomings when he begins his investigation at a pair of local travel agencies. He speaks with a number of travel agents, but all of them tell Murrieta that Benujistán does not exist. At first, he suspects that he is the victim of a cruel joke that has been set up by his employer, but one of the senior employees offers a potentially useful clue when he tells Murrieta that he is not the only person to come looking for an imaginary location. In fact, the second man says that he too would like to buy a ticket to go to Benujistán because it seems more interesting than his job. The evidence seems to suggest that Murrieta’s mission is a wild goose chase, but Murrieta comes to the specious conclusion that he must be at the center of a devious complot:

Tenía ya suficiente motivos para pensar en una maquinación entre bastidores, en alguna diabólica conjura entre las agencias de viajes. Tal vez haya alguien que quiera gozarse con mi desconcierto, me dije. Y consideré incluso la posibilidad de que algún secreto enemigo, en la Jefatura de Ventas,
hubiese movido los hilos para conseguir que me endosasen la papeleta más difícil. (14)

Rather than providing a coherent understanding of the events, the spiraling and chaotic thoughts of Murrieta evince an unhealthy mental condition that is defined by an overblown sense of insecurity and paranoia. The precarious psychological state of the narrator invites doubts surrounding his ability to portray his experiences, and it also raises questions about the credibility of his story. The novel never clarifies whether the protagonist is really the victim of a cruel joke, if he is a pawn in a dangerous conspiracy, or whether the entire story is little else than a massive delusion. The pervading sense of uncertainty undermines the traditional use of an all-knowing, all-capable heroic figure, and it also suggests that the true nature of reality may never be known because it is always subject to the unpredictable and often irrational nature of the human mind.

The hazy distinction between reality and delusion becomes increasingly problematic as the novel parodies a third convention of spy fiction, the investigation. In the espionage sub-genre the investigation develops as the hero searches for evidence surrounding some type of secret plot that takes place among sinister characters and secret organizations that plan to take over the world or destroy it. The conspiracy represents the central enigma of the sub-genre, and the spy must solve it by interrogating colluding individuals and studying clues that reveal who is behind the clandestine plot and why. Unlike the traditional development of a spy novel, however, Preparativos de viaje does not gradually intensify along a clear path toward the unveiling of the conspiracy. Instead, the novel parodies the investigative process by setting up a collection of quasi-interrogation scenes in which Murrieta tries to get information from characters who are believed to have
knowledge about Benujistán. Unfortunately, none of the informants actually reveals pertinent information, and their conversations move along ridiculous tangents that fail to reveal anything significant. In doing so, the story enters into a ludic game of ambiguities in which it is never clear whether the other characters are participating in a conspiracy, whether they know anything about Benujistán, or if they are keeping quiet because someone is listening in on their conversations. The use of parody creates a paranoid reality in which truth can never be obtained because every character has something to hide and every clue is either undecipherable or completely absurd.

An example of this parodic strategy takes place when Murrieta sets up a meeting with an old friend who claims to have been to Benujistán. Peribáñez is a wealthy, well-travelled businessman whom the narrator considers to be an expert on international exploration. Despite his experience abroad, however, one is still left with doubts regarding the so-called expert’s knowledge of the country. He is described as a short, feeble man with a bad comb-over and a reputation for being deceptive. Murrieta wants to impress Peribáñez, so he decides not to tell him that he has been sent to a country that he cannot find on a map. In order to conceal his ignorance, the narrator pretends to know a lot about Benujistán and speaks openly about its location, its insects, and its people in order to see if his friend will correct his assertions and thereby reveal important clues. Unfortunately, his friend’s responses are difficult to interpret. Murrieta begins the conversation by telling Peribáñez that he is going to Benujistán, but the man nonchalantly replies only that it will be a long trip and a difficult economic market.

The comment suggests that Peribáñez knows something about the country, but he does not go into any details, which makes the narrator wonder if he knows more about the
country but is disinterested in the topic or if he knows nothing and is just pretending to know something. Looking to change the subject, Peribáñez begins to discuss his interest in exotic insects. He speaks in detail of the different bugs that he has studied in foreign lands, but Murrieta brings him back to the topic when he proclaims that the butterflies of Benujistán are fascinating. Unfortunately, Peribáñez does not take the bait. He tells Murrieta that the butterflies of Benujistán are too small, and that he prefers the colorful insects of Latin America. Finally, the narrator directly asks his friend what he thinks about the women of Benujistán, and he says that they are “demasiado altas de talle” (27) because they live in the mountains and eat only rice. The small detail finally offers a significant clue for Murrieta because it confirms that Benujistán is located in a mountainous region, which again leads him to suspect that Peribáñez actually knows something about Benujistán. Unfortunately, he does not provide any useful details, which leaves the narrator to make a series of deductions about his conversation.

First, the fact that Peribáñez seems to know something about Benujistán confirms the narrator’s suspicions that the country must exist. Unfortunately, Murrieta reasons, it is possible that he only possesses the same limited knowledge of Benujistán that Murrieta himself has. If that were the case, then his friend’s ambiguous comments are designed to make it seem like he knows a lot about the country in order to maintain his reputation as an expert on international travel. However, it is also possible that Peribáñez is in on the conspiracy, in which case he would know a lot about Benujistán but is pretending not to know anything. This possible scenario would imply that the country is at the center of a substantial cover-up and that knowledge about its geography is not only significant but also dangerous. Unfortunately, the key piece of information is never revealed to Murrieta
or the reader, and both are left to wonder whether anyone actually knows anything about the country in question. Rather than adopting a predictable worldview in which the spy is able to make sense of the enigma, the novel dramatizes a senseless reality in which the protagonist can neither uncover useful information nor discover whether a conspiracy is even taking place.

In addition to his frustrating interrogations, the novel continues its parody of the investigation convention when Murrieta visits a series of local institutions in order to collect information relevant to his mission. Traditionally, the protagonist discovers clues that link the conspiracy to powerful private and governmental organizations. These institutions, and the people who work for them, commonly hinder the hero from discovering the conspiracy, but the hero’s superior physical and mental abilities allow him or her to overcome the obstacles in the investigation and eventually complete the mission. *Preparativos de viaje* further parodies the investigation convention by developing the conspiracy in relation to a number of small and relatively unimportant government organizations that force him to carry out a series of ridiculous bureaucratic procedures.

Looking for answers to Benujistán, for example, Murrieta goes to the public library and finally discovers a useful clue. The librarian tells him about a book, *La secreta descripción del orbe*, which she believes will hold answers to his questions about the country. The book represents a key piece of evidence that, in spy fiction novels, conventionally leads the protagonist to understand the nature of the conspiracy. Unfortunately, Murrieta is constantly impeded from obtaining the text. He first tries to get the book by requesting it, but the library’s “Section B” denies him access because it is said to possess “peligrosos conceptos geográficos” (57). He initially writes off the denial as a common case of small-
time institutional bureaucracy, but he suspects that this particular department may be part of a larger attempt to keep him from finding the truth.

Murrieta’s suspicions are confirmed when he realizes that his actions have attracted the attention of a security guard, and he further believes that the guard is eavesdropping on his conversation with the librarian. The scene does not create a feeling of danger, however, because the language highlights the absurdity of Murrieta’s reality in which a security guard behaves like a spy in a game of cat-and-mouse:

El celador, a cuatro metros escasos del pupitre, cruzó los brazos y levantó la mirada a los arcos del techo. Tuve la impresión de que nos estaba espiando. Él, por su parte, debió de sospechar que yo sospechaba que él sospechaba y, para demostrarme otra cosa, se alejó sonriendo hasta un viejecito que roncaba, le golpeó suavemente en el hombro y se quedó luego a su lado, como previniendo la posibilidad de que volviese a quedarse dormido. (61)

The repetition of the verb “sospechar” turns a scene that would otherwise create a feeling of suspense into one that emphasizes ridiculousness because the language is too excessive to be serious. Moreover, the fact that the narrator only “had the impression” that he and the librarian were being watched fails to clarify why Murrieta is being pursued. It is not clear whether he is getting closer to the answers for which he is looking, if he is caught in an absurd level of corporate bureaucracy, or if the narrator is just being paranoid. Even though the protagonist suspects that his request for books has unknowingly led him into some type of conspiracy, his suspicions are never confirmed, and the scene ends with an absurd petition by the Section B of the library. They tell him that he must return to his grade school and retrieve a certificate that proves that he knows how to read.
The enumeration of meaningless tasks that Murrieta must perform creates a comic tone that runs throughout his investigation, but the humor does not fully mitigate the unfortunate situation in which the protagonist has become trapped. Even if Murrieta were able to obtain the knowledge that he seeks, the novel seems to suggest, it would always be subject to the influence of external forces that seek to maintain power through the constant reaffirmation of the status quo. Rather than providing a vision of reality in which human thoughts and actions can overcome the challenges of evil forces lurking within our world, Tomeo's novel projects a tragic depiction of human agency in which a seemingly interconnected web of secret organizations hinders everyday people from arriving at a clear understanding of the world around them.

The fourth convention of spy fiction that the novel parodies is the hunted man. The hunted man convention traditionally uses a “hunter” or a group of pursuers who work for the conspiring agency in the story. The characters track the protagonist throughout his investigation of the conspiracy and slowly close in on the spy as he or she gets closer to completing the mission. As a result, the convention of the hunted man elevates the level of suspense in the work and signals that the spy protagonist is getting closer to discovering the truth. *Preparativos de viaje* parodies the convention in two ways. Firstly, the novel parodies the traditional “hunters” who appear in the work by using characters that are comically incongruous with the expectations of the sub-genre and subsequently fail to generate a feeling of tension. Secondly, Murrieta’s eventual confrontation with his pursuers does not result in any meaningful revelation. Instead, the convention is used in order to reveal that Murrieta is trapped in a reality that has been carefully manipulated by a sinister organization that cannot be identified or defeated.
Preparativos de viaje develops its parodic inversion of the hunted man convention when Murrieta breaks into the library in order to get the book that he wants. He walks down a dark alleyway and suddenly notices that he has a shadow. He narrates with the exciting language of a spy novel, which creates a feeling of suspense and establishes the expectation that a dangerous individual is hunting the protagonist:

Me levanté el cuello del abrigo, salí a la calle y me hundí en la tinieblas. No había rostro de la luna de unas horas antes y supuse que el cielo se había cubierto de nubes. Escuché pasos a mis espaldas. Me detuve en una esquina, encendí un cigarrillo y volví el rostro lo suficiente para descubrir, veinte metros más allá, la silueta de un hombre. (90)

The dark urban setting, the cigarette smoke, and the sudden appearance of a human silhouette all emulate the codes of a chase scene from spy fiction. The pursuer deflates the feeling of suspense, however, because he suddenly performs a “cabriola de polichinela” (90) and then decides to have a seat on a nearby park bench. Confused, Murrieta decides to get a closer look at the man and ask him who he is and what he is doing. He assumes that a confrontation with the pursuer will finally provide answers because the latter is clearly working for someone who is in on the plot, but things do not develop as they should.

The man following Murrieta turns out to be a private detective named Godofredo, who is the parodic inversion of a hardboiled detective. Unlike the tough-talking private investigators of the hardboiled sub-genre, this detective is a sad, self-conscious man who laments that no one with the name Godofredo will ever be able to succeed in his profession. Even though he does not provide any useful information for Murrieta, their conversation reveals a certain symmetry between their situations. Both men have been assigned
missions that they do not understand, and they are under surveillance for seemingly no apparent reason. Godofredo gestures behind him, and Murrieta realizes that someone is following the man who is following him, but it is not a traditional character from either the hard-boiled sub-genre or spy fiction. Behind the column of a porch, Murrieta sees a “sombra diminuta, que podía corresponder tal vez a un niño o a un enano” (94). The appearance of a second hunter, who proves to be a hard-drinking gnome, produces a sense of absurdity that only becomes more intense when it appears that another detective may also be pursuing the gnome:

Por lo visto nadie confiaba en nadie. Pensé que era inútil lanzarse en persecución del segundo detective, tan ignorante, a buen seguro, como el primero. Porque aun suponiendo que consiguiese atrapar al vigilante de mi vigilante . . . ¿No me arriesgaba a que hubiese un tercer detective? ¿o un cuarto? ¿o un quinto? (94)

The possibility of an endless line of detectives calls attention to the ridiculousness of the situation in which the protagonist has found himself trapped, as well as the futility of trying to make sense of his mission. No matter how many people Murrieta interrogates, it seems, he will only find an unending line of pathetic individuals and useless information. Rather than producing clarity, the scene once again leaves Murrieta and the reader to discern an unsettling textual world in which human thoughts and actions are unable to identify an external force that appears capable of manipulating the reality of everyday people.

The novel parodies the fifth and last convention of spy fiction by setting up a final showdown in an evil lair with a classic villain from a spy novel. The convention traditionally acts as the climax of the novel in which the hero and the antagonist come into
contact and finally engage in battle. The final showdown represents the end point of the hero’s investigation, and during this moment the spy discovers the truth behind the conspiracy and defeats the character that has been behind it. The victory of the hero represents the elimination of the threat, and it also creates a feeling of reassurance because it confirms that the social order has been restored in some way. *Preparativos de viaje* uses this convention by setting up an encounter between Murrieta and the villain who may be behind the conspiracy, but their encounter again fails to provide clear answers to the central question of the novel. Instead, the final showdown does not produce a feeling of fulfillment or closure because the hero is unable to discover the truth behind the enigma or defeat the evil force that is lurking in his world.

Murrieta meets his foe after he breaks into the library in order to steal the book that he has repeatedly requested. He is captured by a pair of security guards and taken through a dark tunnel. He arrives at the lair of El señor Valverde, the quintessential bad guy, who has all of the disgusting characteristics of an antagonist from spy fiction, which include a pair of sunken eyes and rolls of fat around his neck. The scene should represent the moment in the text when the two prepare for a violent confrontation, but the scene fails to create a feeling of tension because the narrator does not meet the expectations of his evil counterpart:

[El hombre gordo] me observó con atención y pareció sentirse ligeramente defraudado.

Si quiere que le sea sincero – observó al cabo de un instante --, le diré que me lo imaginaba con otro aspecto. Usted no tiene precisamente pinta de luchador. (100)
The fat man feels “defrauded” because Murrieta does not meet the standards of a classic hero from a spy novel. The protagonist demands that Valverde answer his questions, but the villain does not respond and instead checks his watch. He tells Murrieta that he and his people have their reasons for secrecy, and that he cannot let him or anyone else know about Benujistán because they would then have to “variar nuestro sistema” (102).

Valverde’s response comes at the moment in the novel when he should reveal the truth behind the enigma, but he instead creates only another instance of disappointment and demonstrates that the entire conspiracy may be nothing more than a case of bureaucracy carried out to an extreme by a clandestine organization that seeks to maintain the status quo. The scene closes when the fat man does not allow Murrieta to take the book for which he has been searching and suggests instead, with a sinister laugh, that he return to the library the next day and once again request it by filling out the necessary paperwork.

Rather than providing some reassurance about the victory of good over evil and the triumph of order over disorder, Tomeo’s parodic variation of the final showdown leaves Murrieta and the reader with humiliation and disappointment.

In his epilogue, Murrieta explains that he left on the day that he had planned for his trip. He relates that he took a train to a distant country, and that he has become a perpetual traveller who continues to search for Benujistán. He writes that in the five years that have passed since he was assigned his mission, he still has not found any meaningful clues about the location of the country. Nevertheless, he remains certain that he will find it. Even though Murrieta has failed to complete his mission, the novel ends with a feeling of optimism:
De cualquier forma, no he perdido todavía la esperanza de encontrar Benujistán. Diría incluso que cada vez lo presiento más cerca. Y algunas noches, en la soledad de mi cuarto, en cualquier oscura pensión, me parece oír un coro de voces amigas, muy próximas ya, entonando himnos de bienvenida y solemnísimos tedeums. (128)

The story concludes with hope and reassurance, indicated by the potential sound of friendly choruses, because Murrieta has finally become aware of the most effective way to approach the absurdity of his situation. He has discovered that the world is a senseless place, and that the only answer is to take part in its perpetual absurdity. Tomeo’s final paragraph indicates that the people who inhabit it are the victims of a reality devoid of meaning or coherency, and that one must abandon the fiction of “reason” if they are ever to live a life of happiness and fulfillment.

**Conclusions about Tomeo’s Parody of Crime Fiction**

As we have seen throughout the discussion of *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* and *Preparativos de viaje*, Tomeo uses parody in order to create alternative textual worlds that evince doubt about the ability of humans to discover truth and to make sense of the world they inhabit. In the first novel, Tomeo uses and abuses the recognizable features of the classic detective novel, which include the mystery, the classic detective, the parade of witnesses, the discernment of clues, and the denouement. In the second novel, Tomeo creates an overwhelming feeling of confusion for the reader and the protagonist by parodying the mission, the figure of the spy, the investigation, the hunted man, and the final showdown. Both novels employ each of these conventions against their traditional
functions and leave their protagonists and readers to discern a world that is senseless and absurd.

The parody of conventions from crime fiction calls attention to the world of popular culture in Tomeo’s fiction, and it also reveals the specific type of reader that the author engages. Tomeo’s novels do not appeal to common audiences of crime fiction because the genre is designed for those who seek the drama and intrigue of the story’s plot and the inevitable resolution at the end. Tomeo, however, writes fiction that frustrates the expectations of popular readers in order to elaborate a discourse on literature and the world. In this way, Tomeo seeks a reader who is interested in the conventions of literature and the ways those conventions can be manipulated to achieve specific ends. One of the many pleasures that are central to Tomeo’s crime novels is the process of identifying the conventions of the genre and observing how those conventions are used to express new ideas about literature and the nature of social reality.

In *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier*, for example, the parodic incorporation and reconfiguration of conventions from the classic detective novel allows him to critique the presupposed objectivity that appears in the sub-genre. The novel adopts a critical position before the conventional brilliance of the detective and suggests that all reasoning is inseparable from human prejudices, feelings, and interests that are often trivial or banal. The second novel takes this critique one step further and suggests not only that ratiocination and objectivity are not useful tools in the comprehension of reality, but that the very nature of our experiences is absurd and lack any type of coherency. In this way, Tomeo follows the work of other writers like Kafka, but his use of humor suggests that the incomprehensibility of the world should not be taken too seriously. The best way to
understand the human condition is to identify its many incongruences, but the senseless nature of reality should not promote extreme physical or emotional reactions.

In the next chapter, I will analyze Tomeo’s parody of a second popular genre that projects an entirely different series of fantasies for readers. Horror narratives differ dramatically from crime fiction because they presuppose an irrational world in which reason fails to explain the presence of abnormal creatures that live inside and outside of a given society. The pleasure of horror narratives may be located in the fascination that is produced through the blurring of boundaries between what is alive or dead and between what is human or monstrous, but the genre still depends upon the eventual annihilation of a monster that represents an external threat to an otherwise reliable and secure social universe. In doing so, horror narratives seek to construct a stable conception of normalcy and humanity, and they also frequently reassure readers and viewers that the true threats to society exist outside of its borders. By parodying the conventions of two sub-genres of horror fiction, Tomeo creates unique textual universes that posit abnormality and monstrosity at the center of human identity and social organization. The first novel that I will study, *La noche del lobo*, parodies the horror sub-genre of werewolf narratives in order to explore the psychology of a character who seeks nothing more than to become a hideous creature. In the second novel that we will study, *Constructores de monstruos*, the author incorporates and reconfigures the horror sub-genre that explores the construction and existence of Frankenstein’s monster. Both novels seek to undermine naïve depictions of horror that portray monsters as external threats existing outside the human condition, and they allow readers to experience a reality defined by difference and monstrosity.
Notes

1 Preparativos de viaje was originally published as Ceguera al azul in 1969. Aside from the new title, the only differences are minor editorial changes.

2 Even though biographical knowledge is not always a reliable analytical tool for interpretation, it is important to note that Tomeo spent several years as a writer and an editor at the Bruguera publishing house in Barcelona, which was one of Spain’s most important purveyors of crime fiction during the decades prior to 1975 (Colmeiro 168). Tomeo’s editorial experience with the world of popular fiction in Spain may have contributed to his familiarity with the popular literary schemes that he would later parody in his novels.

3 Influential critics of the genre note that the appearance of crime fiction and its parodies represents a relatively recent phenomenon in Spain. José F. Colmeiro’s La novela policiaca española: teoría e historia critica argues that Spain did not establish its own tradition of detective fiction until after Franco’s dictatorship. This critic identifies Pedro Antonio de Alarcon’s “El clavo” (1853) and Emilia Pardo Bazan’s “La gota de sangre” (1913) as the first works of Spanish crime fiction, and Joaquin Belda’s ¿Quién disparó? (1909) and Mercé Rodoreda’s Crim (1936) as the first parodies of the genre published in Spain. The relative scarcity of crime fiction in Spain during the first half of the twentieth century leads Colmeiro to conclude that each of these works is principally a derivation of crime stories by North American and European writers, and that it is not possible to talk about a national model of detective fiction in Spain until after 1975 (89).

Spy fiction does not have the same historical significance as the classic detective sub-genre of crime fiction because Spain was not a Cold War power and lacked an
international spy organization such as the CIA, MI6, or the KGB. As a result, the world of espionage never emerged as a major form of popular entertainment. Even though Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Beltenebros* (1989), Andrés Pérez Domínguez's *El silencio de tu nombre* (2012), and several of Javier Mariás' novels employ spies and espionage, these works generally represent a recent phenomenon that is more commonly seen as an extension of the *novela negra* than as an autonomous genre in its own right. The *novela negra* is regularly understood through its relationship to the North American hardboiled formula and regularly uses a tough-talking male or female detective who operates within a dark urban environment. Several of these elements also manifest themselves in Tomeo's *Preparativos de viaje*, but the protagonist's belief that he is a spy aligns the novel with espionage fiction more than with the hardboiled genre.

4 It is interesting to note that Chandler was another of Tomeo’s favorite writers. During an interview in 2012 with *El País*, Tomeo said that he enjoyed rereading Chandler’s treatise on the writing of detective fiction because he appreciated Chandler’s emphasis on clarity and concision (Tomeo, “Sólo se puede” 2).

5 The parade of witnesses is also a common ingredient in the novels of Agatha Christie, who uses this convention most famously *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). Her novel is organized in twelve chapters around the testimonies of twelve witnesses, each of whom helps to piece together a legible account of a murder on a train travelling from Istanbul.
Chapter 2

Real Monsters: Humor, Horror, and Parody in *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos*

*Frankenstein es uno de los grandes íconos de la literatura gótica, con Drácula y el hombre lobo. Pero la figura de Frankenstein se ha frivolizado durante los últimos años, por las series y tal. Es la historia de la inclinación y la fascinación, la muerte y el amor y viceversa* (Pleiss 5).

Javier Tomeo

The previous chapter investigated Tomeo’s use of parody in two novels that reconfigure the conventions of crime fiction sub-genres in order to create narrative worlds defined by irrationality and absurdity. This chapter investigates Tomeo’s parody of two horror sub-genres in order to explore the author’s concept of abnormality. The second of the two novels, *Constructores de monstruos*, is particularly interesting because it was completed only a few months before his death from complications of diabetes at the age of 80, and it would have stood as the final contribution to his literary corpus had he not sent another text, *El hombre bicolor*, to editors from his bed at the Sagrat Cor Hospital in Barcelona. Anagrama published the posthumous novel in 2014, and Páginas de Espuma released *El fin de los dinosaurios*, a collection of the author’s micro-fiction, during the same year. Tomeo’s interest in creating characters that go beyond the conventional limits of human identity allows him to privilege unusual beings and to project a world filled with real-life and fictional versions of monstrosity. Examples abound in his narrative discourse of characters with eleven fingers, three nipples, pear-shaped heads, and a variety of bizarre
psychological complexes. They are construed as lovable losers who struggle to maintain relationships with disinterested seductresses, imaginary friends, overbearing mothers, and blow-up sex dolls. Moreover, Tomeo often references and compares his characters to classic monsters from fiction such as werewolves, vampires, and Frankenstein’s monster. The critical consensus is that his collection of characters with abnormal physiologies and pathological tendencies allows his fiction to exceed the boundaries of literary categorization, but commentators have not yet explored the parodic relationship between his novels and the sub-genres of horror fiction and film. It is my contention that Tomeo incorporates and reconfigures the conventions of horror narratives in order to produce an alternative literary reality that is skeptical of the way that abnormality and monstrosity are often depicted in popular culture.

The horror genre differs from the crime genre in a number of ways. First, both popular genres develop around some type of mystery, but the mystery in the horror genre is fueled by the existence and threat posed by supernatural beings or states (Carroll 13). Furthermore, critics have suggested that the formulas of the two genres are organized in profoundly different ways:

In the detective story it is the conclusion, the revelation of the mystery, that is the driving force of the narrative, whereas in the horror story, the goal of the narrative is what lies between the beginning and the end. The conclusion of the horror story is often unsatisfying in comparison with the reader’s experience of the intervening section. So it is not the revelation, which prompts a sensation of horror, but what precedes the revelation, the time that passes before uncertainty can become certainty. (Leffler 112)
Yvonne Leffler suggests that the crime genre differs from the horror genre in its organization and structure. The success or failure of a crime novel, according to her interpretation, depends upon the conclusion of the story and not the twists and turns that precede it. In a horror story, Leffler argues that the conclusion is largely formulaic and that readers and audiences are most interested in the moments of horror produced by the monster throughout the story rather than by the creature’s inevitable death at the end.

