

REPETITIVE BODIES IN THE WORKS OF JUAN JOSÉ MILLÁS: 1990 – 2007

by

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Repetitive Bodies in the Works of Juan José Millás: 1990 – 2007

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In my dissertation, I examine four novels and one collection of short fiction published between 1990 and 2007 by contemporary Spanish author, Juan José Millás, including *La soledad era esto* (1990), *El orden alfabético* (1998), *Dos mujeres en Praga* (2002), *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* (2003), *Laura y Julio* (2006), and *El mundo* (2007). I offer a theoretical model of bodies with which we may be better able to understand the nature of Millás's fictional *oeuvre*. Specifically, I examine metaphors of physical bodies and texts as bodies as the principle ways in which Millasian characters repeatedly meditate on subjectivity.

My dissertation aims to address the following questions: How and when do physical and textual bodies intersect in Millás's fictional narratives? How and why do his characters habitually modify these two types of bodies? And, what are the implications of repetitive bodies in his works? Millasian characters are isolated and lonely, and they repeatedly revert to the modification of their physical and textual bodies to attempt to make sense of their selves. The delineation of "bodies," in both senses, affirms his characters' experiences as subjective, individual, and claustrophobic, and more importantly, it highlights embodied politics of contemporary masculinity. As characters continuously search for points of reference for their subjectivities, they are repeatedly unable to escape the underlying hegemonic norms of masculinity and their narcissistic approach towards self frequently ostracizes characters and lodges them in a seemingly endless cycle of repetition.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1.....	32
CHAPTER 2.....	78
CHAPTER 3.....	123
CONCLUSION.....	161
NOTES.....	168
WORKS CITED.....	184

INTRODUCTION

Through the ages, the human body has been battered and tortured, isolated and malnourished, tattooed and scarred, and loved and revered. We cannot get away from our physical bodies. Bryan Turner hits the mark when he writes in his 1984 study *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* that “[t]he body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing—a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity” (8). We are our physical bodies, yet it is a difficult task to pinpoint what that truly means. In a 2004 interview, contemporary Spanish author Juan José Millás tells us that “el cuerpo es una medida de todo” (Beilin 68). His comment emphasizes the perceptive nature of our physical bodies, which is inherently subjective and vulnerable. Even though our physical bodies are continuously incomplete, they are one of our most reliable modes of awareness.

The human body in and through literature is also a precarious and perpetually present process that many authors have tried to capture in their texts. Corresponding to our physical bodies, our system of language constitutes one of the ways through which we understand experiences and our selves, and yet language exposes epistemological unsteadiness. Not only do we employ our physical bodies as one of our foremost mechanisms for awareness, but when we attempt to create written texts, language is the filter with which we negotiate perception onto the page. In a 1998 interview with Pilar Cabañas, Millás states that

la literatura consiste . . . con herramientas que no le pertenecen porque el lenguaje es muy artificial y nunca llegas a controlarlo. Tienes que estar pactando con él

porque, seguramente, el texto literario es el resultado de la tensión entre lo que quieres decir tú y lo que quiere decir el lenguaje, entre lo que quieres decir y lo que eres capaz de decir, entre la tradición en la que te has incluido y la subjetividad que tú eres capaz de aportar a esa tradición. Y, en definitiva, son siempre materiales muy gaseosos todos. (104)

Language strives to assign meaning to what we perceive. However, the act of conveying what is perceived exposes the inadequacies of our linguistic system. The representation of both physical and textual bodies in literature, then, uncovers a double uncertainty. First, language is concurrently a reliable and an unpredictable way to transmit experience, even though we repeatedly use it to attempt to record meaning, and even though it can never fully reveal that which we wish it to express. Second, physical bodies and textual bodies are processes in continuous negotiation with language and with those who write and read. Literature is a discipline that is supported by the subjective framework of language. We repeatedly have experiences in the world, but the ways in which we perceive and attempt to record our experiences, whether via our physical or textual bodies, designate our selves as deeply subjective.

In this dissertation, my goal is to address a series of questions. How and when do physical and textual bodies intersect in Millás's fictional narratives? How and why do his characters habitually modify these two types of bodies? And, what are the implications of repetitive bodies in his works? In order to answer these questions I analyze physical and textual bodies in six of Millás's fictional works: *La soledad era esto* (1990), *El orden alfabético* (1998), *Dos mujeres en Praga* (2002), *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* (2003), *Laura y Julio* (2006), and *El mundo* (2007). In these fictional narratives, characters are isolated and lonely, and they

repeatedly revert to their physical and textual bodies to attempt to make sense of their subjectivities. I am specifically interested in how physical and textual bodies manifest in Millás's texts; how they negotiate with one another and with other people; and how they are affected and affect the places and space that they inhabit. Ultimately, the delineation of "bodies," in both senses, affirms his characters' experiences as subjective, individual, and self-reflective. This narcissistic approach attempts to understand the world for one's self and by one's self, frequently ostracizing his characters and lodging them in a seemingly endless cycle of repetition.

In my study, I employ the term "textual body" to highlight the subjective condition of written texts as incomplete and in continuous process. Moreover, I invert the term, which historically has referred to the physical body as a text, to conceive of the text as a figurative physical body.¹ I take it as a given notion that physical bodies are texts, and I contend that texts may also express corporeal qualities. In "Discursive Bodies, Embodied Text" Rita Charon and Maura Spiegel also understand the analogous relationship between text and body and body and text when they write:

One can travel in either direction between body and text. Bodies can speak, as long as we develop the interpretive fluency to comprehend what they say.

Beyond, of course, the fluttering of the vocal cords and the borborygmi of the intestines, bodies weave plot, develop character, and offer metaphor for complex and otherwise unutterable thoughts. Texts can be seen as organic creatures, equipped with organ systems, genetic codes, digestive tracts, and the like. Texts hunger, appease, engulf, inhale, and exhale, and they do all these things like good

biological mortals in order to reproduce themselves, to influence offspring, to compete for niches, and to forage for nourishment. (133)

It may be argued that physical bodies negotiate with textual signification and textual bodies express and assume corporeal drives. Both kinds of bodies are perceptive and receptive, and they repeatedly teeter-totter between construction and destruction, as I seek to show in my dissertation.

Therefore, my conceptualization of “textual body” incorporates several meanings. First, the term highlights the intimacy in the fictional narratives that I analyze in the forthcoming chapters. Like the physical body, then, textual bodies are intertwined with the concept of self. My sense is that a textual body is constructed from an individual subjectivity; the narrative architecture of a textual body frames the fictionalized protagonist who, often from a first-person point of view, tells (or writes) the story. When first-person narration is absent, an extradiegetic narrator relates the story from his third-person intimate point of view, yet the focalization always tends to firmly rest with one character. In *Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses*, Franz Stanzel coins the term “figural novel,” as opposed to the first-person authorial novel, as one in which “the reader views the fictional world in the mirror of the figural medium’s consciousness. The rendering of consciousness thus becomes the main concern of this novel form” (150). He goes on to describe the figural novel’s third-person narration as a

unification [that] takes place between objectivity and subjectivity of expression, between distanced broad survey of the material and dramatic experience of it. This is made possible by the peculiar position which the narrated monologue holds between direct discourse and report or indirect discourse. In narrated

monologue, as in indirect discourse and in the report, the bearer of consciousness or speaker is named in the third person. Despite this third-person reference, however, in narrated monologue the individual traits in the speech or thought of a figure are not fully effaced, as is generally the case in the indirect presentation of speech. (152)

The point of view of a singular “I” gives structure to experience, the “I” owns that particular experience in the act of written composition in some of Millás’s narratives, and when a third-person narrator tells the story, the personal experience of the self remains strong since the focalization of the narrator is usually pinned tightly to one character. Experiences, and the recounting of experiences, for Millasian characters are strictly personalized, regardless of whether they are told from a first-person point of view or in third-person narration.

My conceptualization of “textual body” also includes writing as self-reflection, it incorporates metafictional techniques, and it also refers the intercalated stories, or what I denote as microtexts and the writing-as-a-process that many Millasian characters undertake. Textual bodies are comprised of parts, or distinct metatextual levels, and they continuously engage with the act of reading and writing, two processes that flow towards products but that never arrive at finality. A textual body is like a physical body in the sense that it is a process that is informed by and from many influences.

“Textual body” also includes various rhetorical devices and the narrative strategies that pop in and out of Millás’s works, attracting readers to their alterations. The doubling of characters, narrators, and authors, and correspondingly, the repetitions and refractions that occur on the physical bodies of the characters and in the texts that they read and write create metafictional texts that are in constant movement. Inspired by Roland Barthes’s *The Pleasure of*

the Text, my sense of “textual body” seeks to highlight the complexities of the construction of texts. Barthes equates the text to the physical body when he contends:

Apparently Arab scholars, when speaking of the text, use this admirable expression: *the certain body*. What body? We have several of them; the body of anatomists and psychologists, the one science sees or discusses: this is the text of grammarians, critics, commentators, philologists (the pheno-text). But we also have a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body: it is another contour, another nomination. . . . Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body.
(16-17)

For Barthes, texts, like human bodies, seduce readers, vacillating between pleasure and bliss. He confirms that the text is body, an analogy that repeatedly dismantles and reconciles how we negotiate in the world and with our selves.

Yaw Agawu-Kakraba highlights the volatility of Millás’s narratives when he writes that the latter’s texts are “highly slippery, notoriously unreliable, and almost impossible to contain” (“Dramatization” 13). Ultimately, Millás’s textual bodies are open to interpretation, and they are constantly evolving and interacting with the physical bodies of characters. The acts of writing and reading and the awareness of our physical bodies are ongoing processes that reflect and are reflected in our concepts of self, yet all are imperfect. As ways in which Millás’s characters attempt to define their subjectivities, physical bodies and texts typically end up pushing the characters further from being able to pinpoint their selves. These two types of bodies are modes of perception through which characters negotiate with their selves, with others, and in the world that surrounds them.

Experiencing is a conscious and intentional act for Millásian characters. They deliberately recognize and/or engage their bodies at certain points of interacting with their selves, with others, with objects, in particular places by taking drugs, becoming physically ill, or daydreaming, and by writing and reading texts or striving to write and read texts. His characters live through experiences in and with their physical and textual bodies, and they also often revisit past experiences later in life by writing and/or reading about them. In Millás's works, these two types of bodies require one another to exist and often there exists tension between them.

The anti-Cartesian notion of self, which blurs the line between the mind and the physical body, also opens up the possibility of understanding "bodies" in other ways, such as the textual body. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us that "it is one and the same thing for us to perceive our body and to perceive our situation in a certain physical and human setting, for our body is nothing but that very situation in so far as it is realized and actualized" (340). His statement holds true for both physical and textual bodies. Corporeal modifications and the construction of written texts are two of our most accessible and immediate modes of perception. However, they rarely lead Millás's characters to self-awareness. His characters modify their physical bodies in various ways, including doubling, halving, becoming ill, taking drugs, and/or daydreaming, and they attempt to write what and how they perceive in texts, thus creating textual bodies. Corporeal modification spills over into textual bodies when characters actively write, read, and/or attempt to carry out both.

In a discussion about physical bodies in literature it is difficult to avoid the question of gender, but the limits of my current study prohibit an extensive examination of how Millás inflects gender in his characters. Simply put, Millás tends to normalize gender in his narratives. He pushes gendered bodies either to the background, or he relies on often exaggerated

stereotypes of masculinity in order to focus on the fragmented self as a universal. The question of “bodies,” physical and textual, as well as male and female, are the approaches by which Millásian characters try to distinguish their subjectivities and the means with which they fail to register their sense of their selves. Whether male or female (although it is worth noting that the majority of his main characters are male), his characters struggle to formulate their subjectivities, and they depend on their supposedly universal physical and textual bodies to help them attempt to make some sense of who they are.

Throughout time many authors have contemplated physical and textual bodies in literature. In order to better understand how bodies engage with one another within literary texts, let us take a brief and necessarily selective look at key moments that represent the treatment of human and textual bodies during specific literary movements and eras. It is not the purpose here to offer an exhaustive exposition of bodies in literature, but rather to set forth a trajectory of important bodies, with an emphasis on Spanish Peninsular fictional narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with which we might better understand the physical and textual bodies that Millás constructs in his fictional narratives. Even though the upcoming examples tend to focus on Spanish texts, it is undeniable that bodies as modes of perception are universal phenomena. The study of physical bodies as text and texts as bodies expands through both Western and Eastern literatures and into a wide range of other disciplinary fields.

In a discussion of the human body, Peter Brooks tells us in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* that “[g]etting the body into writing is a primary concern of literature throughout the ages. And conversely, getting writing onto the body is a sign of the attempt to make the material body into a signifying body” (1). It is this analogy—the human body as text and the text as body—that makes the study of bodies in written narratives so intriguing. Brooks

highlights some of the most important literary works in which the human body stands at the forefront in his introductory chapter, titled “Narrative and the Body.” He reminds us, for example, of the key role of the human body in the Christian story of the incarnation, “of the word made flesh” (4), which occurs again and again every time that Holy Communion is taken:

The insistence on the bodiliness of Christ is an endless source of narrative within the Christian tradition, since the adventure of the flesh on the way to the redemption of mankind provides a series of emblematic moments where spiritual significances are embodied. From the early Middle Ages through the Renaissance, writers in the West necessarily see sign and meaning in terms of embodiment and spirit. (4)

Brooks also mentions the role of the body in the Greek tragedies. He writes, “[T]he moment of recognition comes, as it often does in Greek tragedies, through a mark on the body itself” (3). Citing Homer’s renowned epic poem, he recalls that Ulysses is first recognized by a scar on his leg when he returns to Ithaca in disguise (2).² Brooks comments more generally that

[i]t is as if identity and its recognition depended on the body having been marked with a special sign, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic signifier. The sign imprints the body, making it part of the signifying process. Signing or marking on the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative—a body entered into writing. (3)

Marking on the physical body forces it to become a linguistic sign in the aforementioned texts, yet the body also receives and expresses meaning in other ways.

The human body functions as an allegory of Christian morals in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (early 1300s) and Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353). In works of early modern Spanish fiction, such as *El libro de buen amor* (C.1300) by Juan Ruiz, the Archpriest of Hita, and *La Celestina* (1499) by Fernando de Rojas, for example, the body, and especially the female body, is the unattainable object of desire. In *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (C.1554), the poor protagonist's body is put through the ringer as his many masters torture him in different ways.³ In the following passage Lazarillo remembers one scene in particular: "Fue tal el golpecillo, que me desatinó y sacó de sentido y el jarrazo tan grande, que los pedazos dél se me metieron por la cara, rompiéndomela por muchas partes, y me quebró los dientes, sin los cuales hasta hoy día me quedé" (19). Ultimately, what is left at the end is a character whose concept of subjectivity has been literally beaten out of his physical body.

Furthermore, the notion of the textual body is multi-faceted in *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The anonymous author constructs a complex text situated in realism, and the narrative voice in the prologue emphasizes the metatextual levels of the novella. Edward H. Friedman writes that "the 'authorial' contract with the reader by the narrator/protagonist blurs the distinction between the historical author and his alter ego, and thus between the real text and its fictional pretext" ("From the Inside Out" 14). The distorted textual body of *Lazarillo de Tormes* delimits the frame for the violent corporeal alterations that take place on and in the physical body of the protagonist, and the textual body breaks free from the traditional, singular mode of narration to encompass several levels of metatext.

In *Beyond the Metafictional Mode: Directions in the Modern Spanish Novel*, Robert C. Spires notes that metafictional techniques exist in early novels, like *Lazarillo de Tormes*, but he contends that by the early 1980s

the emphasis has shifted from unmasking the conventions to foregrounding the process of creating fiction; rather than a narrator, reader, or character violating another's boundaries, there is a violation of the traditional distinctions among the act of narrating, the act of reading, and the narrated product. The focus, therefore, is no longer directed exclusively or even primarily to the world of the story, but rather to the process of creating the story, either through the act of writing or through the act of reading. . . . No longer does the novel merely tend to point back at itself; now it points primarily at itself. (16)

In the above passage, Spires theorizes that a violation of traditional narrative boundaries, including the act of narrating, the act of reading, and the textual product, is evident in many contemporary Spanish novels. Many of Millás's narratives go beyond the metafictional mode, as the title of Spires's book suggests, by underscoring writing and reading as ways through which his characters might engage in self-reflection. The potential roadblock to "self-discovery," however, is constructed through the same acts of writing and reading.

During the literary Spanish Renaissance, both human and textual bodies are frequently marginalized. *El libro de su vida* (1562) and *Las moradas* (1577), by Saint Teresa of Ávila, present a unique positioning of the female body in the male-dominated, sixteenth-century Catholic church.⁴ The mystic discourse found in her autobiography, *El libro de su vida*, illustrates the ever constant, yet fleeting nature of textual and physical bodies. What Michel de Certeau refers to as the "mystic fable," the desire to obtain that which is unattainable, not only speaks to the desire of Mystics such as Teresa of Ávila to be with God, to make present the perpetually absent, but it also highlights the post-Structuralist problem of discourse and ontology. Our system of language, just like the human body, is inherently insufficient; neither

can ever truly express that which we wish to convey.⁵ In both works by Saint Teresa, she is locked within this paradox. Although monastery walls surround her, it is her physical body that is her literal prison, and it prevents her from attaining her object of desire. Her frequent physical illnesses, such as bouts of nausea and delusions, materialize this limitation of the human body. Saint Teresa's ill physical body and her manipulation of written textual bodies may foreground how Millás deals with bodies in his works. As I discuss in the upcoming chapters, bodies, in both senses, are the modes by which many Millasian characters interact with their selves and in their worlds. Yet bodies also frequently imprison them.

Miguel de Cervantes may just be the master of molding physical bodies in texts and setting up texts as embodied.⁶ His *Novelas ejemplares* (written between 1590 and 1612) not only leaves readers pondering the supposed exemplarity of the texts but also the representations of physical and textual bodies. He constructs an embodied text in the prologue when he tells us that the *novelas* “no tienen pies, ni cabeza, ni entrañas, ni cosa que les parezca” (*Novelas* 63), and he avers that he would rather cut his hand off before challenging someone's moral values. Central to this Cervantine text is the correlation and confusion of physical and textual bodies. Furthermore, in his ingenious collection modes of perception are untrustworthy, which he develops in physical and textual bodies within the text.⁷

Like other works of the Spanish Renaissance, and markedly influenced by Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares*, María de Zayas y Sotomayor experiments with both physical and textual bodies in her *Desengaños amorosos* (1647). In the ten narrations told during a party for Lisis who is slated to marry Diego, there are depictions of explicit violent acts against female bodies, and there are instances in which women inflict violence upon the bodies of their male

counterparts. In one of the narrations, the following deterioration of the physical female body is described:

[E]l color, de la color de la muerte; tan flaca y consumida, que se le señalaban los huesos, como si el pellejo que estaba encima fuera un delgado cendal; desde los ojos hasta la barba, dos surcos cavados de las lágrimas, que se le escondían en ellos un bramante hueso; los vestidos hechos cenizas, que se le veían las más partes de su cuerpo; descalza de pie y pierna, que de los excrementos de su cuerpo, como no tenía dónde echarlos, no sólo se habían consumido, mas la propia carne comida hasta los muslos de llagas y gusanos, de que estaba lleno el hediondo lugar. (303)

De Zayas includes deplorable details of a violently battered and neglected physical body in the above passage. Serving a pedagogic purpose, perhaps the aforementioned macabre corporeal description functions to remind readers of the universality of the physical body: precisely because of its materiality, in every body there exists the potential for physical and possibly violent degradation. It is not a stretch to contend that human bodies in Millás's narratives, although never as violent or disfigured as the bodies of de Zayas's characters, are universal conceptualizations.⁸

The expansive nineteenth century brings about many distinct treatments of the physical and textual body in Peninsular literature. Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's romantic legends, exemplified by "El monte de las ánimas" (1861) and "Los ojos verdes" (1861), often emphasize fantastic and supernatural bodies. In both stories, the physical body, positioned within a verisimilar environment, is a supernatural object of seduction. Russell P. Sebold comments that in Bécquer's stories "se trata de un elemento sobrenatural que irrumpe con tanta fuerza en

nuestro mundo de experiencia cotidiana, que casi somos llevados a aceptarlo como posible” (20). The alteration of the physical body is one way in which Bécquer attempts to transcend traditional notions of reality and fiction (or fantasy). Furthermore, led by his own sensorial perception and guided by modernist impressionism, Bécquer links the act of writing and corporeal awareness. His physical body, like the physical bodies of many Millásian characters, is affected by writing and consequently affects writing, as Bécquer composes written texts from somewhere other than traditionally defined reality. The nineteenth-century author describes the act of writing as an experience of non-reality in the following assertion:

Guardo, sí, en mi cerebro escritas, como en un libro misterioso, las impresiones que han dejado en él su huella al pasar; estas ligeras y ardientes hijas de la sensación duermen allí agrupadas en el fondo de mi memoria hasta el instante en que, puro, tranquilo, sereno y revestido, por decirlo así, de un poder supernatural, mi espíritu las evoca, y cruzan otra vez a mis ojos como en una visión luminosa y magnífica. (*Obras* 622-33)

Millás also tends to reflect upon the acts of writing on the part of his characters as a way to examine the relationship between the physical and textual body. He suggests that many of his characters write or are on the verge of writing as “una necesidad de transferir el cuerpo de la realidad al cuello de la literatura, de sustituirlo, de profundizar en esa zona fronteriza” (Cabañas 106).

Whether romantic, realist, or naturalist, it is common that the physical body is situated within a realistic setting in nineteenth-century novels.⁹ The physical body of Ana Ozores in *La Regenta* (1883-85), by Leopoldo Alas, echoes the bouts of illness that Teresa of Ávila describes in her narratives. Jo Labanyi, in *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*,

suggests that Ana's physical body represents the control of male hegemony (215).¹⁰ Physical bodies also express and embed meaning in Benito Pérez Galdós's *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-87). In *La novela moderna en España (1885-1902): Los albores de la modernidad*, Germán Gullón writes that in the novel Galdós

plantea una situación novelesca cuya consistencia y desarrollo depende del grado de autoconsciencia (sinceridad) con que los seres creados se enfrentan al dilema novelesco. Y ahí reside lo moderno de la obra en cómo los hechos de consciencia acaban por imponerse a los físicos, el personaje vive según se conozca más o menos a sí mismo. (62)

Although Millás's novels take place within a realist depiction of contemporary Spain, his characters never fully understand their physical bodies, their texts, and much less their selves. Their bodies, in both senses, are processes in continuous production.

Even though the so-called Generation of 1898 is more preoccupied with existential questions of subjectivity than with examining the materiality of the human body, the physical bodies of several characters and the textual bodies that they attempt to construct end up reflecting such concerns, and these questions lend themselves to an examination of the act of writing and of perception. As an example, the philosophic novels of 1902 present new ways of analyzing Spanish society, the state of the intellectual, and the individual self. The interior struggle of the individual is projected into the space that surrounds them, as well as onto their bodies and the bodies of others, in these novels. As a case in point, after a failed trip to Madrid in search of work as a journalist, Antonio Azorín, the protagonist of José Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad*, returns home. Once his intellectual pursuit fails he loses hope and his physical body

becomes static. Towards the end of the novel both Azorín's physical body and his creation of texts stagnate; he cannot write and he ends up pacing around the study in his home:

Me levanto, doy un par de vueltas por la habitación, como un autómeta; me siento luego; cojo un libro; leo cuatro líneas; lo dejo; tomo la pluma; pienso estúpidamente ante las cuartillas; escribo seis o siete frases; me canso; dejo la pluma; torno a mis reflexiones. . . . ¡Y me dan ganas de llorar, de no ser nada, de disgregarme en la materia, de ser el agua que corre, el viento que pasa, el humo que se pierde en el azul. (156)

The interior crisis of Azorín overwhelms his mental energy and his written text, and Nietzschean nihilism overtakes him. All that remains is his physical body. Gullón suggests that from the protagonist's existential struggle and in his incapability to write emerges "la frontera borrosa entre página, el texto, y el personaje, y como el texto casi se hace experiencia sensible. . . . El autor muestra el movimiento anímico, interior, preservando la presencia de lo humano en el texto" (*La novela moderna* 197). Azorín's first-person account of his physical and mental stasis is echoed in many Millasian characters who attempt to write but are repeatedly unsuccessful.