The preferred narrative medium of the horror genre is also different from that of the crime genre. As we remember from the previous chapter, crime fiction continues to be a major form of entertainment within popular culture. Horror fiction, however, has not achieved the same mainstream appeal as horror film. Critics regularly observe that horror films are more popular than horror novels because the visual portrayal of a monster is more effective at producing fear than the printed portrayal in literature (Leffler 45). The predominance of film over print in the horror genre, as well as Tomeo’s own admitted interest in monster movies, demands that this chapter recognize the importance of both filmic and print portrayals of werewolves and Frankenstein’s monster. For this reason, I will refer to the targets of parody in both of Tomeo’s novels as “werewolf narratives” and “Frankenstein narratives.” These terms encapsulate the narrative conventions that film and printed literatures share, such as the setting, the monster, and the “happy ending.”

The distinction is crucial because Tomeo’s novels establish an affiliation with visual iterations of the sub-genres of horror narratives, but they do not target elements that are specific to film such as lighting, costumes, or acting techniques.2

This chapter offers new insights into Tomeo’s prose because critics have yet to investigate the author’s parodic reconstruction of the horror sub-genres. Ana Casas writes
that Tomeo’s use of monsters functions “como una metáfora que ilustra alguno de los ejes temáticos del texto” (47). Casas believes that Tomeo repeatedly explores the revelation of truth, the tragic nature of human identity, and an intrinsic failure to communicate through abnormal beings and states (47). For Acín, Tomeo’s narrative is similar to the esperpento esthetic of Ramón del Valle-Inclán, which uses monsters and other manifestations of abnormality in order to reveal the immoral nature of reality that is said to exist behind the façade of appearances:

Muchas de estas taras [en la ficción de Tomeo], junto a la función que conlleva la deformidad vista desde el ángulo de la esperpentización, atraen la atención y permiten que aletee la duda sobre lo definido como cierto y real, resultando que bajo el inocente puede habitar el perverso, que bajo la dócil apariencia de la realidad se esconde la cruel verdad de esta, que bajo la maldad hay cabida para la ternura o que en la indefensión asoma el cinismo.

(Aproximación 116)

For this critic, Tomeo’s fiction projects a profoundly pessimistic worldview in which monsters and abnormality constitute the norm rather than the exception. Acín believes that the author uses monsters and other esperpento techniques in order to reveal the ruthless underbelly of social activity. Finally, Mihai Lacob suggests that Tomeo’s literature projects a postmodern approach to monsters that undermines “normal” forms of identity and social organization: “Dicha omnipresencia [de los monstruos] hace que en los textos del escritor aragonés no surjan dicotomías radicales entre la normalidad cotidiana y el carácter perturbador del elemento fabuloso, o entre la cordura de unos personajes y la locura de otros” (209). For Lacob, the lack of clear borders and stable dichotomies
produces a unique narrative universe that combats naïve conceptions of otherness and posits monsters as an embodiment of radical difference (209).

I here present a new model for understanding Tomeo’s interest in monsters by foregrounding the author’s parody of iconic creatures from popular culture. I will study the ways in which two of the author’s novels, La noche del lobo (2007) and Constructores de monstruos (2013), incorporate and reconfigure the conventions that appear in stories about werewolves and mad scientists. In so doing, the novels undermine the reaffirming visions of abnormality and monstrosity that typically appear in both sub-genres. As I will subsequently argue, the horror genre frequently makes assumptions about the position of evil within our world and the stability of socially defined categories such as normality and abnormality, humanity and monstrosity, and stability and chaos. Tomeo uses parody in order to call attention to the naïve understandings of monstrosity and abnormality that appear in popular horror narratives, and he suggests that the true monsters of our time lurk within our society and ourselves.

The first novel, La noche del lobo, employs the conventions of a werewolf narrative and invites readers to explore the unstable identity of a man who desires to transform into a hideous beast on the night of a full moon. Rather than drawing boundaries that reaffirm the safety of the social order and the stability of the human psyche, Tomeo’s novel projects an alternative narrative world in which abnormality and monstrosity lie at the center of human existence. Constructores de monstruos, by contrast, employs the easily recognizable elements from narratives about Frankenstein’s monster. By reading both texts together, I will show how the author uses parody to question the stability of identity and social organization.
Parody and Horror

As in the previous chapter, in this section I focus on the ways in which Tomeo uses parody in order to undermine the reaffirming conventions projected by naïve forms of popular entertainment. As we remember, leading theorists of parody define the concept as more than just a simple comic rendering of recognizable textual materials. Theorists such as Hutcheon have described parody as being a “double-coded” form of language that both “legitimates and subverts” that which it parodies (The Parody 97). Parodies “legitimize” their targets by incorporating the recognizable elements of a textual antecedent into their original narrative designs. However, parodic texts also “subvert” because they employ the conventions of their targets against the traditional functions. La noche del lobo and Constructores de monstros invoke a parodic relationship with horror sub-genres by incorporating elements that are akin to stories about werewolves and Frankenstein’s monster. The presence of these conventions allows Tomeo to structure and organize the narrative development in a way that is legible for readers. This includes the characters and creatures from long-standing traditions of horror literature and film.

Unlike naïve examples of the horror genre, Tomeo’s parodies establish ironic distance from the serious, terrifying, and ultimately reassuring realities of horror fiction and film in order to present expectations that can be subverted. The author often begins his tales of horror with a humorous accumulation of clichés that orients the reader within a recognizable horror sub-genre. La noche del lobo employs conventions from a werewolf story, while Constructores de monstros sets its scene with Frankenstein iconography. The accumulation of clichés does not create horror, it creates humor. It also invites readers into
an unstable narrative world in which traditional ways of understanding the human condition are questioned. Both novels parody the setting and protagonists who fall comically short of the traditional monsters and mad scientists of werewolf and Frankenstein narratives.

Dentith writes that the “polemical imitation of a preceding text that characterizes parody can have its polemic directed to the world rather than the preceding text” (18). Parodies thus not only engage literature, they engage a “spectrum of cultural practices” that often inform the narrative procedures being imitated (Dentith 18). Critics and theorists of horror fiction and film have argued that “classic” models of horror, which include stories about werewolves and Frankenstein’s monster, often present human identity and social reality as being inherently indivisible. Only through the appearance of supernatural or extraordinary creatures are these categories tested, and the inevitable capture, destruction, or expulsion of the monster at the end reaffirms our belief in the stability of the human psyche and the secure social order. Moreover, in Tomeo’s texts human societies are always presumed to be safe and rational before the appearance of the monster; only through a dangerous external threat do individuals need to reaffirm their sense of stability and security.

**Parody and Horror in Spain**

Literary and cinematic forms of horror have not had the same impact in Spain that they have had elsewhere. Spain lacks a coherent corpus of horror parodies because only after the late 1960s did Spanish audiences regularly enjoy international and domestic horror films, and only during the last two decades has the country produced a series of
internationally recognized directors and parodists of the horror genre. Despite the relative scarcity of horror novels and film in Spain, a brief account of Spanish literary history shows that the country boasts several precursors to the genre. Stories about fantastic creatures can be found in Medieval bestiarios and other monsters can be found in the immensely popular libros de maravillas that were also written during the Middle Ages. The Spanish stage has a history of dramatizing stories about abnormal creatures, and several comedias during the Baroque period used monstrous protagonists who are considered distant relatives of the Wolf Man.

Critics such as Abigail Lee Six have argued that canonical writers such as Emilia Pardo Bazán, Benito Pérez Galdós, and Miguel de Unamuno incorporated common elements of gothic horror into their prose (12-15). She cites incarceration, duplication, and bloodlust as three motifs of Gothic horror that are employed in novels and short stories such as Los pazos de Ulloa (1886), Un destripador de antaño (1880), Doña Perfecta (1876), La sombra (1871), and Nada menos que todo un hombre (1900), and she notes that the texts play on common anxieties such as the fear of madness, the boundaries of the self, and an obsession with blood and violence. She observes that Spanish writers were not as isolated from the rest of Europe as is commonly believed; each of these authors created works that were influenced by classic Gothic writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, H.P. Lovecraft, and E.T.A. Hofmann (Lee Six 15). Curiously, Lee Six does not include Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s Leyendas (1861). The Leyendas is a collection of short tales of terror written primarily during the 1860s. Legends such as “Los ojos verdes” and “El monte de las ánimas” employ many of the same conventions that can be found in today’s best horror
thrillers; these include the incursion into a prohibited space and a setting that coincides with a night of irrational celebration or activity.

Spain would have to wait until the 1960s and 70s for the horror genre to explode in popularity, and it was not literature but film that allowed it to prosper. Like the explosion of crime fiction that took place during this same period, Spain enjoyed a “horror boom” from 1968 to 1975, a period in which the country produced more than 150 horror films, accounting for more than a third of the national industry’s output during that time (Lázaro-Reboll 11). Even though these films were heavily censured, Antonio Lázaro-Reboll writes that classic monsters such as Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolf Man were a “persistent and disturbing presence [in Spain] in the late 1960s and 70s,” inspiring Spanish directors to recreate the recognizable features from international film (67). He also notes that the horror was as an influential cultural movement during the 60s and 70s because it served as a “barometer of the decades’ contradictorily overt conformism and latent dissent, a time when the repressed was on the verge of making a return, in monstrous form” (12). He argues that the mix of sex, violence, and monsters allowed audiences to experience the extreme emotional feelings that had been repressed during the dictatorship.

Despite the popularity of their films, Spanish directors during the 60s and 70s still had to comply with the moral regulations of the Franco regime. For this reason they substituted their real names for English *noms de plume*, and they set their stories outside of Spanish borders, in Medieval dungeons and faraway lands. Jesús Franco, Jacinto Molina (who became famous as Waldemar Daninsky on stage but was also known as Paul Naschy), Amando de Ossorio, and others created an array of horror films featuring classic movie monsters; these include *La marca del hombre lobo* (1968), *El conde Drácula* (1971), and *La
maldición de Frankenstein (1972). Moreover, Spanish directors commonly produced Spanish versions of monster movies from England and the United States. Some examples include Los monstruos del terror (1969), Drácula contra Frankenstein (1971), and Dr. Jekyll y el hombre lobo (1972). The low production value and general lack of esthetic quality inspired newspaper critics to deride Spanish monster films and their generally formulaic nature. In a review of La noche de Walpurgis, for example, the reviewer writes that the director simply “took an abandoned monastery, a werewolf, a devil countess, a stormy night, one or two skeletons, some fake fangs, and a few liters of thick, red liquid” in order to tell the story (qtd. In Lázaro-Reboll 13). Moreover, this same reviewer writes that Spanish contributions to the horror genre were considered “inferior” because they were not rooted in an autochthonous literary or cinematic tradition and therefore could not attain respectability (Lázaro-Reboll 28). Despite these criticisms, however, such films were instrumental in establishing a tradition of horror films in Spain, and the genre has flourished recently with a small but internationally acclaimed collection of directors such as Nacho Cerda and Jaume Balagueró, who have produced the Trilogía de la muerte and Rec series, respectively.

Of all the horrormeisters in Spain, Alex de la Iglesia is Spain’s most renowned parodist of the horror genre. De la Iglesia has produced more than a dozen films in Spain; he has collected the most prestigious awards for Spanish film; and he served as the President of the Spanish Film Academy until his resignation in 2011. Like de la Iglesia, Tomeo routinely incorporates and reconfigures the conventions of the horror genre in his work. The two regularly employ freaks, monsters, and sociopaths to question the norms of accepted human behavior, but readers and audiences are invited to laugh, rather than gasp,
at their absurd creations. Tomeo’s novels differ from the director’s films, however, because his oddballs do not possess the same thirst for anarchy as de la Iglesia’s psychopaths. Whereas de la Iglesia favors inherently violent beings that seek to destroy the world, Tomeo creates mostly harmless, eccentric characters who are too consumed with paranoia and self-doubt to carry out real acts of violence. Both of these artists share an affinity for caricature, satire, dark humor, and the grotesque, but unlike de la Iglesia, Tomeo almost never situates his stories in Spain in order to comment more easily on universal aspects of the human condition.

Terminology, Histories, and Worldviews of the Horror Formula

In order to clarify the terminology that I employ throughout this chapter, I here provide a brief explanation of terms. First, it is crucial to distinguish between horror as a genre and horror as an experience that takes place in the social world. Noël Carroll provides a useful explanation of the two types of horror by differentiating between “art-horror” and “natural horror” (12). He explains that “art-horror” is “the product of a genre” and has recognizable conventions that have been recycled in literature, comic books, pulp magazines, and films from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (13). The fear of nuclear war, the atrocities committed in Nazi concentration camps, and the outbreak of the Ebola virus are all examples of “natural horror” because they inspire fear in the real world and not only in a carefully controlled textual reality. For this theorist and others, the principal ingredients of the horror genre are the setting, the monster, and a series of recognizable stylistic themes. The use of these conventions from the werewolf and Frankenstein sub-genres creates what I will call “werewolf narratives” and “Frankenstein narratives.” I use
the term “narratives” because La noche del lobo and Constructores de monstros parody the narrative features of two horror sub-genres that are recycled in both fiction and film. Finally, I will use the term “Frankenstein narratives,” even though Frankenstein was not the monster but the mad scientist who created the monster.

The applicability of film to my discussion of the horror genre is not surprising given Tomeo’s interest in monster movies. It is no longer possible to ask the author which werewolf and Frankenstein narratives he read or saw, but he admitted during an interview that he had never read Mary Shelley’s novel. However, he did say that he enjoyed horror films from Universal Studios and Hammer, and that his favorite was Fisher’s Dracula (Pleiss 6). His preference for horror films over horror fiction is part of a larger tendency among enthusiasts of the genre who prefer to see a monster rather than to read about one. Even though Anne Rice and Stephen King represent notable exceptions, horror novels have not had the mainstream appeal that film continues to have.

Despite their formal differences, werewolf and Frankenstein narratives share a similar history. Both stories originate in Greek mythology; they appear in Gothic literature during the 18th and 19th centuries; and they become icons of popular culture during the 20th century in pulp magazines and later in classic monster films produced and distributed globally. The first stories of lupine transformation are found in short narratives written between 37 B.C.E. to 116 C.E. and include Virgil’s story of Moeris, who turns himself into a wolf, Ovid’s tale of King Lycaon, who is changed into a wolf by Zeus, Petronius’ anecdote of the metamorphosis of a soldier into a wolf, and Pliny the Elder’s accounts of Greek legends about werewolves (Sconduto 2). The origins of Frankenstein’s monster can be found in the very title of Shelley’s famous novel, Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, first published
anonymously in 1818. The myth of Prometheus is similar to the myth of Lycaon, one of the first werewolf stories, because both narratives feature characters who suffer at the hands of Zeus for disobedience. Zeus transforms King Lycaon into a wolf and kills his fifty children with lightning bolts after the king tests the Greek God’s omnipotence by mixing his dinner with pieces of flesh from a child. Similarly, the story of Prometheus involves a protagonist who steals fire from the gods in order to bring knowledge and enlightenment to humankind. For the crime of undermining the decree of his superiors, who wished to keep fire for themselves, Prometheus is chained to a rock and has his liver torn out by an eagle for eternity. Shelley’s novel is named after Prometheus because the story dramatizes a character who is victimized by a monster due to his own search for enlightenment and power.

Accounts of hirsute men and wolf-like beasts regularly appear during Medieval times in books of magic and marvels, and the topic of lycanthropy, or the condition in which a person is able to transform from a human into a wolf, provoked debates during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries about the nature of the human soul and the devil’s ability to control it (Du Coudray 1). Other explanations forwarded by medical scholars during these centuries maintained that lycanthropy was simply an exaggerated form of melancholy or madness. The Enlightenment’s dedication to reason supported these types of “rational” explanations, and it was accepted that werewolves were little more than a superstition used to understand the actions of people who committed heinous crimes or acknowledged atavistic cravings for blood and human flesh (Du Coudray 2). Werewolf narratives never achieved the fame or popularity of Shelley’s novel or Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), but The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) is commonly cited as
an early contribution to the sub-genre because it explores the personification of the dark “other self” lurking inside every person, the transformation of the protagonist into a dangerous non-human state, and the eventual destruction of the monstrous protagonist (Frost 73).

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* continues to be considered a major work of Gothic fiction, and it inspired a generation of horror films during the 20th century and even recent box office hits such as *I, Frankenstein* (2014). The novel was famously written during a ghost-story contest among Shelley, her future husband, and a group of friends. The novel follows the epistolary format common to some 19th century novels and tells the story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, an eccentric scientist whose obsession with chemistry and other sciences leads him to undertake experiments to bring non-living matter to life. He succeeds in building a hideous creature, but the monster goes on a murderous rampage. The mad scientist dies after he follows the monster to Antarctica, and the creature, saddened by his creator’s death, eventually commits suicide by drifting on a piece of ice into the frozen ocean.

The drama and intrigue of Frankenstein’s monster and the figure of the werewolf each maintained a strong hold on the popular imagination at the turn of the twentieth century. Cheap horror periodicals called “penny dreadfuls” fed off of Gothic literature and produced countless stories about monsters. It was not literature, however, but film that brought Frankenstein and the Wolf Man onto center stage. Horror film explodes in popularity during the 1930s and 40s with the Gothic Film Series from Universal Movie Studios: *Dracula* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943). Hammer Film Productions in
Britain also produced monster movies during the 1950s and 60s with the same classic characters and conventions from the Gothic tradition. Under the direction of Terence Fisher, Hammer films featured Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee in movies such as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *Dracula* (1958), and *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961).

Even though sub-genres of horror novels and film are commonly written off as being removed from everyday social and political reality, critics commonly point to their reassuring assumptions and worldviews. Andrew Tudor and Isabel Cristina Pinedo study how both genres of monster narratives have evolved on the big screen during the twentieth century, and their theories are useful here because they are primarily concerned with aspects of the genre that transcend film:

> Ask people about a movie and, almost invariably, they’ll tell you its story.
>
> This doesn’t mean that audiences are somehow unaware of the significance of acting, of cinematography, of a film’s thematic organization or direction.
>
> Rather, our routine concern with plot reflects the fact that, in most forms of popular cinema, narrative is the primary channel through which aesthetic experience is filtered. (Tudor 81)

Tudor’s emphasis on “story” instead of “film” allows him to focus on the ways in which narrative conventions project worldviews that accept or reject a variety of basic assumptions about the nature of social reality. He and Pinedo note a radical difference between horror narratives produced between the 1930s and the 1960s and those produced from the 1960s until the present. The first group of horror narratives, which they call “secure horror” or “classic horror,” “features the common creatures of the genre such as Dracula, Frankenstein, werewolves, and invaders from outer space. Secure horror
evolves into “paranoid” or “postmodern” horror around the 1960s. Classic monsters disappear during this period, and they are replaced with psychopaths, serial killers, and intelligent extraterrestrial species.

The central difference between the two models, however, is not the monsters in the works, but “the nature of their moral universe and the resolution of conflict” (Pinedo 94). Both critics consider “classic” horror movies to be similar because they share the same formulas and conventions. Each of these narratives opens with the introduction of a monster and the violent disruption of the normative order. The story develops around the rampage of the monster and its pursuit by heroic figures, and it ends with the defeat of the monster and the restoration of the status quo: “The boundary between good and evil, normal and abnormal, human and alien [in classic horror] is as firmly drawn as the imperative that good must conquer evil, thus producing a secure Manichean worldview in which the threats to the social order are largely external and (hu)man agency prevails, largely in the figure of the male subject” (Pinedo 89). Like the sub-genres of crime fiction studied in the first chapter, werewolf and Frankenstein narratives begin in a state of order, move to a state of violence and disorder, and then conclude with the reinstatement of normalcy. The presence of secure boundaries, external threats, and effective human action creates a narrative world in which good triumphs over evil, and the social order is always restored. In contrast, the threat in “paranoid” or “postmodern” narratives suggests that horror is a constitutive aspect of everyday life and “promotes a worldview in which inexplicable and increasingly internal threats to the social order prevail” (Pinedo 90). Both types of horror share the conventional features (monsters, victims, and violence), but their worldviews and endings are fundamentally different; the first advocates for the good of
society and the safety and stability of the individual, while the second cultivates a constant sense of fear, paranoia, and anxiety by mixing those elements in ways that assume that society is corrupt and that no one is ever truly safe.

Of all the conventions I study below, the monster and the reassuring ending of horror narratives have received the most critical ink. Scholars and theorists of teratology, or the study of monsters, have regularly argued that abnormal creatures often serve as ideological mechanisms, which are used to reaffirm “normal,” “natural,” and “rational” forms of identity and conduct. Chantal Bourgault du Coudray, for example, suggests that werewolves embody a unique form of “composite otherness,” which has been used throughout history to support socially constructed ways of being: “Like other Gothic monsters, the werewolf has been thoroughly constructed as an alien ‘other’ threatening the social body; the negative of a normalized social identity” (44). Working through a system of negation, werewolves and other terrifying creatures such as Frankenstein’s monster project abnormal physical and mental states in order to reinforce accepted forms of social thought and behavior. For this critic and others, the creation, appearance, and existence of the monster represent a challenge to the normative order, but its inevitable death, destruction, or disappearance always reaffirms the very boundaries that have become transgressed during the story. Richard Kearney calls this process “scapegoating” (23), and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen refers to the monster’s death as an “exorcism” that “purges a community by eliminating its sins” (18).

The tendency towards a happy ending or satisfactory conclusion has sparked some of the most influential debates among critics of the horror genre. Cawelti writes that the horror genre is similar to crime fiction because its “formulaic tendency” is always toward
“the ultimate defeat or at least temporary departure of the alien creature” (48). Like the mystery archetype, which teaches that any mystery can be solved through logic and ratiocination, the horror archetype provides “the underlying moral fantasy that the unknowable can be known and related to in some meaningful fashion” (Cawelti 49). The evocation of our fears is only pleasurable, he argues, “when we are assured that we will finally be able to understand and relate to them” (49). Within this interpretation, the capture, defeat, and expulsion of the monster represent key conventions of the formula because they assure readers and audiences that human action and intelligence are capable of ejecting the monstrous threat from an otherwise peaceful and rational society. The elimination of the monster, in this sense, is similar to the resolution of the crime, the apprehension of the criminal, and the defeat of the villain. It is the final step in a popular narrative world that subscribes to the beliefs and values of a secure and rational social universe.

Like Cawelti, Moretti argues that horror narratives have always been designed to produce satisfactory resolutions to the social, political, and cultural anxieties that threaten a given social reality. He observes that the ending of Stoker’s Dracula and Shelley’s Frankenstein are like all popular horror sub-genres because they systematically eliminate the dangers posed by the monster or other characters which question the norms of the dominant ideological systems in which they are created:

The restoration of a logical order [at the end] coincides with the unconscious and irrational adherence to a system of values beyond dispute. Professing to save the individual, it in fact annuls him. It presents society - whether the feudal idyll of Frankenstein or the Victorian England of Dracula - as a great
corporation: whoever breaks its bonds is done for. To think for oneself, to follow one’s own interests: these are the real dangers that this literature wants to exorcise. Illiberal in a deep sense, it mirrors and promotes the desire for an integrated society, a capitalism that manages to be “organic.” (Moretti 107-08)

Even though monsters represent a threat to the norms of social reality, they are trapped inside of a genre that is anything but subversive. Like those who die in the horror genre because they break the rules of accepted behavior, the monster becomes a victim of the status quo because it exists and acts in an untraditional or immoral way. For this reason Stephen King, one of horror fiction’s most famous writers, has argued that the genre is “as Republican as a banker in a three-piece suit” (39).

There is, however, an obvious exception to these interpretations. The most common counterargument to the conservative nature of horror narratives is that many stories end without the destruction of the monster. In “paranoid” and “postmodern” horror narratives, for example, the monster often survives, and in some cases it even wins. Cawelti writes off this argument by acknowledging that even in stories where the monster is destroyed, its threat is always diminished and its tactics known (49). One may also point out that the monster’s survival may not necessarily have a subversive ideological meaning but may be intended for sequels. Werewolf and Frankenstein narratives, however, almost never end in this fashion because they embody the values of classic horror: “[In classic horror narratives] the monster is an irrational Other who precipitates violence and transgresses the law. It is evil because it threatens the social order; the suppression of the unleashed menace is a priority for the agents of order. The violence of the law restores repression,
and the social order is reestablished” (Pinedo 98). The social order returns to normalcy in werewolf and Frankenstein narratives thanks to the successful intervention of a heroic figure. This character discovers, after many trials, errors, and much bloodshed, an effective way to defeat the monster, and the showdown between the hero and the creature at the end results in the reestablishment of a safe and rational world.

Tomeo’s novels use the conventions from both classic horror sub-genres, but his strategy of parody destabilizes their secure worlds and creates an overwhelming sense of ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding threats to individuals and society. Both novels constantly create humor through the frustration of readerly expectations, but they also cultivate feelings of paranoia and uncertainty because they never clarify whether the threat is real or imagined. Despite the paranoid tendencies in both novels, however, it must be recognized that Tomeo’s humor and ambiguity do not create the same sense of horror that takes place in films such as Alien or Halloween. Nevertheless, the element of uncertainty suggests an equally skeptical worldview toward the order of society and the stability of the human subject. Tomeo’s fiction gestures toward the chaos of “paranoid” and “postmodern” horror, but the presence of parody prevents his novels from projecting the extreme scenes of violence and bloodshed that have become staples of the horror genre.