Likewise, Fernando Ossorio, the protagonist of Pío Baroja's *Camino de perfección*, strives to stimulate his intellectual pursuits by moving his physical body. He journeys to Toledo and does exercises with Max Schulz on the mountaintop; however, he soon returns home disillusioned because he realizes that his physical movement is not matched by his intellectual production. Gullón notes that in the turn-of-the-century modern Spanish novel "[l]os personajes carecen de perfiles esculpidos, pero poseen una especial de aura, de matices de carácter emanados del interior, ausentes de la fisonomía, que difumina el conjunto" (*La novela moderna*

198). Just like Azorín, in the end Ossorio's physical body grows listless and his written texts fail.

In the two aforementioned 1902 novels, the human bodies of the protagonists are useless modes of perception and negotiation with the world, and by the end of the novels their static bodies are all that they have. Getting back into their bodies might also be a positive experience of potential self-awareness for the protagonists. Gullón writes that the protagonists of these novels “alcanzan la felicidad cuando rompen con los sistemas de valores que gobiernan sus vidas, y abandonando la búsqueda intelectual se abren a lo instintivo, al disfrute sensual de lo cotidiano” (*La novela moderna* 132). When they unsuccessfully attempt to understand the self and the world via writing, they are permitted to experience the physical body as a trajectory of positive and negative sensations.¹¹

Writers of the Spanish Avant-garde rework textual and physical bodies. As one example, the protagonist in *El profesor inútil* (1926), written by Benjamín Jarnés, contemplates texts of the female nude body, including Francisco de Goya's *La maja desnuda*, publicity posters of naked women, photographs, and various women's bodies. Erotic desire in the novel, along with the professor's passivity, seems to mask any possibility of self-discovery. Francis Lough rightfully contends that “the protagonist of *El profesor inútil* takes shape not as a character masquerading as a personality, but merely as the source of interpretations of the world around him. In this sense, his novels are more concerned with the activity of perception and contemplation than with representation” (487). Self-awareness for the professor is never complete as he continues to search for his subjectivity in others. Furthermore, the textual body of the actual novel is also in flux: Jarnés publishes the second edition of *El profesor inútil* in 1934 in which he adds an epilogue and a story. J.S. Bernstein notes that

if a short story can be included in a novel, and if the novel can swell in a second edition by an injection of new fictional matter, then we are not dealing with a self-contained, impermeable world. . . . [S]uch a novel was closer to real life, more of a living thing itself, and like a living being, adaptable and capable of growth. (58)

Text and physical bodies overlap in both the content and architecture of the novel, and their vulnerability seems to reinforce the fact that bodies are in constant process.

In a lecture at a 1921 conference in Madrid, Vicente Huidobro emphasizes the indispensable role of language in the Avante-garde. He states that the vanguard poet “ve los lazos sutiles que se tienden las cosas entre sí, oye las voces secretas que se lanzan unas a otras palabras separadas por distancias inconmensurables” (quoted in Soria Olmedo 38). The fact that the young poets of the Generation of 1927 gathered to celebrate the life and work of Luis de Góngora on the 300th anniversary of his death underscores the key roles of the written word and of poetic excess during the Avant-garde period. Vanguardists experiment with reworking and redefining texts; writing becomes a platform for the exploration of the subconscious for the Surrealists and the text becomes a blank canvas for experimentation for the Dadaists. In Spain, with the freedom granted by the Second Republic, authors and artists alike rethink the *modernista* ideal of art for art’s sake, and movements like Futurism and Ultraism, where experimentation with syntax, a focus on the urban, and a suspicion of traditional modes of perception take hold. The textual body engulfs the human body in many Avant-garde works: language itself, as both a process and a product, becomes immediate and disperse.

After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and during the early years of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the human body is often employed as the metaphoric agent of political power. In *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) by Camilo José Cela, pessimism occurs on the physical

body, and it also takes place in the text as Pascual writes his confession. In fact, John R. Rosenberg argues that “el acto de escribir que define el carácter de Pascual es una de las acciones más violentas de su sangrienta carrera” (“La parábola” 41-42). It is no surprise that Pascual’s imprisoned and ill physical body has been analyzed as a symbol of the repression of the Francoist regime. The violent and bloody details that Pascual reveals to his readers help to construct a deformed reality, one in which physical bodies, beginning with the body of his anthropomorphized hunting dog Chispa and culminating with the body of his mother, are tortured and ultimately eroded. In *Under Construction: The Body in Spanish Novels* Elizabeth A. Scarlett suggests that Pascual Duarte “projects blame onto the maternal body that engendered him and frustration onto seductive female bodies that incite him to act the male sexual role. Pascual’s body emerges at odds with all other textual bodies—male, female, and animal” (142). This tension between the tortured human body and the confession as a textual body makes *Pascual Duarte* a relevant example of the inherently complex negotiation between physical bodies and texts.

The act of remembering is also the process of composing a written text for Andrea in *Nada* (1944) by Carmen Laforet. From her exterior position, Andrea reconstructs a written record of a year of her life when she lived in Barcelona with her extended family. The textual body of the novel is divided: from the present Andrea-narrator writes the memories of Andrea-protagonist. Andrea-narrator not only remembers the past, but she also re-experiences it on her physical body. John W. Kronik theorizes that suffocation appears in *Nada* both textually and physically, and he affirms the link between the narrative structure and the corporeal experiences of the protagonist-narrator when he notes that “[e]l efecto asfixiante que esta acumulación de estructuras ejerce en el ser humano en su afán por vivir queda acentuado por un texto que, él

también, está asfixiado por su propia construcción” (200). The enclosed structure of the novel reflects the hermetic space of Barcelona, the more intimate places that Andrea occupies within the city, her physical body, and even the text that she composes from her present position as narrator.

As the national borders of Spain begin to open, and in reaction to the realist novels of the 1950s, Spanish authors in the decade of the 1960s experiment more explicitly with the representation of physical and textual bodies as the sites of the construction and even more with the erosion of meaning. Most scholars define Luis Martín-Santos’s 1962 novel, *Tiempo de silencio*, as a pivotal point in Spanish literary production.¹² The richness of the novel, which simultaneously combines, deconstructs, and redefines literary tendencies not only from the decades of the 40s and 50s, but also since *Don Quijote*, reflects a complex conception of the new Spanish reality. Physical bodies are tortured, violated, and mutilated in the novel, and the actual text of the novel is itself a distortion of traditional literary techniques in that Martín-Santos combines narrative voices, uses many distinct linguistic registers, and creates a story that, although it follows a chronological line, at times it ventures into a stream-of-consciousness narrative voice.

In *Tiempo de silencio*, there is no escaping decaying bodies in every sense. Cancer invades the borders of Spain in the form of lab rats that pass on the deadly disease to the marginalized Muecas family; Pedro takes part in an illegal abortion on Florita’s already dead body; and his fiancée is stabbed and killed by Cartucho. At the end of the novel, Pedro declares that he has no internal organs, both an anticipation to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri refer to as the body-without-organs in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and an

allusion to the martyrdom of St. Lorenzo on the grill, when he insists, “que me des la vuelta que ya estoy tostado por este lado” (286).¹³

The human body in *Tiempo de silencio* can be read symbolically as the social body of Spain. Scarlett offers a Foucauldian reading of the body of the protagonist Pedro, by studying the power structures with which he negotiates and which are negotiated on his body. She attributes Martín-Santos’s keen knowledge of physiology to his medical background, which “sharpen[s] his awareness of the inseparable nature of the mental and the physical” and demolishes the Cartesian dualism of mind and body (157). Scarlett also notes that “his writing inscribes the body more thoroughly than has the writing of any of his male predecessors in Spain” (157). Her statement holds true for both the physical and textual bodies in the novel, as well as for the degenerate collective Spanish body.

Martín-Santos opens the door for other authors to experiment with bodies in new ways. In Juan Goytisolo’s *Reivindicación del Conde don Julián* (1970), there is an explicit search for individual and collective subjectivity via physical and textual bodies, and this search ends up in total destruction, which clearly “toma la forma de una destrucción simbólica total: no basta destruir las instituciones de la España sagrada. . . sino que se exige una autodestrucción del hablante mismo” (Spires, *La novela española* 282-83). All is destroyed in the novel: the textual body, the individual physical body, and the collective social body.

Contemporary treatments of bodies appear in Peninsular literature in the years after the death of Franco. The transgendered body, the homosexual body, the sex-obsessed body, and the drugged body emerge in literature as the transition to democracy in Spain is taking place. During the transition authors are granted the freedom to portray the human body in various ways, many of which were taboo and/or censured during Francoism, and authors tend to “[turn] away

from experimentalism and . . . return to realism and the pleasure of narrating stories” (Amell 14). In contrast to a novel like *Tiempo de silencio*, in which narrative voices overlap and in which prosaic narration suddenly becomes descriptive, many of the novels written in the late 1970s and early 1980s use traditional notions of narrative, such as one clear narrative voice and a chronological storyline. The physical bodies of the characters, however, are beleaguered.

In other words, as writers push the limits of the socially acceptable physical body in the novels of the transition, they often employ more traditional literary techniques and structures to do so. Rather than focusing on a renovation of literary techniques and textual expression, it seems that many of the novels of the late 1970s and the early 1980s are more concerned with a new depiction of marginalized human and social bodies, bodies that were officially oppressed for almost forty years during the dictatorship. Perhaps because our physical bodies are so immediate and intimate, insofar as they are always with us and we all have bodies, some authors during the transitional years employ human bodies as the vehicles of textual expression to emphasize the social and political changes that were occurring in the Spain of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The novels of Esther Tusquets and Eduardo Medicutti, two Spanish authors who published in the early years after the dictatorship, exemplify the literary experimentation with physical bodies. Tusquets’s first and second novels, titled respectively *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (1978) and *El amor es un juego solitario* (1979), explicitly subvert the Francoist notions of the traditional family and sexuality through the detailed description of female eroticism, both homosexual and heterosexual. In this sense, the physical body in her novels becomes one of the sites of resistance against some of the hegemonic norms set forth during the dictatorship.

Mendicutti's *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1982) presents a transgendered body. Ana Corbalán Vélez devotes a chapter of her study *El cuerpo transgresor en la narrativa española contemporánea* (2009) to the examination of the transsexual body in Mendicutti's novel and she establishes "toda clase de lazos entre la transición política y sexual mediante la figura del transexual como icono central y como emblema de la transición a la democracia y a la posmodernidad" (40). In *Una mala noche* Mendicutti seems to suggest that the transsexual body is an in-between body that functions as a symbol of Spain after 1975. A similar statement could be made about Tusquets's first two novels: the exposed lesbian body in her novels not only challenges the historically accepted social codes, but it also represents a society in transition.

The drugged body emerges as one example of an alluring counterculture in José Ángel Mañas's *Historias del Kronen* (1994). In "The 'Real' Story of Drugs, *Dasein* and José Ángel Mañas's *Historias del Kronen*," Nina L. Molinaro discusses addiction as one manifestation of literary performance in the novel (293). Addiction affects the physical bodies of the characters, such as the physical body of the protagonist Carlos, and the textual body of the novel. Molinaro draws a correlation between physical and textual bodies when she contends, "The discourse of drugs, addicts and addiction in *Historias del Kronen* is both explicit and elliptical, as the novel inquires into the ways in which the narration of addiction, inflected by realism, figures ontology, and *vice versa*. Stories of addiction and schemes of realism score a direct hit in Mañas's novel at the site of Being" (293). In the novel, the physical body requires drugs in order to approach subjectivity, but such a project is unattainable since foreign substances destroy the physical body. Carlos's repetitive actions of taking drugs and having sex only distance him further from his self, from others, and from productively participating in the world that surrounds him. The alienation that the protagonist constructs in the novel is evident in many Millasian characters

who also frequently revert to repetition as a way to escape the everyday and in an attempt to become more aware of their selves. Ironically, however, habitual actions seem to embed the characters even deeper in stasis and apathy.¹⁴

As an author who published his first novel in 1975 and his most recent novel in 2010, Juan José Millás's work has accompanied the end of a brutal dictatorship, Spain's transition to democracy, the Madrilenian *movida*, the Olympic Games in Barcelona, the transition to the Euro, and the terrorist attack on the Atocha train station in Madrid; it has also spanned the terms of five Prime Ministers from three different political parties. His texts are neither explicitly erotic nor overly phantasmagoric, yet they frequently include both. His characters are not drug addicts, but they sometimes take foreign substances to stimulate their bodies. Millás captures the essence of Being by doing the same things over and over again in his narratives, and specifically by employing physical and textual bodies to carry out this task. Marta E. Altisent alludes to Millasian realism, in which the subjective experiences of his characters guide his narratives, in the Introduction to *A Companion to the Twentieth-Century Spanish Novel*. She observes:

Now that the demons of dictatorship seem long gone and democratic “normality” has set in, new kinds of realism have begun to appear in the novel. These do not always mean a return to objective reality, but instead to a conscious construction of the human mind in its ordering of experience beyond established categories; a process than places the sense of self and of the other at the heart of narration. (11)

Millasian characters are obsessed with the potential of knowing their selves. They read and write (or attempt to do so) and they alter their physical bodies as they strive to pinpoint their subjectivities.

Millás has always been concerned with bodies in his narratives. When Juan Goytisolo destroys human, social, and textual bodies in *Reivindicación del Conde don Julián*, Millás begins experimenting textually with the physical body, but in a different way. In his first novel, *Cerberos son las sombras* (1975), which begins in the same way that Millás's life began, with a journey from Valencia to Madrid, the (pseudo-autobiographic) narrator-protagonist remembers his stifling childhood as he writes a letter to his father. In "Ante la novela de los años setenta" Gonzalo Sobejano notes that one characteristic of Peninsular novels published in the 1970s is "la busca del sentido de la existencia en el sentido de escritura, placenteramente ejecutada y observada como una proeza de la voluntad de ser" (507). Auto-reflexive writing will be a continuous trope in Millás's works, and the acts of writing and reading will continue to be unsuccessful ways for Millasian characters to find stable references for self.

In fact, Millás's first novel is comprised of a letter written to the autodiegetic narrator's father. The narrator-protagonist is alienated and helpless. The theme of solitude, which will be constant and recurring throughout Millás's *oeuvre*, seems to stem from the protagonist's unsuccessful escape. His family and he flee the coast for Madrid, yet they become even more unstable and discontented once in the capital; he reverts inward, yet he is unable to find his self; and he attempts to break free from the suffocating reality of his family life in the city, yet he is continuously pushed back into the center of it. He is repeatedly only left with his self even though he is continuously unable to locate his self. In *Cómo leer a Juan José Millás*, Fabián Gutiérrez Flórez suggests that one theme in *Cerberos* is "la soledad asociada, por un lado y junto con la incomunicación, a la problemática de las relaciones humanas, y, por otro, a la del desdoblamiento del yo" (18). Solitude, as one of the guiding principles in Millás's narrative,

seems to be born from the inability to locate stable points of reference, whether with one's self, with others, or in the places that one occupies.

During the next fourteen years, Millás publishes five novels. In all of them he continues duplicating themes and characters, experimenting with the physical bodies of his characters and with textual bodies, exploring themes of solitude and alienation, and questioning the boundary between fiction and reality. Two novels published in the late 1970s and the mid 1980s, *Visión del ahogado* (1977) and *El desorden de tu nombre* (1986), were very well received by readers and critics alike.¹⁵ Both novels feature various points of view and flashbacks controlled by an extradiegetic narrator. Additionally, both tell the story of complicated love triangles, which, according to Gutiérrez Flórez, function as a metaphor of the Spanish collective in the unstable years during the transition (132). Jennifer Kakuk writes that *Visión del ahogado* “es una novela que ofrece una visión universalista tanto de la sociedad como del lenguaje. Al oscilar entre la polifonía y el discurso autoritario, expone el hecho de que no hay salida del lenguaje, a la vez que se esfuerza por romper con el orden impuesto” (31). The same statement could be made about *El desorden de tu nombre*, which introduces Millás's overt experimentation with textual bodies. Specifically, in the novel Julio is an aspiring writer who, only after a series of corporeal and textual modifications, is able to write a novel.

Millás's other three novels published in the early 1980s, *El jardín vacío* (1981), *Papel mojado* (1983), and *Letra muerta* (1984), are not as critically successful as the aforementioned novels, but the themes and techniques are typical for the author. In *El jardín vacío* when Román returns home to Madrid to an uninterested mother, he remembers his childhood through a series of flashbacks and fragmented memories. Influenced by detective novels, *Papel mojado* is the first instance in Millás's novels of protagonists who write (Gutiérrez Flórez 37). Likewise, *Letra*

muerta is the first text with two parts to it, which will be seen in subsequent Millasian novels, and specifically in *La soledad era esto*, perhaps one of Millás's most important works.

In 1990 Millás publishes two seminal novels, *Volver a casa* and *La soledad era esto*, the latter of which won the Premio Nadal in the same year. In 1990 he also begins writing a weekly column for *El País*, published on Fridays, which seems to trigger an inundation of other pieces of short fiction in his *oeuvre*.¹⁶ It might be argued that the new medium of short texts permits Millás an outlet in which to expand his experimentation with repetitive physical and textual bodies. In the prologue to *Articuentos*, Fernando Valls also notes the importance of the year 1990 as a decisive moment in Millás's literary production. Valls writes:

A mí me gusta pensar que es en 1990, con su trabajo como articulista en *El País*, cuando emprende definitivamente un nuevo rumbo narrativo, adoptando una nueva poética. . . Y es en el cruce de géneros (artículo/cuento, fábula/novela, periodismo/literatura) donde surge esa regeneración enriquecedora para el conjunto de su obra. (7)

It is true that from 1990 onward, Millás's work matures, repetition becomes the guiding principle in his narrative, and human and textual bodies evolve as the spaces where repeated motifs take place. In an interview with Katarzyna Olga Beilin, Millás himself comments that writing in newspapers has influenced his larger *oeuvre*. He confesses that

me ha enseñado muchas cosas, por ejemplo, me ha enseñado a ser muy económico. Por lo tanto, me ha hecho valorar más el género del cuento y el de la novela corta, que son los géneros hacia las que me dirijo cada vez con más intensidad. Ha habido un intercambio de materiales porque también la labor

periodística se ha enriquecido de la literaria. Básicamente no son cosas distintas para mí. (76)

Millás often employs the same themes and techniques in his narratives, whether short story, newspaper article, or novel. Moreover, Millás tends to ignore generic boundaries, which emphasizes the flexibility of his textual bodies.

In the upcoming chapters, I rely on the theories of Peter Brooks, Julia Kristeva, and Gaston Bachelard to examine six of Millás's narrative texts that were published between 1990 and 2007. Brooks seems to advocate for the construction of meaning and the attempted transformation of self via physical bodies, whereas Kristeva analyzes physical and textual bodies as more violent and destructive, and Bachelard looks at where bodies are housed and how places and space affect the agency of the self. I employ Brooks's theory in my opening chapter because he sets up, in broad terms, the physical body and the text as body as sites for the inscription of meaning. It is necessary to understand Brooks's ideas in order to better understand the theories of Kristeva and Bachelard and what all three offer to a study of Millás's narratives.

Specifically, Chapter 1 is devoted to the human desire to construct identity through writing or reading *vis à vis* the human body, as described by Brooks in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. I analyze two of Millás's novels, *La soledad era esto* and *Laura y Julio*, that present the strange and intimate connection that Millás creates between human and textual bodies. Physical and textual bodies are, for Millás, two sides of the same coin. They cannot and do not disengage from one another; they are intrinsically linked. In Chapter 2, in which I study the erosion of human and textual bodies by modification, substitution, and illness, I look towards Kristeva's theories of modified bodies in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In Millás's two novels, *El orden alfabético* and *Dos mujeres en Praga*, the construction of

“complete” textual and physical bodies is glaringly unsuccessful. In my third chapter, I analyze the places and space that characters occupy in *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados*, one of Millás’s collections of short stories, and in his recent (pseudo-)autobiographic novel *El mundo*. I use theories of the home as our primary nurturing space set forth by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* to study how physical and textual bodies negotiate with the places and space that surround them. Millás’s characters are usually very private, which is echoed by the intimate places that they inhabit. The protagonist in *El mundo* occupies several hermetic places in which he attempts to transcend the boundaries of place and access space by making his physical body stagnant. In *Cuentos* the bodies of the adulterous characters often betray and imprison them in a repeated cycle of living alternate lives.

In my study, I examine repetition as a mode of perception that takes place in the physical bodies of Millás’s characters and in the textual bodies that they produce. Repetitive tendencies in Millás’s work have not gone unstudied. Scholars such as María José Anastasio, Rebeca Gutiérrez, and David Ruz Velasco, among others, analyze repetition in Millás’s narrative as a postmodern tendency of human nature. Others define repetition as a psychological manifestation of compulsive disorders. Dale Knickerbocker studies five of Millás’s novels according to their symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. In “Notas a la *Trilogía de la soledad* de Juan José Millás,” Marcos Maurel comments that the narrative work of Millás, “se nutre de una serie de obsesiones temáticas, ideas recurrentes . . . que forman parte esencial del núcleo básico de significación que quiere transmitir el narrador” (73). In other words, scholars such as Knickerbocker and Maurel examine repetition in narrative as a symptom of compulsion or neurosis, which emphasizes character development in texts and occludes repetition as a literary technique that drives the process of creating texts. If scholarship agrees that repetitive actions

and techniques are manifestations of psychological and/or physiological disorders like physical illness, compulsive habit, disguise, substitution, and displacement, then it seems that human and textual bodies are the media *par excellence* through which to express such symptoms. Even though repetition is clearly a symptom of some sort of distress, what most interests me in my research is where and how such symptoms are inscribed within literary texts. Human bodies in Millás's narratives are best defined as texts in constant recreation: they may be constructed, eroded, or destroyed, and they always negotiate with the places and space that they inhabit. Repetition, therefore, is more than just a symptom of the human condition; it is also a literary technique to which readers can relate their intimate daily lives.

Human bodies are curious parts of our beings. They are always with us, yet rarely are we able to fully understand them even when we rely on language to attempt to express our corporeal experiences. The closer we get to self-awareness through writing, the further we are pushed from finite meaning. Turner states:

In attempting to write about the body, it is impossible to avoid its contradictory character. . . . We have bodies, but we are also, in a specific sense, bodies; our embodiment is a necessary requirement of our social identification so that would be ludicrous to say, "I have arrived and I have brought my body with me."

Despite the sovereignty we exercise over our bodies, we often experience embodiment as alienation as when we have cancer or gout. (7)

Millás's characters frequently undergo this disconnect between the physical body and the concept of subjectivity, and they often attempt to capture the dichotomy through writing. In his narratives physical bodies often become text and textual bodies are embodied in a strange, complicated association that seems to emphasize individuality over collectiveness. As his

characters go deeper inside their bodies, both physical and textual, they retreat further from society and, ironically, they get further away from potentially knowing their selves.

Physical bodies repeatedly negotiate with textual bodies in Millás's works. Language in his texts manifests itself in distinct ways: characters tell stories, they construct alternate realities, they correspond via emails, and they write intimate entries in their diaries. Scarlett stresses the relationship between written texts and physical bodies when she states, "Since writing itself makes one conscious of the intersections between body and mind, embodiment in fiction (the degree to which characters inhabit textual bodies and the sensations attributed to them) is always an essential constituent of meaning" (2). In Millás's fictional narratives, physical and textual bodies are the two main modes of perception with which characters strive to make sense of the world that surrounds them and to give meaning to their individual subjectivities.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONSTITUTION OF REPETITIVE BODIES: SUBJECTIVITY AND
TRANSFORMATION IN *LA SOLEDAD ERA ESTO* AND *LAURA Y JULIO*

At the root of the creation and destruction of bodies, both human and textual, we often find desire. The human body is the site of the inscription and projection of desire; it is where stories are written and read and thus, where knowing and meaning are in the process of constant negotiation. Brooks notes that “the body is at least our primary course of symbolism . . . and literature, in its use and creation of symbols, ever brings us back to this source, as that which its representations ultimately represent” (6). The inscriptions on and projections from the human body seem to affect the textual process, creating text that is itself embodied.¹⁷ Conversely, yet perhaps emerging from a similar push towards desire, the written text also affects the human body. Reading and writing texts often transform the minds and bodies of Millás’s characters. How, then, does the human body influence the writing and reading of a narrative text and vice versa? Furthermore, how does written discourse alter the human body and how does the human body alter text?

In my first chapter, by specifically studying the function of desire as described by Catherine Belsey in this repeated and continuous process, I analyze the symbiotic relationship between the construction of the human body and the process of creating written texts in two novels by Millás, *La soledad era esto* (1990) and *Laura y Julio* (2006), in order to further examine the characters’ search for subjectivity. Throughout these novels, both the written text

and the human body are fragmented and modified, yet by the end it seems that identities of the characters get close to stabilization as they stop writing and they stop using their bodies as the site of their searches for subjectivity.

In *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, Belsey describes desire as

[a]t once shared with a whole culture, but intimate and personal, hopelessly banal and yet unique: if these are not exactly paradoxes of desire, they are perhaps undecidabilities [sic], instances of the difficulty of fixing, delimiting, delineating a state of mind which is also a state of body, or which perhaps deconstructs the opposition between the two, throwing into relief in the process the inadequacy of a Western tradition that divides human beings along an axis crossed daily by this most familiar of emotions. (3)

Desire constantly and continuously escapes definition. Desire in itself highlights absence and presence; the constant yearning to have something or someone is perpetually present and the object of desire is never attainable. In Millás's narrative, desire manifests itself in several ways on the human body and in the written text: it is elusive, yet constant and it is absent, yet always present.

One way in which Millás frequently expresses desire is by employing repetition in various forms. On the most general level, he reuses characters and themes across his entire *oeuvre*. Within specific texts, he employs repetition to weave an entangled web of associations: elements like telling time and dates and noting ages and names are repeated throughout a text. Yet even more complex is his insistence on repeating both the fragmentation of the human body and the creation and consumption of written texts as manifestations and sometimes consequences of desire. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes links the human body and desire. He describes

fleeting moments of desire as “the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance” on the physical body (10). He tells us that

it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (10)

I would like to suggest that such manifestations of desire can also be textual and that the human body often engages with written text in order to create a complex fusion of desire. Millás’s textual “appearances-as-disappearances” are his repetitive creations that seduce readers with a network of multiples.

In *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Brooks examines different modes and meanings of the human body in modern literature and art. While most chapters of his book focus on specific representations of the (mostly feminine) body in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—for example, he examines marking on the body in Balzac’s novels, nineteenth-century nude portraits of women, and Gauguin’s fascination with the exotic body of Tahitians—, in his opening chapter Brooks explains his theory of the body in the general terms that he subsequently threads throughout the remainder of his study. For him, the human body is both “the agent and object of desire” (5). Taking this idea a step further, as agent and object the human body interacts with that which surrounds it: maybe with other people, perhaps with the furnishings in a home, with private space itself, or even with written narratives. Brooks also argues that physical bodies are “emblazoned with meaning within the field of desire, desire that is originally and always, with whatever sublimations, sexual, but [are] also the extension of

desire to know: the body as an ‘epistemophilic’ project” (5). If we define the term “epistemophilic” according to its two parts of “episteme,” which, hinting at Foucauldian terms of power, refers to “the body of ideas which shape the perception of knowledge at a particular period” (*OED*), and “philia,” which means “amity, affection, friendship; fondness, liking” (*OED*), we arrive at a striking definition that fittingly characterizes Millás’s most frequent project: the desire to know is what encourages many of his characters to modify physical bodies and to write and/or read texts. Belsey reminds us, “Desire alludes to texts—but in order to efface its own citationality. It thus draws attention to its elusiveness, its excess” (*Desire* 17). In a similar way to language, desire is at the same time too much and not enough; it never allows one to actually possess that which s/he wishes to claim as his or her own.

Following Brooks’s theory of the human body, in her recent study *Refiguring the Ordinary* Gail Weiss aptly notes that “the body serves as a narrative horizon for all texts, and in particular for all of the stories that human beings tell about, and which becomes indistinguishable from, themselves” (64). Written text, then, is not only a *manifestation* of the desire to know, but it also becomes an *extension* of the human body, perhaps like an additional limb that sometimes may aid the quest for knowledge and other times may hinder that search. Clarifying this connection between human body and textual body, Weiss writes that

one must recognize not only that the body is discursively constructed, and thus that the body cannot be separated from discourses about it, but also that *texts are themselves embodied*, which means they have their own materiality, which is precisely what defines them (and differentiates them from one another) as texts.

(64, emphasis mine)

Weiss's ideas harken back to Brooks's notion that texts are also bodies. When she states that "the body cannot be separated from discourses about it," she highlights the multiple character of the body, human and textual, with which Millás plays with in many of his written narratives. Belsey also tells us that "desire in Western culture is inextricably intertwined with narrative, just as the tradition of Western fiction is threaded through with desire" (*Desire* ix). To put it succinctly, writing, desire, and the human body cannot be separated, and moreover, they often work collaboratively to help construct a richly layered text.

The human body is not only the metaphorical or literal site of inscription of meaning (or, Brook's "object" [5]), but it is also the agent from which Millás's characters repeatedly negotiate their identities as they read and write. His characters often construct the meaning of their selves via writing and/or reading, and just as Brooks, Weiss, and Belsey maintain, ontological desire and the body are intimately intertwined. Millás employs written text, desire, and seduction and, consequently, his characters also repeatedly modify their physical bodies. Brooks comments:

Narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body's entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifying factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning. (8)

Desire plays a key role in the violation of textual and corporeal boundaries. Many of Millás's characters are staunchly aware that their human and textual bodies are the sites of mediation with the other characters, other written texts, and the objects in the space that surrounds them. They read and write stories about their desires and about sensations of the human body as a way to get closer to knowing.

In this chapter I investigate the pathway of desire from the human body onto the page by specifically analyzing characters that write their own stories and read the stories of others, and by examining the roles their physical bodies play in these exchanges. I examine *La soledad era esto* (1990) and *Laura y Julio* (2006) as the most telling examples of the body's desire to know. I analyze the body as the source of desire that pushes a character to write and/or create his or her story or to read the stories of others, effectively creating embodied texts or written discourses that interact with the human body. I repeatedly look towards the ideas of Brooks, Belsey, and Weiss to attempt to understand how written text, desire, and the human body interact with and because of one another in these two novels. In both novels at hand, we see that as the characters write, their bodies are fragmented and modified, and they are the site of inscription and projection of their search for subjectivity; yet, at the end of the novels when their identities become more established and less transitory, the characters stop writing and they also stop modifying their physical bodies.

In *La soledad era esto*, we meet the protagonist Elena Rincón, one of Millás's many recurring characters.¹⁸ The novel, which is divided into two parts, separates reading and writing: the first part, narrated in the third person, introduces Elena as she reads excerpts from her deceased mother's diary and pieces together her mother's life. In the second part of the novel, Elena becomes the first-person narrator as she writes her own story that, in true Millasian style, reflects that of her mother. Both sections of the novel include written reports from the detective that Elena initially hires to follow her cheating husband, but who she ultimately employs to write reports on her own life. Even though reading and writing construct the architectural framework of the novel, they also share an intimate and complicated relationship rooted in something less tangible, namely desire. In this novel, written discourse in all of its manifestations—reading

someone else's diary entries, writing in one's personal diaries, and hiring a private detective to essentially write one's biography—is put at the forefront. Written text in *La soledad era esto* is the medium on which the human experience is negotiated, and ultimately, it is the receptacle that embodies the desire which manifests from the physical human body. The human bodies and the written texts in the novel construct a complicated system of correlations, one in which Millás plays with the creation of doubles and mirrored images. With the aforementioned theories of Brooks, Weiss, and Belsey in mind, let us not only analyze the symmetrical constructions and repetitions of written texts and corporeal bodies in the novel but also their functions and effects on the reader.

Elena is an unstable character who, even from the very first few lines of the novel, reveals her divided identity *vis-à-vis* the fragmentation of her physical body. At the beginning of the novel, Elena is in the bathroom waxing her legs when she receives a phone call from her husband Enrique, who tells her that her mother Mercedes has died (13). The first line of the novel anchors the human body to experience, a theme that continuously repeats throughout the rest of the story. Elena then sits on the sofa in order to “digerir la noticia” of her mother's death (14). Here Millás employs a verb that describes the bodily function of digestion to refer to a mental action, and then he slips back to the fragmentation of the human body as Elena contemplates her one waxed leg. Millás writes that Elena “con la mano derecha iba arrancándose las costras de cera que endurecían la pierna correspondiente a ese lado del cuerpo. . . . Cuando regresó al cuarto del baño, la cera se había endurecido, de manera que renunció a depilarse la pierna izquierda” (14). Millás continuously employs Elena's physical body as the site of deliberate repetitions. Likewise, never in the rest of the novel will Elena wax her other leg, and neither will Millás let up on his repeated references to her one waxed leg.¹⁹ His

ceaseless obsession with the representation of the human body attempts to capture moments of desire, pleasure, and seduction. In his book *Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film*, Bruce F. Kawin discusses the function and effect of repetition as a technique that exposes our experience as human beings, noting that “repetition, the key to our experience, may become the key to our expression of experience” (7-8). The repeated images and constructions in the novel seem to enhance Millás’s ability to represent human experience, especially the fragmentation and solidarity of the post-human experience. In fact, in *La soledad era esto* the accumulation of repetitions is what permits Elena to undergo her personal “metamorphosis”: by the end of the novel, Elena has left her cheating husband and moved into a new apartment; she has given up drugs and alcohol; she has stopped both reading the diary entries written by her mother and writing in her own diary; and she has terminated her commission of the private detective to write reports on her life.²⁰ It is an ending hinted at in the beginning of the novel in the fitting epilogue from Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*²¹:

¿Es que deseaba de verdad se cambiase aquella su muelle habitación, confortable y dispuesta con muebles de la familia, en un desierto en el cual hubiera podido, es verdad, trepar en todas las direcciones sin el menor impedimento, pero en el cual se hubiera, al mismo tiempo, olvidado rápida y completamente de su pasada condición humana? (11)

If the transformation of Gregor Samsa from human to insect in Kafka’s famous novella occurs perhaps because of the accumulation of his pedestrian tasks as a travelling salesman, it seems that the accumulation of repeated actions in Elena’s life, including reading and writing, is the precipitative agent that allows her to transform.

Ironically (or perhaps fittingly) Elena does not forget her past condition as an addict, but rather she becomes a renewed version of her former self. In the last few pages of the first section, and before she begins to narrate her own story, Elena remembers Gregor Samsa one night as she lies in bed. The narrator explains:

Una vez acostada, tuvo un recuerdo, igualmente gratuito, para Gregorio Samsa, a quien tanto había amado en otro tiempo, y pensó que durante los últimos años también ella había sido un raro insecto que, al contrario del de Kafka, comenzaba a recuperar su antigua imagen antes de morir, antes de que los otros le mataran. El pensamiento consiguió excitarla, pues intuyó que si conseguía regresar de esa metamorfosis las cosas serían diferentes, pues habría salido de ella dotada de una fortaleza especial, de una sabiduría con la que quizá podría enfrentarse sin temor a los mecanismos del mundo o a quienes manejaban en beneficio propio, y contra ella, tales mecanismos. (99)

As Elena remembers the impact of Kafka's novella on her life, she wonders if she will be able to return from her own journey of metamorphosis and essentially escape the endless routine of drugs, illness, alcohol, and an unsatisfying marriage. Kawin suggests, "We may bring voluntary memory into play on purpose to remove the threatening component of an experience" (28), which may just be what Elena is trying to do when she evokes Gregor and his metamorphosis. Furthermore, in *Genders* David Glover and Cora Kaplan note:

Previous interpretations of Kafka's novella have tended to focus upon the anxieties accompanying Gregor's transformation and have often failed to take into account the pleasures that his new body evidently bring him. As soon as he is able to place his legs firmly on the ground, for example, Gregor at once begins to

experience “a sense of physical well-being,” an instinctive “joy” in the discovery of an unexpected capacity for movement; and later he learns to enjoy “hanging from the ceiling,” gently swaying to and fro, a delightful manoeuvre that allows him to “breathe more freely” (Kafka 1992: 89, 101). In such brief, bitter-sweet moments he seems finally to have transcended the care-worn routines of the ordinary commercial traveller he once was. (110-11)

As Elena begins to change after she reads her mother’s diary entries and after she begins to write in her own diary, her physical body brings her pleasure as well. By remembering Gregor and his transformation, which ultimately points to her own desire to change, Elena makes reference to the upcoming transformation that will take place in her physical body once she is able to create written discourse.

Correspondingly, Millás hints at the pending transformation of Elena when he highlights the death of her mother not as the accumulation of a life full of events, but rather as just another occurrence in a long series of events. The narrator tells us, “La muerte de su madre parecía, más que un suceso, un simple hecho encadenado a la secuencia de los días sin capacidad siquiera para construir una ruptura o una victoria sobre lo cotidiano” (16). The death of her only living parent does not seem to concern Elena when she repeatedly refers to her mother as a corpse. Evoking an ironic sense of humor, the narrator exclaims, “Su madre parecía sonreír al fin. . . Permanecía inmóvil como un cadáver, pero su frente arrugada parecía mantener la tensión de un pensamiento” (17). Millás continues fragmenting the human body when he describes the one open eye on the dead woman’s face: “Uno de los ojos permanecía ligeramente abierto produciendo en el rostro un efecto asimétrico que a Elena le recordó que no se había depilado la pierna izquierda” (17). The narrator repeatedly pokes fun at the gravity of death, and Mercedes’s

once living body is again reduced to a mere corpse when Elena contemplates calling her daughter to see “qué tal había pasado el cadáver” the previous night (22). Furthermore, when Elena visits her deceased mother’s home, she throws out the rotting food, an image that parallels her mother’s corpse (41). Death as a non-event, as something that just happens in the experience of life, is juxtaposed with seemingly small, repeated occurrences that carry important meaning due to Millás’s insistence on them.

After her mother dies, Elena finds six bound notebooks in Mercedes’s closet in which she had recorded the events of her life. In one of the diary entries Elena discovers that her mother was the same age as Elena when she wrote in the notebooks. This arbitrary detail may seem to hold little significance, yet the same age of mother and daughter is not only repeated several times in the diaries and in the narration but also in one of the detective’s reports in which Elena finds out that her husband and Detective Acosta also share the same age. At one point Elena wonders, “¿Dónde está la mitad de mi vida? . . . ¿Deja mi madre aquí un espacio simétrico al que ahora ocupa?” (17). The parallel ages of mother and daughter encourage Elena to question her own existence perhaps because she is not original. She realizes that her life is inevitably linked to her mother’s life. Additionally, it is the act of reading the number, her mother’s age, that makes the fact seem more real for Elena. Wondering if the overlapping of ages has now forced her to occupy a part of her mother’s life is one of the first indications that Elena will write her story, just as her mother did when she was 43 years old.

Names are also repeated throughout the novel: Mercedes is the name of both Elena’s mother and her daughter. Both daughters, Elena and Mercedes, have dysfunctional relationships with their mothers, Mercedes and Elena respectively. Millás is a master of symmetrical creations that continue to repeat throughout a given text. Within this insistence on repetition lies an

attempt to arrive at meaning. The fact that Millás, himself a writer, repeats tidbits and assigns seemingly endless repetition to his characters in both their characteristics (like symmetrical ages and names) and by developing themselves as writers and readers testifies to Barthes's proclamation of pleasure as "appearances-as-disappearances." In his article "Defining Solitude: Juan José Millás's *La soledad era esto*," Edward Friedman thinks that Millás takes this continuous cycle too far. He observes, "The eerie effect produced by the repetition of names is undermined by the forced correspondence in ages" (494). However, the technique of continued repetition, or the doubling of doubles, that Millás constructs enriches the complicated relationship between reading and writing in the novel by linking characters over and over again. In this sense repetition may produce a wide array of effects in the reader, including a dulling sensation, perhaps one that encourages Friedman to believe that Millás's use of repetition has little meaning. Kawin notes, "Repetition without insight or excitement creates routine, takes the life out of living, and *cannot cause us pain*. The idea is to make our entire lives routine, so that we will not feel anything—to thicken our senses" (20). Sticking to routine, and in this case routinely repeating small things, may be comforting. However, repetition as a literary technique can also produce pleasure. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Sigmund Freud writes that

if a child has been told a nice story, he will insist on hearing it over and over again rather than a new one; and he will remorselessly stipulate that the repetition shall be an identical one. . . . Repetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure. (66)

The repeating of names and ages in the novel brings the reader pleasure because the technique tightens up the narrative by creating complicated webs of associations.

Another repeated creation in the novel is Mercedes's antipode. The term antipode traditionally defines a location's diametrically opposite geographic point but in the novel it refers to a character's double. The creation of an antipode allows Elena's mother an excuse to not take responsibility for the decisions that she makes in her life. In one of the passages of her mother's diary, Elena reads her mother's description of antipodes:

[S]egún mi madre, todos tenemos en nuestras antípodas un ser que es exacto a nosotros y que ocupa siempre en el globo un lugar diametralmente opuesto al nuestro (si no, no sería antípoda). Me contaba mi madre que este ser anda, duerme, y sufre al mismo tiempo que una porque es nuestro doble y piensa siempre lo mismo que nosotras pensamos y al mismo tiempo. (60)

The construction of an alternate being that is just like the original creates a scapegoat for the original version, but the clone also influences and engages with the original. In *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* Wolfgang Iser notes that "identifying oneself with a phantom in order to bring it to life entails no longer being what one was, even if the new shape is partially conditioned by what one was before" (81). Millás complicates this so-called conditioning of self, however, by relying on repetition to seduce his readers. The female characters are multiplied again since in the above passage, as well as in several other diary entries, Mercedes directly refers to what her mother told her. Even though readers do not know the name of Mercedes's mother, it would not surprise us to learn that her name was Mercedes because with his insistence on repetition, Millás invites us to fill in that which is left out in the novel.

In the following quote Mercedes blames her alcoholism on her antipode:

Algunas tardes, cuando comprendo que estoy bebiendo más coñá de la cuenta, pienso a lo mejor es cosa de mi antípoda, de Elena, que me ha alcoholizado por no saber hacer frente a los momentos difíciles de la vida, como este de la soledad que nos ha tocado vivir a las dos en la vejez. Me da pena porque se está destruyendo, aunque a lo mejor en una de estas se suicida y me hace descansar a mí también.

(61-62)

Elena's mother only begins to identify herself with her antipodes, both her imagined other and her oldest daughter, once her physical, human body has begun to show the effects of alcoholism. At one point she writes that "[I]o malo es vivir lejos de una misma, que es cómo vivo yo desde hace años" (128); yet, just as Agawu-Kakraba notes, "Her boundary-crossing is designed to discover herself outside of herself" ("The Process of Subjectivity" 86). The doubling is further complicated since Mercedes names both her antipode and her first daughter Elena (61). Moreover, since it is her mother who explains to Mercedes what an antipode is, we can only assume that perhaps her mother also had an antipode, or even that Mercedes was one of her doubles, just as Elena is one of her mother's alternate creations.

Nonetheless, Mercedes's attempt to create doubles in the form of her antipode and her daughter fails. She cannot escape her physical body or the alternate bodies that she has created (her antipode, her daughter, and her written diary entries). Ultimately the only liberation seems to take place not in her own act of writing, but when her daughter reads her diary and then writes her own story. The transformation of text into body, or the evolution of Mercedes's written text into the construction of an imagined corporeal counterpart of her daughter and of herself, highlights Millás's continuous insistence on repetition. Since Millás employs Mercedes's

antipode to refer to not just one but two opposites, he breaks the rules of the double. Stated another way, Millás complicates the act of repetition by folding the double.

Elena is situated at the center of another symmetrical creation, that of her mother and her daughter, both of whom are named Mercedes. Millás develops the function of this parallel construction when he writes, “Ambas Mercedes solían reprobarnos con la mirada y castigar con la distancia, con la culpa” (18). Moreover, it is Elena who tells herself, “Yo soy el centro de esa relación simétrica, yo soy su corazón, yo la alimento” (18). Elena functions like the center of the teeter-totter for the two Mercedes in her life, yet she is far from a stable base. Millás takes this symmetrical relationship a step farther, as he often does, by noting that Mercedes is also the name of Elena’s younger sister. Elena questions her position within the threesome of Mercedes perhaps to find her true self. She thinks to herself that her daughter

[e]s igual que mi hermana, otra simetría. . . . Mi hermana también se llama Mercedes, como mi madre, como mi hija. ¿Como quién soy yo? ¿A quién de estas personas me parezco? ¿Cuál de estos rostros dolorosos se llama Elena y lleva una pierna sin depilar? ¿Soy la referencia de alguien o sólo la mitad de este desconcierto? (19)

Several pages earlier she wonders, “¿Era simétrica la realidad o la simetría era un ideal provocado por la inteligencia del hombre? ¿Acaso todo lo que se podía dividir por la mitad daba lugar a dos partes armónicas y similares?” (17). Once again, Elena recognizes all of this repetition, all of Barthes’s “appearances-as-disappearances,” yet she is still unsure about what to do with this knowledge, as is evident in her repetitious questioning of her own position within the entanglement of repetitions. It is only once she writes her story that she is able to stop questioning and start living, just like Gregor Samsa does after he transforms into an insect.

Before we discuss the diary entries of Mercedes and Elena, however, telling time and dates as other symmetrical constructions in the novel must be mentioned. Elena's mother passes away at 6:30 pm, "la mejor hora de irse de este mundo," according to the narrator (13). It is an intriguing time for Millás to choose since six o'clock in the evening is the halfway point between noon and midnight, and since thirty minutes is the center point of an hour. Similarly, while at her mother's home, Elena takes note of the symmetry of her mother's pieces of furniture; they have not been moved even as time has passed. The narrator describes the living room: "En ese mismo salón, con idénticos muebles y semejante atmósfera, habían sido niños y adolescentes y jóvenes" (42). After the death of Elena's mother, her brother brings their mother's sofa and a pendulum clock to Elena's house. Once he has arranged the two items in the exact same way that they sat in their parents' home for decades, the parallel alignment of the furniture is juxtaposed to the symmetrical ticking of the clock that interrupts Elena's ability to sleep. The narrator describes the rhythmic noise of the clock: "Las campanadas del reloj de péndulo—que daba los cuartos, las medias y las horas—la arrancaban con regularidad de un sueño frágil como el vidrio y epidérmico como la superficie de las cosas" (55). Millás employs time not as a synchronic construct, but rather as a circular event. Time, then, seems to be another medium from which Millás creates symmetry. The diaries of Elena's mother, composed in the past, function as a mirror that not only reflects Elena's life, but also gives her the ability to write in her personal diaries in the second part of the novel.

In her diaries Mercedes writes about her physical body as a prison, which serves as a fitting metaphor for both Elena and Mercedes's illnesses, as well as their addictions, and even invokes Saint Teresa de Ávila's written descriptions of the limitations of her own physical body. Mercedes explains her body in terms of the destitute neighborhood where she lives. She writes,

“El caso es que llegué a este barrio roto que tiene una forma parecida a la de mi cuerpo y una enfermedad semejante, porque cada día, al recorrerlo, le ves el dolor en un sitio distinto” (49). Just like Elena, Mercedes continuously links her human experience to her physical body in her writing. In one example she gives an odd description of urination. Mercedes explains in a diary entry that, since she was a little girl, she has always thought that people empty the same urine that fills up their bodies again and again. She writes, “Mi madre . . . me explicaba que el pis se tenía que ir por el váter para pasear y airearse un poco, pero que después regresaba a mi cuerpo y eso se demostraba que el hecho de que a las pocas horas volvía a tener ganas de orinar” (59). Even though the image is silly, the fact the Mercedes chooses that small piece of information to include in her written text may once again highlight her physical body as her primary medium of experience. In fact, some lines later she herself notes that she still believes that “ese líquido que expulsó de mi cuerpo es el mismo que expulsé al poco de nacer, un líquido que a lo largo de todos estos años se ha movido por el interior de un circuito misterioso, conectado a mi vejiga como una obsesión al pensamiento” (59-60).

Millás is a fan of creating metaphorical and literal circuits that surround and penetrate the human body. Systems of repetitions like Mercedes’s description of a bodily function, names and naming, telling time, and noting ages create symmetry and encourage readers to make connections between images and concepts that, at first glance, may seem purely coincidental. What seems to be the case, rather, is that Millás is very adept at creating cycles and repetitions, usually in relation to the physical and textual bodies, which highlight the possibility of human perception and the human body’s mandatory role in physical sensation.