The Conventions of Werewolf Narratives

Werewolf narratives contain a series of conventions that set a series of expectations for readers. I here provide an account of the primary conventions that Tomeo parodies in order to construct his parody of the sub-genre. The first convention that La noche del lobo parodies is the setting of a werewolf narrative. The werewolf sub-genre traditionally
employs a series of temporal markers and details that set the scene for a story about a man who transforms into a wolf: a woodland environment, a forking path, a strange mist, and a full moon at night. In addition, the sub-genre organizes the setting around a center-periphery structure. Tudor writes that classic horror narratives divide their narrative action between two clearly delineated spaces, the murky domain of the werewolf and a town or city inhabited by potential victims. The action of the story often commences in the forest, which is home to the monster as well as other types of sinister characters such as witches and demonic worshippers. These characters are the source of lycanthropy when people become werewolves as the result of magic, curses, or spells.

In contrast to the misty milieu of the werewolf, the second part of the setting is the town or city, which is populated with innocent individuals who exist within a secure and orderly social environment. Tudor writes that the clear delineation between the two types of characters and spaces creates the center-periphery model of narrative development and suggests that evil only lurks outside of society (125). The werewolf’s penetration into the otherwise safe urban center leads to the anticipated moments of violence and horror, but the need to provide a reassuring ending and assuage anxieties about the effectiveness of human action demand that the boundaries between good and evil, and between monstrosity and abnormality, are always safely redrawn (Tudor 126).

The second convention that the novel parodies is the lycanthrope. Traditionally, this character appears in the sub-genre as half-human and half beast, transforms on the night of a full moon, and terrorizes the people and animals from nearby urban centers. Men and women become lycanthropes when a werewolf bites them or when a witch or a gypsy places a spell on them. In some narratives people are born as werewolves, but in these
situations the lycanthrope always discovers that his or her bloodline is affiliated with some type of malevolent force. In each case, the sub-genre does not assume that the nature of the human mind or the rational order is inherently irrational or insecure. Within the logic of the werewolf narratives, therefore, it is only through the intervention of irrational and supernatural forces that a given society is threatened; human identity is never presented as unstable and arbitrary. Instead, readers and audiences may reaffirm their own “normalcy” by contrasting themselves with the abnormal minds and bodies of the lycanthropes.

The third convention that the novel parodies is the transformation. The transformation scene represents one of the most anticipated and iconic moments of any werewolf narrative. Lupine metamorphoses produce horror and fascination for readers and audiences as the lycanthrope undergoes a painful process of physical and mental transformation during the appearance of a full moon. The transformation process is a unique characteristic of the werewolf sub-genre because the lycanthrope is unlike other monsters that possess stable (though obviously abnormal) identities. Dracula and Frankenstein, for example, are always monsters because they never occupy a human state. Werewolves, by contrast, are tragic figures because their humanity allows them to reflect upon their unfortunate identity, and they regularly chain themselves to trees and lock themselves in dungeons in order to avoid murdering the people they love. Despite their best efforts, however, the beast always overcomes the human side of lycanthropes, and their transformation delivers the action and violence that are essential to the success of a werewolf narrative.

The fourth and final convention that the novel parodies is the reassuring ending. Werewolf narratives often conclude with the death of the lycanthrope at the hands of a
hero who discovers a way to break the curse or kill the monster. A silver bullet represents the most effective way to kill the creature; in some cases the lycanthrope dies, and in other cases, the wolf man reclaims his full human identity. Regardless of the two options, the monstrous threat is eventually mitigated, and the secure, rational nature of the social order is reestablished. As we remember from above, the conclusion of a werewolf story acts as one of the defining elements of classic horror, a genre less interested in subverting the norms of society and more interested in reaffirming stable categories of human thought, action, and identity.

**Lupine Frustrations: Horror, Humor, and Lycanthropy in *La noche del lobo***

The concept of parody not only illuminates the skeptical vision of social reality that Tomeo incorporates into *La noche del lobo*, it also offers a useful tool to consider the major aspects of its formal composition. The novel parodies the characters, conventions, and clichés of werewolf narratives in order to produce a unique literary reality that undermines the naïve myths regarding normality, monstrosity, and social organization found within this particular sub-genre. Rather than creating horror, Tomeo’s novel creates humor and invites the reader to imagine a world in which abnormal forms of identity and behavior undermine reassuring conceptions of the human condition in the present. Parody is a vehicle for exploring the nature of monstrosity, and it suggests that profound aspects of the human condition may be missed when abnormality is solely considered to be deviant, dangerous, and worthy of ostracism or destruction.

Critical evaluations of *La noche del lobo* have followed many of the same patterns presented in the previous chapter. Vania Maire Fivaz has emphasized how Tomeo’s interest
in sociology allows him to create a protagonist who “se inserta perfectamente en el linaje de los locos-cueros, iniciado por el polémico Elogio de la locura de Erasmo de Rotterdam y el Don Quijote de Cervantes” (168). Fivaz argues that Tomeo endows his protagonist with patterns of psychopathic behavior in order to create an unsettling narrative universe that emphasizes the creative potential of abnormal human conduct:

A contracorriente de la lógica normativa que tiende a aislar y alejar aquellos elementos que son fuente de inquietud, el escritor aragonés hace aflorar la psicopatía en sus obras engalanada con los atributos de la creación, introduciendo con ello en nuestro patrimonio cultural experiencias que we solemos rechazar como atópicas. (168)

La noche del lobo blends the author’s knowledge of criminal behavior with a longstanding tradition in Spanish and European fiction that celebrates insanity, deviance, and other forms of irrational thought and conduct. For Fivaz, Tomeo subverts the norms of the social order and invites us to explore a universe in which creativity and imagination dominate reason and logic. Similarly, Acín writes that La noche del lobo is impossible to understand from a rational perspective. He emphasizes the novel’s allegorical dimensions, noting that, “El sinsentido de su situación [la de Macario y Ismael] les lleva al sinsentido de la vida: la quiebra de sus anclajes ‘realistas’ permite que entren en sus vidas elementos nuevos como la duda, el recuerdo, el delirio, la imaginación o la capacidad de soñar” (“Javier Tomeo” 33).

For both of these critics, Tomeo’s novel represents a challenge to traditional models of thought and realist aesthetics. Gómez López-Quiñones’ understanding of the work is surprising, therefore, because he reads La noche del lobo alongside mainstream writers, who include Enrique Vila-Matas, Albert Sánchez Piñol, and Arturo Pérez Reverte. For this
critic, the sublime illuminates central aspects of Tomeo’s narrative design, which then allows for insights regarding the author’s interest in undermining heterogeneous understandings of human identity and subjectivity (La Precariedad 34). According to his critical model, Tomeo’s novel depends upon the “fractura constitutiva en la subjetividad de sus personajes” (34), and it takes part in a larger trend among Spanish writers who use the sublime in order to question stable forms of identity and social organization. Each of the above critical approaches reveals the sociological and philosophical foundations of La noche del lobo, but the role of parody has remained unexplored.

It is impossible to deny the confluence of werewolf narratives and parody when describing the bizarre events that take place in Tomeo’s La noche del lobo. The novel commences as an unidentified third-person narrator relates that Macario, the protagonist, has left his hut in the woods in order to take a walk at twilight on the night of a full moon. Macario has spent the day reading about fantastic creatures and strange information on the Internet, and it has led him to believe that he is going to transform into a hideous beast when the moonlight emerges from the clouds. During his walk, he comes across a forking path and decides to take the trail that leads to a nearby town. An unfortunate misstep, however, causes him to twist his ankle, and he falls helplessly to the ground. Macario checks his cell phone but the battery is dead, and so he sits alone in the darkness until he hears the laments of another man who has also injured his ankle on the same path only a few feet from him.

The second man is Ismael, an overweight insurance salesman from the city who was walking in the opposite direction and has shared the same fate as Macario. Both men lie only a few feet apart, but they are unable to see one another because it is night and a thick
mist has fallen upon the countryside. They decide to wait in the woods until they can signal someone to come to their aid in the morning. Ismael is concerned that a lone wolf may roam the woods, an idea that Macario ridicules because he says that all of the wolves have disappeared from the region. Ismael, however, knows that he is in a dangerous situation because he has seen every monster movie at his local cinema and therefore knows that anything is possible on the night of a full moon. Ismael's anxiety grows as Macario becomes increasingly uncomfortable throughout the evening. Macario's personality seems to change, and he nervously adjusts his dentures each time that the light strikes his face. The two spend the night conversing about a variety of topics in order to distract themselves from their situation, but Macario's story constantly leads Ismael to wonder if the other man is going to transform into a snarling beast or if he is simply an individual with abnormal psychological tendencies. The novel concludes when Macario notices the light of a bicycle moving through the forest. The bicyclist approaches, and he promises that he will return to town and alert the authorities that the two men are trapped in the woods. Unfortunately, the biker does not return promptly, and Macario begins to suspect that the man has either forgotten about them or has simply decided not to tell anyone about their existence. Fortunately, they discover that their concerns are misplaced because the ambulance finally arrives and takes them to the hospital.

The first convention the novel parodies is the setting of werewolf narratives. Tomeo parodies the setting of the sub-genre by amassing temporal markers and scenic details and then employing them against their traditional function. The confluence of horror and humor becomes apparent in the opening lines when the novel draws attention to a conventional temporal marker from the werewolf sub-genre:
Jueves, treinta de noviembre, festividad de San Andrés. Es el último día del mes, eso lo sabe todo el mundo. Después de noviembre vendrá diciembre, que tiene treinta y un días y es el último mes del año. Luego vuelta a empezar. Lo que no sabe mucha gente es que esta mañana el sol asomó la cabeza exactamente a las siete horas diecisiete minutos y que se pondrá a las dieciséis cincuenta, es decir, a las cinco menos diez. (9)

The action takes place on the night of St. Andrew’s Feast, which is appropriate because stories about werewolves often take place on an evening of irrational rituals or pagan celebrations. The cliché also becomes a vehicle for parody, however, because it is used to set up a ludic game of expectations surrounding the reader’s knowledge of the Gregorian calendar. The phrase “eso lo sabe todo el mundo” demands the complicity of the reader, as he or she is reminded (or shamed for not knowing) that there are thirty days in the month of November and thirty-one days in December. Moreover, the unnecessary explanation that “las dieciséis cincuenta” is the same as “las cinco menos diez” also reveals a narrator who is methodical, or a bit obsessive compulsive in regards to the specification of time. The collision between psychological abnormality and imagery from werewolf narratives creates parody because it implies that we are not entering an ancient world of lycanthropy, we are entering the reality of a pathological human.

The incongruence conveys a sense of humorous distance from the otherwise serious and dramatic elements of the werewolf sub-genre, and the gradual accumulation of other setting devices also emphasizes parody. During Macario’s walk through the woods, for example, he quickly comes across “un camino que quinientos metros más allá se bifurca en dos senderos. El de la izquierda conduce hasta el pueblo, el de la derecha no conduce a
ninguna parte, y tal vez sea ése su mayor encanto” (11). A forking path is commonly found in werewolf narratives because it forces characters to make decisions that prove fateful. The choice often leads to questions about fate and destiny, but the narrator’s observation here that the path leading to nowhere may offer the “mayor encanto” once again deemphasizes the seriousness of Macario’s situation and undermines the dramatic setting of a werewolf narrative.

Other clichés abound with the appearance of a mysterious mist that blocks Macario’s vision, a cawing crow, a hooting owl, and a full moon that periodically escapes from behind the clouds. The excess of conventional setting devices and the constant use of ironic language enable Tomeo to reconfigure the traditional spatial arrangement of a werewolf narrative. As we remember, the sub-genre divides its action between two easily distinguishable settings, the forest environment of the beast and the secure social center. Within this predictable narrative design, the “normal” and “rational” victims live in a town or a village while the monster dwells outside of the populated center. Tomeo rewrites the logic of the werewolf sub-genre by eliminating the rational center and focusing the story on the traditionally peripheral and irrational space of the monster. The narrator focalizes Macario and emphasizes that no one from the town or city will come to the characters’ aid because “hace meses que no pasa nadie por esta parte del páramo,” and “Los conductores prefieren ir al pueblo por el camino asfaltado que pasa por el otro lado del páramo, aunque tengan que dar un rodeo” (19). The bus drivers’ preferences for asphalt roads assure the characters and the reader that no one from an adjoining town or city has any reason to visit Macario’s moorland. This suggests that the two characters are completely isolated within a
peripheral space and, more importantly, that those from a populated center will not be a factor in the development of the story.

Moreover, the novel repeatedly emphasizes that something extraordinary is about to take place and establishes an irrational environment rich with humor and uncertainty. The novel evinces its parodic setting when the narrator relates the thoughts of Macario as he looks at the full moon and observes “La luna llena continúa sonriendo. Falta bastante para que se instale en la parte más alta del cielo, pero parece como si esta noche se trajese algo especial entre manos” (23). The “smiling” face of the moon sets the expectation that a supernatural occurrence is imminent, but the humorous language “se trajese algo especial entre manos,” keeps the reader guessing as to whether something truly special is or is not going to occur. A similar moment transpires soon after when Macario hears the sounds of crickets, and the narrator again relates his internal monologue, “esta noche, por culpa seguramente de la luna llena, se están infringiendo algunas normas” (25). The idea is confirmed shortly after when he hears a crow cawing in the tree above him and thinks, “Tal vez [el cuervo] está anunciando que esta noche va a ocurrir alguna cosa que nadie espera y se desespera porque los hombres no la entienden” (34). The “infringement of norms” as well as an occurrence that “people cannot understand” cultivates curiosity and the need to know more, but the ironic language also sows doubt as to whether Tomeo is setting up a horror story or whether the setting has been designed around a frustrating economy between conventions and expectations. Rather than moving between the two clearly delineated spaces of reason and irrationality, the novel unravels within an inescapable reality defined by ambiguity and absurdity. Parody destabilizes the traditional setting of a
werewolf narrative and projects a world turned upside down in which the rational order simply does not exist and irrationality is normal and expected.

The novel parodies the second convention of the sub-genre, the lycanthrope, by developing a character who falls comically short of the conventional werewolf. *La noche del lobo* carries out its parody of the lycanthrope in three ways in order to undermine common assumptions that the werewolf sub-genre projects to its audiences. First, Tomeo employs a modern version of Cervantine parody in which the protagonist is unable to separate fiction from reality after having spent too many hours reading about fantastic creatures on the Internet. Secondly, the use of parody creates moments of humor instead of horror and cultivates feelings of empathy and pathos rather than horror and repulsion. Thirdly, the novel frequently makes references to werewolf narratives in order to set up humorous comparisons between the protagonist and traditional werewolves.

*La noche del lobo* employs the first parodic strategy when Macario reads about Dracula and the Wolf Man on the Internet, and his behavior begins to demonstrate that his interest in monsters may be influencing his perception of reality:

[Macario] entra en las páginas dedicadas al hombre lobo, que de un tiempo a esta parte es su tema preferido, y lee que una simple estrella de cinco puntas pintada con la sangre de un animal basta para mantenerle alejado. Lee también que los hombres lobo pueden ser involuntarios, como consecuencia de una maldición, y natos, que nacen siendo hombres lobo. “No tengo todavía nada de hombre lobo,” bromea [Macario], ajustándose la dentadura postiza.

(10)
Like Spain’s famous knight errant, Macario’s obsession with fantastic reading material affects his interaction with the world around him. The ideas that “cinco puntas pintadas con la sangre de un animal basta para mantenerle [al hombre lobo] alejado,” as well as the fact that some wolf-men are born wolf-men and that others “nacen siendo hombres lobo” are not only conventions that structure a werewolf narrative, they also become essential ingredients to Macario’s way of perceiving himself and the world around him. Unlike Cervantes, however, Tomeo never makes a clear distinction between fiction and reality. The fact that Macario “todavía” doesn’t have anything in common with a hombre lobo invites us to wonder about his psychological state. His true identity remains unclear, but his lycanthropy is obviously not the product of an irrational curse from a sentient being; it is the result of his cyber addiction. His obsessive use of the Internet and his consumption of the “millones de libros” (22) saved on his computer create the monster of the story. Rather than locating the source of monstrosity in the supernatural, Tomeo’s parody of the lycanthrope suggests that common aspects of quotidian life are possible sources of monstrosity in the modern age.

The comical discrepancy between Macario and a traditional wolf man signals the second parodic strategy that undermines the traditional character of the lycanthrope. Macario routinely expresses that his eyes are turning red (22); he nervously rubs his dentures “como quien quiere comprobar al tacto el filo de un cuchillo” (25); he has trouble breathing under the moonlight (54); and he feels the need to howl at the moon when it moves from beneath the clouds (123). The description of a toothless man rubbing his dentures is one of many humorous images that subvert the conventional lycanthrope, but parody also enables the story to provide moments of reflection surrounding the
problematic nature of monstrosity. The humor in Macario’s actions is imbued with a sense of tragedy because he is the victim of a society that has forced him to believe that “en alguna parte existe un mundo mejor” (33). Tomeo’s caricaturized version of the lycanthrope not only invites readers to laugh at the protagonist’s psychological state, it also leads them to imagine a “mundo mejor” in which freaks, monsters, and misfits can live in harmony without the normalizing influences of society. Parody here undermines the assumption that monsters are disgusting creatures that pose a threat which must be overcome or destroyed, and it invites readers to sympathize with those who fall outside the paradigms of accepted human identity and behavior.

In addition to using a Cervantine model of parody and foregrounding humor and pathos, the novel employs a third parodic strategy by repeatedly emphasizing the discrepancy between Macario and more traditional wolf men of the sub-genre. Unlike the lycanthropes from popular culture, Macario wants to become a beast that transforms on the night of a full moon. His desire represents an inverted vision of reality in which monstrosity is ideal while “normal” forms of conduct and identity are presented as reductive and confining. The parodic strategy first manifests when Ismael proclaims that he knows everything about wolves and wolf men because “Durante los últimos quince años ha visto todas las películas de Drácula y del Hombre Lobo que pusieron en el cine de su barrio y en la televisión y es capaz de distinguir los lobos que nacen siendo lobos de aquellos hombres que sufren de melancolía y acaban convirtiéndose en licántropo” (20). Macario seems to fit into the category of “aquellos hombres que sufren de melancolía,” but his thoughts and actions constantly create uncertainty as to whether he is or is not a “real” wolf man. Ismael is also alarmed because Macario does not seem to know that it is not good
to be a lycanthrope because, as Ismael observes, “los hombres lobo lo pasan bastante mal en las películas” (21). He says that most wolf men lock themselves in rooms or chain themselves to the bars of a window when they feel like they are going to transform. The scene emphasizes parody, however, because Macario admits no interest in restraining himself. He wonders if he could be a “hombre lobo independiente” and says that he wants to be a werewolf that “no quiere encadenarse” (21). The humor in the scene develops, of course, because Macario does not think or act like traditional wolf men in the sub-genre. He embraces monstrosity and actually wants to transform into a violent beast.

The novel employs the same strategy toward the end of the novel when Macario once again demonstrates his obsession with lycanthropy. Ismael begins to speak about his wife, a woman whom he loves and greatly admires, but Macario confesses that he cannot focus because he is suffering from violent mood swings:

“Lo malo es esa luna de ahí arriba” dice Macario. “Voy a confesarle algo: esta noche, apenas la veo entre las nubes, todo se me revuelve patas arriba. Se esconde y otra vez lo veo todo normal. Es la primera vez que se me ocurre algo parecido. Me siento como uno de los hombres lobo de sus películas. “No hay que creer en las películas,” dice ahora Ismael... “¿Y si realmente anda suelto un hombre lobo por estos alrededores?” [pregunta Macario]. “¡Jo, jo, jo!" Se ríe otra vez Ismael, sin comprometerse. (113)

Macario’s confession to Ismael reveals the protagonist's concern that his fantasy of lycanthropy may be more than a delusion. Unlike the “hombres lobo de sus películas,” however, Macario is excited by the idea of transforming into a wolf. His question to Ismael, which comes directly after Ismael has explained that such films are not real, demonstrates
a profound desire to become a supernatural creature. The exchange concludes with Ismael’s nervous laughter and the idea that he “does not want to commit himself.” Ismael’s peculiar response seems to indicate a tension between the worlds of fiction and reality. He knows that Macario is probably not like the characters in the films that he has seen, but he also seems frightened that the man may truly be a werewolf. The unspoken play of ambiguity creates humor, but it also invites Ismael and the reader to wonder if monsters are truly confined to the world of fiction. Moreover, Macario’s enthusiasm about achieving a monstrous identity once again destabilizes the conventions from werewolf narratives. Rather than drawing clear distinctions between normality and monstrosity, Tomeo’s novel asks questions about the stability of these categories and proposes that monsters may in fact inhabit “normal” everyday reality.

The third convention the novel parodies is the transformation. Writers and directors go to great lengths to produce the anticipated moments of horror and fascination that occur when an otherwise normal person transforms into a snarling animal. *La noche del lobo* parodies the transformation convention by constantly suggesting that Macario is about to transform into a werewolf each time the moon appears from behind the clouds, but it frustrates the expectation because he never actually changes into a wolf. Instead, the moonlight produces a series of humorous effects in the protagonist. The first instance of parody takes place when the full moon appears while Macario is just starting his walk through the woods: “En este instante aparece la luna llena y Macario siente como si una hermosa mujer le confortase y le pasase le mano por la frente. Ha estado esperándola durante toda la semana. Hubo incluso una noche en la que se le puso tieso, aunque tal vez eso fuese por otros motivos” (16). Like traditional lycanthropes, the appearance of the full
moon has an effect on Macario, but he does not react like traditional wolf men. Instead of becoming a beast, he senses the presence of a beautiful woman capable of making him “tieso.” The erection, rather than the transformation, frustrates expectations and puts into motion a reoccurring pattern of frustrations, which undermines the intense drama of the werewolf sub-genre.

Examples abound as the appearance of the moonlight incites Macario to act in strange ways, but the “lycanthrope” never changes into a werewolf. In one instance, for example, the moonlight “le penetra sutilmente por todos los poros del cuerpo,” but it only causes him to “respirar con más problemas que puede esperarse de una simple bronquitis” (54). The indirect comparison between bronchitis and lycanthropy in the scene creates humor, and it is a joke that Tomeo uses again when the moonlight returns and produces more problems for Macario: "Esta noche [la luna llena] está jugando al escondite pero cada vez que reaparece lo hace con un poco más de veneno en la sonrisa. Cuando la tiene sobre su cabeza le falta aire y no tiene más remedio que respirar con la boca abierta, como un pez fuera del agua" (86). In addition to Macario’s "bronchitis," the game “escondite” and the full moon’s “smile” alert the reader to an absurd collection of causes and effects that pale in comparison to the symptoms suffered by traditional lycanthropes.

The humor in the scene is complete when the narrator focalizes Macario and reveals his inner monologue:

Se pasa la yema del índice por los dientes de porcelana y comprueba que tiene todavía todos los dientes parejos, cada uno en su sitio de siempre. Ésa es la gran ventaja de las dentaduras postizas: nunca, ni siquiera durante las
noches de luna llena, pueden crecerte los dientes y ponerte en un compromiso. (86)

Rather than creating horror, Macario's dentures serve as a running joke and reveal the abnormality of the protagonist. Even though he has proved incapable of transforming into a beast, he constantly worries that his prosthetic teeth are going to grow into a pair of fangs that can be used to harm the man beside him. The humor undermines the terror of the story's “monster” and instead provides a look inside the mind of a character who is the victim of an unstable mental pathology.

The novel emphasizes the parody of the transformation convention in the closing chapters when the full moon comes out from behind the clouds with greater frequency. Ismael's fears start to become real when the moonlight appears, and Macario begins discussing his favorite food. He tells Ismael that he has always enjoyed preparing ox in rum sauce, but that there are other meats that are more delicious. Ismael asks him if he is referring to beef stew, one of his favorite dishes, but the other man responds with an unsettling answer: “'Me refiero exactamente a la carne humana,' precisa Macario, hablando otra vez al dictado de lo que le dice la luna. '¿Sabe usted que las nalgas de los gorditos como usted, fritas con un poco de mostaza, están para chuparse los dedos?'” (123).

An initial feeling of humor results from Macario's unusual reaction to the moonlight. He once again does not transform but instead is incited to discuss his love for human meat. From there, the scene becomes increasingly absurd because Macario not only claims to know the taste of human meat, he claims that he has an affinity for eating “nalgas” with mustard. The parody of the transformation reveals the humorous and tragic aspects of a lycanthrope and undermines the traditional aspects of the sub-genre. Even though he is incapable of
transforming, the reader is left to observe a curious character who blurs the line between normality and abnormality, humanity and monstrosity.

The novel ends by parodying the last convention of any classic werewolf narrative, the happy ending. The satisfactory conclusion in the werewolf sub-genre traditionally takes place with the death of the monster, its return to human form, and the celebration of the status quo. Even in cases in which the monster does not die, narratives about werewolves always suggest that reason and social order are capable of overcoming the monstrous threat. Tomeo parodies the reassuring conclusion of a werewolf narrative by employing a stock ending, the appearance of an ambulance which rescues the two main characters, but the closing paragraphs do not offer a coherent understanding of the bizarre events that take place in the novel: “La luna se ríe también entre las nubes. Se siente orgullosa de sí misma, aunque esta noche, a pesar de todos sus esfuerzos, no haya conseguido transformar a Macario en un hombre lobo. Puede que lo consiga la próxima vez” (146). The personification of the moon, which “laughs” and “is proud of itself,” contributes to the parody because the moon seems to be laughing at readers, whose expectations are frustrated throughout the story. Even though it seems clear that Macario is not a real wolf man, the story ends by suggesting that he may in fact be capable of transforming into a wolf, but on a different night. Rather than reassurance, the novel concludes with an unsettling feeling of ambiguity because the tidy resolution to the novel’s central question, whether Macario is or is not a wolf man, is simply postponed.