Millás treats the human body not as an individual entity—for example, there are virtually no distinctions between the physical illnesses and substance addictions of mother and daughter in

the novel—, but rather as an agent of human experience. This is not to say that the body is a passive object; we see that both the textual body and the human body are employed as both objects and agents in constant negotiation in the novel. The characters transform, fragment, and modify human bodies (their bodies and the bodies of other characters) and they write and read written texts. However, just as the narrator indirectly notes that Elena “fue muy feliz al sentir que dejaba en manos de otros la responsabilidad de su cuerpo” (33), the human body is not individual or discrete, like the written texts in the novel it is a social, collective construct that relies on repetition for the self to be defined and define itself continuously.

Interestingly, then, if written text is inherently social, it must be noted that Mercedes’s experiences with and via her body are essentially private; they occur in the private space of her home. In this sense, Millás defines the human body as both public and private. What the body is and how it is perceived relies on constant social definition. On the other hand, however, by forcing the physical body to be private, Millás questions the social and cultural influences on it. Straddling the line between social representation and private accounts of the body (Mercedes’s experiences with her body in her home), Millás attempts to position the human body as our first and foremost vehicle for perception. Even though Millás’s repeated construction of his characters’ human body may be described as a synecdoche of the social situation of a Spain still in transition, many years after the so-called official years of transition, he insists on the body as a *private* entity. That is not to say that he refutes cultural norms of the human body nor the collective nature of written text, but rather that he defines the human body and written text as primarily private.

Mercedes links the private and the public experiences of her physical body to her text by describing her body in geographical terms, like a neighborhood. She writes the following lines in her diary:

Las uñas de mis pies son la periferia de mi barrio. Por eso están rotas y deformes. Y mis tobillos son también una zona muy débil de este barrio de carne que soy yo, donde anidan seres que han huido de alguna guerra, de algunas destrucción, de algún hambre. Y mis brazos son casas magulladas y mis ojos luces rotas, de gas. Mi cuello parece un callejón que comunica dos zonas desiertas. Mi pelo es la parte vegetal de este conjunto, pero ya hay que teñirlo para ocultar su ruina. Y, en fin, tengo también un basurero del que no quiero ni hablar, pero, como en todos los barrios arruinados, la porquería se va acercando al centro y ya se encuentra una con modas de naranja en cualquier sitio. Por mi cuerpo no se puede ni andar de sucio que está y el Ayuntamiento no hace nada por arreglarlo. (48-49)

This intimate entry, the written record of a lonely, middle-aged woman, highlights the complex relationship of doubling between the human body and the textual body that the author so skillfully constructs in the novel. The second part of the novel, Elena's reconstruction of self through writing in her diary and reading the detective reports about herself, depends on what was written and from whose perspective it was written in the first part of the novel. Elena can only write her story because Mercedes wrote her own story and, subsequently, because Elena read her mother's words. Kawin states, "Literature takes place in a developing present, and its repetitions must remain near-repetitions. They can only suggest Repetition" (182). Written text, together with the acts of writing reading it, is the body that brings about an intimate connection between mother and daughter, linking the perceptions and sensations of their life experiences.

In *True Lies: Narrative Self-Consciousness in the Contemporary Spanish Novel*, Samuel Amago describes this re-creation of the written text in the following terms. He states, “In *La soledad era esto*, narrative is a symbolic cartographic act through which Elena Rincón is able to *chart her space of self*” (70, emphasis mine). Amago focuses on writing as a “cartographic act,” as a way to situate the self in space, and his choice of words is both intriguing and complementary to my study. Writing, or the act of creating embodied text, is a complex process in *La soledad era esto* because it takes place via a series of precipitative agents. Both Mercedes and Elena establish their “spaces of self” in their diary entries, and both do so in two parallel texts that are not only divided by the actual architecture of the novel, but also by the cyclical nature of time that Millás creates in the story. Furthermore, Elena is also positioned (or in Amago’s terms, she is “charted”) in her mother’s diary entries and in the reports from the detective whom she hires to help her construct her own life story. “Charting,” then, may be understood as a highly subjective experience that requires engagement with other characters and other texts. In *Tattooed Bodies: Subjectivity, Textuality, Ethics, and Pleasure*, Nikki Sullivan writes that “reading and writing are not simply functional tools with which to discover or represent meaning or truth, but rather that their open-ended processes are both affective and intersubjective or intertextual” (151). Desire is repeatedly active in this constant negotiation.

Mercedes refers directly to Elena only a few times in her diary entries: once when she describes her antipode and once again when she confesses that she destroyed the fourth notebook because in its pages she wrote negatively about her children. In Mercedes’s text, interestingly enough, her children are not her main point of interest, as they might be for other mothers who write in general. Rather, she writes about her children as entities separate from herself; her written discourse, as opposed to her children, seems to become an extension of her body. When

she writes, Mercedes refers to her children not as corporeal beings who share her same genetic make-up but as ethical mysteries: “De los hijos no sabemos qué decir porque son buenos y malos al mismo tiempo” (50). For Mercedes, her children are not only “una parte separada de tu cuerpo” but they also come “de otro barrio, aunque estén en éste” (50). The use of the “tú” form in Mercedes’s entry makes us wonder to whom she was writing. Was she referring to herself as if she were looking at her reflection in a mirror? Or did she know that one day someone would find the bound notebooks in her closet and read them? Utilizing the informal singular “you” here once again doubles Mercedes, and perhaps it even constructs another one of Mercedes’s antipodes, in this case, herself.

In the only diary entry in which she directly refers to her children, Mercedes highlights how different they are from her, but more importantly she takes note of how the birth of three children has affected her physical body. She writes that

mi útero está descolgado por una especie de flojera de los ligamentos a que estaba sujeto. Eso hace que se desplome sobre la vagina arrastrando a la vejiga en su caída. Por eso, al toser o al reírme con fuerza se me escapa involuntariamente algo de orina y por eso también vivo con esa sensación de que algo, dentro de mí, ha cambiado de lugar. (50)

Mercedes appears more concerned with the impact of childbirth on her own body than with the other physical bodies to whom she gives birth. She cannot, or maybe she does not choose to, attempt to grasp the intelligibility of the materiality of her children’s bodies; instead she tries to give meaning to the changes in her physical body by writing about it.

Even though Mercedes sets up her daughter as a distinct entity from herself, Elena and her mother are both 43 when they write in their diaries. As Elena writes in her diary not only

does her human body transform, it also becomes more present and it becomes more and more evident that her human body belongs to her. All of her texts—her collective written story that is comprised of her diary entries, speaking directly to her readers, the detective’s reports, and a final letter to her estranged husband, Enrique—become embodied. Amago remarks, “Elena’s efforts as a writer not only constitute the second part of the text as she writes it into existence, but she is also aware that *her body is a text* that can be written and consequently understood” (74, emphasis mine). This collective text keeps her human body alive. When Elena does not write in her diary or otherwise contribute to her story, she feels her human body slipping away from her. At one point, when she has not written for awhile, she exclaims, “Pese a la firmeza de mis propósitos, llevo varios días sin acudir a este diario y eso me proporciona la rara sensación de no existir” (115).

Symmetry is highlighted in the act of writing. In the second part of the novel the third-person narration is usurped by Elena’s voice as she writes her own story. Millás inserts Elena’s diary entries, which are the main microtexts in the novel, as well as several other short pieces of intercalated fiction into the second part of the novel, which includes the detective reports and the last microtext, a letter to Elena from her husband. Elena’s construction of her story mirrors her mother’s diary; in a sense, the written text that she constructs is a repetition of her mother’s narrative. Yet, just as Gilles Deleuze reminds us in *Difference and Repetition*, repetition inherently implies difference. Repetition and writing share an intimate relationship: both are processes that rely on another’s repeated intervention. Repetition can only occur because the original occurred before it and writing requires the repetitive reading of its script. Ultimately, repetition is the guiding force that permits text, in the broadest sense, to be created. It gives body to a text. As Elena records the events of her life, just as her mother did, she creates a written

copy of her experiences and sensations, yet the copy can never be the original and the act of repeating changes the essence of the first version. Kawin notes, “The falsification of reality in art or memory comes about from the attempt at repetition, the action or voluntarily remembering; by trying to ‘perceive’ the event again, we change it” (31). Even merely perceiving an event and writing about it, or hiring someone to write about it, can never capture the original experience. The observation of the world that surrounds us and the attempt to make sense of what we perceive by assigning language to it is an insufficient process. In a sense, trying to capture a moment in time that one is never able to fully grasp via memory or via language is never enough. Putting words down on paper, however, is one way to pursue this ever-fleeting meaning.

The diary as a genre blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction and between narrator and protagonist. The intimate perspective and the focalization are pinned to the character that writes. Although in *La soledad era esto* there are no temporal markers of dates that categorize the entries (other than the inclusion of ages within the diary entries), both Mercedes and Elena write about their past from a present first-person perspective. Furthermore, diaries are obviously private texts, yet neither Mercedes nor Elena expresses her loneliness in explicit terms within the diary entries. They both use the body and the process of writing to hint at the private nature of the recording of their life. In his article, “The Diary Novel: Notes for the Definition of a Sub-genre,” Gerard Prince notes that “it is very common indeed for diary novels to contain passages underlying not only the essential loneliness of the diarist but also the fact that his writing is a very private matter intended to remain very private” (478). The process of writing in diaries for both female characters in this novel is, in fact, private, yet the product in Mercedes’s case becomes shared and in the case of Elena, readers can suppose that her diaries will also be read by another (perhaps her own daughter), which confirms Millás’s insistence on repetitive and

inherited cycles. In this sense, the genre of the diary here takes on implicit epistolary characteristics.²²

Nevertheless, just as her mother must have done many years earlier, Elena buys notebooks in which she will write her story. She describes the experience in her first diary entry:

He comprado un conjunto de pequeños cuadernos, cosidos con grapas, que se parecen mucho a los que utilizó mi madre para llevar a cabo un raro e incompleto diario que, tras su muerte, fue a parar a mis manos. Mi vida discurre apaciblemente entre la lectura de su diario y la redacción del mío. (108)

Agawu-Kakraba finds differences in the two women's journals when he states, "[H]er mother makes no conscious effort to redefine her subjectivity and resigns her fate to a Madrid that she calls 'este barrio roto'" ("The Process of Subjectivity" 48). Yet, for Agawu-Kakraba Elena's writing "indirectly reinforces her [Mercedes's] desire to reconstitute herself" ("The Process of Subjectivity" 88). It seems, however, that the two diaries as bodies of text are the means by which identity is negotiated for both characters. The process of writing, or reconstituting by making small modifications to a character's human body *vis-à-vis* another character and/or another written text, is more striking than the outcome of said process. Elena's mother does this via her creation of the antipode and the daughter (the two Elenas), and Elena does this via the reading of her mother's diary and by the subsequent doubling of writing in her own journal. That is to say, Millás situates at the forefront of his narrative the process of reading and writing, or the creation of embodied texts, and how they mirror the reconstitution of the human body. Elena's mother reconstitutes her human body in her antipode/daughter, and Elena reconstitutes her human body when she stops consuming drugs and alcohol and leaves her broken marriage.

If Mercedes looks to her antipode to complement the brief texts that she writes in her diaries, before Elena actually writes in her diary herself, she chooses a private detective to take on the role of writer. Both characters live their lives through each other and both are scripted and mirrored by each other. Elena first hires Detective Acosta to prove that her husband is, in fact, engaging in an extramarital relationship, yet only the detective's first written report chronicles Enrique's affairs. After that first report Elena anonymously requests that the detective record her own life via a subjective lens. In other terms, she employs Acosta to compose a microtext about her life, which gives readers yet another perspective on Elena. Her request that a third-party interpret her life permits Elena to get closer to writing about her life. In this sense, the detective's microtexts function as a medium through which Elena is able to test the waters as a writer. Agawu-Kakraba comments, "The interpolation of the detective's reports within Elena's text is important for the protagonist because those reports enable her to sketch the contours of her new self perceived through the mirror of another" ("The Process of Subjectivity" 87), and Mercedes employs her antipode in a similar way. Furthermore, Scarlett observes, "Living vicariously through someone else's story is a prominent characteristic of Spanish new narrative. . . . Being a spectator of one's own life. . . is an unmistakable response to the primacy of spectacle in the postmodern world" (175). Elena could not see herself from her self; her body is a metaphorical prison until she can see herself through the subjective perspective of someone else, in this case, the two someone elses of the private investigator and her mother.

Reflecting back on her former self, Elena describes her solitude in accordance with the human body when she writes:

La soledad es una amputación no visible, pero tan eficaz como si te arrancaran la vista y el oído y así, aislada de todas las sensaciones exteriores, de todos los

puntos de referencia, y sólo con el tacto y la memoria, tuvieras que reconstruir el mundo, el mundo que has de habitar y que te habita. (133-34)

The allusion to an amputation suits Elena's transformation well; it forces her to live inside her physical body and perhaps inside her mind. Yet the human body as an object and a subject always exists. In *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance*, Jane Blocker puts it well when she writes that

we are at one and the same time our bodies and *not* our bodies. Our experience of the world is embodied, deeply physical, and sensory, but we also conceive of ourselves and our bodies as separate entities—I and it—that exist in a relationship whereby “I” am the presumed subject and “it” is the presumed object. [. . .] We are never entirely its and it is never entirely ours, which makes the body a theater of romantic conflict wherein is staged a sense of impossibility, of “never-knowing.” (7)

Writing enables Elena to approach the limits of the body's capacity to know. These ontological edges—or what Derrida describes as the gap between the signifier and the signified—are examined in the texts that Elena writes and in the fragmentation of her physical body (for instance, her one waxed leg). At one point Elena confesses, “A veces pienso que la identidad es algo precario, que se puede caer de uno como el pelo que se desprende cuando nos lavamos la cabeza y desaparece por el sumidero de la bañera en direcciones que ignoramos” (154-55). This revelation problematizes the traditional Cartesian dichotomy of body and mind and at the same time it highlights the fact that the attempt to know attracts and dispels desire. Belsey describes desire as “an effect of absence. . . . But desire is also referential: it inhabits the flesh. Desire is not a property, therefore, of mind or body, still less of mind *and* body. On the contrary, it

exceeds the duality of their relationship” (*Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* 34). Millás ruptures traditional rules of the construction and development of the human body that focus on the body as one unchangeable and complete entity inseparable from the mind. He also attempts to alter traditional modes of the creation of written text by employing repetition to complicate these systems.

Elena eventually breaks free from her old self, proving that writing is a cathartic process that enables her to redefine her identity. She carries out repetitive acts of conscientiously taking care of her physical body and of reconstructing her identity as she writes, and when she finally leaves her husband and the suffocating space of the apartment that she shares with him, her body reacts in a positive way. She writes, “En estos momentos siento que la rareza intestinal ha desaparecido y noto su ausencia como la ausencia de la melena cada vez que inclino la cabeza” (181). In one last act of writing, Enrique writes Elena a goodbye letter in which he articulates his relief at being finished with her and her physical body; he states, “También yo tengo derecho a que se respete el modo de vida que he elegido, y en ese modo de vida no tienen cabida las tragedias, ni las molestias intestinales ni los dolores de cabeza” (169). In the end, Elena is transformed: she stops taking drugs and drinking alcohol, and her physical illnesses fade into the background. The architecture of the novel (the two parts of reading and writing, the generational doubling of mother, daughter, and granddaughter, and the repetition of key signifiers like time, names, and ages) creates a complex and complete storyline. Yet perhaps the most striking parts of the novel are the acts of reading and writing expressed on, through, and by the human body.

The human body and the embodied text are also at the forefront of *Laura y Julio* in that both main characters experience the world through their physical bodies and they write their stories and read the stories of others. Laura begins as the principal author of her story through

the emails that she exchanges with her lover Manuel, who lives next door in an apartment that mirrors the one that Laura shares with her husband Julio. Even after a car accident leaves Manuel in a coma in the hospital, Laura continues to write to him and in these written exchanges readers learn that she is pregnant with his child. When Laura and Julio separate, Julio takes on the phantasmagoric life of Manuel by moving into his apartment and dressing in his neighbor's clothes. Just as Millás in *La soledad era esto* employs the human body as the site of human experience and desire and ultimately as the agent of written text, so too does he carry out a similar task sixteen years later in *Laura y Julio*.

Millás complicates the triangular relationship between the three characters of *Laura y Julio* by redefining the traditional notion of family and also by referencing incest. Just as Elena Rincón enacts a triangular relationship with her mother and her daughter, so too does Manuel function as the center of the relationship between Laura and Julio. Millás writes that the members of the threesome “no podían vivir ni él sin ellos ni ellos sin él” (14). Manuel is described both as Laura and Julio's child and as their intermediary; the narrator notes, “Durante el tránsito del deseo al silencio apareció en sus vidas Manuel, al que procuraban tales cuidados que había venido a ocupar, en cierto modo, el lugar del hijo” (25.)²³ Like Elena in *La soledad era esto*, Manuel functions as the center of the relationship between Laura and Julio. The narrator tells us:

Quizá Manuel había ocupado el lugar del hijo durante los últimos tiempos, pero si Manuel no regresaba del coma, Laura y él [Julio] tendrían que mirarse el uno al otro sin intermediarios; tendrían que hablarse sin intermediarios; que administrar sus silencios y sus conversaciones y sus quejas sin intermediarios. (51)

The creation of Manuel as the center of the relationship, and even more, as both the object and subject of Laura and Julio's marriage, is one of Millás first symmetrical constructions in the novel. Additionally, Laura and Julio both feel loss when they learn that Manuel is in a coma in the hospital after an automobile accident. The narrator states that "su matrimonio, sin ese individuo, resulta ya incompleto" and even Julio takes note of the solitude when he tells Laura, "Parece que nos hemos quedado viudos" (8). Miguel is not just the figurative child, he is also described as Laura and Julio's spouse.

If Manuel is described as their son, and if he is also having an affair with Laura, the relationship between the three is further complicated by the incestuous comments that Manuel makes about the married couple when he visits them at their home. In one instance, Manuel dryly tells Laura and Julio that they look like siblings. He continues to advocate incest by stating that "[s]i yo hubiera tenido una hermana, la habría seducido o me habría dejado seducido por ella" (10). Ironically, however, Manuel is having a secret affair with Laura, which leaves readers wondering if she and he also look like siblings. If this is the case, the web of desire—lovers, siblings, neighbors, spouses, and so forth—becomes more and more difficult to unravel.

Likewise, Millás continuously reverts to the human body to describe this strange construction of desire. At one point the narrator characterizes Manuel, who often visits his neighbors' home, sitting on the end of their sofa "como un feto dentro del útero" (11). Little does Julio know at this point that Manuel is sleeping with his wife, or that he is the father of the fetus growing in his wife's womb. The image of Manuel as an integral part of the trio, yet hidden away on the edge of the couch, foreshadows the future birth of the child and also reinforces Manuel's position as a necessary component in the marriage between Laura and Julio. Manuel's physical body is such a powerful force in the story that when Julio visits his comatose

neighbor at the hospital, he notes, “Aunque [Manuel] permanecía entubado y conectado a diversas máquinas, daba la impresión de que era él, con sus energías, el que hacía funcionar los aparatos y al revés” (20).

After Manuel’s accident, Julio begins to transform the appearance of his physical body into that of his dying neighbor. As he enters his neighbor’s apartment for the first time, and after being asked by Manuel’s father to check up on the place, he describes his transformative experience in Bakhtinian terms as crossing the threshold: “en vez de dirigirse a su casa, [Julio] se dirigió a la de al lado, cuya puerta abrió y cerró tras de sí después de atravesar el umbral” (39). Upon crossing the doorway into the new space, Julio begins to transform. He experiences an accumulation of corporeal sensations and he notes that his neighbor’s home mirrors the one that he shared with his wife (40). In this sense, the doubling of physical bodies is reflected by the parallel spaces of the two apartments. Julio comments, “[T]odo lo que en su casa caía a su izquierda quedaba en ésta a su derecha, tuvo la impresión de haber llegado al otro lado del espejo” (40). The parallel construction of the spaces is also highlighted by the two similar kitchens, which seem to Julio to be “dos siameses unidos por la espalda,” as well as by the similar layout of the bathroom and the master bedroom that “acataban asimismo las leyes de la reflexión con un sometimiento sorprendente” (40). To top it all off, the narrator exclaims, “[L]a vivienda fuera en última instancia una réplica del cuerpo y por lo tanto un espacio mental” (41). The implications of this statement are many. First, Millás has stated elsewhere that the house is a reproduction of the human body: its windows are eyes, the front door is a mouth, and the hallways that run through it are intestines (personal interview). When Julio inhabits Manuel’s apartment he does not only occupy a parallel space; he also has crossed over to the other side of the mirror. The space of the home reflects the space of the self not only here but also in *La*

soledad era esto. Moreover, just as a house “houses” our personal belongings and memories, so does the human body “house” our most personal wishes and desires. In this sense, both the house and the human body are constantly evolving objects, not static artifacts.

Soon Laura cannot handle the pressure of a failing marriage and Manuel’s failing body, and she kicks Julio out of the house on New Year’s Eve. With nowhere to go, Julio decides to stay at his dying neighbor’s house. He secretively enters Manuel’s house in the following lines:

Sin encender ninguna luz, con movimientos de funámbulo, para que ningún ruido se filtrara en la vivienda de al lado, llegó hasta el dormitorio de su vecino, donde se desnudó y se metió en la cama al mismo tiempo, pensó, que su fantasma, o su reflejo (quizá su sombra), se metía en la de la casa de al lado, junto a Laura. . . .

Antes de cerrar los ojos, vio penetrar por la ventana la claridad con la que el amanecer del nuevo año iluminaba su existencia. (83)

Thus, with the dawn of a new year and the occupation of a new space, Julio begins to transform into somebody new, yet somebody with whom he and his wife are very familiar. The first acts of his metamorphosis are to wash his body and transform his outer appearance into that of Manuel. Brooks comments, “In modern, narrative literature, a protagonist often desires a body (most often another’s, but sometimes his or her own) and that body comes to represent for the protagonist an apparent ultimate good, since it appears to hold within itself—as itself—the key to satisfaction, power, and meaning” (8). It would be too trite, however, to say that Julio wants to become Manuel when in fact what seems to be happening is that by moving into a new space, Julio is given the chance to experiment with his own physical body. This task brings him pleasure. He dresses his body in Manuel’s clothes and he sprays his neighbor’s cologne on himself. Julio’s body is no longer his, yet neither is it Manuel’s; it has transformed.²⁴

The first time that he showers in Manuel's apartment is a scene of metaphoric rebirth. "Julio acercaba su mano a los mandos de la ducha," the narrator describes, "al jabón, a la esponja, como si fuera la primera vez en su vida que tocaba aquella clase de objetos" (95). Julio notes that his hair looks like Manuel's after he uses his hair products and he even shaves his face with Manuel's razor. The experience brings him pleasure: the narrator tells us that, "su rostro agradeció al quedarse más fresco y despierto, más receptivo a los estímulos del aire que con la maquinilla eléctrica que utilizaba él" (96). He also dresses his body in Manuel's clothes, paying attention to how good his body feels in the clothes of his wife's lover. A bit exaggeratedly, the narrator comments that "[a Julio] [l]e pareció asombroso que la ropa influyera de aquella manera en el estado de ánimo, pues lo cierto es que flotaba literalmente al recorrer el pasillo" (97).²⁵ Julio undergoes a rebirth that causes his physical body to rejuvenate.

The transformation of Julio into Manuel allows him the opportunity to write a new story for himself, one that is based on desire. Brooks tells us, "If the plot of the novel is very often the story of success or failure in gaining access to the body—and the story of the fulfillment or disillusionment that this brings—the larger story may concern the desire to pierce the mysteries of life that are so often subsumed for us in the otherness of other people" (8). Now living full-time in Manuel's apartment, Julio, who is sick with a high fever, spends days asleep in his neighbor's bed, yet he still pays attention to what Laura is doing in the apartment next door. As if researching a future project, Julio listens to and watches his wife go about the daily activities of her life. His research is described in terms of learning a new language: "[l]eía cada sonido producido por su mujer como si fueran las letras de un alfabeto que llenaba de frases el espacio" (83). Learning to read the language from his new space, Julio seems to have regressed to a pre-symbolic stage during his transformation into Manuel. It is as if he is trying to make sense of the

symbols that surround him, or he is attempting to make the transition to the symbolic, learning a new language via sounds.