The final words of the novel also contribute to the overwhelming sense of uncertainty. The arrival of the ambulance means that Macario, who has not been able to actually see Ismael due to the fog, will finally be able to see the person with whom he has
been conversing: “Por fin vamos a vernos las caras’ [Macario] le dice a Ismael, levantando la voz por encima de los gritos de los camilleros. Pero el marido de Genoveva [la esposa de Ismael] ... ya no tiene ganas de contestarle” (146). Ismael’s silence concludes the novel with questions rather than answers. It seems that Ismael, who is either scared of Macario or just tired of talking to him, wishes to end his communication with the other man. It is not clear why he would not want to see Macario’s face or why he would choose this moment to become silent after an entire evening of dialogue. The appearance of the ambulance brings closure to the novel, but it does not explain the abnormal occurrences that have taken place in the woods. The conclusion seems to suggest that some aspects of our world may never be known, and that monsters may not represent an external threat that can be isolated and destroyed. La noche del lobo thus blurs traditional forms of social and literary classification in order to show that abnormality, irrationality, and monstrosity represent an inherent part of a reality that is anything but normal.

The Conventions of Frankenstein Narratives

Like werewolf narratives, Frankenstein narratives possess a series of conventions that separate them from other types of horror narratives. In order to understand the parody in Constructores de monstruos, it is necessary to review the conventions of the Frankenstein sub-genre. The first convention that Tomeo parodies is the setting. Like the werewolf sub-genre, Frankenstein narratives traditionally employ a series of temporal markers and setting details about a mad scientist and his creature. A castle, a laboratory filled with scientific instruments, body parts, and skeletons are a few of the many conventions that invite readers into this recognizable world of horror iconography. In
addition to these conventions, the Frankenstein sub-genre also organizes the setting around the same center-periphery structure found in werewolf narratives. The story occurs in three clearly delineated spaces: the abode of the monster, the laboratory of the scientist, and the town or village of ordinary people. The rigid spatial organization accentuates the peripheral position of the monster and the mad scientist, and it fosters the assumption that evil is external and not inherently part of the rational order. Like werewolf narratives, the threat to a given society does not exist within its defensible borders but in a castle on the outside of town.

The second convention that the novel parodies is the figure of the mad scientist. Tudor writes that the mad scientist represents both the villain and the hero of the Frankenstein sub-genre because he creates the monster and subsequently becomes responsible for its capture or destruction. Tudor further explains that mad scientists are often portrayed as strange, eccentric individuals, but it is assumed that their actions represent the justifiable intellectual pursuit of the search for knowledge. In this sense, mad scientists are not the true monsters of the story but the unfortunate victims of their actions. Moreover, the mad scientist’s superior intellectual abilities posit him (and Tudor observes that it is always a man) as the expert and the hero of the story because he possesses the knowledge and volition to mitigate the monstrous threat and return order to the fictional world (113). Tudor writes that “unambiguous allegiance” to the victorious experts is common in Frankenstein narratives; the sub-genre’s promotion of scientific leadership and expertise was often used in classic horror films to teach the masses that they are “in need of protection and guidance from an appropriately qualified elite” (126).
The third convention that the novel parodies is the creation of the monster. Readers and audiences await the iconic moment in any Frankenstein narrative when a lightning bolt strikes the tower of the laboratory, and the scientist, filled with excitement and madness, exclaims that the monster is alive. The process of creation often represents a small part of the narrative because the scientist can create the monster without complications. In Shelley’s novel, for example, the creation of the monster takes place in only a few pages. Filmic depictions often dramatize a series of failed experiments at the beginning of the story, but each failure leads to the successful creation of the monster, normally at night during a thunderstorm.

The last convention that the novel parodies is the happy ending. As we remember, the ending of the horror sub-genre is essential to assure that good always conquers evil and that reason and human action are capable of restoring order. The death of Frankenstein’s monster has been represented in a number of ways. In Shelley’s version, the monster catches up with his creator on a ship in the North Pole, and once he discovers that Dr. Frankenstein has died, he decides to commit suicide. James Whale’s Frankenstein (1931), produced by Universal Studios, ends with the people of the town rising up, trapping the monster in a mill, and then setting the mill on fire with the creature inside. Terence Fisher’s The Curse of Frankenstein (1957) ends when Dr. Frankenstein sets the creature on fire and pushes it into a vat of acid. Unlike “paranoid” narratives in which the monster wins or is cast away for only a short period of time, conventional Frankenstein narratives demand closure in order to reassure audiences that societies can be protected by their experts, and that the forces of reason and good will always win over the forces of irrationality and evil.
Is it Alive (Yet)?: Parody, Monstrosity, and Horror in *Constructores de monstrosos*

Like *La noche del lobo*, *Constructores de monstrosos* parodies the characters and conventions of Frankenstein narratives in order to create an original work that calls attention to the naïve assumptions and worldviews that appear in the sub-genre. Rather than reassuring readers by reestablishing boundaries between good and evil, and between normality and monstrosity, Tomeo's novel projects a world turned upside down in which abnormal forms of thought, behavior, and social conduct become the norm. Within his fictional universe, reason and morality fail to overcome the threatening and monstrous forces of reality, and readers are left to question the nature of normalcy and the place of good and evil within human society. The novel proposes that monsters serve a vital role in the construction and reaffirmation of individual and social identities, and it suggests that monsters are reflections of us rather than dangerous, abnormal others that must be destroyed. Because of its recent publication date, *Constructores de monstrosos* has not received any critical attention to date. My reading hopes to begin a conversation regarding one of Tomeo's final contributions to his *oeuvre*.

The plot unfolds around the conversations and machinations of Raimonius von Bernstein and his assistant Tadeusz von Rippstein, who work together to create a monster for Raimonius' nefarious uncle, the military governor of Ulmdg. The story is organized around a series of journal entries written by Raimonius in the months leading up to the New Year, which is when he and his assistant must complete the monster. Neither he nor Tadeusz wants to extend the date because they are scared of von Bernstein's uncle, who has a short temper and a long pair of fangs. The two scientists work in a castle laboratory on the outskirts of Furstendorf, but it quickly becomes obvious that neither has experience
in the creation of monsters. Moreover, the two men simply do not get along. They use the newest edition of the *Manual de construcción de monstruos*, written by leading monster expert Gropius, in order to guide their work, but they fail to agree on what the monster should look like or how it should behave.

The story concludes as Gmnuk, the hunchback who serves the scientists their nightly dinner, puts poison in their food. Von Bernstein suspects that Gmnuk did this because he is secretly working for the nefarious Baron of Krakenberg, who is the sworn enemy of Raimonius’ uncle. Raimonius and Tadeusz become sick and Tadeusz dies in his sleep. Raimonius survives and he is assigned a new partner. The two work together much more successfully than did the previous tandem, and they finish the monster in only three months. The monster has little in common with the creature from the conventional narratives of Frankenstein, however, because it looks and moves like all of the other cartoonish figures that appear in the story. He has eight eyes, and he walks with his arms extended because he has no reasonable sense of direction. Despite his comical appearance, Raimonius’ monster succeeds in quelling the social uprisings in Furstendorf. Filled with jokes, anecdotes, and profound moments of reflection about humans and monsters, Tomeo’s final novel features all of the wit and humor that is common to the author’s opus.

The first convention that the novel parodies is the setting of Frankenstein narratives. As we remember, the sub-genre sets the scene with a variety of temporal markers and setting devices. *Constructores de monstruos* presents the first of these clichés in Raimonius’ initial diary entry. The first day, October 30, is also known as the Devil’s Day; the second chapter occurs on October 31, the night when Halloween is commonly celebrated, and another chapter opens during Day of the Dead. The reader notes parody
because each of the dates is described with archaic language that most readers will find hard to decipher. The first chapter takes place, for example, on the “Tricentésimo tercer día del calendario gregoriano y número trescientos cuatro en los años bisiestos” (15). Like La noche del lobo, the narrator initiates the story with a ludic game of dates and numbers hypothetically associated with the Gregorian calendar. The language points to an awareness of the sub-genre’s tendency to situate the action in pre-modern time periods, and it here establishes ironic distance from the conventional setting of a Frankenstein narrative and invites the reader to become complicit with the parody.

The parody of the sub-genre’s pre-modern setting is accompanied by a countdown to the deadline of the scientists’ project. Each chapter opens with the number of days the two men have left to finish their monster; this complements the tension that Tomeo often exploits for humor. In the opening to the second chapter, for example, the narrative stresses that Raimonius and Tadeusz only have sixty-two days remaining. The language mitigates the tension and exchanges horror for humor and wordplay: “Tricentésimo cuarto día del calendario gregoriano y número trescientos cinco en los años bisiestos. Faltan sesenta y un días para que termine el año, fecha en la que Tadeusz y yo, si acertamos en nuestro trabajo, tendremos listo ‘como aquel que dice, a punto de entrega’ la fenomenal criatura que mi tío está esperando” (19). The abstruse explanation of the Gregorian calendar once again parodies the setting of the Frankenstein sub-genre, and the looming deadline for the creation of the monster also produces apprehension. However, the intervention of colloquial language, “como aquel que dice, a punto de entrega,” reduces the customary tension and replaces it with comic relief. The humorous incongruity between
seriousness and absurdity once again creates distance from the horror sub-genre, and it allows the reader to achieve an ironic and critical position.

In addition to parodying temporal aspects of the sub-genre, the novel parodies an ammassment of setting details from Frankenstein narratives. The castle and the scientists’ laboratory offer two of the most prominent targets in Tomeo’s parody. *Constructores de monstruos* is set within a castle identified by a strange name, and it is filled with a collection of curious scientific instruments: “[mi tío el markgrave] puso a mi disposición en el vecino castillo de Furstein (a tres leguas escasas de Fursterndorf) un laboratorio equipado con modernos alambiques, pipetas, retortas, cubas hidroneumáticas, matraces aforados, tijeras de disección y microscopios de última generación” (16). The repetition of peculiar-sounding names like Furstein and Fursterndorf, as well as references to a precise and yet clearly fictional geography, once again emphasizes humor and wordplay, which continue as the paragraph ends with the excessive enumeration of the laboratory’s scientific instruments. The fact that the microscopes are “de última generación” also encodes humor, as it is clear that the story takes place during a time in which microscopes are likely to be non-existent. Rather than elaborating an atmosphere of peril and doom, the narrator emphasizes that the story is set within a world of ridiculousness and absurdity.

The parody of the setting becomes increasingly palpable as the narrator continues his description of the scientists’ castle and laboratory. He writes that the castle is divided into two specific areas: Space A, which is a large studio with a vaulted ceiling, and the laboratory, which is referred to as Space B. The narrator relates that one arrives at Space B, “después de recorrer un interminable pasadizo iluminado día y noche con hachones de esparto encendidos” (19). At first glance the castle seems to resemble any other castle from
Gothic literature and film, but the language is also charged with subtle absurdities. While it is common for a castle to have an “interminable pasadizo,” it is not common for the narrator to say directly that the passageway is “never-ending.” Such an assumption is typically left for the reader to gather from the details presented. The fact that the torches are illuminated “noche y día” also piques one’s curiosity. It is possible that the inside of the castle is naturally shut off from all light, but this kind of clarification is never given. Instead, one is left to wonder if the castle is a nebulous, isolated place or if the burning torches represent a ridiculous and wasteful operation carried out on a daily basis. Additionally, the narrator writes that, “Doscientos metros más allá ese mismo pasadizo se bifurca y una de las desviaciones sigue hasta las inmediaciones del cementerio, a quinientos metros del castillo” (19). The forking path is the same setting detail found in *La noche del lobo*, and the placement of a cemetery outside the castle walls is such an obvious cliché that it seems more parodic than serious. Finally, there is the marble worktable in the laboratory, which is surrounded by “un circulo de catorce esqueletos dispuestos a modo de cortina” (21). Skeletons are common to Frankenstein narratives, but their arrangement, “a modo de cortina,” replaces the inhumanity of the scene with the humorous sound and image of bones that shake and dance each time the scientists enter and exit.

All of these conventions produce humor and distance from a typical Frankenstein narrative, and they also serve to reconfigure the traditional spatial configuration of the sub-genre’s setting. Like werewolf narratives, the Frankenstein sub-genre employs a center-periphery model that suggests that evil and abnormality do not originate from within society but at the periphery of its everyday operations. The laboratory and the domain of the monster traditionally represent the periphery in the story, which is home to mad
science and monstrosity, while the town, village, or city represents accepted forms of human thought and behavior. The majority of the story traditionally unfolds in one of these “central” areas, where scientists, experts, and local leaders make plans to defeat the monster. Tomeo’s novel reconfigures this model by focusing its narrative action on the peripheral location of the laboratory, and by organizing a world in which the construction of monsters “es uno de los oficios que últimamente se han puesto de moda” (16) because monsters are necessary “para poner un poco de orden en este complicado mundo de nuestro tiempo” (17). In contrast to traditional Frankenstein narratives in which clear delineations are made between normality and abnormality and between reason and irrationality, Constructores de monstruos eliminates the rational center, and it allows the story to unfold in an original setting in which abnormal thoughts and actions are the new norm. The novel destabilizes the traditionally secure setting of Frankenstein narratives, and it creates a nightmarish reality in which abnormality, monstrosity, and irrationality overcome the forces of reason, order, and humanity.

The second convention that the novel parodies is the figure of the mad scientist. Even though mad scientists are responsible for creating the monsters, they are seen as heroic figures and leaders because they represent the only hope for ordinary citizens once the monster has started its preordained rampage. Constructores de monstruos parodies the mad scientist by featuring a pair of men who fall comically short of the mental, physical, and moral standards of the traditional “experts” and “heroes” of Frankenstein narratives. The first and most obvious parodic element involves their names, Raimonius von Bernstein (who is also the baron of Cucurstein and studied at the University of Sachastein) and Tadeusz von Rippstein. The constant stream of steins evinces the story’s relationship to
Frankenstein narratives, but the excessive repetition signals ironic distance from the conventional melodrama of the sub-genre. Moreover, the two men are not experts; they're idiots who possess no practical experience. Raimonius unwittingly reveals his deficient mental state in the opening lines when he provides readers with too much information about his past. He finds it necessary to tell us that he was born after only seven months in his mother’s womb, but that he had no problem adapting to the “mundo extrauterino” (16). The odd comment suggests that he may have suffered more birth defects than he realizes, and that he may not possess the unparalleled scientific abilities of other scientists in similar narratives.

The parody of the mad scientist continues when Raimonius writes that he is excited to work for his uncle, but he admits that he has never actually created a monster. Even though he received excellent marks at the University of Sachastein, it seems improbable that he will be able to carry out his project because “No tengo ninguna experiencia en ese campo [de crear monstruos]. Será pues el primer monstruo que construya, pero estoy decidido a poner en la tarea mi mejor voluntad y todo mi talento” (16). His admitted lack of experience immediately invites doubt regarding his competence, and his attempt to compensate for his lack of practical knowledge with his “mejor voluntad” and “talento” only makes it seem like he has undertaken an impossible mission. To make matters worse, Raimonius’ partner is not only lacking practical knowledge, he knows little about monsters and frequently shows up late to their meetings. He also repeatedly contradicts von Bernstein and makes absurd comments that distract both men from the task at hand. While discussing the potential monster on their first day of work, for example, Raimonius proposes that they name the creature “Karolus,” because it is the name of “kings and
emperors,” but his assistant hates the name for two reasons. First, Tadeusz explains that he has a bad association with “Karolus” because he used to have a pathetic dog named Karolus with one testicle. Secondly, he explains that he hates the letter “k” because “siempre le ha parecido una consonante agresiva” (24). The scientists’ petty squabbles emphasize their lack of professionalism and pathos and produce a scenario in which two scientists cannot agree on something as simple as the name of their monster.

Tomeo also parodies the convention of the mad scientist by endowing his characters with comically abnormal physical appearances. Raimonius and Tadeusz are both cartoonish figures defined by exaggerated features and corporal incongruences. Raimonius, for example, possesses a large head that he himself recognizes as being “demasiado grande” (16). His oversized head produces an excessive sense of self-consciousness regarding his appearance and intellect, but it also reveals motives that are unbefitting of the traditionally heroic mad scientist. His selfishness becomes clear when Raimonius tries to convince his assistant that the monster should have an enormous head because a bigger cranium means that it will have bigger brains and therefore more intellect: “‘Amigo mío’ respondo, ‘si Karolus tiene la cabeza grande todo el mundo podrá darse cuenta a simple vista de que es un monstruo inteligente. Ni siquiera tendrá necesidad de abrir la boca para demostrarlo. ‘¡He ahí Karolus y su gran cabeza de pensador esclarecido!’, exclaimará la gente al verle llegar” (35). The excitement of Raimonius evinces his desire that the monster be celebrated for its intelligence, but his enthusiasm is also laced with irony. The scientist has been trying to convince readers of his own intelligence since the opening pages of the novel, which invites readers to wonder if the hypothetically large head of Raimonius’ monster is an attempt to compensate for the creator’s own physical defects and mental
deficiencies. Unlike traditional mad scientists, Raimonius’ project does not represent a legitimate quest for scientific knowledge. Instead, his monster will serve as a living embodiment of (and a possible cure for) his extensive range of mental and physical defects.

The parody of the mad scientist continues with the description of Tadeusz’s physical appearance. Unlike his colleague, Tadeusz has an abnormally small head, which puts him into competition with Raimonius because the assistant admits that “nunca me han gustado las cabezas grandes” (26). The competition between the two oddly shaped individuals regularly plays out in slapstick fashion as the characters exchange insults about the size and intelligence of the other’s head, brains, and mental capacity. Raimonius, for example, believes that his assistant is stupid because he has a head like a “garbanzo,” and von Rippstein regularly chides his superior for being a “cabezón” (35) and for having a cranium like a “calabaza” (36). Each insult provides the fodder for a comic game of oneupmanship that collides with the dedication and reason readers would expect from a pair of mad scientists. Moreover, their lack of professionalism bleeds over into their conversations about the monster. Their dialogue often produces humor, but it also reveals the anxieties of Raimonius and his selfish motives for undertaking his project.

The third convention that the novel parodies is the construction of the monster. The moment of creation is one of the sub-genre’s most iconic moments, and it usually takes place early in the work. Problems often arise early in the process of experimentation, but the scientist’s expertise eventually leads to the anticipated moment when the creature moves for the first time, and the protagonist proclaims “it’s alive.” Constructores de monstruos parodies the creation of the monster by repeatedly frustrating the readerly desire to see the scientists create a living thing. Rather than dramatizing a professional
scientific project, the scientists’ conversations regularly take ridiculous and trivial tangents that derail their mission and impede them from completing the monster. A clear example of the parodic strategy takes place when Raimonius and Tadeusz begin to argue over how they should dress the creature. The two decide that they should begin working with a cadaver, but Raimonius becomes obsessed with a series of unnecessary details:

¿Lo vestiremos de aldeano hambriento o de burgués venido a menos, con un frac raído y una gran chistera apolillada? Lo vestiremos de aristócrata? ¿Elegiremos unos pantalones con su correspondiente bragueta? ¿Sin bragueta? ¿Bastará tal vez con que le pongamos uno de esos triángulos de tela que se atan con un lazo cuando el pajarito ha vuelto a su tío? ¿Con calzoncillos? ¿Sin calzoncillos? Algo que habrá que decidir al respecto. (79-80)

Raimonius’ attention to trivial questions about the social status of the monster and his interest in the creature’s lower half derail the progress of the two scientists and impede them from bringing the cadaver to life. His mad science becomes bad science that is conflated with overblown anxieties about the creature’s “bragueta,” “pajarito” and “calzoncillas.” Additionally, the humorous image of a monster in a top hat collides with the seriousness of the scientist’s language, which is evinced by the phrase “Algo que habrá que decidir al respecto.” The reality, of course, is that none of these options needs to be decided upon because all are unnecessary details that impede their progress.

Additional tangents regularly take place throughout the story as the two scientists have conversations about topics that include the following: the existence and possible life cycles of clown fish, the necessity of blinking, the importance of animals, recipes for
garbanzo beans, and whether Snow White’s fairy grandmother could have created her magical cart out of a pepper instead of a pumpkin. Each of the absurd and trivial topics frustrates the readerly desire to see the scientists complete the task at hand. The parodic economy of conventions and expectations undermines the traditional events of the Frankenstein sub-genre, and it results in an original and frustrating narrative scenario about two constructores de monstruos who are completely incapable of creating a monster.

In addition to producing humor and absurdity, Tomeo’s ironic depiction of the construction of the monster provides profound moments of reflection regarding the differences and similarities between humans and monsters. The dramatic interludes create parody by derailing the scientists’ attention to the task at hand, but they also allow the novel to explore common definitions of monsters and the motives that humans have for constructing them. Early in the novel, for example, Raimonius reads in his manual that there are “monstruos por exceso,” which possess an excessive number of body parts, and “monstruos por defecto,” which lack the distinctive parts of a normal physiology (25). The novel’s presentation of teratology as a large and possibly complex system of classification (“monstruos por exceso” and “monstruos por defecto”) undermines the understanding of monstrosity as a deviant form of otherness.

A similar moment of reflection on monstrosity takes place when Raimonius asks his partner if they have to make Karolus into an ugly monster:

Le contesto que los monstruos, por definición, tienen que ser feos, asimétricos y deformes. Eso es, por lo menos, lo que se espera de ellos y lo que aconseja el manual [de Gropius]. “Si no lo fuesen” añado, “ya no serían monstruos y no nos servirían de consuelo.” No entiende lo del consuelo, así
Raimonius’ understanding of monsters once again distracts the scientists from their project, but it also points to the crucial role that monsters play in the creation of individual and social identities. The mental and physical abnormalities of monsters allow humans to feel “consuelo” because the monsters are idols of abnormality that can be used in order to project normalized visions of themselves. His reflections call attention to the ideological processes that traditionally take place in classic horror narratives, and they suggest that human identity is inherently unstable, insecure, and dependent upon scapegoats in order to reaffirm accepted conceptions of identity and social organization.

The final convention that the novel parodies is the happy ending. Critics often refer to Frankenstein narratives as archetypal classic horror because they always conclude with the death of the monster. Whether the creature is ejected into the abyss, burned to the ground, or thrown into a vat of acid, Frankenstein’s monster tends to be destroyed or removed from a society that is otherwise considered to be safe and inherently good. Tomeo frustrates conventions by ending the novel with events that leave more questions than answers about the safety and stability of the social order. The final page of the novel depicts a day in the life of Raimonius and his monster as they make their daily rounds through the city in hopes of bringing stability to the social order:

Cada día al atardecer lo cojo [el monstruo] de la mano y nos vamos a dar vueltas y más vueltas por las calles de la ciudad, sobre todo por los barrios más conflictivos, es decir, por donde antes solía reunirse la gente para
conspirar. No hay manifestación que se nos resista, apenas nos ven aparecer
la gente huye despavorida. En ese aspecto, el markgrave puede estar
tranquilo. (111)

Unlike traditional Frankenstein narratives, the story does not end with the destruction of
the monster but with a father-son relationship between the scientist and the creature as
the two begin their reign of terror. The scientist, who traditionally plays the role of hero,
has become attached to the monster that will overcome any resistance. The evil forces of
the story, represented by Raimonius and his uncle, are in no way controlled or destroyed,
and they instead will endure into the future. The last paragraph suggests that the social
order is not secure or righteous, and that it can only be controlled with violence and
oppression.

Moreover, the final lines of the story invert the traditional relationship between the
hero and the monster, and the reader must discern the meaning behind a creature that
reminds Raimonius of his deceased partner:

Algunos atardeceres, si no llueve, nos sentamos en la plaza de la catedral y
contemplamos en silencio la puesta de sol. Le gusta mucho que le hable de los
peces payaso y por esa razón y otros detalles diversos sospecho que para
construir su enorme cuerpo aprovechamos, sin que yo lo supiese, algún
órgano del infeliz Tadeusz [von Rippstein]. Otros días nos miramos sin
rencor a los ojos y trato de contarle alguna cosa que lo distraiga. Cabe, pues,
la posibilidad de que Tadeusz sobreviva en en Karolus y, según cómo se mire,
eso me parece un gran privilegio. (112)
The final lines once again subvert the Frankenstein sub-genre as the mad scientist, who traditionally wants to destroy the monster, instead sits with it at the plaza “contemplando en silencio la puesta de sol.” Moreover, the fact that the monster may literally carry a piece of Tadeusz within him suggests another breakdown in the division between humanity and monstrosity. The monster, which has been theorized throughout the novel as a perfect embodiment of human anxieties, will carry on into the future both as a horrific creature and as Tadeusz. The problematic duality of the monster’s identity leaves questions about humanity and monstrosity that are traditionally left unexplored in the sub-genre. These are accompanied by feelings of dissatisfaction and wonder towards a world that cannot be fully understood. Tomeo concludes his final novel with his usual dose of humor but, as always, it is accompanied by a dark and skeptical vision of reality that invites us to ask if our own world has anything in common with the monsters and scientists of the magical land of Fursterndorf.

**Conclusions about Tomeo’s Parody of Horror Narratives**

As we have seen throughout the discussion of *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos*, Tomeo parodies the conventions of horror narratives in order to produce textual worlds that evince doubt about the separation between humanity and monstrosity in popular culture. In the first novel, Tomeo parodies the conventions of the werewolf sub-genre, which include the setting, the lycanthrope, the transformation, and the happy ending. In the second novel, Tomeo creates an inverted narrative reality by incorporating and reconfiguring the conventions of Frankenstein narratives: the setting, the mad scientist, the creation of the monster, and the satisfactory conclusion. Traditionally, these
conventions have been used to assemble a secure world of horror in which human identity is stable, and the monstrous threat is always external to any given society. Heroes, experts, and scientists are thus able to identify, isolate, and destroy the monster and bring peace and stability back to the otherwise safe social center. Tomeo uses parody in order to destabilize the traditional operations of both horror sub-genres and to evoke a paranoid literary universe in which the monstrous threat lies at the center of society and the human psyche. Rather than reaffirming boundaries, *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos* blur the borders between humanity and monstrosity and invite readers to examine the usefulness of categories such as normality and abnormality. These novels reject the status quo and instead ask questions about the moral nature of a society that ostracizes individuals who do not conform to accepted models of human action, thought, and social behavior.

Additionally, the parody of both sub-genres of horror eschews traditional literary classification. The “climax” of the first novel does not take place with the metamorphosis of the protagonist from human to beast but instead with the transformation of the text from a story about a werewolf to a story about a psychopath. The second novel does not transform like the first, but it achieves an inverted vision of reality that contradicts traditional models of the Frankenstein sub-genre. The subversion and manipulation of recognizable conventions produces a type of literature that favors humor over seriousness and ambiguity over certainty. The unpredictable nature of both texts, which is achieved through parody, seems to search for a type of reader who does not conform to the conventions of mass culture. Instead, *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos* are designed for readers who seek the ironic play and subversion of recognizable elements.
from fiction, and for readers attracted to ideas that do not follow the trends of popular culture.

My final analytical chapter will study Tomeo’s parody of two sub-genres of sentimental fiction in *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de silicona*. I first study the way that *El cazador de leones* incorporates and reconfigures the conventions of sentimental romance novels in order to question their reassuring premises regarding love and human communication. In the second novel, *Los amantes de silicona*, I will examine the ways that the novel frustrates readerly expectations of the erotica sub-genre in order to suggest that profound emotional and physical interaction between two individuals is impossible. Both novels combat the naïve premises of sentimental fiction and create skeptical narrative worlds in which love conquers nothing, and humans are incapable of ever achieving transcendent interpersonal relationships.

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Notes

1 The quote is from my personal interview with Tomeo, which is forthcoming in *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea*.

2 Both sub-genres form part of what sociologists call “classic horror” or “stable horror.” The term “classic horror” is different from the “classic detective story,” however, because the first refers to a wide range of ideologically conservative sub-genres of horror produced during the 1930s-1960s (werewolf narratives, Frankenstein narratives, and vampire narratives), whereas the later is the name of a specific, ideologically conservative sub-genre of crime fiction.

3 Tomeo wrote his own *bestiario* in 1988, appropriately titled *Bestiario*.
4 As I explain in my section on terminology, the consensus among critics is that film is a more effective medium for creating feelings of terror in audiences than the medium of print.

5 A review of literature on Spanish film shows that works of horror were not produced in Spain before the Spanish Civil War, and that censorship during the 1940s and 50s prohibited the overt violence and sexuality common to the genre.

6 King continues this quote with the following explanation: “The story is always the same in terms of its development. There’s an incursion into taboo lands, there’s a place where you shouldn’t go, but you do, the same way that your mother would tell you that the freak tent is a place you shouldn’t go, but you do. And the same thing happens inside: you look at the guy with three eyes, or you look at the fat lady or you look at the skeleton man or Mr. Electrical or whoever it happens to be. And when you come out, well, you say, ‘hey, I’m not so bad. I’m all right. A lot better than I thought.’ It has that effect of reconfirming values, of reconfirming self-image and our good feelings about ourselves” (39).

7 St. Andrew’s Feast is not traditionally celebrated in Spain, but it is a popular day of celebration elsewhere. St. Andrew’s Eve is a night of superstition and magic in many countries in Great Britain and Eastern Europe. Young women often take part in rituals that are said to reveal the name or face of their future husbands.

8 In addition to critiquing the Internet and the vapid contents of the books saved on Macario’s computer, Tomeo parodies the lycanthrope to present media and other forms of digital technology as part of a larger human failure to communicate in the modern age. Macario not only reads about werewolves, he also spends his days sending e-mails to which nobody responds; he makes cell phone calls that no one answers; and he spends hours
watching television. Media and technology fail to provide him with authentic human interaction and instead exacerbate the feelings of loneliness stirring within him. When Ismael asks Macario if he feels lonely living by himself, he responds, “Cuando pongo el televisor en marcha es como si toda la casa me llenase de gente alegre. Ésa es la gran ventaja de la televisión. ¿Entiende lo que quiero decirle?” ‘Más o menos’ dice el caminante solitario [Ismael]” (28). The scene is both sad and humorous because Macario is unable to recognize the obvious contradiction: the “gran ventaja” of television is that it can make people seem like they are surrounded with happy companions even though they are completely alone. In this case, however, it is not Macario’s psychological state that impedes communication but Ismael’s lack of interest and empathy. He does not try to better understand Macario or help him; he simply responds “más o menos.” His indifference inverts the categories of humanity and monstrosity by allowing Ismael to play the role of the cruel and merciless human being. More than just a critique of mass media and popular culture, the parody of the lycanthrope allows the novel to depict an inhuman crisis of interaction in which people are unable to establish meaningful interactions because of a lack of empathy or simple disinterest on the part of those around them.

9 Constructores de monstruos opens with a prologue in which Tomeo reflects upon his creative process and the reasons why he has decided to include a series of drawings at the beginning and end of each chapter. He writes that he has always liked to draw, and that he frequently sketches the characters and settings of his stories before he starts writing. The drawings that appear in the novel consist of small, cartoonish sketches of the protagonists and the creature. The monsters in these drawings have the general look of Frankenstein’s creation; they are tall and ugly, and they have the iconic pair of metal bolts
coming out of their necks. The creature is not scary, however, because it is a caricature. Its oversized head emphasizes humor, and it often wears a pair of white boxer briefs. The two scientists receive a similarly comical treatment in the illustrations, as they both are short, clumsy, and stupid. They wield knives in several of the drawings, but their hopeless facial expressions foreground their inability to meet the standards of a traditional mad scientist.

10 Other characters from the novel are also visual caricatures. Hans, the man who brings them bodies from the mortuary, is described as having, “los ojos de distinto color, uno verde y el otro azul como una canica de cristal, y las orejas muy separadas de la cabeza, como las asas de una cazuela (27). Another character, Gmnuk, is described as the scientists’ “criado enano (y además zambo)” (39). He lacks an eye and speaks to the scientists with a series of grunts that they struggle to understand.
Chapter #3

Writing Bad Romance: Parody, Solitude, and Communication in *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de siliciona*

In addition to his parodies of crime fiction and horror films, Tomeo also reconfigures the conventions of popular romance fiction. His interest in the genre is surprising because critics have repeatedly observed the “notable ausencia de voces femeninas en la obra de Tomeo” and that “En su ficción se habla de la mujer o a ella, pero no con ella” (Glenn 383). Molinaro has observed that “women always lose in Tomeo’s world” and has postulated that only *La agonía de Proserpina* represents a departure from his tendency to “reinforce the exclusionary codes of masculinity” (136). In interviews the author repeatedly refuted claims of sexism, but his novels are filled with unstable men who prey on women, ignore their loving spouses, and blame their pathologies on psychotic mothers. Moreover, Tomeo’s narrative disavows any reassuring conception of love and human interaction. Pozuelo Yvancos notes that “radical solitude” and “incommunication” are two of Tomeo’s most defining *leit motivs* (181-82), and José Ignacio González Hurtado writes, “la narrativa de Tomeo se vuelve sobre un tema obsesivo que preside su obra complete: la soledad y la incomunicación absolutas.” (3).

The Aragonese’s demonstrated tendencies toward misogyny and solitude make him one of Spain’s most unlikely writers of romance fiction, but two of his novels organize their structures around the conventions of romance novels. It is my contention that *El cazador de leones* (1987) and *Los amantes de siliciona* (2008) take part in the same pattern as the other novels I have studied by parodying sub-genres of popular literature. Both texts parody the formulas of romance fiction in order to create alternative narratives that project worlds of
loneliness and impotence. In this way, the two novels studied here do not represent an exception to his other well-documented narrative patterns, but they do borrow from the world of romance fiction, whereas his other works prioritize the parody of other popular genres. The first novel, *El cazador de leones*, relates the story of a strange man who unsuccessfully tries to seduce a woman over the phone by telling her that he is a lion hunter. The detailed descriptions of his bravery are wildly unconvincing because he has read so many romance novels and other types of popular fiction that he has begun to confuse fiction with reality. This strategy is common to Tomeo’s characters, as Macario from *La noche del lobo* and Luis Murrieta from *Preparativos de viaje* also demonstrate this quixotic quality.

The second text, *Los amantes de silicona*, is organized around a frame narrative in which the narrator transcribes an erotic romance novel written by his friend. Tomeo’s text, which reads as the narrator’s transcription of his friend’s erotic romance novel, conveys the story of a couple who has fallen out of love. The protagonists, Basilio and Lupercia, both buy the newest and most advanced pair of artificially intelligent inflatable sex dolls in order to fulfill their sexual desires, but problems quickly arise when their “lovers,” Big John and Marilyn, develop complex emotions and try to leave their human counterparts behind. By reading the texts together, I will show that the author uses parody to mock the fantasies of popular romance fiction and portray the contemporary world as devoid of profound human emotions and interpersonal interaction. In so doing, I will illustrate how the two texts take part in a larger pattern that appears throughout the author’s narrative discourse, a pattern that frequently employs parody in order to undermine the assumptions of popular fiction. Moreover, *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de silicona* offer a critique of readers and
writers of popular fiction. Like *La noche del lobo*, the two romance parodies portray readers and writers of popular fiction as the absurd protagonists of the story. Finally, I will demonstrate that loneliness, which has appeared as an important topic in the other novels I have studied, becomes the primary concern of the two novels discussed here.

**Parody and Romance Fiction**

Tomeo’s ironic appropriation of the conventions associated with romance fiction produces the “double use-and-abuse of expectations” that Hutcheon attributes to parody (*A Theory* 82). She and other critics regularly indicate that in order to establish a relationship with a target text a parody must incorporate the object of critique into its original structure and thereby call attention to the specific textual features of that antecedent. In the context of Tomeo’s novels, *El cazador de leones* utilizes recognizable conventions from the sub-genre of sentimental romance fiction. Likewise, *Los amantes de silicona* uses easily identifiable conventions from the romance sub-genre of erotic fiction. These conventions allow Tomeo to structure the narrative development in a predictable way, and they permit him to create an affiliation with the countless works that comprise the world of romance fiction.

Despite their “complicity,” Tomeo’s novels also establish ironic distance from the content and form of the textual antecedents to which they refer. The frequently humorous incongruences between form and content frustrate readerly expectations by producing “collisions” between the original text and its transformation. One of the ways that he fashions these so-called collisions is by combining the dramatic and flowery language of romance fiction with characters who are incapable of love and are instead motivated by
animalistic urges and base sexual instincts. Moreover, as we have seen throughout this investigation, the author makes what Rose calls “apparently meaningless, absurd changes to the message or subject-matter of the original” (Parody 37). Like all of Tomeo’s novels that I study, both parodies of romance fiction repeatedly provide situations in which the narrator or protagonist of the story undertakes a coherent monologue or dialogue that could be found in any work of popular fiction. Parody manifests, however, because the discourse always devolves into absurdity. In the cases of El cazador de leones and Los amantes de silicona, the conversations and monologues are modeled after iconic characters from sub-genres of popular romance fiction, but the characters’ discourses involve ridiculous tangents that have little to do with the reassuring worlds of sentimental and erotic romance fiction.

Finally, as Dentith argues, parodies question the ideologies and assumptions of their textual antecedents. For this reason, a parodic text not only establishes an ironic relationship with other types of cultural texts but also engages the values that usually undergird popular fiction (Dentith 18). The consequences of parody are particularly hazardous in the world of romance fiction because the genre is firmly anchored in a series of idealistic beliefs about love and human interaction that have remained consistent for centuries. As I explain below, romance novels are designed to reaffirm social institutions and cultural practices that many scholars have deemed to be restrictive and oppressive. The genre does not subvert the legitimacy of social customs and established institutions; instead, it confirms fantasies about love and communication. Tomeo’s parodic works undermine the major values articulated by the genre and replace them with an opposing
worldview in which humans are incapable of falling in love, communicating, and carrying out meaningful sexual acts.

**Parody and Romance Fiction in Spain**

Before discussing the popular romance genre in Spain it is crucial to distinguish between the terms “Romance” and “popular romance fiction.” Barbara Fuchs writes that Romance is a “notoriously slippery category” because it encompasses a wide range of literary texts that have appeared across several centuries. First, she explains that the term “Romance,” in its narrowest sense, describes a particular genre of narrative poems that emerged in the twelfth century and were written in vernacular language, or “romance” (4). She further argues that the idea of Romance as a genre becomes problematic because works as diverse as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare’s late plays, and Harlequin novels are all considered “romances” (5). Because of this latent imprecision, Northrop Frye has defined Romance not as a genre but as a mode of literature which features a human hero who is superior to other men and his environment (*Anatomy* 33). Within the Romance mode, Frye observes, the plot develops around a conceptual opposition between good and evil in which the social ideals of a ruling class are projected onto literary heroes and heroines (*The Secular* 29-30).

The idea of Romance in Spain has acquired a more specific meaning because the term is used to describe the Medieval national tradition of *novelas de caballerías*.¹ These “Romances” were immensely popular in Spain, France, Portugal, and Italy from the fifteenth through the sixteenth centuries. They featured brave knights who battled magicians, monsters, and dragons in order to save damsels, free prisoners, and bring peace
to the countryside. *Amadís de Gaula* and *Tirant lo Blanc* are two of Spain’s most famous *novelas de caballerías*, and as a parody of the *novela de caballerías*, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quijote*, continues to be one of Spain’s most iconic literary works. Another important parody, *La Celestina*, targets not the *novelas de caballerías* but a different category of Romance literature involving Medieval stories of courtly love. Critics like Dorothy Sherman Severin (1989) have suggested that *La Celestina* in fact parodies stories of courtly love and may also be read as a specific parody of San Pedro’s *Cárcel de amor* (c. 1470).²

Popular romance fiction, on the other hand, is an unequivocally contemporary phenomenon that describes a billion-dollar industry of mass-produced narrative fiction published by companies like Mills & Boon and Harlequin. This genre is so successful that in 2004 it comprised more than half of all sales of paperback fiction in North America alone (Fuchs 124).³ The Romance Writers of America (RWA) define popular romance fiction as a novel with two central components: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending (Fuchs 125). In Spanish, popular romance fiction is known by one of two names, *la novela rosa* or *la novela sentimental*. The genre first appears at the beginning of the 20th century and reaches its “época de esplendor” with the rise of the *novela de quiosco* in the 1940s (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 177). Ramón Charlo Ortiz-Repiso comments that Barcelona’s Editorial Juventud launched the first two collections of popular romance fiction in Spain. The first, *Novela Rosa*, included more than 500 works published between approximately 1923 and 1938. The second collection, published in 1939, ran until 1946 and featured more than 150 titles. Charlo Ortiz-Repiso identifies Bruguera, the publishing house where Tomeo worked as a writer and editor of popular genre fiction during the late
1950s and early 60s, as one of the most important publishers of romance fiction during the postwar years.4

He explains that it is difficult to know how many authors of popular romance fiction were actually Spanish because most adopted Anglophone pseudonyms. The genre was commonly read in translation, and Spanish writers quickly learned their works sold better with English-sounding names (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 204). However, the true master of Spanish popular romance fiction, María Socorro Tellado López, wrote under a Spanish pen name that is still used to describe anyone who is hopelessly sentimental. Corín Tellado was known for writing her novelas rosa in less than a week and for having written more than 4,500 during her career. Her dedication to the formula and her conservative projections of women won her legions of loyal fans and staunch critics both inside and outside of Spain.5 Tellado and other writers removed all controversy from their content during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s to avoid conflicts with censors, and many novelas rosa unabashedly supported the Franco dictatorship by featuring introductions that explicitly underscored the Catholic values and moral piety of the stories that followed (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 179).6

The end of the Franco dictatorship and the internationalization of the Spanish literary market ushered in new forms of popular romance fiction that could not have existed during the dictatorship. Charlo Ortiz-Repiso writes that the erotic romance sub-genre slowly took over the romance novel market during the 1970s and 80s, even though it continued to be disguised as part of the sentimental romance sub-genre:

Al final de los años setenta empiezan a aparecer novelas populares con cierto tinte erótico, terminando por ser este un elemento común, de forma tal que bajo el disfraz de novela rosa se escondían relatos en los que el romanticismo...
brilla por su ausencia y lo que domina es el sexo y la búsqueda del placer, desemboando finalmente en publicaciones totalmente dedicadas al género erótico. (105)

For this critic, international companies like Mills & Boon and Harlequin played a major role not only in the internationalization of the Spanish literary market during the 1970s and 80s but also in the dissemination of the erotic sub-genre. With the help of the Atlantic Distributing Company, the Canadian publishing house Harlequin launched several series of erotic romance fiction in Spanish starting in the 1980s. The first was the Jazmín series, published roughly between 1981 and 1983, and its success spurred the immensely successful Novelas con corazón series, which ran from the 1980s to the mid 1990s and featured series that included the following: Super Jazmín (1983), Tentación (1985), Super Julia (1987), Super Bianca (1987), Jazmín Zodiaco (1988), Romanza (1991), and Médicos & Enfermeras (1995) (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 105).

**History, Terminology, and Worldviews of the Romance Genre**

In order to clarify the terminology that I employ throughout this chapter, I here provide a brief explanation of relevant terms. Scholars like Fuchs and Sarah E. Sheehan follow the definition forwarded by the RWA and characterize romance fiction as a genre with a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. For Sheehan, the genre does not adhere to a formula but instead to a series of conventions that can be developed in countless ways and marketed to a wide range of specific interests and tastes (vii). All romance novels contain the essential love story and the happy ending, but each sub-genre possesses variations in setting, location, historical period, the gender of the
protagonists, the importance and frequency of sex, and even the appearance of supernatural characters and forces. Moreover, much romance fiction is marketed toward specific readerships. A complete list of romance sub-genres can extend for pages, but some of the most popular categories include the following: historical romance, modern romance, paranormal romance, young adult romance, urban, LGBT romance, Afro-American romance, sentimental romance, and erotic romance (Sheehan x-xi).

Cawelti argues that all of the romance sub-genres fall under the “romance archetype” because their moral fantasy is “that of love triumphant and permanent, overcoming all obstacles and difficulties” (42). He recognizes that modern works of romance have opened the genre to new types of characters, relationships, and story lines, but that the archetype is most commonly associated with a conservative and naïvely optimistic reality that “essentially affirms the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity” (42). Similarly, Nash has suggested a certain “manner of thinking” prevalent in romance narratives disseminated in paperback fiction, film, and magazines:

[In the romance genre] everyone is “meant for each other.” There are no existentialists in this winsome world; the life-style forbids them ... There is always optimism, smiling timorously through passing clouds of bearable troubles, beaming triumphantly on the happy ending of the tale. The foundation of this optimism is confidence in the institutions of our society, the politics and beliefs that sustain the marriage, the family, and the ethos of the Home. (22)

Like the other popular genres I have studied, romance fiction represents another vehicle for idealization because it is designed around the unwavering belief that marriage and
family are clear paths to happiness and fulfillment. The genre seeks to uphold the values of the status quo and the rules of acceptable conduct, and it presents marriage, love, and sexual fulfillment as the most effective vehicles for achieving a satisfying life.

The stability of the genre’s conventions and ideology has allowed it to maintain a certain “look” throughout the ages. Pamela Regis’ *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* offers one of the most detailed accounts of the history and conventions of the genre. Taking cues from Frye’s work on Romance as a mode, Regis traces the basic ingredients of popular romance fiction back to Ancient Greece. Even though considerable differences exist among classical, medieval, and modern romances, she argues that all romantic fiction possesses an “optimistic” and “idealized world,” one that downplays verisimilitude and exaggerates human emotion (20). She writes that this generally “romantic” sense of idealism can be found in literature from almost every century, and that it thrives today not only in romance novels but also in detective fiction, horror, and science fiction, among other genres of popular fiction. Each of these genres, she believes, projects idealized and reaffirming depictions of the human condition (20-21). Even though they share the same general sense of idealism, romance novels differ from the other genres because the love story is the focus of the happy ending rather than the resolution of a mystery or the defeat of the monster.

For Regis, the modern romance novel begins to take shape in the mid-18th century with Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740); it develops during the 19th century with Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813); and it becomes a billion dollar industry in the 20th century with the romance novels of Georgette Heyer, Mary Stewart, Janet Daily, Jayne Ann Krentz, and Nora Roberts, and thanks to publishing companies like Harlequin and Silhouette. She observes that, over time, the romance novel comes to feature
one or more heroines and heroes and possesses eight essential conventions: a *setting* with a society that opposes the story's amorous relationship; *the meeting* between the two lovers; *the barrier* to their love; *the attraction* between them; *the declaration of love*, the *point of ritual death* of the relationship; the *recognition* of the barrier; and *the betrothal* that leads to a happy ending (30-38). Within these eight basic elements, Regis acknowledges other common conventions like the seduction of one or more characters, the wedding, the dance, the exile of a scapegoat character, and the presence of an evil character who reforms his or her ways (39). She also recognizes that these conventions can occur in any order, at any point within or beyond the narrative, and multiple times. She further argues that the flexibility of the genre makes it seem redundant at times, but that the permeability has also led to its stunning success in the commercial market.

The conventions of two popular romance sub-genres, sentimental romance and erotic romance, are the focus of this chapter because Tomeo parodies them in *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de silicona*. Both sub-genres are part of the popular romance genre because they feature the requisite love story and the happy ending, and it is therefore commonplace to call both “romance novels.” However, the necessity of targeting romance fiction to a specific readership often produces divisions between the sub-genres. Sentimental and erotic romance fiction, therefore, are considered to be different types of romance novels because they emphasize different experiences within an intimate relationship. The sentimental romance sub-genre is more conservative than the erotic sub-genre because the first primarily focuses on the perspective of the female heroine, the development of her love relationship with the hero, and her eventual union with the hero, traditionally in marriage. For Regis, the emotional feelings of pleasure experienced by the
herione during her courtship, seduction, and betrothal represent the defining experiences of sentimental romance novels (22).

Accordingly, sex has always represented an important ingredient of romance fiction, but sexual encounters are “optional” or “accidental” in the sentimental sub-genre because the emphasis is always on love and the development of the emotional bond between the heroine and the hero (Regis 22). In the erotic romance, however, there must be steamy sex scenes because narrative attention is on the physical act and the experience of sexual intercourse between the two central characters. The focus on sex makes the erotic sub-genre more taboo than its sentimental relative, and this limits the mainstream appeal of the sub-genre. Fuchs and Regis do not treat erotic romance fiction in their studies of Romance and popular romance fiction, and Sheehan identifies it as “category fiction” because its “very steamy and sexy” stories only appeal to a specific readership (xi). Derek Parker’s manual on how to write erotic fiction defines the sub-genre as “books about sexual behavior and activity” and he admits that the aim of erotic romance fiction is not to depict love but “to arouse sexual feelings in readers as subtly or as blatantly as the author wishes” (1).

More in keeping with my own argument, one of the leading purveyors of erotic romance, Passionate Ink (the Erotic Romance Special Interest Chapter of the RWA), defines the erotic romance sub-genre in the following way:

Romance in which erotic elements are integral to the plot and take the book beyond traditional romance boundaries. The erotic elements (in the context of any traditional or non-traditional romantic relationship) play a major part
in plot and/or character development, and the end of the book is emotionally satisfying and optimistic. ("What is," n.p.)