In complementary fashion, Julio's career is also all about transformation: he creates movie and television sets. His job is to first construct models of the set, which ultimately will become the real thing. In a similar way to the reflection of the house and the human body, the narrator notes that Julio "[t]enía una gran facilidad para construir espacios físicos capaces de representar espacios mentales y eso era lo que más apreciaban de él los directores de cine" (33). Furthermore, Julio's career also mirrors that of his father. Both are architects in their own rights: his father designs houses and Julio designs movie sets, or houses "de mentira" as he reminds his father (63). Julio's current project—designing a cardboard model of a set for a movie about the relationship between a young cashier and an elderly woman who frequents the supermarket where the cashier works—reflects the alternate reality that Julio enters when he begins living in Manuel's apartment.

Correspondingly, Julio thinks of his life like a cardboard model; he imagines the spaces that he inhabits as a model of a bigger reality. The narrator comments, "Acostumbrado a reducir los espacios arquitectónicos a maquetas, podía ver en su imaginación las dos viviendas, adheridas la una a la otra como las partes de un espejo de dos caras. Y él estaba ya inevitablemente en los dos lados" (51). Likewise, the second time Julio enters Manuel's home, the narrator notes that he "[p]odía verse a sí mismo desde arriba, como si la vivienda fuera una maqueta y él un muñeco móvil, un autómatas" (53). Other events in Julio's life also end up being false, including the pregnancy of his wife. Laura is indeed pregnant, but she lies to Julio by telling him that she is not pregnant so that he will leave and so that she will be able to raise the child as the offspring of Manuel.

It seems that Julio desires to be the creator of his own reality. In fact, on one occasion the narrator notes:

Si él tuviera una vida regalada, se dedicaría a construir maquetas por el propio placer de construirlas. Quizá fundara un museo de maquetas lo suficientemente grandes como para que los visitantes pudieran penetrar en ellas y jugar a ser los muñecos de un decorado gigantesco en el que habría consultas de ginecólogos y supermercados y viviendas de ancianas que vivían y morían solas, con el televisor encendido, y casas de matrimonios y de solteros y conventos de curas y de monjas. (54)

Designing sets for the fictional world of movies can only do so much for him, and he recognizes that his job, much like the job of a writer, can never truly reproduce the reality of life. In this sense creating cardboard models is similar to writing stories: both systems, material and written, get close to representing reality, yet neither can never truly be that reality. In Julio's mind one way around this would be to create a new reality, one in which the models that he creates are actually the fixtures of life: in his alternate reality, the models are one and the same with what they represent. With his perspective focalized through the lens of the narrator, we learn that “[a] lo que [Julio] aspiraba en realidad era reproducir la vida a la misma escala que la vida, de ahí, pensó, la necesidad del hijo” (54). A human body is the only entity that reproduces human life itself; Julio will be able to most closely approximate a model of himself only through having a child with his wife.

Julio's cardboard models evolve from miniscule scales to wishful life-sized realities and the stories that he tells also evolve in a similar way. Millás inserts microtexts in the novel in the form of three short stories that Julio tells Julia, his stepsister's young daughter.²⁶ Storytelling is

another way that Millás complicates the creation of written text within the novel. In *Laura y Julio*, Millás employs Julio as the author of three microtexts, but as is often his tendency, Millás constructs the storytelling duties of Julio in such a way that the character must struggle for authorship.

In Julio's first microtext, the two characters with similar names share story-telling duties. The young Julia forces Julio to tell her a bedtime story, stating, "Si quieres que me duerma, me tendrás que contar un cuento" (71). She tells him, "Tú di érase una vez y verás como sale," after which a game of co-authoring ensues:

—Érase una vez —dijo Julio y se calló.

—Érase una vez un país —añadió la niña.

...

—Érase una vez que un país —repitió Julio— en el que había menos sombras que personas.

—¿Por qué?

—Porque la mitad de la gente nacía sin sombra.

—¿Y cómo era la gente sin sombra?

—Atolondrada.

—¿Qué quiere decir atolondrada?

—Que pensaban poco las cosas.

...

—¿Sabían leer?

—Mal.

—¿Y qué pasó? (71)

This exchange of co-authorship with Julia continuously prompting Julio to continue fabricating the microtext about the shadows without people goes on until the young girl falls asleep. The repetition of the familiar beginning of a story, “érase una vez,” adds dimension to the back-and-forth between the two characters, highlighting the difficulty of starting a story from scratch and focusing on the repetitious enunciation of the phrase. The technique of anaphora not only creates a poetic effect that is aesthetically pleasing due to its symmetry, it also connects the two characters, the two “Julios” who, despite their differences in age and gender, occupy a similar position as that of the storytellers of this first work of intercalated fiction.

As Julia drifts off to sleep, Julio takes control of the microtext, telling her that since only half of the population has shadows, the government mandates that each person give half of his or her shadow to those without any. This creates a search *en masse* for the other halves of their shadows: “El afán de las sombras por encontrar la otra parte de sí mismas,” Julio tells Julia, “era tal que mandaban más que las personas” (74). And he continues: “Las sombras dominaban los movimientos de todo el mundo. Y cuando dos medias sombras, que originalmente habían sido una, volvían a encontrarse, sus propietarios no tenían más remedio que irse a vivir juntos: tal era el poder de las sombras” (74). Julio’s development of the microtext in this manner foreshadows his reconciliation with his wife that occurs near the end of the novel. The game of mirrors and reproduction that Millás creates with the two side-by-side apartments and the transformation of Julio into Manuel continues here in this microtext. The first double is obvious: the names of the co-authors, Julio and Julia, closely mirror one another. Secondly, the content of the story—the half shadows that reestablish themselves as whole shadows—may not only represent Julio’s transformation into Manuel, they also may foreshadow the ending of the novel, when Julio and Laura reinstate their marriage. Additionally, Julio is excited about his newly found ability as a

storyteller: “Estaba excitado, como un orador que hubiera pronunciado, con éxito, el mejor discurso de su vida” (75). Millás’s choice of adjectives here, “excitado,” carries with it a hint of erotic desire. Like Elena when she, like her mother before her, records her story, Julio briefly tastes autonomy when he constructs his own story, even though it is only a bedtime story.

The next microtext that Julio tells the little girl also requires a bit of prompting from her. She requests that Julio tell her a story from the same country of shadows to which he replies that he does not know what else happens in that country (114). They cultivate a dialogue similar to the previous one. The little girl asks him, “¿No sabes si las muñecas nacían con sombra o sin sombra?” (114). The question provokes the second story that the two create together. Julio begins:

—Una vez salió de la fábrica una muñeca sin sombra.

—¿Por qué?

—Por un error en el proceso de producción.

—¿Qué es el proceso de producción?

—El conjunto de fases por el que pasa la construcción de una muñeca.

—Bueno, sigue. (114)

Together Julio and Julia repeat the story about the shadows that they constructed in their first exchange and together they add on to it. Once again the focus of the story is not on people. Human bodies have been usurped by specters: the shadows rule the first story and here, in the second microtext, the shadows of inanimate objects, the dolls, also force the human body from the center. The materiality of the physical body is put into question when its shadow, and even the shadow of the human body’s miniature representation of a doll, becomes the most important character in the story. Weiss writes, “Recognizing the materiality, or more precisely, the

materialities, of texts (including the body as text) is to acknowledge that texts are necessarily embodied just as bodies can be understood textually” (64). The other country that Julio and Julia create together is a place devoid of bodies, a place where shadows rule. Much like Julio’s usurpation of his neighbor’s identity and like his love of creating model worlds, the fantastical world that he constructs with the small girl is not just a bedtime story: it too is an alternate world, one that he as the author controls.

In the last story of the micro-trilogy, Julio is more confident in his storytelling skills. Once again, Julia insists that he tell her a story about the shadows. Julio quickly fulfills her request and begins a new story in the same way that stories have begun for ages. He tells her, “Érase una vez una tintorería de sombras” (167). When the little girl asks for further explanation he tells her, “No me interrumpas todo el rato” (167). By the time he tells her the third story his position as a creator of stories has been established. No longer requiring a co-author, the act of writing the three stories about the country of shadows prepares Julio to be able to write the most important inserted story of the novel, the one that will bring him and his wife back together again.

Coupled with the stories that Julio and Julia write together, we also find the stories that Julio constructs as Manuel. The transformation to being able to write as Manuel is steady: Julio first begins by simply logging onto Manuel’s email account so that he is able to clandestinely read his neighbor’s emails, but soon he actually writes an email posing as Manuel. The possibility of reading the emails of his wife’s lover’s seduces him. Millás describes the first time that Manuel’s computer entices Julio: “Al darse la vuelta, su mirada tropezó, como en tantas ocasiones, con el ordenador de Manuel, pero esta vez cedió a la tentación de encenderlo” (119).²⁷ When Julio opens Manuel’s email box, a hoard of new messages downloads and he reads one by

chance, which happens to be from Laura (120).²⁸ Writing to her comatose lover, she confesses that “hay algo providencial en el hecho de que el niño haya aparecido en el instante que te he perdido a ti” (120-21). Following Millás’s tendency to create doubles, Laura’s growing fetus in a sense replaces her dying lover.²⁹

As an example of another repetitive construction, Julio discovers in one of Manuel’s many emails that Laura found out that she was pregnant the very day that Manuel got into the car accident that would ultimately claim his life (121). In the same message, Laura swears to Manuel, “A partir de hoy, escribiré un diario del embarazo que enviaré a tu correo electrónico para que cuando despiertes del coma, porque estoy segura de que despertarás, amor mío, estoy segura, segura, segura, puedas saber qué ocurrió, día a día, desde el accidente” (121). Reading these words physically affects Julio. “La habitación se quedó sin oxígeno,” the narrator tells us, and “Julio tuvo que levantarse y salir precipitadamente al pasillo, donde tampoco lo encontró. Comprendió entonces que el problema no se encontraba fuera, sino dentro de sí. Sus pulmones se habían bloqueado de tal modo que era incapaz, por más que abriera la boca, de tomar aire” (121-22).

Additionally, the narrator maintains that Julio has always known his future. The story has already, and has always, been written. The narrator tells us that Julio has always known that Laura would be pregnant, even when he had yet to meet her. He states that Julio

llegó a la conclusión de que lo sabía desde siempre. Lo asombroso es que “desde siempre” quería decir desde toda la vida. Lo sabía en el colegio; en el instituto; en la academia de decoración. . . . Lo sabía desde que antes de conocer a Laura, desde antes de conocer a Manuel, desde antes de casarse, como si tratara de una profecía que le hubieran anunciado en un tiempo remoto y la hubiera olvidado. [.

. .] Julio sintió que también él era el producto de una Biblia en la que estaba escrito lo que ahora acaba de averiguar. (123-24)

If the story has always been written, the implications are many. Not only is providence divine, but it also points towards the fact that no matter how much Julio attempts to transform—no matter how much he writes, re-presents, or even re-writes the story—the future is already predetermined. Only the actual process of transformation brings him pleasure since he believes that the outcome has already been written. Later that same night, Julio returns to read the emails that “venía[n] escribiéndose desde el principio de los tiempos” (125). His act of writing attempts to change time, yet just as the myth of Penelope who weaves a tapestry to ward off suitors in anticipation that her husband Ulysses will return, Laura will also return to Julio in the end. In these instances, weaving and writing serve as a mere distraction from the present, yet no matter what is woven or written, the future will remain the same because it is predetermined in the past. Once again, even though the novel progresses chronologically, time as an underlying motif is circular.

As the reader of his wife’s secret relationship with Manuel, Julio learns, via the emails that Laura writes to Manuel, how their affair began. The interrelation of the human body and the textual body has always existed in Laura and Manuel’s relationship. Julio reads that the two met in the massage parlor where Laura works long before Manuel was their neighbor. Laura describes to Manuel the first time that she massaged his body in an email to him in which she states that “era [. . .] como si amasar tus músculos los creara de nuevo” (126). She continues, “Quizá [. . .] tú no te diste cuenta, pero había ocasiones en las que abandonaba el masaje para moldearte” (126). If Laura, through written emails to her lover, and Julio, through the creation of models of movie sets, both attempt to write texts, they also both attempt to rework the human

body. Julio tries to transform himself into his wife's lover by wearing Manuel's clothing and living in his apartment, and Laura tries to recreate her own body by touching and then molding her lover's body.³⁰ Although they seem to be opposite tendencies, Julio transforms himself into someone else while Laura attempts to recreate herself. Her physical body changes as the fetus inside of her continues to grow; yet, she states that she only truly knows her own physical body by touching Manuel. In another message to Manuel she writes that, "[n]o conocía ni remotamente las posibilidades de mi cuerpo hasta que conocí el tuyo" (127).

Laura rediscovers herself through her physical relationship with Manuel just as Julio attempts to rediscover his self by dressing in Manuel's clothes and living in his house. Maybe what really happens, however, is that the married couple actually create themselves *vis-à-vis* Manuel's body. Once again biblical references highlight the creation of the human body when Laura writes to Manuel the following lines:

Era [. . .] como si después de que yo te hubiera creado con mis manos, tú te incorporaras y aún recién hecho, todavía caliente, como Adán después de que Dios soplara sobre él, te dispusieras a devolverme el favor creando un cuerpo verdadero para mí, porque yo carecía, amor, de un cuerpo propiamente dicho hasta que tú le diste forma. Disponía, sí, de la material prima, de la masa, pero era una masa informe, insensible, sin articulaciones, sin circuitos. Mi cuerpo era una *casa vacía*, oscura, húmeda, hasta que tú entraste en él y empezaste a prender las velas, a encender la chimenea, a habitarlo. (127)

Just like the story of Genesis, the physical body occupies center stage in the creation of life for both Laura and Julio. In Laura's case, the tables are turned for it is she, and neither Adam nor Julio, who creates her lover. Millás flips the roles of the characters in the story of Genesis here

by alternating the traditional gender roles of the characters. Such a statement against hegemonic gender and erotic norms is once again reinforced in the relationship between the dying Manuel and Julio. In his preface to *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* (2001), Millás states that many extramarital affairs actually take place not because the male lover is attracted to the married women, but rather because he is attracted to the husband. Engaging in the affair allows him to get closer to the husband, which in turn fulfills his homo-erotic desires.

Reading these messages between lovers brings Julio much pleasure. The narrator writes, “Leyendo aquellos mensajes, por lo general breves, pero intensos, sentía un ardor sexual que tampoco había conocido en sí mismo, como si fuera otro—¿quizá Manuel?—el que se excitara a través de su cuerpo” (127-28). Julio only permits himself to feel pleasure by imagining Manuel’s body as his body. Julio’s physical body can only be the receptacle for sensory experiences once he has begun to pay more attention to it by trying to transform it into Manuel’s body. It seems, then, that Millás suggests through his characters’ physical bodies the subversion of the human body as the site of inscriptions of societal standards of gender performance and sexual behavior, yet the privacy of the body prevails here. Julio is indifferent and apathetic until he begins to write his own story; until he takes control of his physical body *vis-à-vis* the identity of his dying wife’s lover, he is unable to experience life through corporeal sensations. In attempting to transform his body into his dying neighbor’s body, Julio discovers the different facets of himself, namely, as a writer of his own experience and as a successful husband to Laura. Iser explains it well when he states that “human beings are at best differential, traveling between their various roles that supplant and modify one another. Roles are not disguises with which to fulfill pragmatic ends; they are means of enabling the self to be other than each individual role. Being oneself therefore means being able to double oneself” (80-81). By the

end of the novel Julio is comfortable with who he is because he has experienced life from the perspective of his wife's lover.

As a voluntary voyeur of his wife's extramarital affair, Julio also chooses to read the email messages that Manuel writes to Laura. Manuel's messages to her reflect the ones that she has written to him. In one message he tells her, "Has de saber que también mi cuerpo, antes de que lo moldearas, era una masa inerte a la que tus manos dieron la forma de un hombre y tu hálito le insufló el alma" (135). Manuel permits Laura to mold his body, assigning to her the role of creator.

In several messages from Manuel to Laura, Manuel imagines crossing over to the other side of the bathroom mirror, something that Julio actually does. Manuel writes to Laura

imaginaba que entraba en el cuarto de baño de mi casa, que retiraba el espejo que hay sobre el lavabo y que detrás no había pared [. . .], sino la espalda de tu espejo, donde daba unos golpes para anunciarte mi presencia. Entonces, tú retirabas ese espejo y los dos quedábamos frente a frente, como si cada uno fuera el reflejo del otro. (137-38)

Once again Manuel's appearance in the game of reflections and exchanges complicates the relationship between the three. Reading these intimate words from his wife's lover is sexually enticing for Julio, and he ventures into the bathroom where he tries to picture Laura's reflection, but the one that stares back at him is Manuel's (139). Perhaps seeing Manuel's reflection in the mirror his transformation into Manuel indicates that Julio's transformation into his wife's lover is successful and foreshadows the end of the novel when Julio is able to return to his wife.

Laura continues writing to Manuel even when he is in a coma in the hospital and Julio, acting as Manuel, writes Laura an email that will bring the two back together. The tone of his

letter—his ultimate microtext—is authoritative and concrete. He tells his wife that “hay una energía independiente del cuerpo” and he informs her that he (as Manuel) has come to visit her in his phantasmal form to say his final goodbyes. “Lo cierto,” he writes, “es que acabo de morir, querida Laura, querida mía. Me he convertido, como tú suponías que ocurre con los muertos, en una fuerza invisible, pero real” (184). In the message Julio (as Manuel) tells Laura that Julio should be the father of the child and he also writes, “Julio y yo, pese a las apariencias, estábamos misteriosamente unidos por un vínculo de complementariedad” (184-85). The narrator even ventures to tell us, “El hijo era de él y de Manuel, que Laura no era más que un instrumento necesario para que ellos dos—la unión de lo abstracto y lo concreto—pudieran procrear” (185-86). Ultimately, Laura and Julio will raise little Manuel together. The reading, writing, and so-called transformation does not lead them to a new reality, but rather back to the same life that they once knew. Yet they are different: Julio seems more confident as himself because he has experienced life from the perspective of someone else, and Laura seems more able to be who she is because Manuel (or Julio posing as Manuel) told her to take her husband back. In the end, Manuel still controls their marriage from the grave, and what is even more significant, his image has been regenerated in the physical form of the young child, Manuel. Weiss comments:

Paradoxically, just as the spider’s web secures its victims in order to “undo” them, the text also secures writer and reader, allowing them to come into existence not as substantive subjects, but as those who give meaning and purpose to the web’s existence by being woven within it and who are necessarily destroyed in the process. Desire plays a key role in this entrapment. (52)

The written text of emails, not to mention the actual process of writing the text, seems to manifest what Weiss so thoughtfully explains: written discourse is the web spun from the desire

that ultimately seduces the two characters, the writer (Julio posing as Manuel) and the reader (Laura), to become entangled in the network of written discourse. They are prisoners of the metaphorical spider, which in this case just may be Manuel in all of his manifestations.

Near the last lines of the novel, Julio remembers that Manuel once told him, “Desengáñate, la vida de los seres humanos, tanto en su dimensión colectiva como individual, está montada siempre sobre un mito, sobre una leyenda, sobre una mentira, en fin” (186). Julio attempts to experience reality through both the human body and the textual body (and even through the intertwining of the two), an insufficient goal that never arrives at a conclusion. These intertwining bodies remind us of the compulsive cycle of the postmodern experience of using systems, whether the human body or the written text, to try to make sense of the world in which we live.

Brooks writes that the body “is the nexus of desire. . . the drive to know, and narrative: those stories we tell about the body in the effort to know and to have it, which result in making the body a site of signification—the place for the inscription of stories—and itself a signifier, a prime agent in narrative plot and meaning” (5-6). In the two novels that I have analyzed in this chapter, the physical body is the vessel of desire that pushes characters to write their stories and/or to read the stories of others. What is left over in all of the entanglements of desire is text: the human body as text and the embodied written text. Elena, Julio, and Laura explore the construction of the human body via fragmentation and transformation. All three characters also read and write texts, media that permit them the space to analyze their identities. The human body and the written text as body are frequently the means by which reality is negotiated and where the quest for knowledge takes place. Both are discourses in constant motion and both require another human body and another reader in order to construct meaning. Brooks writes

that “the body maintains an unstable position between such extremes, at once the subject and object of pleasure, the uncontrollable agent of pain and the revolt against reason—and the vehicle of mortality. As such, it is always the subject of curiosity, of an ever-renewed project of knowing” (1). I would like to suggest that virtually the same statement could be made about written texts: they are the object and the subject of seduction, and the processes of reading and writing constantly point towards the elusiveness of knowledge. The transitive nature of the human body and the open-ended process of creating written text represent the intrinsic paradox of the human condition: we are always searching, but we never know. This is our postmodern situation, and as Amago has noted, “From the beginning, Millás’s fiction has always linked writing and living” (69). More significant, however, is how Millás carries out such a task. He does so by employing repetition as a technique that attempts to capture the innate paradoxes of writing and the construction of the human body’s experience in the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE EROSION OF BODIES IN *EL ORDEN ALFABÉTICO*
 AND *DOS MUJERES EN PRAGA*

In the previous chapter, I showed how Millás links the construction of textual bodies and human bodies in his narrative in order to emphasize his characters' repeated searches for subjectivity: Elena in *La soledad era esto* and Julio in *Laura y Julio* express their identities *vis-à-vis* writing text, and Millás employs their physical bodies as fragmented, liminal projects that end up more complete by the end of the novels.³¹ Ultimately, both main characters attempt to constitute their identities via the processes of writing and reading, and the representation of the human body becomes less fragmented as their subjectivities become more defined.

Thus, as I illustrate in Chapter 1, the search for subjectivity in Millás's works most frequently manifests as an examination of the boundary between reality and fiction both in human bodies and on textual bodies. Millás's characters often attempt to write their selves. That is to say, writing and reading frequently become the means by which characters search for their more authentic beings, or in other terms, the ways in which they attempt to locate and define stable points of reference. Such points of reference, however, are often unattainable for several reasons. First, language is an inherently representative system: a sign can never be the signifier and the signified, which highlights the impossibility of pinpointing concrete meaning. The discursive ontological gap of the sign is also frequently reflected in the human body in Millás's works. Like our texts, our bodies try to make sense of perception and to arrive at meaning, yet

neither body nor text can ever express concrete signification because both are constantly evolving; both are systems in continuous process. As I demonstrate in this chapter, Millás stresses the *process* of writing or reading texts and human bodies over the final *product* of what is written or read.

If in the first chapter I examine the construction of identity by writing and reading text and the constitution of the physical body primarily via the ideas of Peter Brooks, then here in the second chapter, using the theories of Julia Kristeva as my main analytical framework, I examine the erosion of both the human body and the textual body in two of Millás's novels, *El orden alfabético* (1998) and *Dos mujeres en Praga* (2002). Unlike the novels in the first chapter, in *El orden alfabético* and *Dos mujeres en Praga* the characters' bodies and texts are left battered and incomplete by the end of the stories. Characters in these novels try to create meaning by modifying their bodies and by attempting to construct text, yet the process of these acts actually provides some sort of insight into the attempted formation of their subjectivities, as opposed to the final product. In this sense, Millás seems to comment on the failed human struggle to uncover meaning in our lives through our two best yet inherently insufficient media: language and the human body.

Because Brooks's *Body Work* was published almost twenty years after Kristeva published her *Revolution in Poetic Language* in French (1974), their theories do not chronologically align. Brooks specifically examines the action of marking on the physical body and he sets the framework for wide-ranging investigations of the representation of the human body in art and literature. His examination of the marked Tahitian body, for instance, is empirically based and it is verifiable because he creates a model of analysis that is easily transferable to other examples of art and literature. By contrast, Kristeva takes a more explicitly theoretical approach.

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva examines text and the human body as interweaving media and outlines her primary ideas about text and the human body, which will become the basis for her subsequent volumes.³² In the book, which is a part of her doctoral dissertation, she argues that a “revolution” took place in the nineteenth century when the critical analysis of texts became a way to explore the human system of language and thus, our way of perceiving the world around us. Intrigued by the works of linguist Emile Benveniste and influenced by her mentor Roland Barthes, Kristeva challenges the structuralist concept that language is a static, disembodied object. Rather, she posits that language is a process always in production, and it is embodied in the text and in the materiality of the body, as I discuss below. Leon S. Roudiez writes of her ideas that “text cannot be thought of as a finished, permanent piece of cloth; it is in a perpetual state of flux as different readers intervene, as their knowledge deepens, and as history moves on” (5). Text is inherently always in process because of the nature of language: meaning fluctuates from the very moment it is uttered.