Like other experts on the sub-genre, this group foregrounds the importance of “erotic elements,” but its definition is unique because it highlights the specific function of sex within the larger structure of the text. Sex does not operate as a mere vehicle for the sexual arousal of the reader: it furthers the development of the characters and the plot. Despite the increased level of physicality, the definition by Passionate Ink makes clear that erotic romance is not pornography, which instead features “stories written for the express purpose of causing sexual titillation. Plot, character development, and romance are not primary to these stories” ("What is," n.p). Within this interpretation, “pornography” is not part of the romance genre. Commentators regularly argue that pornography is visual and often violent in nature, whereas erotic romance rarely describes the placement of bodies and instead focuses on the internal sensations experienced by the characters during sex.8

The Conventions of Sentimental Romance Fiction

Like all genres and sub-genres of popular fiction, sentimental romance novels employ a series of conventions in order to achieve specific effects. Tomeo parodies four conventions that Regis identifies in her study of romance fiction: the meeting, the heroine and hero, the courtship and seduction, and the happy ending. Many of these conventions are universal and appear in all sub-genres of romance fiction, but the configuration of the conventions in El cazador de leones suggests a parody of sentimental romance fiction. The first convention Tomeo parodies is the meeting between the heroine and the hero. Regis observes that the meeting in romance fiction normally occurs at the beginning of the story
and that it is also frequently narrated in the form of a flashback (31). In the sentimental
sub-genre, the meeting is often the result of a random occurrence or an unexpected event,
which invites speculation as to whether the chance encounter between the two characters
was truly an accident or whether it was fate. The meeting in the sentimental romance and
other sub-genres establishes an idealized reality in which the world seems controlled by
destiny, and all men and women will one day meet their mate, fall in love, and willingly
participate in the institution of marriage.

The second convention that Tomeo parodies is the heroine and the hero.
Traditionally, the heroine of romance fiction is the focus of the narration and receives most
of the narrative attention. She is either the narrator or else a third-person narrator
focalizes her thoughts, actions, and desires in intimate detail. Cawelti and others suggest
that the heroine is central to the story because she is the character with whom the reader
must relate (41).9 Similarly, Regis writes that the desires of the heroine “are always
central,” and the story will not be effective or interesting if the heroine is not a vivid
character who captures the reader’s imagination” (55). Authors produce interesting
heroines by endowing their female protagonists with a high level of agency. Regis observes
that some modern heroines fall into old stereotypes like the “penniless orphan,” but this is
no longer the norm:

         Usually ... the heroine of the twentieth-century popular romance has the
freedom she needs to pursue her own ends; the rights she needs to possess
her own property, as well as, often enough, the skills requisite to acquire that
property herself; and a right to companionate marriage. She has not yet
achieved such a marriage - she has not met her love match - but the possibility is firmly in her power. (111)

The 20th century heroine achieves power in the story through her ability to eschew the control of external forces and to take command of her personal and professional lives. She is able to overcome challenges associated with obtaining legal rights or property, and she also succeeds in selecting, seducing, and marrying a qualified mate.

The hero, on the other hand, rarely receives the same attention and frequently appears as a “type” with little character development. Regis identifies two major variants which appear in romance fiction. The first is the “dangerous hero,” who takes the form of a bad boy, a captain, a chief, a pirate, a warrior, a bandit, or a secret agent, among other options. More urban variations of the dangerous hero regularly appear as savvy businessmen, eccentric artists, and enigmatic billionaires. Jayne Ann Krentz describes the “dangerous hero” as being the “tough, hard-edged, tormented heroes that are at the heart of the vast majority of bestselling romance novels” (107). She writes that these characters possess few emotional or sentimental characteristics and instead act through brute force in order to demonstrate their exaggerated sense of masculinity and sexuality. The second type of hero in romance fiction is the sentimental hero. The sentimental hero is an obvious participant in the sentimental romance sub-genre, and he is a slightly more complex character type because the heroine does not need to conquer the sentimental hero like she must conquer the dangerous hero. The sentimental hero borrows many of the bad boy characteristics of the first character type, but he has a sweet, tender side that he reveals only for the heroine: “[the sentimental hero] is strong, virile, manly (a lion among men), but he is wounded physically, psychically, or emotionally ... If the alpha hero must be tamed,
the sentimental hero is hurt or damaged in some way, often emotionally, and the heroine must heal him” (Regis 113-14). The combination of lion-like virility and emotional damage produces a male character who, with the help of the heroine, must explore his own feelings, emotions, and identity. The sentimental hero enables a narrative scenario in which the heroine and the hero take part in conversations that explore not only the male character’s overt masculinity but also his profound feelings, emotions, and sentiments.

The third convention that Tomeo parodies is the courtship and seduction in romance fiction. The courtship develops around the communication between the heroine and the hero in the period before their eventual union. Seduction plays an important role in the courtship, and sentimental romances are commonly filled with romantic walks, exchanges of gifts, poetry, letters, and flattery. The declaration of love is another important element of the courtship between the two characters and is often the definitive act that unites the heroine and the hero. Additionally, Regis writes that the courtship represents a structural convention of popular romance novels because it contains some type of barrier or tension which impedes the characters’ union: “[The courtship] is what the heroine and hero have to argue over, discuss, act upon, research, think about, talk to their friends about, avoid, seek out, and otherwise confront each other about” (114). In some cases, the courtship may extend through the entire novel as the heroine or the hero repeatedly tries to attract the attention of her or his potential partner. In other cases, the two may love one another from the beginning, but a question of social status or race stands between them. Regardless of the complication, Regis notes that the interaction that comprises the courtship must always move from a state of “disorder” to “order” (114). In this sense, the courtship functions in a way that is similar to crime fiction and classic horror narratives.
The movement in these genres, and in all popular culture in general, is always from a state of chaos to a state of control.

The fourth and final convention is the happy ending. Critics, commentators, and other experts on the genre consistently identify the happy ending as one of the two most important conventions of all romance fiction. Traditionally, the hero and the heroine unite at the end of the story after overcoming a variety of barriers. Marriage is the most common way for the two characters to come together, but they also may enter into a long-lasting relationship that is equally satisfactory. Cawelti notes that sometimes one of the two characters dies at the end, which adds an element of tragedy to a romance novel, but even in these cases he argues that the death of the heroine or the hero only makes their relationship seem more transcendent and eternal (42). The genre’s reliance upon the satisfactory conclusion separates it from other genres that have shown greater flexibility in their conclusions. Contemporary crime fiction has constantly played with the denouement of the genre in order to produce surprises for readers, and “paranoid” horror fiction and films frequently end without the death of the monster. If a sentimental romance does not end with the union between the hero and heroine, however, then readers and editors are likely to reject the story because it does not meet the essential criteria of the sub-genre.

**Don’t Talk to the Lion Hunter: Parody, Sentimental Fiction, and the Failed Art(s) of Seduction in *El cazador de leones***

Parody not only illuminates the skeptical vision of love and human communication found in *El cazador de leones*, it also offers a useful tool with which to consider the formal construction of romance fiction. Tomeo’s novel parodies the conventions of sentimental
romance fiction in order to produce a unique literary reality that undermines the optimism and idealism of the sub-genre. Rather than creating an emotionally satisfying narrative that supports marriage and other related social institutions, the author allows us to imagine a world dominated by loneliness and a profound inability to communicate. Through parody Tomeo questions the optimistic vision of social reality found in the sentimental romance sub-genre, and he projects a pessimistic environment devoid of love and meaningful human interaction. In this way, the novel takes part in the larger pattern of parody I have studied throughout the dissertation: Tomeo’s fiction tends to undermine the idealistic assumptions found in each major popular literary genre in order to propose a humorous but discouraging image of the human condition.

Critical evaluations of El cazador de leones have focused on the topics of solitude, abnormal human behavior, and interdiscursivity. Acín writes that the novel is one of Tomeo’s most representative works because it demonstrates all of the “dimensions” found in texts such as El castillo de la carta cifrada, Amado monstruo, and La ciudad de las palomas (Aproximación 67). He maintains that Tomeo’s attention to solitude compliments the sociological investigation of his characters and the exploration of the blurred lines between fiction and reality: “El uso de lo sicopático, de la locura y semejantes posibilita el desnoblamiento de la personalidad - un método clave en la lucha contra la soledad, método que puede verse, de manera muy diáfana, en El cazador de leones - a la vez que muestra la inadecuación entre discurso y realidad, tan abundante en la narrativa de Tomeo ("Javier Tomeo” 20). As with many evaluations of Tomeo’s prose, Acín links his fiction to sociology and observes that loneliness becomes a pretext for the author to explore the minds of
characters with multiple personalities. This critic does not, however, emphasize the role of popular fiction and parody in the construction of the double personalities of the characters.

González Hurtado highlights the same trends in Tomeo’s novelistic discourse, but he also observes that the author’s interest in loneliness manifests in the relationship between Tomeo’s texts and those of other writers: “Puede concluirse ... que el narrador aragonés, como muchos de sus personajes, parece crear sus ficciones desde un aislamiento total, ajeno a modas y tendencias literarias, políticas o mercantiles” (391). González Hurtado equates the solitude of the characters with the lack of affiliations between the author’s novels and other literary schemas and traditions. Both critical approaches recognize fundamental aspects of Tomeo’s novelistic discourse, but they do not explore the relationship between *El cazador de leones* and sentimental romance. It is my contention that *El cazador de leones* is not as “lonely” as some believe because the novel offers a coherent parody of sentimental romance novels. By calling attention to the use of parody, I will illuminate how the author’s recurring use of solitude responds to the assumptions and worldviews that this romance sub-genre traditionally offers to readers.

*El cazador de leones* follows a common pattern in Tomeo’s narrative discourse by featuring a first-person narrator who performs an extended and one-sided dialogue. The story begins when the narrator, Armando Duvalier, calls a woman named Nicolasa on the phone and tells her that he has finally returned from Africa. Unfortunately, she does not remember him, and Armando is forced to clarify. He reminds her that he had called three months earlier when he was trying to reach the Consulate of Bolongo in order to resolve a problem with his passport, but he had called the wrong number and connected with her by mistake. He continues to remind her that she initially thought he was a distant relative, an
uncle who had disappeared years before, but then she had realized that he was someone else. Nicolasa still does not recall their earlier conversation, so Armando tells her they had begun their earlier conversation when she had asked him about the location of Bolongo, and he had responded that it is in the heart of Equatorial Africa. Furthermore, he then said he knew the continent well because he was a lion hunter who frequently traveled there for business. Before ending the conversation, as Armando tells her now, he promised to call her again when he returned from Africa. True to his word, he phones her on a rainy afternoon nearly three months to the day after their first interaction. This time, however, Armando has more on his mind than Bolongo.

*El cazador de leones* relates the second telephone conversation between Armando and Nicolasa. Curiously, however, the novel never reveals the thoughts or words of the woman. The reader’s only access to the heroine appears in Armando’s reaction to what she tells him over the phone, which offers an incomplete and likely skewed depiction of the events. The story moves along through a stream of poetic metaphors, flattery, romantic language, and captivating stories about the lion hunter’s adventures in Africa. In one instance, for example, Armando relates to Nicolasa how he killed his first lion. It is not clear whether she is impressed by Armando’s stories or not, but he presses on, expanding on his quests in Africa, his relationships with several women, and his philosophy on life and destiny. The novel concludes when Armando becomes overwhelmed by his strong feelings towards Nicolasa and reveals his deep love for her. Unfortunately, she does not reciprocate and instead responds with an insult that leaves him fuming. He retaliates with his own series of insults and then admits that he suffers from a physical abnormality; he was born with six fingers on each hand. His revelation explains why he prefers to seduce women
over the phone, but the seduction has already come to an end. He tells her that she has missed her opportunity for true love, and the novel ends as Armando curses Nicolasa and then hangs up the phone.

The first convention the novel parodies is the meeting. As we remember, the meeting in romance novels takes place at the beginning of the action and regularly appears in the form of a flashback. The meeting is often an accident or a random occurrence in which the hero and the heroine happen to be at the same place at the same time. Tomeo parodies the convention by setting up a narrative situation in which Armando tries to make their first meeting seem like destiny, but Nicolasa does not remember him and the hero must jog the heroine’s memory:

Vamos, vamos, haga memoria. Fue, como le digo, hace unos tres meses, día más, día menos. A esta misma hora. Y también estaba lloviendo. Yo tenía que llamar al consulado de la República de Bolongo por un problema de pasaporte, pero equivoqué el número, o hubo uno de esos extraño cruces que de vez en cuando se producen y me salió usted. Me dijo que no tenía nada que ver con Bolongo y que ni siquiera había oído hablar de ese país. Entonces le pedí disculpas y, sin saber cómo, nos enredamos hablando. (10)

Armando’s pathetic insistence, “vamos, vamos, haga memoria,” suggests that the hero either failed to make a memorable first impression or that he “remembers” a conversation in the past that never took place. The first possible scenario demonstrates parody because the heroine does not swoon at the memory of their first encounter; in fact, she fails to even remember it. The second scenario also suggests parody because the meeting would then merely be the result of the delusion of a character trying to live out a fantasy from a
romance novel. Moreover, Armando’s reminder that the first conversation occurred at a similar time and during a similarly rainy day contributes to the parody. By making it seem like time is repeating itself, Armando depicts their “extraño cruce” as a question of fate instead of a wrong number. His tactic engages the idea of destiny, which is common in meetings between the hero and the heroine of romance fiction, but the possibility of Armando’s deceit annuls the idealistic notion of fate and suggests instead that their first encounter was either a carefully crafted lie or a total delusion on the part of Armando.

The parody of the conventional meeting concludes as Armando continues to try to transform their encounter into an act of fate. He tells Nicolasa that he is single and does not have a family, but he also recognizes that he cannot complain, saying, “el destino acude muchas veces en ayuda de los hombres solitarios. Porque al fin y al cabo, señorita, fue el destino quien hizo que se equivocase al marcar el número del Consulado de Bolongo. Puse el dedo donde no tenía que ponerlo y me encontré con su voz” (14). Armando further attempts to convince Nicolasa that his phone call was the result of destiny, but the context once again undermines his argument. If Nicolasa does not remember the first meeting (or if the first meeting was just a delusion), then it is unlikely that their encounter was truly a matter of destiny. Instead, it appears that Armando is trying to manipulate the object of his desire by substituting the world of romance fiction in the place of “actual” reality. The “meeting” between the heroine and the hero in El cazador de leones, therefore, does not contribute to an idealized narrative universe in which people are brought together. Tomeo’s unconventional meeting is employed to establish a world of deception in which the hero must conquer the heroine through deceit.
The second convention that the novel parodies is the heroine and the hero of a sentimental romance. Unlike the parody of other popular character types like the detective, the spy, the lycanthrope, or the mad scientist, Tomeo does not parody the heroine by manipulating her physical or mental state but by eliminating her narrative function within the text. As we remember from the previous discussion, the heroine traditionally possesses a high level of agency, and she commonly enacts her power as the narrator of the story. The first sentence of *El cazador de leones* commences Tomeo’s parody of the heroine by foregrounding the importance of Armando’s voice while simultaneously diminishing that of Nicolasa: “‘Buenas noches’ dice el hombre, apenas le parece escuchar al otro lado del teléfono la voz de la mujer, ‘perdone usted mi atrevimiento’” (9). The almost inaudible voice of Nicolasa subverts the traditional agency of the female protagonist and inverts the roles of the heroine and the hero of popular romance fiction. Rather than focalizing the heroine, the novel emphasizes the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the male character. The parodic manipulation frustrates readerly expectations and immediately calls attention to the lack of profound interaction between the two main characters in the novel.

The parodic central position of the hero increasingly demands attention as Armando imagines Nicolasa’s appearance. In traditional romance novels the heroine imagines the physical and emotional characteristics of her future lover, but Tomeo reconfigures the conventional scenario by allowing the male hero to project his own fantasies onto the female character. Moreover, as we see below, his fantasies are not anchored in any type of concrete experience; they are instead the musings of a man who seeks to replace his actual reality with that of a sentimental romance novel. Early in the story, for example, Nicolasa
inquires about the toughness of lion meat, which sends Armando off on a wayward tangent about Nicolasa’s teeth:

Además, recuerde aquel refrán que asegura que a buen hambre no hay pan duro. Aunque me imagino que para usted no habrá pan duro que se le resista. ¿Qué por qué le digo eso? Se lo digo, señorita, porque estoy seguro de que tiene usted una dentadura magnífica, una de esas dentaduras en las que se resume toda la belleza y toda la salud de un cuerpo joven. ¿Me equivoco? ¿No? ¿Dice usted que, tal como sospechaba, no le falta ni un solo diente y que, además, los tiene todos sanos? No podía ser de otro modo. (33)

First, it is crucial to note that the author does not showcase any dialogue between the characters; he only presents Armando’s questions and affirmations. Moreover, the protagonist’s fantasy about Nicolasa’s teeth is in no way grounded in reality. He quite literally produces the heroine out of “pan duro” by envisioning her ability to bite through hard bread. His questions at the end, “¿Me equivoco? ... ¿No,?” attempt to confirm his fantasy, but the reader is not allowed access to Nicolasa’s response, which makes Armando’s final affirmation, “no podía ser de otro modo,” seem like his speculations have no grounding in reality. The scene not only annuls the agency of the heroine by stressing the lack of interpersonal communication between the two characters, it replaces Nicolasa entirely with an ideal, because fictitious, woman with perfect, and perfectly strong, teeth.

In addition to parodying the heroine’s position within the text, Tomeo parodies the hero of sentimental romance fiction by imbuing Armando with an excess of seductive qualities that emphasize ridiculousness and absurdity. Readers can track the parody from the novel’s opening lines when Armando introduces himself with “Me llamo Armando
Duvalier. Sí, Duvalier, con V de victoria ... Armando Duvalier, el cazador de leones” (9). The hero’s first name, Armando, evokes the image of an alluring male character. His French last name, Duvalier, also captures the imagination, as the “language of love” invokes images of romance and seduction. Moreover, Armando’s need to clarify the spelling of his last name, “con V de victoria,” demonstrates his shameless self-confidence and his ability to defeat any rival and overcome any challenge. The excess of sexual meaning, the repetition of “Armando Duvalier,” and his profession as a lion hunter are too ridiculous to be serious; they not only create ironic distance from the character but also invite speculation as to whether he really is who he says he is or if he is instead appropriating the fictitious identity of a character from a romance novel.

The parody continues as Armando exhibits the conventional “tough guy” characteristics of the men from romance novels. He emphasizes his bravery and strength by recounting stories about his adventures in Africa, but the stories also leave questions about whether Armando is capable of meeting the standard qualities of a romance hero. One such story, for example, details how he killed his first lion. He relates that it happened only two weeks into his first trip to Africa. He and his horse were taking a break when the beast appeared and killed his mare. Furious from the death of his beloved animal, he sought out vengeance on the lion and explains:

No tuve miedo. La luz de la luna me permitió adoptar la posición más favorable y apenas dos segundos después le envié la primera bala a la frente, justo en el centro. No le maté con aquel disparo. El león cayó sobre mí, derribándome ... No lo dudé pues ni un instante. Desenfainé el puñal que
llevaba en el cinto y se lo hundí varias veces en los ijares, hasta que dejó de moverse. (30)

Armando’s narrative offers an image of himself that is similar to one of the tough guys of romance fiction. His lack of fear and quick action highlight his formidable masculine power, prowess, and good instincts. Like any suitor, Armando portrays himself as a brave and aggressive alpha male capable of overcoming any challenge.

The reader notes parody, however, as Armando makes a fatal mistake in the conclusion of the story. He maintains his powerful masculine identity, but the story takes an odd turn when he includes a reflection upon the seconds surrounding his kill:

Como usted podrá suponer, en aquellos momentos no pensé en nada y me defendí por puro instinto (hay que descubrirse ante esas fuerzas misteriosas que se generan en el hombre, incluso en los más pusilánimes, cuando se ven en una situación desesperada), pero al cabo de los años, recordando aquel lance, pienso que actué como en una especie de arrebato amoroso y que consumé con mi puñal una serie de bárbaras penetraciones (tal como lo oye, señorita, aquello fueron auténticas penetraciones vaginales, y que Dios perdone mi fantasía), que me hicieron conocer el éxtasis de la crueldad, que es tal vez la forma más refinada del amor. (31)

The monologue begins in traditional fashion as the lion hunter once again reiterates his bravery, but his story follows an unlikely tangent as Armando connects the penetration of the lion’s body with a violent sexual act. The language is particularly unfortunate for Armando as his references to “bárbaras penetraciones,” “penetraciones vaginales,” and “éxtasis de la crueldad” go well beyond the tasteful sexuality of the sentimental sub-genre.
Moreover, his comment about cruelty being “la forma más refinada del amor” is dramatically out of place, as it is not clear how such a declaration could possibly be true. Armando’s unhealthy combination of violence and sexuality exceeds the parameters of the sentimental romance sub-genre, and it gestures toward the language of an erotic romance novel. However, the language is too excessive and too absurd even for an erotic romance because Armando’s discourse takes him into an inappropriate narrative world of abnormal sexuality that borders on masochism and bestiality. The scene ends when Nicolasa apparently admits that Armando’s story has given her goose bumps, all of which confirms that his ploy to depict himself as a seductive hero has failed completely. The protagonist’s inability to behave as a traditional hero of either romance sub-genre foregrounds the discrepancy between reality and the fictional world in which he lives, and it creates a unique narrative that undermines romance literature and those who read it.

In addition to his claims of excessive masculinity, Armando possesses an overblown range of emotions that parody the other “type” of hero from popular romance fiction, the sentimental hero. Like many male heroes from the sentimental sub-genre, Armando’s tough-guy personality is coupled with a powerful sense of sentimentality. Nevertheless, his sentimentality exceeds that of a traditional romantic hero, and Armando is repeatedly overcome with strong emotions that drive his discourse along unpredictable paths. He unleashes one of his first exorbitant displays of emotion when he replies to an otherwise benign comment that Nicolasa supposedly makes about women:

¿Dice usted que sin mujeres los hombre viviríamos más tranquilos? ¿Me está hablando en serio? ¡Vaya por dios! ¡Otra vez me sale usted por los cerros de Úbeda! Lo hace seguramente a propósito, sabe que yo soy un romántico
(puede incluso que sea uno de los últimos románticos que quedan en este mundo), y usted trata de sacarme de mis casillas haciéndome creer que estoy hablando con una mujer prosaica, incapaz de entender mis sentimientos. Es inútil, amiga mía, no siga por ese camino, no conseguirá engañarme. (34)

The humor in Armando’s words stems not only from his ridiculous response to Nicolasa’s declaration about women, but from the fact that his disproportionate reaction also sends the hero on his own trip through the cerros de Úbeda. From there, he segues into a digression about being the last romantic in the world and then grows angry at the thought of his listener being too vulgar to understand his emotions. The male character’s failure to sell himself as a sentimental hero is comical, but it also accentuates his lack of interpersonal communication skills and underscores the presence of a character who is incapable of establishing a profound connection with another person.

Finally, another layer of parody exists in the “literariness” of the male protagonist. As he does with Macario from La noche del lobo, Tomeo employs a Cervantine form of parody as Armando’s mind seems to have shriveled from having spent too many hours reading cheap literature. He describes himself as a “lector impenitente” and tells Nicolasa that he is speaking to her “desde una habitación repleta de libros” that “se amontonan desde el suelo hasta el techo, cubriendo todas las paredes” (42). He says that his favorite books are “libros de viajes” and “narraciones maravillosas” because they allow people to inhabit a fantastic world that is better than the one in which they live. He denies being one of these “soñadores” who confuses fiction with reality but it is difficult to believe because he seems frustrated with his own reality, saying “es magnífico poder inventarse un mundo que nos guste más que el que nos dieron” (44). Similarly, his assertion that he does not
read romance novels also seems dubious when Nicolasa apparently asks him about his interest in the *novela rosa*: “¿Me pregunta si tengo también novelas románticas [en casa]?

¿Se refiere usted acaso a lo que algunos llaman novelas rosa? No, de ésas no tengo, pero hubo una época en la que me dio por coleccionar relatos eróticos, protagonizados casi siempre por señoritas bastante metiditas en carnes, con medias negras y ligueros de fantasía” (59). Armando’s collection of erotic fiction explains the sexual undertones that drive his character, but his rejection of sentimental romance novels is unconvincing because he actually references works from the sub-genre and because his language and behavior clearly derive from a *novela rosa*.

Just before he comments on his reading habits, for example, Armando asks Nicolasa how she imagines him to be: “¿Piensa usted acaso que me parezco a aquel Armando que supo enamorar a Marguerite Gautier?” (55). The reference is to Alexandre Dumas’ famous sentimental romance, *La Dame aux camélias* (1848), which features the heroine Marguerite Gautier, and the hero, Armando Duval. The similarity between the names of the male protagonists proves Armando Duvalier’s connection with a famous work of sentimental romance fiction, and it also calls attention to the parodic framework of other moments when Armando seems to confuse romance novels with reality. At one point, for example, he says that he wishes to live in a world of fiction so that he can enjoy a “primavera que no se acaba nunca” (67). He makes another comment later on when he describes his conversation with Nicolasa in terms of a romance novel, saying that he wants to live with her, “la historia de un amor apasionado que nació inesperadamente, casi por casualidad, en una tarde de lluvia” (77). Armando’s unrealistic desire to reside in a world of fantasy and romance emphasizes caricature and humor, but it also produces a tragic
character who cannot take part in meaningful relationships with the people around him. Unlike the traditional heroes of sentimental romance fiction, Armando Duvalier is a lonely and misunderstood man who must hide in fiction in order to feel comfortable with himself and others. Like all of the protagonists in Tomeo’s narrative, his inability to communicate has driven him to his pathetic attempt to connect with a woman over the phone.