Following Barthes’s ideas in his essay “From Work to Text,” Kristeva defines text as a process in constant motion in her brief prologue to *Revolution* titled “Prolegomenon.” Much like the shift from the term “work” to the term “text” that Barthes advocates, Kristeva supports the move from “literature” to the broader term of “text.” Here her use of “text” attempts to erase the boundaries enforced by the traditional literary canon. That is to say, “literature” for Kristeva is too restrictive a term whereas “text” refers to anything that allows us to analyze the elusive sign. Both Barthes and Kristeva “emphasize not what literature ‘is,’ but rather what it *does*; they regard it not as a product, but instead as a production” (Becker-Leckrone 11). For Barthes and Kristeva “literature” becomes both the object and the subject of study when it is defined as “text.” Text in this sense is constructed and constructive.

Kristeva's post-Structuralist approach to discursive analysis not only marks a key conceptual shift in how we think about text, it also encourages us to reexamine how we conceptualize the human body. She posits that language and the human body are inseparable from one another and that language is inscribed in the materiality of the body. She describes the body as text in the following passage:

Caught up in this dynamic [of text], the human body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again, set itself in motion, or function biologically and physiologically, unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process. Without such a practice, the body in process/on trial is disarticulated. . . . Within the process, on the other hand, by confronting it, displacing its boundaries and laws, the subject in process/on trial discovers those boundaries and laws and makes them manifest in his practice of them. (*Revolution* 101)

According to Kristeva, neither text nor the human body carries innate meaning; they both are continuously assigned meaning. Just like text, the body is constantly in production as it continuously negotiates with that which surrounds it.³³ Furthermore, following Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of the separation from the mother, Kristeva stresses that the body is a vessel of desire and that corporeal drives repeatedly push us to try to fulfill that which it is inherently lacking. Unlike Lacan, who marks the mirror stage as the beginning of one's lack, Kristeva believes that the body is always inherently incomplete even before birth. Yet for both Lacan and Kristeva, the object of desire—be it the mother, the body, or the text—is always unattainable. Bryan S. Turner puts it well when he states in *The Body and Society* that “desire

cannot be finally satisfied since desire is its own object” (11). In the two novels at hand, desire manifests itself in texts within the novels and on the physical body.

To continue, Kristeva utilizes two key terms, the semiotic and the symbolic, to showcase the dialectical back-and-forth between bodily drives and language’s attempt at the construction of discursive signification.³⁴ The semiotic is pre-linguistic; it occurs when the physical body is the only medium through which we can perceive and attempt to understand the world. The symbolic refers to the use of language in an attempt to create signification. Kristeva defines the symbolic and the semiotic in the following lines:

[T]he *symbolic*. . . is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures. Genetic programmings are necessarily semiotic: they include the primary processes such as displacement and condensation, absorption and repulsion, rejection and stasis, all of which function as innate preconditions.
(*Revolution* 29)

The struggle between the symbolic and the semiotic, according to Kristeva, simultaneously connects and distances the body from the mother’s body and the semiotic orients the body to already established family structures. This orientation houses what Kristeva refers to as “chora,” which she defines as “a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. . . . The *chora* is not yet a position that represents something for someone (i.e., it is not a sign); nor is it a *position* that represents someone for another position (i.e., it is not yet a signifier either)” (*Revolution* 25-26). As the speaking subject enters into the symbolic position, such as when a child utters her first sounds or in *El orden* when Julio obsessively repeats phrases, one enters into the space between the signified and signifier, or

in Kristeva's terms, the thetic phase. This phase attempts to expose the break between the symbolic and the semiotic.

Furthermore, it is often within the space between the symbolic and semiotic that Millás's characters attempt to redefine their selves, but where they frequently become stuck in the act of searching for points of reference to define their subjectivities. As they try over and over again to traverse this gap by repeating phrases about remolding the physical bodies, their texts and their bodies erode more and more. What is most pertinent to the two novels analyzed in the current chapter is Kristeva's interest in the space between the semiotic and the symbolic, between movement and stasis, where signification constantly attempts to coalesce, yet where it continuously disperses.

The fluctuation between the physical body and the text continuously shows up in Millás's works. The bodies of his characters and the bodies of his texts intertwine to form a complicated web of possible modes of signification. Furthermore, his novels are frequently metatextual and discursively multilayered. In *El orden alfabético*, the first novel examined in this chapter, the erosion of text includes the disappearance of one letter at a time from the alphabet, the repetition of spoken phrases, and the use of the encyclopedia as an unsuccessful means to maintain the patriarchal system of the family. In the second novel, *Dos mujeres en Praga*, text is eroded through the presence of two microtexts (intercalated stories within the novel) and in the modification of words that one of the characters explores. In addition, the bodies of the characters in both novels are altered by the end of the stories and thus, they also discharge meaning as they unsuccessfully attempt to authenticate their subjectivities.

Millás insists on repeatedly employing text and the human body as sites of meaning throughout his entire narrative corpus. The repetition of themes and techniques may bind his

works together, yet such repetition also creates a system of neurotic habit. Kawin describes the differences between constructive repetition, which we saw in the novels discussed in the first chapter, and negative repetition, which we see in the novels in this chapter. He observes that constructive repetition has the “ability to emphasize, interweave, and lyricize to its unity in the creation of what E.K. Brown calls ‘expanding symbols’” (6).³⁵ By contrast, negative repetition is “neurotic, habituation [sic], and enervating” (Kawin 6). Constant repetition does not lead anywhere; the characters discussed in this chapter become stuck in endless routine. Kristeva also discusses the negative effects of repetition when she writes:

What we call *text* differs radically from its contemplative simulation, for in the text the *instinctual binomial* consists of two opposing terms that alternate in an endless rhythm. Although the negative, aggressivity, anality, and death predominate, they nevertheless pass through all the theses capable of giving them meaning. . . . The entire gamut of partial drives is triggered within the *chora* underlying the text, endlessly “swallowing”/rejecting, appropriating/expelling, inside/outside. (*Revolution* 99)

Even though it may be defined as a drive towards signification, negative repetition reinforces the static space between the semiotic and the symbolic. It creeps towards signification, yet it never arrives at meaning. In the two novels at hand, repetition frequently paralyzes the characters in a space of empty meaning.

Millás’s characters often erode textual understanding by writing, reading, and destroying language, and they erode corporeal understanding by distorting their physical bodies. Characters often undergo bouts of sickness (headaches, nausea, and so forth) at the beginning of the process of renegotiating their identities, and Elena and Julio from the previous novels are no exception.

These illnesses may be described in terms of Kristeva's re-birth, the return to the origin, the attempt to begin anew the process of the creation of identity. The bodies of Millás's characters erode as a way to escape the static space of insufficient discursive meaning, yet just as repeating phrases does, modifying their physical bodies locks them within that position. In her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva discusses the physical symptoms that the incomplete self undergoes:

“I” do not want to listen, “I” do not assimilate it. “I” expel it. But since the food is not an “other” for “me,” who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself. . . . During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. [. . .] There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

Physical illness on and from the human body is frequently bracketed within the confines of written text in Millás's works. His characters get sick and/or modify their bodies at the same moment as they write, as they commission someone to write for them, or as they distort verbal and written language. In this sense, the body in Millás's narrative becomes text and the text becomes embodied; each functions symbiotically with the other and both express meaning via repeated actions. In addition, characters often become obsessed with parts of the human body and with parts of texts. No matter what is repeated (human bodies or texts), the act of repetition highlights the erosion of the possibility of pinpointing fixed meaning.

Kristeva's ideas about text, the physical body, desire, and repetition work well as a cohesive theoretical concept for analyzing *El orden alfabético* and *Dos mujeres en Praga*. Text and body are processes in constant production. Desire (or in Kristeva's terms, drives) and

repetition push Millás's characters to attempt to uncover meaning, a task that they carry out both on text and on their physical bodies. In this chapter I examine how repetition and desire erode the possibility of creating text and establishing intact textual and human bodies in both of the novels.

Millás's 1998 novel *El orden alfabético* is divided into two parts, each of which tells the story about Julio as a child and as an adult.³⁶ When he is a child, Julio spends days lying sick in bed where he drifts in and out of an imagined, alternate reality. Julio conjures up a fantastical world where the alphabet is disappearing and where adolescent desires overtake his child's body. Furthermore, he is obsessed with language and with his changing body. In the second part of the novel, Julio's obsession with language and physical bodies locks him in a static position. He is unable to create significant relationships and he cannot construct meaningful text. The novel ultimately reveals that no matter how hard Julio tries to construct text—written, verbal, or corporeal—he continuously fails. Here I analyze the erosion of language and the main character's construction of alternate realities in relation to the modification of the human body. The human body and the text in *El orden* are the means through which traditional media of perception are questioned, which ultimately unveils that ontological knowledge is not obtainable.

As is the case in *La soledad era esto*, Millás divides the novel into two almost symmetrical sections. In the first part, we meet Julio, the protagonist and first-person narrator, just before his fourteenth birthday.³⁷ In the second section a third-person narrator recounts Julio's life as an adult. What occurs in the first part affects Julio in the second part of the novel and essentially lodges him as an adult in a state of continuous repetition. Moreover, Julio's physical body, sickened during the first part and consequently mired in repetition in the second part, is the medium through which the protagonist experiences the world that surrounds him.

In the first part of *El orden alfabético*, Julio is a young adolescent boy who undergoes physical transformation as his child's body begins to change into an adult's body. As these physical changes are taking place, Julio simultaneously dreams up an alternate reality in which language gradually disappears. The disappearance of language points towards what Kristeva describes as a return to the pre-symbolic stage, which in Julio's case is both linguistic and corporeal. Julio is metaphorically reborn, but in the second part of the novel he is an adult and readers realize that his transformation is not successfully completed. Julio literally loses his voice: he is the narrator of the first part of the novel but in the second part of the novel a third-person narrator takes over the story.³⁸ He also does not fulfill the biological mandate set forth by his grandfather and father to have children. With the deaths of his grandfather and father, Julio is the last living male in his family, yet he can produce neither written text nor children. Therefore, unlike the novels examined in the first chapter in which writing and procreation enable the protagonists to transform, in *El orden alfabético* written text masks the possibility of knowledge and forces the represented physical body into a repetitive cycle of stagnancy.

Let us first examine the ways that Millás destroys text in this novel. Words disappear and books and newspapers fly away as if they were birds until “no quedaba en casa nada con letra impresa” (36), all of which complicates the processes of perception and cognition. In the first part of the novel and as an adolescent boy, Julio is obsessed with his father's collection of some 100 encyclopedic volumes. Narrating in the first-person, the young Julio tells us:

En casa había una enciclopedia de la que mi padre hablaba como de un país remoto, por cuyas páginas te podías perder igual que por entre las calles de una ciudad desconocida. . . . Yo mismo, por aburrimiento, abría a veces uno de

aquellos libros desmesurados, de tapas negras, y leía lo primero que me salía al paso con la esperanza de encontrar un callejón oscuro. (11)

The encyclopedias function as the portal to the imagined alternate reality that he conjures up when he is lying sick in bed. Julio's father also uses the encyclopedic entries to transport himself to an alternate reality.³⁹ Unlike Julio's adventures in alternate realities, however, readers do not learn much about his father's other spaces perhaps because Julio is both the narrator and the character of focalization of the first section. It is clear, though, that for both son and father, the encyclopedia opens up the possibility for the creation of other worlds: Julio imagines a world devoid of the alphabet and his father often escapes from his own reality by reading the encyclopedic entries or by listening to cassette tapes to learn English.

The cycle of repetition in the novel may originate in language since the set of encyclopedias (which in themselves are archives of language) was a gift from Julio's grandfather to his father (38). Anastasio tells us that the encyclopedia

pasa del abuelo al padre, hasta llegar al protagonista, como legado cultural, como símbolo de la transmisión de un mundo lingüístico, de una realidad de símbolos. . . . Es a través de su relación con la enciclopedia como Julio intenta mantener su confianza básica en esa herencia; en su instrumento máspreciado—el lenguaje. (195-96)

The cycle of three generations who read and are obsessed with the encyclopedia highlight the transmission of language as a biological and hereditary system. Anastasio comments that for Millás "el lenguaje no se entiende como una función natural y biológica sino como la principal creación cultural que heredamos y aprendamos de los demás" (197). The encyclopedia as a family heirloom represents language as a social and familial construct that in itself is a complex

system of representations. Furthermore, Kristeva echoes this idea that social learning occurs as the subject is still in the process of defining his or her identity, which is precisely what Julio experiences as he is physically ill in bed and undergoing pubertal changes. Kristeva writes, “Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures” (*Revolution* 25). Linking behavior and the physical body in these lines, Kristeva describes social systems and boundaries like written language (the main system of communication) and social norms (such as desire for that which should not be desired according to social norms) that Julio questions as he is sick in bed.

If language is inherited, Julio’s father’s loss of language is also intriguing because it parallels the repeated loss of language that Julio imagines as a fourteen-year-old child. The second part of the novel is narrated in the third person and focuses on Julio as an adult once his father, who suffers from dementia and aphasia, is admitted to the hospital. Slowly but steadily Julio’s father loses the ability to use and understand language. Here Millás links the loss of language and the deterioration of the body since his father suffers from aphasia due to a brain hemorrhage. Aphasia, which is defined as the “[l]oss of speech, partial or total, or loss of power to understand written or spoken language, as a result of disorder of the cerebral speech centres” (*OED*), occurs due to trauma in the physical body (specifically the brain), yet it also affects the ability to participate in the social system of language. With the deterioration of both his body and his speech, Julio’s father experiences a loss of subjectivity as he loses the ability to participate in the hereditary system of language that he learned from his father and passed on to his son. Furthermore, his father’s pending death in fact parallels Julio’s grandfather’s death,

which occurs in the first part of the novel, and it also highlights the cycle of life in general that Millás constructs in this novel.

For Julio the encyclopedia is described as both the map of reality and the ultimate alphabetic order (127). Hannah Westley observes, “As the knowledge of language is incorporated into the body, text is the very tool by which we express this knowledge and thereby transform the impersonal abstract potential of language into personal expression” (122-23). Undergoing pubertal changes to his body in the first part of the novel, Julio fantasizes about the erosion of language. As a teenager, logic suggests that his reality and the objects in his world(s) must be governed by the alphabet and he is confused as to why objects in the world are not organized in alphabetical order:

[N]o entendía bien porque, siendo la enciclopedia un modelo de organización, la realidad no se ajustaba siempre al orden alfabético. . . . Esta falta de acuerdo permanente entre el mundo enciclopédico y la existencia real constituyó una de las preocupaciones más fuertes de mi infancia. (14-15)

Essentially, when Julio questions the relationship between language and reality, he exposes the gap that exists between the signifier and signified. Kristeva’s concept of the thetic functions well in relation to Julio’s obsession with the encyclopedia because it highlights the innate problem of language: we can use words to attempt to describe something, yet those words will never achieve full meaning because they can never be the thing they strive to represent. The encyclopedic entries, essentially a group of words (the definition) that describe a word or phrase (the defined), stress the inevitable gap of the sign.

As a young teenager, Julio begins to question the cultural legacy of the system of language that he inherits from the males in his family. At one point he wonders how the world

would change if the alphabet began with “asesino” and if the word “madre” disappeared (12-13). In a world full of men, Julio’s choice of words to keep and those to destroy is striking. A Freudian reading of his insistence of keeping the word “murderer” (and, in fact, to position it as the first word of all words) and to erase the word “mother” from the encyclopedia exposes the construction of an almost all-male world where the desire to kill the mother explicitly exists. In fact, Julio’s mother very rarely interacts with him in the world of language, for it is clear in the novel that language is a hereditary system that is passed on only to the males in the family; language is a male cultural legacy. Moreover, in Julio’s alternate world “mesa” is the first word to disappear: the television reporter cannot say it and neither can Julio’s family members as they watch the news, but Julio is puzzled as to why the table where they sit still remains.⁴⁰ Not only does the disappearance of such words from the linguistic system expose Julio’s struggle with language from a very young age, but it also foreshadows the aphasia from which his elderly father suffers in the second part of the novel.

When more letters, words, books, and even street signs begin to disappear, Julio has a tough time making sense of the world, but one way that he is able to attribute meaning to the empty signifiers is by relating language to the human body. He describes the experience of losing language by comparing it to the human body, and specifically to teeth, in the following line: “Daba la impresión de haberse desprendido de nuestro vocabulario dejando en su lugar un vacío incomprensible, como cuando perdemos una muela por cuyo hueco pasamos la punta de la lengua una y otra vez” (65). The absence of language in his alternate reality, expressed here in bodily terms, parallels the physical transformation that Julio is undergoing as a fourteen-year-old boy.

Anastasio refers to the disappearance of language in the novel as the process of animalization, arguing that language differentiates human beings from animals (199). Undoubtedly, some anthropologists would argue against Anastasio's statement, yet what is of interest here is the fact that the loss of language permits Julio to revert to the primacy of his physical body. After language begins to disappear in his dream world, the human body becomes the medium that Julio uses to perceive and negotiate with what surrounds him. To put it succinctly, the disappearance of the linguistic sign forces the human body into a pre-symbolic state, one where corporeal sensation and the lack of oral enunciation dictate perception. Kristeva employs the Platonic term *chora* to describe this semiotic state that is corporeally nourishing and prior to the conception of signs. She defines *chora* as "a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (*Revolution* 26). In this sense, Kristeva's *chora* is the space to which Julio returns once language begins to erode in his dreams, once the only system that helps him to make sense of the world begins to erode.

As Julio fantasizes that language disappears, he wonders about the connection between his grandfather and the encyclopedia: "Quizá morirían al mismo tiempo su enciclopedia y él" (50). Similarly, in the second section, as his father moves closer to death, he loses his ability to participate in the world via language. His father first begins to forget the English phrases that he learned by listening to cassette tapes. He tells Julio, "No recuerdo cómo se dice: *El periódico está debajo de la mesa*, ni *Ayer olvidé los cigarrillos en la repisa de la chimenea*," to which Julio replies, "¿Y qué más da, papá?" (170). Julio's flippant response upsets his father who tells him:

¿Cómo que qué más da? He invertido media vida en aprender esas frases. ¿Te imaginas que el dinero ahorrado para la vejez durante toda tu existencia se

evaporara de repente? Yo no he guardado dinero, porque me parecían más valiosas las oraciones gramaticales inglesas, así que no me digas que da lo mismo perderlas que no. (170-71)

Not being able to use language upsets Julio's father just as the disappearance of language concerns the adolescent Julio in the first part of the novel. Language is one of the most treasured objects that these men possess.

Both characters exist in liminal phases of their life in that the fourteen-year-old Julio is not a child and not yet a man and Julio's father straddles the line between life and death. They experience the loss of language via their physical bodies, Julio via his changing pubescent body and his father via his dying body. When he realizes that he cannot repeat the phrases that he learned from his English language tapes, Julio's father "se puso a llorar con el ojo derecho y Julio le tomó el hombro muerto con cierta aprensión, como si temiera contagiarse de aquel viaje hacia lo opaco iniciado por el cuerpo hemipléjico" (171). The fragmented body of Julio's father illustrates that he is dying and, moreover, that he is literally dying in halves. He relies on one eye to see and the hemorrhage affects one half of his brain:

Su padre puso media cara de no comprender la palabra *adúltero*, o quizá de que no era el momento de considerarla. Estaba lúcido con la mitad del cuerpo hábil, aunque se trataba de una lucidez extravagante que se manifestaba en la intensidad de su mirada impar y en la posición reflexiva de la comisura derecha de los labios. Producía el efecto de que toda su personalidad se hubiera acumulado en una de las mitades de su cuerpo. (193)

Halving is an intriguing technique in Millás's works: we have seen that he divides Elena's legs in half in *La soledad era esto*; in the novel at hand, Julio's father dies off in halves; and in *Dos*

mujeres en Praga, which will be discussed later this chapter, one of the characters modifies her face and body by halves. Yvette Sánchez notes that “en esta variante de simetría y asimetría, en vez de desdoblamiento de una figura en dos, se produce la reducción o condensación a su mitad” (82). The division of the human body into halves serves a unique function by highlighting that the search for subjectivity is frequently fragmented. Dividing the physical body, however, is more than just a reflection of the internal state of identity. The physical body and the inner self share a semiotic relationship; both influence each other and both are influenced by the other.

Fever and hallucinations as physical manifestations of Julio’s struggle to redefine his self on the human body rule his world(s) in the first half of the novel. As the young Julio suffers from a high fever, he hallucinates about being in two places at once (16-17). His perception changes, as it often physiologically does when one has a high fever, because his physical body is ill. Likewise, being sick heightens Julio’s concept of how his physical body functions. Pairing together disparate body parts, he tells us, “Yo era consciente de todo mi cuerpo a la vez, de los dedos de los pies y de las orejas, de la lengua y de las pestañas, de la nariz y los párpados: vivía, en fin, en un mundo en el que las cosas se definían por su intensidad” (17-18). As he lies in bed, his fever comes and goes. When it returns Julio perceives it primarily through his body: “[L]o notaba en la debilidad de las rodillas y en la tristeza que, procedente de las ingles y los codos, se anudaba en la garganta, confundándose con las anginas” (42). Illness allows his body a new land of perception.⁴¹

The phase of a teenager who is undergoing puberty is itself a static phase. Not a child but not yet an adult, the teenager occupies a transitory position similar to that of the linguistic gap between signifier and signified, or in Kristeva’s terms, the space of the chora. Changes to the physical body that occur during puberty reinforce the stagnancy of this sort of nowhere position.

Furthermore, corporeal senses become heightened as the young person attempts to figure out how to manage his or her changing body. Beta Copley suggests that

[e]arly adolescence starts with the emotional responses to the bodily changes of puberty. It brings psychic energy to the surface in sexual content, and ushers in the mental tasks and changes of the whole process. Major preoccupations at this time are likely to be around these bodily changes and concomitant confusions as to who one is in relation to this child-into-adult body. (83)

During the first half of the novel, Julio mentally charts his changing body as he lies sick in bed. Even though his mother takes him to visit the doctor, they never find out the reason for his illness.⁴² It is logical to assume, then, that Julio gets sick because he is in a transition phase; he is neither a child nor an adult, and his concept of language reflects this condition. In fact, during the days that he lies sick in bed, his body physically transforms: he grows a moustache and he gets taller. He describes his physical changes when he tells the reader that “[m]i madre afirmaba que me hacía mayor, que crecía después de las enfermedades, pero era más: creo que me convertía en otro” (42). He feels like he is becoming someone new. His transformation reminds readers once again of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* and Julio himself makes an explicit allusion to Gregor Samsa several pages later when he states, “Yo era escarabajo solitario” (54).⁴³

Julio’s hallucinations often manifest in the form of dreams when he is lying sick in bed with a high fever. In this sense, fantasy and reality become indistinguishable from one another. According to Kristeva, fantasy may occur as the connection between the signifier and signified is questioned, manipulated, and ultimately eroded. She describes fantasy in the following lines:

Not only is symbolic, thetic unity divided (into signifier and signified), but this division is itself the result of a break that put a heterogeneous functioning in the

position of signifier. This functioning is the instinctual semiotic, preceding meaning and signification, mobile, amorphous, but already regulated. . . . In the speaking subject, fantasies articulate this irruption of drives within the realm of the signifier; they disrupt the signifier and shift the metonymy of desire.

(Revolution 49)

Julio's alternate reality highlights his bodily drives, distorting his sexual desires as his fantasies continuously attempt to replace his reality.

In the alternate reality of dreams which course through the first half of the novel, Julio fantasizes about Laura, one of his classmates from school. Desire overtakes his body and his language as he becomes obsessed with her physical body. He fixates on Laura's body, noticing her teeth first. He tells us that

aunque había visto miles de dientes en mi vida me parecieron un instrumento nuevo, de enorme precisión, pero no sólo servían para cortar el pan y masticarlo, sino para gustar. A mí me gustaba una chica de un curso superior al mío, Laura, que al reírse enseñaba también un poco las encías, como quien muestra sin darse cuenta un borde de la ropa interior. (23)

As an adolescent boy, Julio experiences desire *vis-à-vis* moments of fleeting presence, or in the Barthesian sense, he participates in moments of appearance-as-disappearance as he catches glimpses of the synecdoque of his desire: Laura's teeth. Desire here, however, is phobic; it is obsessive and repetitive. Just as Kristeva suggests, desire erodes the possibility of text as it is continuously replaced by the teeth, a specific fragmented body part, and meaning becomes elusive as Julio's desire becomes more pronounced through the repetition of such manifestations of desire.