The third convention that Tomeo parodies is the courtship and the seduction. The courtship involves the communication between the two lead characters as they move toward their eventual union. Seduction is a key element of the courtship convention, as the two characters exchange romantic banter and gifts until one of them finally declares his or her love for the other. Armando mimics the convention by trying to seduce Nicolasa with a barrage of flattery and presents, but he does not succeed like the traditional men of romance novels. Early in his narrative, for instance, Armando suggests that men must regularly send to his listener beautiful bouquets of flowers, and he appears surprised at her response:

¿Cómo? ¿Dice usted que nadie le envía flores? ¿Cómo pueden dejar sin flores a una muchacha como usted? ¿Hasta tal punto llega ahora la descortesía de los hombres de esta ciudad? ¿No saben acaso que hay atardeceres en los que las flores suspiran y se convierten en alma? En fin, no hablemos más sobre el particular, me toca a mí enderezar ese entuerto. Si me da su dirección le prometo que mañana recibirá usted una docena de rosas. Corresponderé de ese modo a la amabilidad que usted demuestra escuchando mis cuitas. (17)

Armando’s surprise at Nicolasa’s revelation and his ability to wax poetic about an afternoon in which flowers “suspiran” y “se convierten en alma” serve as exaggerated yet
believable forms of flattery that could capture the imagination of a heroine in a sentimental romance novel. We note parody, however, because Nicolasa does not appear impressed. She frustrates the convention by not revealing her address and subsequently rejecting his offer to send her flowers.

In addition to his offers of flowers and intriguing metaphors, Armando flaunts another kind of flattery that abounds in the novel. Unlike the example given above, the hero’s romantic language often jumps the rails and enters the dark corners of his imagination. Shortly after the aforementioned incident, for example, Armando gives a compliment that is not likely to seduce Nicolasa:

...cierro los ojos y puedo imaginármela recostada entre suaves almohadones de terciopelo, mientras su mirada de reina (mejor aun de princesa, porque usted, por lo que parece, no conoce todavía a su rey) vaga errática por las espléndidas madreselvas del jardín. En estos momentos, señorita (y le ruego que me vuelva a disculpar, si le parece que empiezo a pasarme de rosca), pienso incluso que bien pudiera ser que usted ni siquiera menstrúe, que esté por encima de cualquier servidumbre fisiológica y que, precisamente por ello, sea usted la compañera ideal del fauno. (20-21)

Armando’s romantic outburst starts out well. The seductive image he paints of Nicolasa sitting upon a bed of pillows is likely to intrigue the heroine of a sentimental novel, but he keeps talking. He attempts to put his lover on a pedestal above all other women, a common technique in the art of the piropo, but he does so inappropriately. His discussion of menstruation is clearly too personal for anyone to find charming, and it also reveals his discomfort with biology. As a result, Nicolasa apparently tells Armando that he is
“idealizando en demasía” (21). Rather than taking part in a successful courtship, Armando’s *piropo* fails to convince his lover and sends the story into an uncomfortable explanation of female physiology in the animal kingdom.

The parody of the seduction reaches its not-so-climactic finale when Armando declares his love to Nicolasa at the end of the novel. Normally the declaration of love completes the courtship and leads to the happy union between heroine and hero. Following the convention, Armando’s sweet talk eventually arrives at a defining moment when he reveals to Nicolasa that he is madly in love with her, and that she is the woman of whom he has always dreamed: “¡Sí, sí, mi idolatrada princesa! ¡Usted es esa mujer ideal por la que estoy dispuesto a sacrificar mi libertad! ¡Usted, que ha conseguido enamorarme sin más ayuda que esa voz divina que Dios le ha dado y ese respirar irresistible que tiene usted cuando se acerca el teléfono a los labios!” (91). The amassment of exclamation marks accentuates the excessive use of dramatic language, and the parody intensifies at the end due to the spatial barrier between the two characters. Armando’s reference to her “divine voice” and lips is a common strategy of seduction, but it is also comical because he is not gazing into her eyes, he is talking to her on the phone.

Furthermore, things do not develop for Armando like they do in sentimental romance novels. The reader is not allowed access to Nicolasa’s response, but it is clear she does not reciprocate Armando’s feelings:

Hubiera podido ahorrarse ese comentario, señora mía. No era necesario que me hiriese usted de ese modo. Dice usted que no quiere sucumbir, y menos todavía en compañía de un loco. Muy bien, usted es libre de pensar lo que
Rather than succumbing, Nicolasa puts an end to Armando’s advances and responds with an insult. Her comment seems particularly hurtful because she takes something he said in confidence, that he is crazy with love, and she uses it against him, calling him a crazy person. Her rejection puts an end to Armando’s seduction and leads to the final and most famous convention of the romance genre.

The last convention the novel parodies is the happy ending. Tomeo reconfigures the ending of sentimental romance novels by breaking the genre’s most important rule. It is crucial in all romance fiction that the characters live happily ever after, in order to fulfill the desires of the heroine, the hero, and the reader. Tomeo, however, evades the happy ending by concluding the story with an unconventional twist that arouses intense feelings of anger and frustration in Armando. Nicolasa’s rejection of the narrator’s love not only makes Armando aggressive and vulgar, it also inspires him to admit why he prefers to communicate by phone. The novel’s “big reveal” takes place when Armando tells Nicolasa that he was born with six fingers on each hand: “Pues preste un poco de atención, mi respetada señora. Tengo el teléfono cogido con la mano izquierda y con los seis dedos de la derecha estoy tamborileando sobre el micrófono… ¡Escuche, escuche esta especie de zapateado digital!” (94). Rather than depicting the moment in which the two characters overcome a barrier and finally come together, Tomeo frustrates expectations by surprising Nicolasa and the reader with the unsettling sound of a six-fingered “zapateado digital.”
Moreover, the not-so-happy ending takes on a violent tone when Armando, still upset from his rejection, turns obscene. He accuses Nicolasa of leading him on, and he says that he is going to hang up the phone and terminate their love forever:

No, no se preocupe, no voy a darle esa satisfacción, porque ni siquiera estoy seguro de que en el fondo no se sintiese halagada por mi maniobra. No voy a tomarme pues ese trabajo. Prefiero colgar el teléfono y dejarla a solas en la penumbra de su habitación, esperando que, aunque sea por culpa de un error, vuelva a sonar el teléfono. Le antico, sin embargo, que algún día, cuando se sienta ya irremediablemente sola, volverá a pensar en mí y que entonces comprenderá que perdió conmigo la oportunidad de vivir un amor sin precedentes. (95)

The novel finishes with strikingly different language. Armando’s romantic words quickly turn ugly, and the story does not end with a satisfying union but with a violent verbal attack on the heroine. Of all the ways to dismiss her, it is particularly telling that he repeatedly wishes her a future of loneliness and hopelessness. He wants to leave her “esperando”; he wants to leave her “a solas”; and he wants to leave her with a sensation of loss regarding the profound feeling of love that she will never have. The insults seem to express the frustration, loneliness, and disconnection that Armando suffers toward those around him, and they also suggest that love may more often be a source of anxiety and despair than a vehicle for emotional satisfaction. Parody in El cazador de leones includes a stern critique of the idealized narrative worlds found in sentimental romance fiction and upholds the harsh reality of pain and suffering that define the human condition.
The Conventions of Erotic Romance

Like sentimental romances, erotic romance novels contain the two essential ingredients of all romance fiction, the love relationship and the satisfactory ending, and the sub-genre also features “the meeting” as its first convention. As in the sentimental romance sub-genre, the meeting often commences erotic romance novels and allows the story to develop in a world where fate constantly intervenes. Clichés like “love at first sight” and “instant chemistry” are often used to describe the meeting between the two characters, and they setup an idealized love story in which the heroine and the hero seem destined to be together. The difference between the sentimental and erotic romance sub-genres lies in the emphasis on sex, as it is also common for the heroine and hero to sleep together right after meeting.

The second convention the novel parodies is the heroine and the hero. Parker’s description of the two main characters of erotic romance fiction shares many characteristics with Regis’ description of the sentimental romance sub-genre. He writes that the characters must be and well developed, and they must capture the reader’s imagination. Like Regis, Parker recognizes the importance of the female character and her agency in the sub-genre, and he observes that the heroine must possess positive qualities with which the reader can identity (81-83). His description of the male character is also similar to that of Regis, in that he downplays the need for the psychological development of the hero. Parker describes several “types” of male characters that have appeared in the erotic romance sub-genre, and, as Regis noted, they tend to be modeled after the “dangerous hero” or the “sentimental hero” archetypes of the genre. The most important aspect of the sub-genre, and the way that critics distinguish it from the sentimental
romance, is its focus on the characters’ sexuality. Parker states that the heroine and the hero in an erotic romance must have exceptional sex drives because their desire for physical intimacy serves as the central motor of the narrative action (81-82).

The third convention the novel parodies is sex. As Regis has suggested, sex has always been present in works of popular romance fiction, but it is not a defining element of every sub-genre. As we remember, this critic explains that sex is only an “accidental” or “optional” aspect of sentimental romance novels (22). The erotic romance sub-genre, however, depends upon multiple sex scenes to satisfy readers and to aid in the evolution of the story and the characters. In terms of the storyline, Parker writes that the development of the central characters and the plot must take place during the sex scenes, “if only because there’s not a great deal of space elsewhere” (83). The importance, intensity, and detail in an erotic novel’s sex scenes separate the sub-genre from sentimental romance novels, and Parker explains that many popular writers of erotic romance are diligent readers of sex manuals like the *Kama Sutra*. The careful scripting of sex in erotic romance provides the necessary elements of eroticism, and it also facilitates the exploration of the thoughts, feelings, and desires of the heroine, and sometimes those of the hero, during the sexual act.

Even though the explicit sexual content of erotic romance novels may not appeal to all readers of the genre, works of the sub-genre are still considered to be “romance novels” because they feature a love story and conclude with an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. Like the sentimental romance sub-genre, the happy ending often results in marriage, but in some cases the story may end with the beginning of a relationship that will endure into the future. Each of these four conventions appears in Tomeo’s novel in
order to tell the story of a love relationship between a heroine and a hero, but the author’s use of parody undermines the way in which these common elements traditionally appear in the erotic sub-genre of romance fiction. *Los amantes de silicona* is the last novel I study here, and it represents one of the author’s most acerbic contributions to contemporary Spanish literature.

**Parody in the Bedroom: Sex, Dolls, and the Conventions of Erotic Romance in *Los amantes de silicona***

*Los amantes de silicona* incorporates and comically reconfigures the four primary conventions of erotic romance fiction discussed above: the meeting, the heroine and the hero, sex, and the happy ending. Parody allows Tomeo to undermine the idealistic depictions of love and sex that appear in the erotic sub-genre of romance fiction, and it is used to present a reality in which artificially intelligent sex dolls are superior to humans because they are the only characters capable of taking part in a profound emotional relationship. Rather than reaffirming socially accepted notions of love, marriage, and sex, the novel paints a cruel alternative reality defined by impotence and sexual dissatisfaction. Despite its strikingly bitter tone, the novel maintains Tomeo’s signature sense of ironic distance and invites readers to laugh and gasp before the bizarre textual world he creates.

*Los amantes de silicona* has attracted almost no critical attention, in part because of its recent publication. Begoña Sáez Martínez highlights the novel’s meta-literary and post-modern elements, and she argues that the novel “funciona como metáfora del presente y del futuro próximo, de una sociedad de avances tecnológicos asombrosos y de esos vínculos humanos frágiles, transitorios y precarios” (15). Her investigation downplays the
parody of erotic fiction and instead focuses on characters and questions associated with the science fiction genre. Her idea is suggestive because it points to another genre that Tomeo incorporates into his corpus, but her study does not analyze the novel’s parodic dimensions. Rafael Conte’s review of the book celebrates it as one of Tomeo’s best, and he observes that the author utilizes meta-fiction in order to launch a “falsa autocritica” of his own writing style and to posit a critique of mainstream popular culture (“Una falsa”). More critical work needs to be done with the novel, as the two short articles only scratch the surface of a complex text that fuses meta-fiction, satire, and parody. As I will subsequently argue, Tomeo employs a parodic narrative strategy in the novel that targets the conventions of the erotic romance sub-genre.

Los amantes de silicona commences when an unnamed first-person narrator relates that his friend, Ramón M, has sent him an erotic romance novel. Ramón has asked the narrator to give him feedback on his work, even though the narrator-reader admits that he may not be qualified to do so. He also admits that he is not a professional writer or editor; he is a dedicated salesman and distributor of mangos and custard apples. The narrator is reluctant to help Ramón because he knows his friend is not a gifted writer and because neither man has much experience in the literary and non-literary fields of eroticism. Tomeo’s novel features a prologue, the five chapters of Ramón’s erotic novel, and an epilogue. The narrator transcribes the pages that Ramón sends to him in the mail and writes that he has only added a few commas and corrected misspellings in order to maintain the “laconic and lightly pessimistic air” of the original text (12). Each of the five chapters is followed by comments from the narrator, who repeatedly informs Ramón that he does not have talent and explains why the novel does not constitute a well-wrought
piece of fiction. He points to holes in the storyline and moments of unconvincing action, and he critiques the general absurdity of the story. Nevertheless, the narrator admits to his friend that bad novels are constantly achieving success in his country, and for that reason alone Ramón should continue writing.11

The five chapters that the narrator reproduces represent the bulk of Tomeo’s novel, and they relay the failed love story of Lupercia and Basilio and the erotic romance of two blowup sex dolls, Marilyn and Big John. Lupercia and Basilio are a married couple who has fallen out of love after many years together. The two manage a sex shop, live in a small third-floor apartment, and sleep in separate rooms divided by a hallway. They no longer have sex, and they instead satisfy their sexual desires with their respective blow-up sex dolls, Big John and Marilyn. More than just inflatable toys, their dolls represent the newest technology and are loaded with advanced features that allow them to emulate human thoughts and actions. Lupercia and Basilio share a comfortable sex life with Big John and Marilyn until the couple comes home one day to discover the two dolls having sex on their couch. Enraged by their finding, the humans demand that Marilyn and Big John give up their sexual relationship, but the two dolls have already fallen in love and have sworn to be together forever. Upset by the perceived infidelity, Lupercia and Basilio speak with their sex dolls, but they become upset because Marilyn tells Basilio that he is not big enough, and Big John reveals to Lupercia that he only wants to have sex with Marilyn. Basilio responds by buying a less intelligent sex doll, but Lupercia becomes so angry that she stabs Big John in order to deflate him.

The two human characters soon forget about Marilyn and Big John, which gives Marilyn an opportunity to find Big John and save him. She locates tape and a bicycle pump
in the closet and brings life back to her lover. After declaring their eternal love for one another, the two dolls realize they must leave the house in order to be together, even if it means death. They plan their escape one afternoon while Basilio is at home playing with a less advanced doll named Kurosawa, and Lupercia is entertaining a female friend from the sex shop. The three human characters continue drinking hard alcohol and begin watching porn downstairs. Marilyn and Big John, who are upstairs in the same apartment, decide at this moment to jump out of the third-story window and escape. The love story ends as the sex dolls exit through the window, but instead of hitting the ground they are caught by a gust of wind that carries them over the city and into the blue abyss. The central storyline of the novel is the sexual relationship between Big John and Marilyn, which will constitute the focus of this investigation. As I show below, Tomeo parodies erotic romance fiction by developing the relationship of the two blow-up sex dolls with the conventions of this specific sub-genre of romance fiction. The use of parody produces humor, but it also projects a pessimistic vision of the human condition in which sex technology is more effective at communicating emotions than actual human beings.

The first convention the novel parodies is the meeting. Traditional erotic romances start with an encounter between the heroine and the hero, which sets up the two main characters for a sexually charged relationship. Unlike traditional erotic romances, however, Tomeo's story features a meeting between the two sex dolls, Marilyn and Big John, who immediately fall in love. Their romance sharply contrasts with that of Lupercia and Basilio, the two human characters who have fallen out of love after several years together and "en ningún caso mantienen relaciones sexuales" (15). The sex dolls first meet at the beginning
of the story, but the details of their meeting remain hidden until the narrator relates Big
John’s explanation of his first encounter with Marilyn:

“Creo que estoy enamorado de Marilyn” reconoce Big John. “Lo nuestro va
más allá de un simple polvo.” Para hacer esa confesión [Big John] se ha
permitido el lujo de pestañear brevemente. Hay enamoramientos repentinos,
que nacen a primera vista. Otros hablan de flechazo y de química instantánea.
Eso es, por lo que cuenta Big John, la clase de amor que hace unas horas le
encendió el alma. (60)

Big John uses a variety of clichés from the meeting convention of an erotic romance novel.
He describes their meeting as “love at first sight,” he references “Cupid’s arrow,” and he
also refers to the “instantaneous chemistry” that both immediately felt. The accumulation
of clichés presents the meeting between Big John and Marilyn as though it were the
meeting between two characters in an erotic romance novel, but the language collides with
our realization that the “lovers” are not human beings but artificially intelligent robots
designed for sex.

The parody of the meeting continues as Big John shares more details about their
first encounter. He says that he and Marilyn decided to watch a soccer game shortly after
they met, and he also comments that because he had never seen a female doll enjoy sports
as much as she did, he quickly fell in love: “Fue a partir de ese momento cuando empecé a
comprender la clase de muñeca que tenía a mi lado. Marilyn es el amor de mi vida, me dije.
Y supongo que en ese mismo instante ella empezó también a comprender la clase de
muñeco que era yo, así que, poco a poco, empezó a abrirse las piernas y resoplar por la
nariz” (62-63). Again, the parody in the scene results from the humorous collisions
between Big John’s language, which uses the clichés from the meeting convention in erotic romance fiction, and a series of absurd elements. First, Big John’s simplicity as a character shines because he realizes that Marilyn is the “love of his life” because she too likes to watch soccer. Secondly, it is impossible to forget that the talk of instantaneous chemistry and “love at first sight” is not coming from a traditional heroine and hero of a romance novel but from a pair of inflatable sex dolls.

The story of the meeting is complete when Big John relates that the two ended their first meeting by having sex. The appearance of sex within the meeting is common in erotic romance fiction, but it does not commonly play out like it does in Tomeo’s novel. Big John says that the two of them began to “follar como locos” once the soccer game ended and a pornographic movie came on the television. It was at this point that Lupercia and Basilio came home and discovered them on the couch. The male sex doll concludes his story by saying that “Ésta es la verdadera historia de nuestro enamoramiento” (63). The story of the characters’ “enamoramiento” employs the language, the idealized conceptions of destiny, and the sex scene that are common to any traditional erotic love story, but the incongruous element, the fact that the characters are sex dolls, undermines each of the conventions and sends the story into an unexpected narrative terrain. Rather than projecting a reaffirming notion of love, destiny, and sexuality, the meeting between the two sex dolls creates a sad contrast between the two human characters who are incapable of taking part in a profound emotional relationship and two artificially intelligent pieces of plastic that are capable of communicating profound “human” emotions.

The second convention the novel parodies is the heroine and the hero. Tomeo parodies the two types of characters in erotic romance novels by equipping the sex dolls
with the typical physical, emotional, and sexual characteristics of the heroine and the hero from the sub-genre. By modeling Big John and Marilyn after these archetypal characters, Tomeo creates an inverted narrative reality that exalts the superiority of the sex dolls over the pathetic, unattractive human beings. When offering a general description of Basilio and Lupercia in the opening pages, for example, the narrator writes that the two share “un aspecto tan vulgar” that it is not even necessary to waste words in describing them (13). The narrator declares that Big John and Marilyn, on the other hand, are fully equipped both physically and emotionally for the traditional roles of the hero and the heroine of erotic romance fiction. Marilyn pertains to the third generation of “muñecas consoladoras,” the HP-457, and is capable of kissing in fourteen of the thirty ways proposed by the Kama Sutra. Furthermore, she has a “hypnotic gaze” and becomes more intelligent and more compatible with her sex partners over time. Additionally, Marilyn is equipped with a sound system in which she moans with the “tono inocente que conviene a las más hábiles corruptoras de mayores” (17). Finally, she plays French opera music when a person squeezes both of her nipples simultaneously, and she is capable of learning and producing advanced language systems. These express deep emotions that, “incluso a los hombres de carne y hueso no les resulta fácil expresar” (18). Marilyn’s ability to meet and exceed the beauty, refinement, and sexual potential of Lupercia demonstrates her superiority not only to the other female character but also to the human species as a whole.

Similarly, Big John is modeled after the superior sexuality of the male characters found in popular erotic fiction, which makes him exceed the physical and emotional capabilities of Basilio. First, Big John is the newest model of artificially intelligent sex dolls, which includes “un pene que está siempre presentando armas” (18). Moreover, users can
stimulate Big John simply by squeezing one of his synthetic testicles: “Si se le aprieta el testículo izquierdo la dureza del pene aumenta todavía más, pasando sucesivamente de duro a muy duro y, por último, a duro-brillante, que es, según la clasificación que establecen algunos sexólogos populares, la máxima nota que puede concederse” (18). Big John’s ability to reach the “máxima nota” evinces his superiority over not only Basilio but all human males, and he is also capable of exciting sadistic users; he howls in pain and he can play the roll of boss in a sado-masochistic relationship because he is comfortable in leather and is capable of wielding a whip with seven tips (18).

Finally, Big John possesses a romantic spirit that allows him to speak about love without remorse. The narrator describes how the doll’s circuitry is designed for the production of customized piropos, which helps Big John to describe his love of Marilyn in terms of Plato’s theories: “Ahora [Big John] cita al gran Platón y recuerda que el amor es un estado intermedio entre el poseer y el no poseer. Para que Lupercia pueda entenderle mejor, le explica que cuando no se posee, no se ama, pero que cuando se posee, se deja de amar” (68). Like Plato, Big John explains that all beings only desire what they cannot have, and for this reason love is often a source of unresolvable tension in people’s everyday lives. The combination of ancient philosophy and modern sex technology undermines the drama and seriousness of Big John’s words. The contrast contributes to a parodic scenario in which the robots seem more capable of expressing complex feelings and emotions than the human who purchased them. The exaltation of the sex robots’ physical, emotional, and sexual superiority frustrates the idealized reality that defines the romance genre, it sends the novel into uncharted narrative terrain, and it dramatizes the superiority of technology over traditional human values and emotions.
The third convention the novel parodies is sex. Tomeo parodies sex scenes by describing in detail the ludic intercourse between a pair of blowup sex dolls. The use of parody creates humorous sexual engagements throughout Los amantes de silicona, but it is also used to establish a sad narrative reality in which technological creations are more effective at sex than actual human beings. Lupercia and Basilio are incapable of enthusiastic intercourse, but Big John and Marilyn cannot keep their hands off one another because their relationship is modeled directly on the conventions of erotic romance. The parody lies in the fact that they are not humans but silicone dolls. After Basilio and Lupercia surprise Big John and Marilyn on the couch the narrator describes the sexual act carried out by the dolls:

Durante los primeros instantes Basilio y Lupercia no aciertan a reaccionar y los dos muñecos siguen dándole al manubrio como si tal cosa. No les falta, pues, entusiasmo, pero no follen como una pareja de carne y hueso. Sus movimientos resultan demasiado mecánicos. Mueven las pelvis con una precisión mecánica, como el émbolo de prensa hidráulica, y ni siquiera aceleran el traqueoteo en los momentos finales, que es cuando los humanos incurren en cierta desarmonía de movimientos. (35)

The description of the intercourse between Big John and Marilyn contains all of the details common to erotic romance, but humor and parody manifest in the comical difference between human sex and robot sex. The hydraulic noises and mechanical movements of the two dolls suggest a high level of efficiency, but their precision lacks the tactile experience achieved by two lovers who have surrendered to a sensual encounter. The difference foregrounds the parodic discrepancy between the parody and serious versions of the sub-
genre, and it creates a completely absurd sex scene enjoyed by two sex dolls that take part in the pleasures of an emotionally satisfying relationship.

The frustrating moments of sex evolve as the two dolls move out of their honeymoon phase and begin to embrace the more profound feelings of love. This phase of their relationship reflects the common movement of men and women in erotic romance fiction toward a profound union that leads to marriage or monogamy. However, their identity as sex dolls undermines the sub-genre’s usual feelings of depth and sentimentality. After Big John professes his love to Marilyn, the two begin to embrace emotions that go beyond sexual desire. The narrator writes that at this moment the two should be “motivados para darse un revolcón,” but instead they “empiezasesen a comprender que follar no lo es todo, ni siquiera en el frívolo mundo de los muñecos hinchables” (123). The “frivolous” world of dolls is at the heart of the scene’s humor because it collides with the serious and dramatic world of the erotic sub-genre. Rather than acting like sex dolls, the two behave like a pair of helpless romantics who no longer need sex to anchor their deep emotions. Marilyn continues by asking Big John to “háblame de amor,” and he repeats his earlier discourse from Plato on love being “un estado intermedio entre poseer y no poseer” because, as the narrator observes, he is ultimately a robot that depends upon the phrases saved within his circuitry. For that reason “no sabe muchas cosas más” (123). The machine’s recycled use of Plato subverts the dramatic language common to romance novels because it calls attention to the fact that the speaker is not a thinking human but a robot that is only capable of repeating the phrases contained in his hard drive. The movement of their relationship from sex to love represents a common strategy in an erotic romance, but
sex dolls obviously cannot develop such relationships. Their success as a couple represents the antithesis of the relationship between the sexless, loveless humans and elicits an overall sense of disappointment in the ability of humans to carry out meaningful relationships.