Furthermore, in her analysis of the performative body, Blocker reminds us that images of the mouth may suggest female genitalia (21). It is not, however, the most erotic zones of the mouth, the lips or tongue, that explicitly intrigue Julio, but rather the most instrumental, the teeth and gums. Julio's obsession with his classmate's teeth highlights the innate connection between pleasure and pain, for the mouth may bring pleasure by kissing but it may also induce pain by biting and chewing. Laura's lips perform like a curtain, opening and closing at exact moments to reveal the sharp instruments that they also conceal. In one instance, Julio exclaims, "[P]ensé en la boca de Laura, recordé sus labios levantándose como una falda para mostrarme en una sonrisa todo lo que había debajo" (55). That which is hidden and that which could possibly harm him attracts the young character to his classmate.

When Julio kisses Laura in his dream world for the first time, the act is clumsy and almost violent even though he tries to be tender. Julio describes the scene: "[L]a empujé al interior de un portal oscuro, intentando practicar una delicadeza que quizá no me salió bien, y una vez dentro comencé a besarla mientras nuestros cuerpos, como un desmañado animal de cuatro piernas, buscaban una pared donde apoyarse" (57-58). Employing Kristeva's interpretation of Lacan's theory of the Oedipal drive, Julio's aggressiveness with Laura may be a manifestation of this chora. In this sense, the scene may represent the break from the mother together with his eternally present desire to return to her. Kristeva notes that "[t]hrough the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now more than ever I elaborate the want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by *saying*" (*Powers* 41). Julio attempts to fill the lack of his mother with text, or in other terms, by trying to make sense of his lack via language. It is, however, an impossible task since the system of language itself is inherently composed of gaps and absences.

Julio is obsessed with Laura's body in the first section of the novel and he tries in various ways to recover it in the second section. His obsession is a drive of desire over which he has little control. He himself notes, "Mi curiosidad por su cuerpo, en vez de disminuir, iba creciendo a medida que lo conquistaba, como una forma de deseo fuera de mi control" (69). As Julio discovers Laura's body, she becomes more entangled in his fantasies. He explains, "Laura y yo nos convertimos en una burbuja de experiencia flotando en el ámbito de aquella realidad muda" (58). Even though Julio's alternate reality and his actual reality are two distinct worlds (where he is sick in bed and where language disappears and he fantasizes about his classmate), it is the physical body that functions as the medium between them. Julio emphasizes this connection when he tells us, "Los dos lados, siendo tan diferentes, estaban próximos, pegados el uno al otro" (58).

Another part of the body that fascinates Julio is the feet. Located at the far end of the human body, these extremities frequently function as a portal to Julio's imagined alternate reality.⁴⁴ He comments that "percibí sobre la planta de mis pies la presión de otras plantas de dimensiones idénticas, como si hubiera otro cuerpo también echado boca arriba al otro lado de un espejo invisible . . . imanes que corren paralelos por las dos caras de una superficie" (62). With this description, readers are reminded of the connections between Mercedes and her antipode in *La soledad era esto*, which are associated through Mercedes's imagined construction and represented in her written diaries, yet here the two dimensions are linked by a specific body part. Millás seems to expand the definition of the antipode when, in *El orden alfabético*, he refers to the parallel bodies as two magnets that have opposite forces, yet are irresistibly attracted to each other. Even more interesting is the linguistic correlation between the English word "antipode" and the term "anti-poder," or "anti-power" in English. The construction of an

imagined alternate reality may not be the key to understanding reality; conversely, it may obfuscate the possibility due to its inherent dichotomies. In Julio's two realities, power and powerlessness or productivity and impotence create a gap that divides his two worlds into a space where binaries are questioned and meaning is not tangible. Just as Millás destroys binaries such as desire/pain and want/phobia, he also plays in the gap between power and powerlessness in his representations of the human body.

In sum, teeth and feet are objects of fetishism for Julio. Kristeva describes fetishism in the following lines in which she once again associates the physical (here, the fetishized object) and text:

It is perhaps unavoidable that, when a subject confronts the factitiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish? And language, precisely, is based on fetishist denial ("I know that, but just the same," "the sign is not the thing, but just the same," etc.) and defines us in our essence as speaking beings. (*Powers* 37)

Julio focuses on fragments of the human body, yet he also is obsessed with language. In this sense, he feels a push of desire towards both specific body parts and the parts of the linguistic sign. Furthermore, because fetishism denotes desire, it obviously carries with it a strong connotation of eroticism. In *En brazos de la mujer fetiche*, Lucía Etxebarria and Sonia Núñez Puente associate the foot fetish with eroticism:

Una explicación sexológica moderna relaciona el fenómeno del fetichismo de pies con el hecho de que existen en los pies ciertas zonas sensoriales directamente

asociadas con las regiones genitales. En realidad, un mapa del pie puede asociar el punto desde el apéndice con prácticamente cada parte del cuerpo, como cualquier acupuntor podría explicar: la reflexología podal diseña mapas del pie en conexión con el resto de los órganos humanos. (102)

Julio's puberty emphasizes a new discovery of sexuality and, more specifically, reveals the fragmented nature of his body parts, of Laura's body, and of the bodies of his parents.

In *The Forms of Youth: Twentieth-Century Poetry and Adolescence*, Stephen Burt also defines the connection of modern adolescence to sexuality and erotic behavior. He writes that puberty is "characterized by special psychological phenomena, among them heightened sexuality . . . [and] a focus on the inner life or authentic self" (4). Julio feels strong reactions towards feet, which represents the desire for that which is prohibited, when he lays sick in his parents' bed.

He desires and fears his fetish at the same time when he tells us:

Luego estaba la zona de los pies, en el extremo más meridional de la cama, adonde había que llegar deslizándose con movimientos de reptil, para que no se desordenaran las sábanas. Ésa era la región de las tinieblas perpetuas. Durante todas las estaciones del año reinaba en aquel ámbito la más completa oscuridad, de ahí que sólo estuviera habitado por pies, pies ciegos, naturalmente, igual que los cangrejos sin ojos que viven en las profundidades tenebrosas de grutas marinas. Cuando me aventuraba a bucear por aquellas simas donde la ropa de la cama daba la vuelta para introducirse debajo del colchón, siempre llevaba el corazón en la garganta al imaginar que podía tropezar con una pareja de pies callosos, llenos de uñas retorcidas. (61)

He feels compelled to explore spaces and body parts that have been prohibited for him in the past. Even when the body part is as grotesque as his description of his father's feet, he is still attracted to them. He exclaims, "Una vez le vi los pies a mi padre y no me gustaron nada: me parecieron seres de otro mundo, tan pálidos, tan absurdos" (61), yet he still desires to explore the spaces that they inhabit precisely because they are prohibited objects of desire.⁴⁵

In the second part of the novel Julio "continuaba igual de abandonado que entonces" (157). Even as a lonely adult he still attempts to understand the world around him, he still unsuccessfully attempts to use text and his body as the principal means of interaction with the outside world, and he continues to perceive that reality is split in two. The omniscient narrator states, "[H]ay un lugar idéntico a éste en el que todo el eso está sucediendo ahora mismo, del mismo modo que hay un sitio" (214). Julio makes up an imaginary family as he attempts to take on the paternal role that his father and his grandfather both assumed, but, following the logic set forth in the novel, he is unable to become the patriarch because he does not have biological children nor is he able to construct any text other than the several phrases that he repeatedly recites, which I define here as microtexts. Julio literally cannot write or produce biological offspring. Kristeva highlights the connection between authorship and paternity when she writes, "The *matrix of enunciation* in narrative tends to center on an axial position that is explicitly or implicitly called 'I' or 'author'—a projection of the paternal role in the family" (*Revolution* 91). Granted, although in the second part of the novel the narrative voice shifts to the third-person, the focalization still rests with Julio. Even though he no longer narrates his story, he still struggles with the possibility of authorship in the broadest sense, which inevitably leads him to a repetitive cycle of what Kawin refers to as "enervating habits" from which he cannot escape (6).

In one particular example, Julio tries to take on the role of father and/or author by continuously repeating a phrase about his imagined family. Throughout the second part he frequently repeats to himself, to his family, and even to strangers, “Mi familia no está en casa porque en esta época del año viaja al sur para visitar a mi suegra, que es viuda” (190). Yet he is never able to fully take on the paternal role described by Kristeva; he gets stuck in the repetition of the text and the signifier (the words in the phrase) are never able to correlate to the signified (the wife and child that Julio does not have). Another microtext that Julio continuously repeats is linked to his fetish of teeth: “Están haciéndole la ortodoncia al crío y tenemos que ir todos los miércoles al dentista” (164). Once again this repeated phrase emphasizes Julio’s inability to have a family, and consequently, to pass language to his son. His imagined son (who, fittingly, is the same age as Julio was in the first part of the novel) and his son’s imagined orthodontic work are merely constructions of Julio’s obsessive mind. Kawin pinpoints the negative nature of such repeated phrases when he writes, “Certainly when we come to habit, we have come to the most destructive effect of repetition, for it is the doing of things over and over, each time with less energy and less interest, that is the root of repetitiousness in literature” (21). Even though the repetition of phrases in terms of the creation of fiction or the construction of an alternate reality permits Julio to once again escape reality, it also brings him joy. Kawin states it well when he writes that “[r]epetition, the re-experiencing of something identical, is clearly in itself a source of pleasure” (19). Millás explores the lines between pain and pleasure, between truth and fiction, and between desire and phobia, yet lodged between all of these dichotomies we find continuously unfulfilled drives, which in Julio’s adult world becomes unsatisfied enunciations that manifest themselves as repeated phrases. In this sense, Julio’s concept of text from childhood to adulthood becomes more and more eroded. The system of language is no longer a

means by which he is able to experience his different worlds as in the first section; rather, as an adult the attempted creation of text locks him in a compulsive cycle of repetition from which he cannot escape. Kristeva supports this view when she writes that “[in adulthood] language has then become a counterphobic object; it no longer plays the role of an element of miscarried introjection, capable, in the child’s phobia, of revealing the anguish of original want” (*Powers* 41). Our linguistic system, and consequently text, *becomes* the unattainable object of desire.

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva also stresses the negative aspect of the repetition of phrases when she writes:

Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed—repetitive and monotonous. Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. (33)

The microtexts that Julio repeats throughout the second part of the novel lead him nowhere; they are empty signifiers that do not point to any true object. Kristeva emphasizes this when she states that “[t]he arbitrary sequence perceived by depressive persons as absurd is coextensive with a loss of reference. The depressed speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of: glued to the Thing . . . they are without objects. The total and unsignifiable Thing is insignificant—it is mere Nothing, their Nothing, Death” (*Black Sun* 51). As an adult, Julio is alone; once his father dies, he is the last male character without an heir. The novel and his life end in this continuous cycle of repetition. By the end, neither his body nor the texts have permitted him the means by which he is able to transform. Routine and habit overtake him and he is locked in a repeated

sequence of stagnancy. His body and the possibility of text completely erode by the end of the novel.

Bodies also erode in *Dos mujeres en Praga*. Millás begins the novel by telling us that we cannot rely on organizational systems to perceive the world. Perception and the knowledge of reality are not ordered by a system in the novel just as the alphabet does not organize the world in *El orden alfabético*.⁴⁶ When Luz Acaso hires Álvaro Abril, a writer who works at Talleres Literarios, to write her biography, he tells her, “Yo no estoy seguro de que las cosas suceden unas detrás de otras. Con frecuencia suceden antes las que en el orden cronológico aparecen después” (9).⁴⁷ Here Álvaro exclaims something that is frequently repeated in Millás’s works: humans construct order, be it alphabetical, chronological, and even biological, from perception. Amago writes, “In order to make sense of the world that surrounds us, we need to believe that things happen in an ordered fashion. But the narrator [of *Dos mujeres en Praga*], like his postmodern readers, recognizes that the order we put to our experience of reality is an arbitrary creation of illusion” (92). Order is not innate; we give organization to what we perceive in order to attempt to make sense of the world that surrounds us.

Within this framework Millás situates the main story, which is really comprised of several stories of character development woven together and several microtexts. The novel explores two unlikely relationships: the relationship between Luz Acaso, a middle-aged woman, and Álvaro Abril, whom she commissions to write her biography as well as the relationship between Luz and the young aspiring writer María José. The human body and the attempt to produce texts are often the sites of meaning in these two relationships. Even through all of the writing and storytelling, by the end of the novel both text and the physical body become eroded. Just as written text suppresses the possibility of knowledge in *El orden alfabético*, in *Dos*

mujeres en Praga the characters have difficulty creating written text and often, when they do write, they desire to destroy or distort what they write. Amago notes, “The novel traces the process by which each of these characters finds personal meaning in the narrative act, and it is the act of narration that holds the novel and its characters together” (87). However, writing is not what binds the characters together by the end: Luz dies of AIDS, Álvaro gives up his quest to write another great novel, and after various attempts María José does not produce any text, written, oral, or corporeal. Both Luz’s creation of texts (that is to say, her many lies) and Álvaro and María José’s desire to be writers end up destroyed. The process of writing, or wanting to write, does bring the characters together in the first place like Amago argues, but it is also precisely what erodes the possibility of knowledge by the end of the novel.

In this novel biological order trumps human-made systems like telling time and written language; the human body is the medium from which characters experience the complicated web of strange biological associations with which they live. Furthermore, fantasy and reality are not housed in different spaces in this novel, but rather they frequently overlap and are rarely distinguishable from one another. Álvaro tells Luz at one point that “[I]as fantasías también forman parte de la realidad” (49) and the omniscient narrator highlights this exclamation when he writes that

cada uno de nosotros lleva dentro un “lo que no,” es decir, algo que no le ha sucedido y que sin embargo tiene más peso en su vida que “lo que sí,” que lo que le ha ocurrido. Es posible que haya personas en las que misteriosamente se cumpla “lo que no” y deje de cumplirse “lo que sí,” pero no tengo ningún caso documentado de lo que, de existir, sería una aberración pavorosa. (65-66)

The story fluctuates between what is real and what is false, which stresses the possibility of perception *vis-à-vis* the human body as one way to get closer to knowing, another theme that is threaded throughout the novel.

The story begins when 40-year-old Luz Acaso goes to Talleres Literarios to commission a ghostwriter to write her biography. Álvaro Abril is a failing writer who, after only publishing one successful novel several years prior to their first encounter, now makes his living by giving classes and writing biographies at Talleres Literarios.⁴⁸ As their meetings continue, Álvaro fittingly discovers Luz's body parts: "[D]esviaba la mirada del cuerpo de Luz Acaso, cuyos senos acababa de descubrir. El día anterior había descubierto sus clavículas. Parecía que se le revelaba por partes, aunque siempre se le hubiera presentado entera" (70). As these two characters blur the line between reality and fiction (and between truth and lies), the one real object that Álvaro is able to perceive is Luz's physical body. His perception of her body, however, is fragmented. Just as Julio latches onto strange parts of Laura's body in *El orden alfabético*, so too does Álvaro desire that which he cannot have in *Dos mujeres en Praga*. Yet this desire makes his knowledge of Luz's body seem more familiar. The narrator writes that Álvaro "[f]ue descubriendo su cuerpo, en fin, como se descubre una ciudad extranjera en la que sin embargo tienes la impresión de haber estado alguna vez" (72-73).

When Luz leaves Talleres Literarios for the first time, she feels a strange mixture of pleasure and discomfort, which reflects the crossing of boundaries between truth and fiction as she tells Álvaro her life story and/or her fictional tale (rarely is it clear when Luz is lying or telling the truth). She leaves the school "perturbada, pero dichosa, aunque habría sido imposible señalar dónde terminaba la perturbación y comenzaba la dicha, pues la una se introducía en el

territorio de la otra como los dedos de dos manos cruzadas” (57). Telling lies brings Luz pleasure, yet phobia and worry underlie her drive to create text.

Furthermore, Luz Acaso’s name gives readers insight into the type of character that she is and into what Amago calls the “hermeneutic confusion” that structures the novel (89). In his article “Battered Bodies and Inadequate Meanings: Violence and Disenchantment in Juan José Millás’s *Visión del ahogado*,” Brad Epps aptly notes the connection between the body and naming in Millás’s 1977 novel, *El desorden de tu nombre*, and in *Dos mujeres* names take on a similar role. He states that the novel states that “the enigmatically motivated disorder is perhaps first and foremost the disorder of the name: another name, an other’s name, your name. And the disorder of the name—the sign of the self—is of course often thought to be adequate to the disorder of the body: the treacherous site, or repository, of truth” (46). The juxtaposition of “light” and “maybe” in Luz’s full name (Luz Acaso) describes her well: from the very beginning of their relationship, Luz not only lies to Álvaro, but she also plays in the border between what is true, metaphorically the light, and what is false, represented by the ambiguity of her last name. Frequently, she tells Álvaro one thing, but then tells him that she was lying. For example, in one instance she says to him, “Le mentí ayer. . . Eso era mentira, pero mi llanto era verdad” (49). In this sense, her name highlights the blurry binary of truth and fiction and the fact that she might or might not be telling the truth at any given moment in the novel. Luz lies and tells the truth as she reveals to Álvaro events in her life to include in her biography, which emphasizes that Luz’s perception of her life is also composed of an odd mix of fiction and reality.

The confusion between what is true and what is not is highlighted throughout the novel in human bodies and in texts. Amago marks the technique of the narrator’s switch in point-of-view

in the third chapter as the starting point for the subsequent confusion between truth and fiction that we will see in the rest of the novel:

The sudden appearance of a first-person narrator this far into the novel serves as a warning to the reader, who so far has taken for granted the narrative point of view and everything for which it traditionally stands: objectivity, truth, and neutrality. It is here that the reader is forced to realize that things are definitely not what they seem in the novel, and significantly, we learn soon thereafter that Luz's story has probably been invented in its entirety. (90)

Luz tells Álvaro that she is a widow, but then she tells him that she lied about that part of her life. Even though she admits that she was making up being a widow, Luz continues adding on to the story by linking the loss of her false husband to her physical body. She directs Álvaro to tell the story of her dead husband in her biography: “[C]uéntelo, cuente que sentí la pérdida de mi marido como, como. . .” (50). Unable to finish the simile, the writer Álvaro finishes it for her as he attempts to associate her false experience to true physical loss. “¿Como una amputación?” he asks her, to which she responds, “Como una reposición más bien, una reposición de algo que había perdido al casarme” (50). Luz's choice of words here—she replaces the writer's choice of words, “amputation,” with her own, “reposition,”—hints at María José's reworking of her own body via distortion and repositioning.

When Luz meets María José outside of Talleres Literarios, Luz also lies to her, and this time she again links her lies to her physical body. She lies to the young woman, telling her that she suffers from lower back pain (13) and is left-handed (19). After the two go back to Luz's apartment, she confesses to María José that she is left-handed only sometimes: “Soy zurda contrariada. Sólo utilizo la izquierda cuando estoy sola” (19). If Álvaro fragments Luz's body

in their meetings, Luz also turns to the body in order to attempt to connect with another character, which in this case is María José. The distortion of the human body is one characteristic (real or not) that both characters, Luz and María José, share. Therefore, a repeated motif in the novel constitutes the erosion of the human body by means of substitution and distortion.

María José pushes the limits of perception by covering her right eye with an eye patch and putting her right arm in a sling so that she can experience the world from the left side of her body. Brooks notes, “Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative—a body entering writing” (3). María José’s physical body becomes a text when she modifies it. María José’s corporeal modification is also the first characteristic that Luz notices about her young friend. The narrator tells us that after getting in her car upon leaving Talleres Literarios, Luz “vio al otro lado del cristal a una joven con un parche en el ojo derecho” (11).

When the two female characters are at Luz’s house to eat lunch and talk, the narrator continues stressing the left side of María José’s body as the side from which she experiences the world: “María José sonrió con el lado izquierdo de la boca. . . A veces, no siempre, hablaba y reía con medio lado nada más. Y apenas utilizaba el brazo derecho” (16). María José distorts the right side of her body in an attempt to be able to write using the left side as her main experience of perception. The distortion of her body echoes the halving of Julio’s father’s body in *El orden alfabético*. Kristeva explains halving as part of the process in the search of subjectivity:

Repeated drives or the shocks from energy discharges create a state of excitation. Because it remains unsatisfied, this excitation produces, through a qualitative leap, a repercussion that delays, momentarily absorbs, and posits that excitation. Repeated *rejection* thus *posits* rejection. Although repeated rejection is separation, doubling, scission, and shattering, it is at the same time and afterward accumulation, stoppage, mark, and stasis. In its trajectory, rejection engrammatizes, it marks One in order to reject it again and divide it in two again. As a step towards the development of the signifier, the engram is rejection's self-defense, its relative immobilization, which in turn, allows the reactivation of drives: re-jection. Without this stasis . . . rejection could not produce something *new* and displace boundaries. (*Powers* 171)

Division on the body relies on a body in transition. In Kristeva's terms, María José attempts to produce new meaning by halving her body, but she is continuously unsuccessful. The repeated corporeal halving never produces something new and it never arrives at a clear concept; rather, the act of repeating in itself highlights the process of creation over the final product. María José's body, just like her subjectivity, is in a static state that she attempts to escape by modifying her body by halves. In one instance, she tells Luz about her plan:

[P]ensé que ese empeño mío en escribir sobre cosas que ignoraba podría significar también que quería escribir con la parte de mí que no sabía hacerlo. . . . Ideé el siguiente plan: me taparía el ojo derecho con un parche e inmovilizaría la pierna y el brazo de ese lado forzándome a hacerlo todo con la mano izquierda. . . Se trataba, por decirlo así, de escribir un texto zurdo, pensando de arriba abajo con el lado de mi cuerpo que permanece sin colonizar. (18)

María José associates creating written text with the fragmentation of the human body. The body is split in half just as Julio's concept of reality is divided in two and his father's ill body is literally halved in *El orden alfabético*. For María José (just as for Luz, Julio, and his father), there are only two possibilities: the left or the right (or in Luz and Julio's cases, reality and fiction). In this sense, her perspective of the process on writing attempts to destroy the gap between signifier and signified. She tells Luz, "Comprendí que a la gente le gusta lo real. La mayoría de los escritores, pensé, hablan de cosas que no son. Y además escriben con la mano derecha, con el pie derecho, con el pensamiento derecho" (20-21). In María José's strict binary world, the right is normal and quotidian, but the left is the means by which she may be able to get closer to producing some sort of meaning through perception.

It is obvious that María José is obsessed with experiencing reality from the left side; however, her repeated insistence in covering her right eye with a patch and putting her right arm in a sling may represent maneuvers that actually shelter her from fully experiencing the world through all of her senses. Kawin states that "[h]abit protects us from awareness or sensation, anxiety or pain" (22). The modification of her physical body permits María José a space from which she feels safe to explore the world that surrounds her; in other words, the modifications create a border between her body and the world. Furthermore, the space that she inhabits reflects her mission to use her left side: "La ambición de un proyecto como el mío requería un espacio físico singular para llevarlo a cabo: tal vez un país zurdo, una ciudad zurda, aunque hay lugares como Praga que me parecen zurdos" (22). Additionally, both Luz and María José describe Luz's apartment as a left-sided space, one that reminds them of Prague, which, in their shared opinion is a left-sided city. The interior of the apartment also reflects María José's mission to write from her left side. The locked room, which is located on the left side of Luz's apartment, reflects

María José modified body: “En cierto modo, esa estancia cerrada era la metáfora del lado izquierdo que María José pretendía colonizar en el interior de sí misma” (104).

Once María José begins to write from her left side, her perspective changes and these changes are, not surprisingly, anchored to her physical body. The narrator tells us that she “masticaba nada más que con los dientes y las muelas del lado izquierdo. La comida tenía otro sabor, incluso otra textura. Estaba descubriendo un mundo de sensaciones” (23). In one instance, María José describes to Luz her experiences in the left side of her body:

No te puedes imaginar lo misterioso que es ese lado. Al principio temí que estuviera hueco, y que al atravesar la frontera entre el hemisferio derecho y el izquierdo cayera en una especie de vacío, como cuando la tierra era plana y los barcos que llegaban a sus bordes se precipitaban en la nada. Pero por lo poco que he podido ver, ese lado está lleno de construcciones misteriosas y de una vegetación desconocida. (104)

Essentially, María José here worries that she will get stuck in limbo, that she will be caught between two realities, or in other terms, between the gap between the signifier and the signified. Moreover, at one point María José tells the narrator, “Sé zurdo durante un rato y verás cómo todo se ilumina” (212). Her journey to the left side, and as a person who experiences life from the left side of her body, opens up the possibility of understanding the world in a new way. Yet, the process of body modification itself, rather than the outcome (which, in María José’s case, is never fully obtained), is the purpose of the distortion. That is to say, the act of modifying is in itself the goal; there is no other possible result. Weiss suggests that

the body can never be dispensed with altogether, for the body is . . . the omnipresent horizon for all the narrative human beings tell (about it). As such, it

grounds a person's quest for narrative coherence, and in so doing establishes that individual's moral accountability for the quest itself, an accountability that includes the failure to complete the quest. (70-71)

Distorting her body is an attempt for María José to control her body (and ultimately to redefine her body) so that she may experience life from the space between reality and fantasy, yet she never completes this project.