The fourth and final convention the novel parodies is the happy ending, which can be found in the conclusion of the love story of Marilyn and Big John. While the human characters are downstairs, the two sex dolls plan to escape from the house where they have spent their lives because they know that they will soon be thrown into the garbage. They decide that the only way to be together forever is to commit suicide by throwing themselves out of the window. Rather than ending tragically, however, a gust of wind provides a glimmer of hope for the two dolls:

Los muñecos se arrojan, pues, al vacío cogidos de la mano, pero son como dos globos enamorados, flotan en el aire y no llegan al suelo. La brisa los levanta y se los lleva abrazados por el cielo azul, escoltados por media docena de blanquísimas palomas, muy por encima del caserío de la ciudad. Pasan por encima del cinturón industrial y sobrevuelan praderas de color esmeralda sobre las que no les importaría caer y morir definitivamente, pero la brisa se los lleva todavía más lejos y pronto se les pierde de vista. (139)

The final image of the novel would be striking and beautiful were it not so absurd. The contrasting colors of the blue sky, white doves, and emerald-colored meadows paint a memorable backdrop for Marilyn and Big John as they glide over the city’s putrid industrial landscape. Their disappearance into the abyss suggests that the only way to escape the cruel society below is to continue floating, but as anyone might guess, the two must some
day descend into the world that has rejected them. The story of Big John and Marilyn evokes a glimmer of optimism in an otherwise despicable world, but it is crucial to remember that they are only a pair of hyper-intelligent blow-up sex dolls. The parody of the happy ending allows the love story between Big John and Marilyn to conclude with the conventional union between the two characters, but like all of Tomeo’s novels, the story leaves the reader to contemplate an ironic and disheartening vision of the human condition.

**Conclusions about Tomeo’s Parody of Romance Fiction**

In my fourth chapter I have studied the parodic incorporation and reconfiguration of conventions from popular romance fiction. Unlike other popular genres that I have discussed, the field of popular romance fiction offers several challenges because the term “romance” elicits several meanings for critics and readers alike. “Romance” represents not only a genre of narrative poems from the twelfth century that were written in the vernacular or “romance language” but also a mode of literature that encompasses works as diverse as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, Shakespeare’s late plays, and popular romance fiction. The term becomes increasingly slippery when applied to Spanish literature and culture because of the country’s Medieval tradition of *novelas de caballerías*, known in English as “Romances.” The particular object of parody in Tomeo’s fiction, however, is not early-modern versions of Romance but a specific field of popular fiction. Popular romance fiction represents a relatively recent phenomenon in Spain, as it became a major genre of popular literature during the 1940s. The novel’s emphasis on romance, rather than sex, and its reaffirming vision of love and marriage served to project the ideology of the Franco
dictatorship, especially in the mass-produced novels of Corín Tellado. The novel evolved
toward a more erotic version of romance fiction after the end of the Franco dictatorship,
and the erotic romance sub-genre, along with countless other sub-genres, continues to be
successful thanks to the influence of international publishing houses and distributors of
romance fiction like Mills & Boon and Harlequin.

The two novels I investigate in this chapter, *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de
silicona*, incorporate the conventions of the sentimental and erotic sub-genres of romance
fiction. As I have suggested above, my argument departs from that of González Hurtado,
who has suggested that Tomeo’s novelistic fiction represents an isolated literary world. My
readings suggest the error of reading the author’s fiction as being a “lonely” brand of
narrative because both novels studied here, and all of the novels I have studied throughout
my dissertation, have shown the important roles played by popular genres and sub-genres
of popular literature and film. The first novel engages the conventions from the sentimental
romance novel by employing four major conventions, which include the meeting, the
heroine and the hero, the courtship and seduction, and the happy ending. The second novel
parodies conventions that include: the meeting, the heroine and hero, sex, and the happy
ending. Tomeo not only uses parody in order to construct alternative narrative realities
that frustrate the expectations of romance fiction, but he also projects a pessimistic world
of loneliness that underscores the sad state of the human condition. Rather than producing
narratives that reaffirm idealized notions of love, romance, and sexuality, Tomeo’s parodies
of romance question whether love, sexuality, and profound communication between
human beings are even possible. Of all the novels I have studied in this investigation, *Los
amantes de silicona* is perhaps the most pessimistic novel in Tomeo’s oeuvre. In it, Tomeo
suggests that human beings have lost their ability to communicate, fall in love, and carry out meaningful sexual relations, and it is up to technology, represented by a pair of artificially intelligent sex dolls, to replace a feeling of emotional depth that has seemingly become lost to humanity. Nevertheless, Tomeo’s use of parody also keeps a sense of ironic distance from the gloomy worlds that his novels project for readers, and it seems to suggest that it is better to laugh, rather than cry, at the pessimistic realities of the human condition.

1 It is worth noting that the tradition of the novel is rooted in the idea of Medieval “romances.” Today, many European languages use the word “roman” in a way that is similar to the word “novel.”

2 Severin also argues that La Celestina’s ironic critique of the exaggerated emotions commonly found in sentimental literature offers a decisive blow to the development of sentimental romances in Spain during this time period. She also suggests that the irony and sarcasm in Fernando de Roja’s text “opens the way” for the picaresque genre, which will appear in the middle of the sixteenth century and extend throughout the seventeenth century (48).

3 The RWA does not track sales specifically in Spain, but the country does form part of the billion-dollar romance fiction industry. In the United States, romance novels make up 13% of all adult fiction sales (“Romance Writers”). According to the official website of the RWA, 84% of readers in the U.S. are women, between the ages of 30-54, and E-books are now the most common format for romance fiction.

4 Charlo Ortiz-Repiso considers Bruguera to be the most important publisher of romance novels both because of the number of titles published and because of the seventy-
six years the publishing house stayed in business. Its first collection, *Pimpinela*, launched in 1946, was followed two years later by *Madreperla*. Bruguera began publishing other popular genres during the 1950s. These included war novels, detective fiction, and westerns, but by the 1960s it returned to an emphasis on romance fiction and published seven collections of popular romance fiction. Bruguera would print eight more such collections during the 1970s and the company also featured curious promotions such as its “Historias de la vida real” series, in which readers were asked to send to their favorite romance writers a story of a “real” romance, and the author would then turn the story into a romance novel (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 185-87).

5 Mario Vargas Llosa famously described her as “el fenómeno sociocultural casi más notable en la lengua española desde el siglo de oro” and as the last writer of true popular fiction. He celebrates Tellado’s relentless work ethic, her humility, and her complete lack of public pretension, although Vargas Llosa admitted that he never actually read her work (Vargas Llosa). Other critics have not been so friendly. Blanca Álvarez, for example, blasts Tellado for her complicity with the Franco dictatorship, calling her work “la mejor propaganda del Régimen,” and she writes that Tellado was “convencida de que solo adormeciendo el potencial de las mujeres, lograría que su cruzada soportara increíbles años de dominio” (148). Calling attention to the conservative ideology of her novels, Álvarez comments that Tellado followed three simple tenants of the regime’s propaganda: “Las mujeres sólo tienen valor cuando se resisten al sexo no matrimonial; ningún hombre respetará a una mujer que se entregue antes del matrimonial; Ningún hombre respetará a una mujer que se entregue antes del matrimonio” (148). The conservative nature of Tellado’s fiction aligned with the moral and religious values promulgated by the Franco
dictatorship, but its widespread appeal transcended Spanish borders. Today, Corín Tellado is still remembered as one of the most prolific writers in the Spanish language, and her work places second, behind that of Cervantes, as the most commonly read writer of Spanish fiction (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 111).

6 The plots of these novels developed around a love relationship between a man and a woman, which eventually led to marriage. They generally avoided portraying the internal thoughts or emotions of the female protagonist, and the relationship almost always remained friendly and platonic (Charlo Ortiz-Repiso 178). The absence of feelings, passion, and carnal desire produced a family-friendly narrative that was safe for parents and children alike. Charlo Ortiz-Repiso describes the “preliminary notes” to several works of the sub-genre published during this period, and these inevitably assured readers that the content was not only “puro y casto” but that it was also filled with “sana alegría” and taught superior “cualidades morales” for readers (102). Critics like Salvador Faura, Shelley Godsland, and Nickianne Moody further argue that the novela rosa contributed to the post-war reconstruction of Spain. They maintain that the happy endings penned by Tellado and others masked the country’s miseries and peddled the dictator’s Catholic ideology to the public. Moreover, these critics suggest that Spanish romance fiction contributed to the government’s imposition of ethical values and assisted in the process of the sublimation of the individual’s sexual energy (Faura, et al. 49).

7 Sex appeared in popular romance fiction during this period, and writers and publishing houses of high literary merit began to recognize the cultural significance and marketability of erotica. As an example, the Sonrisa Vertical collection of erotic fiction published by the Tusquets publishing house in Barcelona represented a major player in the
country’s celebration of eros, and the 1989 winner of its annual award for erotic fiction, Almudena Grandes’ Las edades de Lulú, sold more than a million copies inside and outside of Spain (Legido-Quigley 9). Moreover, influential novelists like Esther Tusquets, Ana María Moix, Ana Rossetti, and Rosa Montero routinely inserted erotic elements into their fiction in order to achieve a variety of esthetic effects and to critique cultural conceptions of sex and gender in circulation before, during, and after the dictatorship.

Eva Legido-Quigley has identified two strands of erotic writing that form during this period, both of which continue to influence writers in Spain who use eroticism to different social and philosophical ends. The first group of writers produced erotic fiction between 1975 and the mid 1980s. According to Legido-Quigley, their works represent “una protesta socio-política” against the status quo of the “national-Catholic system” enforced by the Franco dictatorship (13-14). She includes in this group the following authors: Carmen Riera, Esther Tusquets, Ana María Moix, Helena Valentí, and Rosa Montero. The second strand of writers represents a shift in erotic writing from “erótica disidente a una [erótica] decadente, que se corresponde con el cambio de un espíritu utópico a uno ‘distópico’” (Legido-Quigley 16). For this critic, the latter group represents a shift because, “el status quo deja de ponerse en tela de juicio, el valor contestatario del erotismo se difumina y el radicalismo pierde su valor subversivo” (17). She argues that authors such as Ana Rosetti, Consuelo García, and María Jaén invert the conventions of erotic fiction in order to subvert or ridicule popular attitudes toward morality. Moreover, she includes Mercedes Abad, Almudena Grandes, and Rossetti as writers whose work borders on the concept of “Thanatism,” which is a “poética erótica antivitalista y deshumanizada, de tonos decadentes, donde lo habitual es la violencia y la enajenación” (18). Her study highlights
the similarities and differences among writers who use the erotic sub-genre to project a unique vision of sexuality and human relations not unlike the world of skewed human interaction commonly found in Tomeo’s narrative world.

8 Regardless of the sub-genre, popular romance fiction has attracted negative criticism because of its naïve assumptions and worldviews. Germaine Greer, for example, accuses the genre of enslaving female readers who “cherish the chains of bondage” (176). Teresa L. Ebert writes that “the reality represented in any romance narrative, not just Harlequins, is overwhelmingly patriarchal, and any equality that is allowed is highly restricted and never significantly challenges male hegemony (47). Similarly, Tania Modleski writes that women must go through a process of “self-subversion” and “sacrifice instincts” in order to survive in the romance novel (37).

9 Cawelti, Regis, and many others attribute this to the genre’s primarily female readership.

10 Armando’s twelve fingers are reminiscent of the protagonist of Amado monstruo, the novel Tomeo published before El cazador de leones. In it, a character with six fingers on each hand takes part in an extended dialogue with a future employer at a bank. El cazador de leones suggests that Armando may be the same character from Amado monstruo, but Tomeo never confirms our suspicions. In any case, the reference is a clear example of what Acín and others call “interdiscursivity,” or the game of references that Tomeo creates within his narrative world. I contend here that parody is equally important in the analysis of the novel.

11 The shameless comment about Ramón’s writing clearly represents a satirical attack on the contemporary Spanish publishing industry, which has been often criticized
for valuing marketability over literary quality. Further studies can locate this same critical viewpoint throughout the novel, but the focus of this investigation will remain on parody.
Conclusions

My dissertation on Javier Tomeo has proposed a heretofore unexplored theoretical model for understanding his narrative fiction. My study proposes that the concept of parody illuminates crucial structural and thematic components of six of the author’s novels. These include: *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier*, *Preparativos de viaje*, *La noche del lobo*, *Constructores de monstruos*, *El cazador de leones*, and *Los amantes de silicona*. My understanding of parody is informed by the leading theorists of the concept: Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson, Margaret A. Rose, Simon Dentith, Carlos Pueo, and Seymour Benjamin Chatman. While each critic differs with respect to his or her understanding of parody’s place in postmodernism, consensus exists regarding the basic textual operations of parody. First, parodies incorporate the conventions of a textual antecedent into their original narrative structures. From there, a parody reconfigures the antecedent in order to create ironic distance from the text or texts to which it refers. The ironic incorporation and reconfiguration of a target text creates parody, and it subverts or undermines the worldview or ideology of the targeted text. As I have argued, Tomeo’s fiction parodies three major genres of popular literature and film that include crime fiction, horror narratives, and romance fiction. Tomeo’s use of parody evinces his interest in engaging the world of popular culture, and it also serves to project his alternative vision of the human condition. Rather than writing reaffirming narratives that proclaim the prevalence of reason, normality, and love, Tomeo pens alternative worlds that produce a contemporary reality defined by absurdity, abnormality, and loneliness.

One of my first conclusions is that parody serves to accurately describe the structural framework of Tomeo’s fiction. Each of the texts I study borrows from the
primary conventions of genres and sub-genres of crime fiction, horror films, and romance novels in order to organize the narrative development in a way that is legible for readers. The incorporation of conventions from popular fiction allows Tomeo’s narrative to reproduce literary formulas that have existed for centuries, but the author maintains ironic distance from these forms in order to undermine the worldviews and ideologies of crime fiction, horror narratives, and romance novels. This observation represents a contribution to scholarship on Tomeo because it adds to critical discussions about the author’s narrative schemas. Ramón Acín, José María Pozuelo Yvancos, and José Ignacio González Hurtado have described Tomeo’s “early novels,” which were mostly published between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, using the concept of “interdiscursivity.” The term allows these critics to characterize Tomeo’s first works of fiction as an isolated collection of texts that treat similar topics and constantly reference one another. My analysis departs from the theory of “interdiscursivity” because it signals the affiliation that Tomeo’s novels share with narrative works beyond the author’s opus. Moreover, my readings departs from the author’s own observations about his novelistic works, as he often admitted in interviews that his novels lacked any type of coherent form. My analyses suggest that the author frequently structures his prose with the conventions of popular culture.

My studies of Preparativos de viaje, El discutido testamento de Gastón Puyparlier, and El cazador de leones uncover the consistent use of parody in Tomeo’s early works, and my thesis also suggests that the author intensifies his use of parody at the end of his career. The other novels I study represent three of Tomeo’s final four novels: La noche del lobo (2006), Los amantes de silicona (2008), and Constructores de monstruos (2013). The fourth novel, which is not included in this study, is Pecados griegos. It admittedly does not fit
within the scope of my current study, but it does parody the characters and conventions of Greek mythology. The predominance of parody at the end of Tomeo’s career suggests a gradual movement in his writing away from interdiscursivity and toward parody, which may represent a final phase of the author’s career.

As I have shown throughout my investigation, Tomeo repeatedly structures his novels around the parody of at least four major conventions in three genres and six sub-genres of popular literature and film. The first is an introductory convention that sets the stage for a story about a detective, a monster, or a love story between a heroine and a hero. In the case of *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* and *Preparativos de viaje*, for example, the author commences the narrative action with a humorous collision between form and content that undermines the rational language, overt dramatism, and seriousness of classic detective novels and spy fiction. Similarly, Tomeo’s horror parodies, *La noche del lobo* and *Constructores de monstruos*, open with a variety of clichés from the setting of a werewolf or Frankenstein narrative, but the spooky ambiances invite readers to laugh at the odd occurrences that take place on the night of a full moon and within the confines of a derelict castle. Finally, my chapter on romance fiction details how Tomeo begins *El cazador de leones* and *Los amantes de silicona* by parodying the conventional meeting between the heroine and the hero. The difference between what is supposed to happen and what actually takes place inverts the narrative reality that readers expect and sends the storyline towards the perils of loneliness.

After parodying an introductory convention, Tomeo ironically reconfigures a recognizable character type like a detective, a spy, a lycanthrope, a mad scientist, or a romantic heroine and hero. His development of oddball characters has been well
documented by critics, and it may represent the writer’s most outstanding contribution to contemporary Spanish literature. My study of Tomeo’s characters is unique, however, because it reveals how the author’s outsiders, freaks, nerds, and other “weirdos” are often modeled after archetypal figures from popular culture. Tomeo creates parody by equipping these otherwise recognizable characters with pathological tendencies and physical abnormalities that do not correspond to the brilliance, terror, and beauty of traditional characters from popular fiction. The detective in *El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier* and the spy in *Preparativos de viaje* use reason in order to make sense of the reality in front of them, but they ultimately fail because they are delusional or because they are unable to comprehend the mystery or enigma presented to them. The protagonist of *La noche del lobo*, a lycanthrope, is not a real wolf man but a social outsider who has spent too many hours on the Internet reading about mysterious creatures. The two mad scientists in *Constructores de monstruos* also fail to possess the superior mental abilities associated with their profession, and they are described as caricatures with abnormally sized heads and bodies. Finally, the hero of *El cazador de leones* is incapable of seduction, and it is the sex dolls of *Amantes de silicona*, rather than the human characters, that are capable of a profound sexual relationship.

It is worth noting that this observation about Tomeo’s characters dialogues with the author’s own comments about his writing. In the prologue to *Constructores de monstruos* the author writes:

> Hace ya bastante tiempo que, antes de escribir mis historias, esbozo el escenario previo por el que habrán de moverse mis criaturas de ficción (...) puedo conocer antes el espacio ideal que servirá de marco general a mi
Tomeo’s reflections emphasize the importance of caricature within his narrative opus, and they seem to support my ideas about the way the author constructs his characters. In order to create any type of “caricature,” written or drawn, an author must take a recognizable figure or design and distort it in some way. It seems that some of Tomeo’s favorite scenes and characters are borrowed from the world of popular culture, but as we have seen throughout my dissertation, it is not the figure or design itself but the comical manipulation of these forms that produces the author’s unique artistic style.

Finally, it is crucial to point out the “quixotic” qualities that many of Tomeo’s characters possess. Tomeo often features a character who is obsessed with a specific genre or sub-genre of popular literature or film. In Preparativos de viaje the protagonist never admits to having read a spy novel, but he narrates the story and adopts the identity and tone of a secret agent from the espionage sub-genre of crime fiction. In La noche del lobo, Macario spends his days reading about werewolves and other fantastic creatures on his computer. El cazador de leones features a protagonist who is well versed in popular romance fiction, and Los amantes de silicona also presents a character who writes erotic romance fiction. The presence of quixotic characters extends the author’s criticism of popular fiction because it allows Tomeo to undermine the worldviews of popular culture, and it allows him to humorously dramatize actual readers, writers, and viewers of popular fiction and film. The humorous difference between the fictional realities of the protagonists and “actual reality” (namely that of the reader) produces another layer of parody, as it
establishes the characters as “freaks,” “nerds,” and “oddballs” who, like “Star Trek Trekkies,” find their identity by re-enacting the codes of popular culture.

After parodying an iconic character, Tomeo’s novels then target a convention that traditionally adds tension to the story. His crime parodies use the “parade of witnesses,” and the “hunted man,” but these conventions always lead to frustration because they do not produce any clear revelation about the mystery or enigma presented at the beginning. Similarly, La noche del lobo and Constructores de monstros parody “the transformation” and “the construction of the monster,” respectively. Tomeo employs both conventions in order to the anticipation and anxiety that are common to the two horror sub-genres, but Macario’s inability to transform into a wolf and the mad scientists’ struggles to create a monster produce a stream of unsatisfied expectations for the characters and the reader. Finally, the parody of the “declaration of love” in sentimental romances and “sex” in erotic romances defeats the optimistic worldviews of both romance sub-genres.

These conventions finally lead to the parody of the “happy ending” that appears in popular genres of fiction and film. Because the detective or spy is unable to solve the mystery, the monster is never defeated, and the lovers never unite, Tomeo’s fiction always ends with disappointment, sadness, and tragedy. The unsatisfactory conclusion in each of the six novels clearly exemplifies the author’s interest in frustrating the reaffirming visions of social reality found in popular culture, and it also allows Tomeo to project his own skeptical vision of the contemporary human condition. While each of the six novels I investigate feature topics like absurdity, monstrosity, and loneliness, the author privileges one of these topics over the others in each novel. The frustrations posed by the absurd represent the defining elements of El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier and
Preparativos de viaje; abnormality and monstrosity serve as the predominant thematic components of La noche del lobo and Constructores de monstruos; and the problematic depiction of love and sex define El cazador de leones and Los amantes de silicona. I do not believe that any coherent chronological pattern exists with regard to Tomeo’s selection of these genres, as it seems that he picked his parodic targets at random over the course of his fifty-year career. However, it is my belief that the author drew from these genres in order to express specific misgivings he had toward daily life both inside and outside of Spanish borders.

With this conception of parody in mind, I propose that Tomeo’s career has three phases. The first started in the 1950s when he worked as a writer and editor for the Bruguera Publishing House, one of Spain’s most important purveyors of popular fiction and comics. After this initial moment in his career, he reinvented himself as a novelist with greater ambitions who wrote fiction with high literary merit, such as El unicornio, El cazador, and Los enemigos. It is during this second phase that he began penning the interconnected and “interdiscursive” narrative universe that blossoms throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. His production slows down toward the end of the 90s, and he begins publishing fewer novels at the turn of the century. The novels published from 2000 to 2013 do not rely as heavily on “interdiscursivity,” and he instead intensifies his use of parody. However, it would be problematic to assume that parody only appears during the final years of his career. Tomeo used parody to construct some of his most-well known novels from the late 1970s to the early 90s (and among these are El discutido testamento de Gastón de Puyparlier, Preparativos de viaje, and El cazador de leones), but one of my major conclusions is that his use of parody intensifies in the final years of his career as a novelist.
This “intensification” has two possible explanations. The first is that Tomeo may have looked to popular culture during his final years in the same way that satirists look to daily news headlines for fresh material. Tomeo repeatedly admitted to being a “lector parco,” and it is therefore not difficult to believe that he might turn to television, film, and popular fiction to inspire his imagination, especially as he moved into his fifth decade of literary production. The second, I believe, may be rooted in the growing antagonism that Tomeo felt toward other generations of writers in Spain and towards the Spanish literary market as a whole. Interviews with Tomeo published late in his life are remarkably different from those published during the 80s and 90s. The title of a particularly bitter interview in 2012 with El País, “Solo se puede escribir desde la mala leche,” is a collection of the author’s laments about the state of the Spanish publishing industry and the equally tragic state of the human condition. His increased anxiety about the changing world around him is perhaps not uncommon for a writer who suffered bad health and was repeatedly snubbed by the country’s major literary awards. I would like to note, however, that Tomeo was a gentle, friendly, and warm man when I met him only a month before his death in the Sagrat Cor hospital in Barcelona. My research on Tomeo also brought me in contact with several of his closest friends, critics, and professional colleagues. I was always delighted to hear of their fondness for Tomeo both as a writer and a person.

There are, however, limitations to my investigation of parody in Tomeo’s novelistic discourse. First, Tomeo was a prolific author who not only wrote novels but also short fiction, micro-fiction, theater, and several works that elude literary classification. I do not explore the other genres of literature that Tomeo wrote, as my primary interest is in his novelistic prose. Nevertheless, I believe my theory can be extended to several of his short
story collections. Secondly, my investigation does not treat Tomeo’s most famous novel, *Amado monstruo*. This text possesses several scenes that parody both horror narratives and romance novels, but the parody seems to result from the incompatible blend of these genres. This does not disprove my theory, but it does seem to point to another parodic technique in Tomeo’s fiction. The exclusion of *El crimen del cine Oriente* offers a similar issue. The title of the novel suggests that it incorporates the conventions of a crime fiction novel, but I believe the parody stems once again from the incompatibility between the love story, the murder, and the repeated comparisons between Juan, the male protagonist, and the Wolf Man. Thirdly, I adopt an understanding of popular literature and culture that is not always consistent with many recent critical approaches found in the fields of cultural studies and genre studies. In doing so, it is not my intention to reinforce an exclusionary and possibly “elitist” vision of “high” literature over “popular” literature. Throughout my research I read and reflected on several works of “popular literature” that went beyond some of restrictive models I propose in my analyses. Finally, my study has focused on the most recurring genres that Tomeo parodies, but there may be others. I believe the conventions of science fiction are key to *Los amantes de silicona* and *La ciudad de las palomas*. Also, I believe the adventure novel becomes an object of parody in *La patria de las hormigas* and possibly other novels in Tomeo’s œuvre.

I will conclude with a few ideas about Tomeo and his place among contemporary Spanish writers. After finishing his career with Bruguera, Tomeo sought to establish himself as a writer of high literary merit and produced novels of great aesthetic and linguistic quality. His fiction, however, is not for the masses. The author never followed the trends of the Spanish literary market because he never wrote social realism, and he never
wrote for mass readerships in the decades following the death of Franco. Instead, Tomeo employed anti-mimetic forms of narration like parody that engage a discriminating readership who enjoys identifying both the conventions of popular literature and the ways they can be manipulated to achieve unique literary ends. His death in 2013 represents the end of his career as a novelist, but it does not mean the end of criticism on the writer. I hope that this investigation will provoke new dialogues on Tomeo’s work and that it will inspire more critical inquiries regarding the texts of a truly remarkable writer.
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