As we have seen, both Brooks and Kristeva discuss distorting and marking on the body. Brooks notes that "bodily marking not only serves to recognize and identify, it also indicates the body's passage into the realm of the letter, into literature: the bodily mark is in some manner a 'character,' a hieroglyph, a sign that can eventually, at the right moment of the narrative, be read" (22). For Brooks, the act of bodily marking creates text; for María José, her body is the gateway to constructing text, a gateway through which she is never completely able to pass. According to Kristeva, marking on the body is similar to the violent bodily rejection of self as seen in the cases of illness for Julio and Luz and in María José's case when she modifies her body. Distorting the bodies of characters in Millás's work is yet another means by which to push the limits of the perception concerning what is real and what is not.

If María José modifies her physical body, she also modifies words. She fetishizes her body and her text; her attachment and wonderment with the capabilities of her body is excessive yet gratifying. For Barthes, "the text is a fetish object, and *this fetish object desires me*" (27).⁴⁹ María José's marginalized position is reflected by both the modification of her body and the distortion of her words. María José is working on writing about lower back pain (or "lumbago" in Spanish) yet just as she distorts her body, she also distorts the writing of the word "lumbago" because it aesthetically pleases her. The modification of the word itself gives her pleasure. She

remembers the lazy eye that she had when she was a young child, which affects her understanding of lower back pain. She tells Luz,

Tiene un ojo vago, decía mi madre a sus amigas, que me observaban con aprensión, pues el ojo vago carecía del prestigio de otras enfermedades. . . . Quizá la fascinación que me produjo la palabra lumbago cuando la oí en el autobús, procediera de aquella experiencia infantil. Tiene un ojo vago, tiene lumbago. Imagínate . . . lumbago escrito de este modo: l'um bago. Seguro que l'um bago significa el ojo vago en algún idioma. (20)

Here María José makes a connection between completely disparate body parts—the lower back and a lazy eye—due to the phonetic similarities of the two words. Because both written words are similar, she creates a connection between the two body parts, or in other terms, between the two signifieds. Once again, in Millás's narrative texts and human bodies share similar functions: both are media on which desire and loss are repeatedly negotiated.

Without a doubt, the attempt to create text takes on an important role in this novel. Just as we see in *El orden alfabético*, the modification of texts and bodies is not what enables characters to get closer to establishing their subjectivities in *Dos mujeres en Praga* even though it is often the way that they attempt to construct meaning. As a repeated motif, in fact, language, as a tool that may create text, here is hereditary, just as the encyclopedias are in the previous novel. In their first meeting, Álvaro tells Luz that “escribir una biografía es muy parecido a escribir una novela que luego puede regalarse a los hijos o a los nietos. Constituye una forma de permanecer del mismo modo que se permanece en el álbum de fotos familiar” (8). If language is hereditary it is also a reflection of the complicated biological connections that Millás creates in this novel. Yet, in true Millasian style, readers never know if such connections are real or fake.

Millás does this by using lies, half-truths, and the grammatical construction of the past subjunctive to show the slippery line between what is true and what is not.

Millás also explores fiction versus reality in the microtexts in *Dos mujeres en Praga*. In the novel, there are microtexts that are hinted at and microtexts that are explicitly inserted within the novel's text. Luz Acaso is the main author of the implicit microtexts in the novel, which are the stories that she makes up for Álvaro. The first of the two explicit microtexts in the novel is the narrator's short story "Nadie," which is about Luis Rodó who one day receives a phone call from Luisa, his biological daughter whom he does not know exists. This microtext mirrors the story between Luz (the fictional mother) and Álvaro (her fictional long-lost son whom she imagined giving up for adoption after he was born in a convent). In "Nadie," after Luis's affair with Luisa's mother Antonia ends, Luis no longer feels the desire to engage in extramarital relationships. The omniscient narrator writes that Luis "ya no esperaba encontrar en esa actividad clandestina ningún mensaje salvador, de modo que se retiró del adulterio por lo que le pareció una desproporción intolerable entre placer y daño" (82). Once again, Millás stresses the relation between pain and pleasure here, noting that the two are intrinsically linked, yet they are opposite emotions. Luis feels the urge to fulfill his unquenchable desire, which he does when he replaces adultery with alcohol: "[S]ólo en el alcohol acabó encontrando un equilibrio soportable entre destrucción y gozo" and he is able to find a balance between the two emotional drives (82). Furthermore, when he finds out that he has a daughter he feels a strange mix of emotions, or "una mezcla de alivio y desengaño. . . . [S]iempre la proporción obsesiva entre la felicidad y desdicha," as he himself describes the experience (85). His physical body also reacts when he receives Luisa's unexpected phone call. The narrator tells us that "Luis Rodó fue atacado por

una caída del ánimo que se anunció con un sudor disolutivo que empapó su frente, y una sensación de vacío en el estómago” (85-86).

Once again, readers have insight into Millás’s characters through their names. In the story, Luis gives his newly revealed daughter the name “Nadie,” which emphasizes his perception of her as a person without an identity. She exists in his world only as an adult, yet his interaction with her is fleeting. She begins as nobody and she ends up as nobody. In one instance, the narrator writes that Luis “daba marcha atrás repitiéndose que aquella criatura, Nadie, no existía fuera de su cabeza” (85). When the two meet, he takes note of the physical similarities between Luisa and her mother: “Se parecía mucho a Antonia, desde luego, pero era una Antonia algo diabólica, pues al sonreír se le achicaba anormalmente el ojo izquierdo y mostraba colmillo fuera del sitio transformándose súbitamente en otra: era un doble imperfecto y, en ese sentido, había en él algo amenazador, aciago” (90). Luisa is her mother’s flawed antipode: when she smiles her eyes become asymmetrical and she exposes the misalignment of her teeth. Luisa is a copy of her mother, but she can never replace the original.

Obviously, Luisa’s name is an echo and distortion of Luis’s name itself. In their meeting, Luis also finds physical similarities between himself and his daughter: “[Q]uizá durante un segundo nada más . . . se vio reflejado en la chica como en uno de esos espejos colgados de las paredes de los restaurantes en los que al mirarte ves, al mismo tiempo que tu rostro, el de tu enemigo” (92-93). Yet the correlation of his reflection and Luisa’s parallels the association that he makes between Luisa and Antonia’s physical appearance. Perhaps Luis is attracted to his daughter’s appearance because she looks like him. In fact, his narcissistic tendencies accumulate when the two go to Luisa’s apartment for coffee. Functioning as another double, the apartment is of course the same apartment where Antonia and Luis carried out their affair years prior to his

encounter with his daughter. Unable to control his sexual desire for his daughter Luis has sex with Luisa, who has become a doubled double: she is his double and she is also the double of his ex-mistress. The narrator tells us that “[e]l tiempo era un espejo: reflejaba las cosas más que prolongarlas” (97), as his daughter slowly transforms into Antonia in Luis’s mind. Crossing the boundaries of socially accepted norms by performing the incestuous act not only highlights Luis’s narcissism, it also emphasizes the imperfect system of reflections and repetitions that Millás employs here. The microtext ends after the prohibited act between father and daughter, and readers are left with a strange notion of biological relationships and doubling.

The second complete microtext is Álvaro’s short story, “El cuerpo del delito.” This microtext exemplifies Millás’s mastery of the many levels of metafiction: Álvaro includes the story in an email that he sends to the narrator and the story in itself is a letter that Álvaro writes to his mother, yet it is also a work commissioned by his editor but deemed unpublishable.⁵⁰ In the story the author-protagonist (who obviously is Álvaro) struggles to write and publish his commissioned text entitled “Una carta a mi madre” for which Álvaro demands that the publishing company pay him in cash, but he soon realizes that the money given to him is counterfeit. At that point, he makes a strange association between the fake bills and his mother: “Aquel dinero no sólo era tu cuerpo, madre, sino que era de repente también el cuerpo del delito” (186). From here on the money and the concept of his mother become indistinguishable from one another just as text and body are intertwined elsewhere in Millás’s work. Here text is the money that Álvaro is paid to write his story. Both money and the body of Álvaro’s mother are replicas of the original: the paper bills merely represent certain values and Álvaro’s concept of his mother attempts to represent, and re-present, his deceased mother. In her article “Desire in Theory: Freud, Lacan, Derrida,” Belsey notes:

Every object of adult desire is always only a substitute for an original object which is forever lost, and which it represents. Since each substitute, each representation, is always only that and no more, it can never fully be the object of unconscious desire. Loss returns as the impossibility of perfect satisfaction. (391)

Álvaro can never possess that which he desires. Thus, he becomes stuck in an endless cycle of desiring and loss.

On several occasions, the writer describes his mother in terms of his prohibited attraction to her body. Just like many of Millás's other characters, Álvaro is obsessed with knowing his mother's body. At one point in the letter, directly addressing his mother and confessing his taboo desire for her body, he writes the following lines:

El descubrimiento del pezón fue como el de una enfermedad adictiva, pues si bien al principio lo detesté, luego ya no podía vivir sin él. Tampoco tú tenías unos pezones normales, madre, pues carecían prácticamente de areola y surgían del seno casi sin transición, como si no estuvieran incluidos en el diseño original y alguien te los hubiera incrustado de forma algo cruel. . . . [E]sos pezones sólo existían en mi imaginación, pero creo que me mentía para que dejara de buscar, pues quizá esa particularidad anatómica (¿anatómica?) era lo único que nos separaba. Nunca he dejado de preguntarme dónde termina la anatomía y comienzan las emociones. (188-89)

The writer attempts to make sense of his relationship with his mother; he obviously feels an emotional connection to her, yet his attraction to her physical body blurs the line between traditionally accepted mother/son relationships and incest. He confesses that he feels guilty about lusting for his mother's body and at one point he writes that "el resultado de aquel

intercambio de satisfacciones entre tu cuerpo y el mío fue que deseé ser adoptado más que ninguna otra cosa en el mundo, pues si era adoptado podía disfrutar sin culpa de aquellas experiencias delictivas” (191). The theme of adoption is repeated throughout the entire novel because it enables characters to break traditional biological associations and to place the body’s desire for that which is unattainable in a position of primacy.

In the letter, Álvaro tries to conjure up a complete image of his mother in his mind, but he cannot. The image of his mother remains compiled of fragmented body parts: “Era capaz de reconstruirte por partes, pero luego, cuando intentaba verte entera, las partes perdían su contorno, se diluían en el conjunto, como si hubiera entre el todo y las partes un conflicto que aún no he logrado resolver” (189). Álvaro is never able to fully obtain that which he desired when he was a child or that which he desires now as he writes as an adult. He is unable to recapture or make present again the past experiences with his mother.

Another way to attempt to reconstruct the body of his mother is by hiring prostitutes to shower in front of him; he spies on them as they wash their bodies just as he did as a child when his mother was showering. Similar to the act of writing text, Álvaro’s attempt to recreate his mother’s body is repeatedly unsuccessful no matter how many different media he uses and no matter how many times he tries to recreate her. At the end of the story, the writer robs the ashes of his mother from the cemetery and he disposes of them in the bathroom sink of one of his prostitutes. Later, when he receives a rejection notice from his editor that the work will not be published, he plans on burning the letter and placing it in the urn where his mother’s ashes were. Once again, text and the human body are linked in the lines that finish the letter to his mother when he writes, “Polvo eres, tú también, cuerpo de la escritura, y en polvo te convertirás” (208).

Both of these microtexts, “Nadie” and “El cuerpo del delito,” which are written by men about women, are exaggeratedly erotic and emphasize the body as the site of the impossibility of getting closer to the fulfillment desire. This project, however, is destroyed by repetition itself. In “Nadie” the author attempts to reproduce his relationship with his ex-mistress by having sex with his daughter, or really with the copy of his mistress. In a similar way, the author-protagonist of “El cuerpo del delito” attempts to reproduce his mother’s body by writing her a letter and by watching prostitutes bathe. Neither mother nor daughter nor lover are ever reconstituted, which not only points towards repetition as a literary technique that highlights continuous and endless desire and loss but also to the mother as an object defined by a void. Unattainable yet forever desired, the male characters destroy female bodies via their attempt to create text in Millás’s narrative time and time again.

Dos mujeres en Praga concludes after the brief intermission of the intercalated microtexts. Readers discover that Luz dies and María José begins living in her apartment full-time. Readers, however, are not privy to the suffering of Luz; she dies very suddenly. We do not need to read about her last days because Luz was already defined as a fragmented character previously in the novel. She straddles the line between reality and fiction and even though she herself does not modify the body, she surrounds herself with two characters, Álvaro and María José, who distort her body, their own bodies, and texts. By the end of the novel text and body end up eroded. Neither María José nor Álvaro is able to produce written text and María José’s body modification takes her nowhere. It seems, then, that it is not the outcome that is stressed in this novel, but rather the process that, even though it may bring characters closer to fulfilling their desires, actually ends up destroying any possibility of reconstituting the authentic self.

In both *El orden alfabético* and *Dos mujeres en Praga*, we find that bodies and texts are the repositories of static meaning where identity is eroded via illness, distortion, and substitution. Modified bodies and texts within the novels often reflect the unyielding search of Millás's characters for subjectivity. However, what is left over after all of these modifications and attempts to create texts are not the resolved endings that we discovered in *La soledad era esto* and *Laura y Julio*. Rather, in the novels at hand, points of reference for the self are lost time and time again as characters attempt to uncover their authentic selves via the distortion of their bodies and text. Amago comments, "Among the principal themes of his [Millás's] fiction are the individual's alienation by contemporary society and his or her search for a more authentic existence; the exploration of the processes of constructing and representing personal identity; and the examination of the writer's attempt to represent reality through writing" (65). Such searches in these two novels end up going nowhere, which may lead readers to discover a social commentary by Millás. The attempt to produce text and to modify the body seems to reflect the actual social situation of our time: no matter how much we try and no matter by which means we try, we can never arrive a fixed meaning and thus, we can never rely completely on our perception as a true replica of reality.

The characters in both *El orden* and *Dos mujeres* are fragmented. They are obsessed with writing (or with the possibility of creating written and oral text) and they modify their physical bodies both consciously and unconsciously as points of references to the authentic self. In this sense, they are narcissists, locked in their bodies and their texts. The search for meaning, then, continuously and repeatedly manifests in the texts and on the bodies of these characters and leaves their subjectivities unfinished. Kristeva argues that text and the body are interwoven media that humans use to perceive the world, yet even though they are continuously modified

both remain inherently incomplete cognitive systems. In Millás's two novels both human bodies and textual bodies are the means by which perception and reality are examined, yet both are insufficient media of investigation. Both repeatedly yield empty meaning; the process of searching on the body and in texts only uncovers an endless cycle of repetition that leads nowhere.

CHAPTER 3

BODIES IN PLACES AND SPACE IN *EL MUNDO*
AND *CUENTOS DE ADÚLTEROS DESORIENTADOS*

In the previous two chapters I illustrate how Millás conceives of our reality in four of his novels by modifying his characters' physical bodies and by creating textual bodies within his narrative texts. By doing so, he suggests that how we perceive and negotiate with the world around us is constantly evolving. Both human and textual bodies in his works participate in and record the disjointedness of our experiences of places and space. In this chapter, I examine how human bodies and textual bodies negotiate with the places and space that they occupy in two of Millás's works: his self-proclaimed autobiographical novel *El mundo* (2007) and a collection of short fiction titled *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* (2003).⁵¹

In the current chapter "space" refers to both perceptions and experiences within the geographic sites that we inhabit whereas "place" is a defined, geographic location. Yi-Fu Tuan offers a clear definition of "space" and "place" in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. In his phenomenologically-based study Tuan examines the functions of our biological bodies and our notions of awareness in human interactions in places and space. Our physical bodies and cognitive awareness help shape our perceptual understanding of places and space. He suggests that

[t]he ideas of "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat

of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (6)

Places and space are intrinsically linked, yet they serve distinct functions: we occupy places, but we inhabit space. We can be in a place, but we sense and experience a space.⁵²

Following these ideas, then, in the current chapter “place” is defined as static and geographically stable, whereas “space” is defined as dynamic and flexible. Our experiences in space transform as our perceptions continuously change and evolve. Space resists concrete characterization and stability, and it is often evoked by the intangible and abstraction. Desire and nostalgia, for example, frequently manifest in space; they are difficult to define in concrete terms, yet easy to simply experience. Space is the location of experiences, and the self negotiates with what surrounds it, which can be conceived of as an individual activity. Place, on the other hand, is the particular geographic location where such negotiations in space occur, and it is inherently more social than space.

Throughout his *oeuvre*, Millás repeatedly suggests that our physical and textual bodies affect and are affected by the places and space that they occupy. In the first two chapters of this dissertation I analyze how Millás’s characters modify their physical and textual bodies as they search for points of reference in an attempt to define their subjectivities, and I suggest that neither physical nor textual bodies are stable, static objects. Rather, physical and textual bodies are both objects and subjects in continuous negotiation with themselves and with that which surrounds them. As one reads Millás’s narratives, it becomes clear that the perceptions of his characters are directed to interact with the places that they occupy, but their physical and textual bodies often prohibit them from experiencing such places in any sort of meaningful way. In

other words, his characters long to form significant exchanges in intimate places, such as the house, brothel, or secret apartment, but their projects of construction repeatedly fail.

It seems that the more that Millás's characters attempt to grasp a concrete sense of self in a particular place, the further they drift from place into space. The geographic locations of the places that they occupy often feel foreign for Millásian characters. Consequently, they attempt to negate their existences in places and instead try to reach space, which exposes the fine line between reality and fiction. The confusion between what is real and what is not is a common theme in Millás's narrative, and his characters frequently conceptualize the gap between reality and fiction *vis-à-vis* the modification of their physical bodies and the construction of textual bodies. In this sense, both human and textual bodies constitute perceptive filters of space.

Millás's characters often access space by negating the activeness of their physical bodies and/or by attempting to read and write texts. Yet, instead of helping characters to understand the places that they occupy, their bodies frequently distance them from gaining ontological knowledge or forming any sense of meaning. Even with all of their modification of text and body, Millás's characters are repeatedly unable to fully inhabit space and they are forced into occupying places once again, which negatively affects their understanding of their selves.

The protagonists in *El mundo* and *Cuentos* demonstrate how Millásian characters tend to interact in places and space. In *El mundo* and *Cuentos*, the protagonists employ their bodies—both physical and textual—in an attempt to situate their selves in places. This project, however, repeatedly fails and ends up disconnecting them from place and disorienting them in space. In these two works, the modification of the physical body often occurs through the suppression of corporeal action. For example, characters work themselves into the fetal position and hide in small places, and they are unable to participate in sexual acts. As they deny the roles of their

physical bodies in interchanges with other characters, they try to access alternate spaces with their minds. This vacillation between the action of going inward via their physical bodies and the action of attempting to leave their physical bodies in order to reach alternate spaces temporarily unhinges the characters from place. In *El mundo* and *Cuentos* characters also repeatedly construct written text in order to pinpoint their position in space and places. Just as their physical bodies fail as reliable modes of perception, so too do the created texts distance them from the possibility of understanding their selves in places and space.

The theories of Gaston Bachelard offer a framework through which to better understand how Millás's characters seek to interact with the places that surround them.⁵³ However, Bachelard's model of human perception constitutes an ideal for Millás's characters, an ideal that they fail to realize most often because they become stuck in the continuous loop of repetition. Making no explicit distinction between the terms "space" and "place," Bachelard argues that the geographic locations that we occupy have tangible, definable qualities, what scholars now define as "place." He is also interested in how we perceive and negotiate with where we are and how our perceptions affect our concept of subjectivity, both of which take place in space. Bachelard approaches intimate places like the home as sites where individual experiences of self occur and where "space" as a subjective concept is particular and unique to the individual. In this chapter, I borrow Bachelard's notions of the perception of space within place and I highlight the differences between the two terms in Millás's texts.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Bachelard contends that the home is the place *par excellence* to experience oneself within space. According to Bachelard, the home must be defined as much more than its measurable and describable parts, which make it a "place"; it must

also be characterized as the personal experience of the dweller within it, or “space.” Suggesting that the places that we inhabit are complicated and complicating spaces, he writes:

It is not a question of describing houses, or enumerating their picturesque features and analyzing for which reasons they are comfortable. On the contrary, we must go beyond the problems of description—whether this description be objective or subjective, that is whether it gives facts or impressions—in order to attain the primary virtues, those that reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting. (4)

Even though Bachelard does not ignore the fact that our houses are geographically delimited places, he is more concerned with examining how the intangible essences, or spaces, of the home interact with physical bodies. Being in our homes is intrinsic to who we are, according to Bachelard, and our experiences within the space of the home ideally nurture us and help us to better understand ourselves and our bodies. For Bachelard, the home is nurturing and it inherently provides us with shelter from the outside world. He writes that the home “is one of the greatest powers of integration . . . [of] the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” and emphasizes the role of the home in the cultivation of self (6). The home is also “a *tool for analysis* of the human soul,” according to Bachelard (xxxvii). He implies that, within the space of the home, we are able to further experience our authentic selves, or what he refers to as the human soul.

Furthermore, for Bachelard the home provides a primary image to give form to the concept of subjectivity. In the Bachelardian home, we easily locate points of reference for places onto which we can anchor our selves. Bachelard’s concept of the home relies on an understanding of space as flexible, mutable, open to interpretation, and always fundamentally

beneficial to our concept of self. Millás's characters want to experience their homes in a Bachelardian way, yet they repeatedly fail in this project. His characters' frequent inability to comfortably occupy a place, and to utilize space as a tool for self-analysis, suggests that we can never completely know our selves or trust our modes of perception.

Bachelardian spaces are inherently positive and nurturing. He theorizes that the space of the home is innately and complexly connected to the processes of self-discovery. Bachelard states that we inhabit the space of the home through our bodies. Attempting to capture the poetics of the house, he coins the term "topoanalysis" to describe the things within the house and how we negotiate with them in the space of the house (8). The term is appropriate since it not only captures the geographic characteristics of the places that we occupy (*topo*), but because it also refers to our experience of space as first and foremost a subjective one (*analysis*). Perception and experience for Bachelard are intrinsically personal activities. Millás's characters occupy houses, and they attempt to make the houses into homes, thereby transferring from place to space, via their perceptions of their selves. Rarely, however, do they succeed.

Drew Leder's theories of how bodies interact in places and in space complement Bachelard's ideas of the self in the home and, like Bachelard, Leder blends objective reason and individual subjectivity in his approach. Additionally, his study highlights the relevance of Bachelard's contributions to contemporary scholarship by emphasizing the complexity of the human body's role in sensing the world around us. In *The Absent Body* (1990), Leder examines corporeal absences in everyday negotiations. Even though we are always in our bodies, he theorizes that we often ignore the body's role in how we perceive the world around us. To exemplify this paradox, Leder reminds us that in the German language there are two words for

body: *Korper*, the physical body, and *Leib*, the lived body.⁵⁴ He argues that we often get caught up with the sensations of the physical body and ignore the lived body, which he describes as

an ecstatic/recessive being, engaged both in a leaping out and a falling back.

Through its sensorimotor surface it projects outward to the world. At the same time it recedes from its own apprehension into anonymous visceral depths. The body is never a simple presence, but that which is away from itself, a being of difference and absence. (103)

In this passage, Leder implies that we are complex beings who often ignore the roles of our bodies in our exchanges with each other and objects in the world. According to him, when we interact in the world, we do so with our bodies whether or not we are aware of the body's role in such negotiations. Leder's idea of the lived body incorporates the paradox of presence and absence. In this sense, our bodies are always present in our selves, yet rarely are we fully aware of their roles in human perception. The concept of the lived body, which subverts the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body, is especially relevant to my study because it includes the physicality of experience on and in the body as well as the intangible essence of individual perception. To put it clearly, the lived body, when we catch brief glimpses of the ideal, inhabits space. Millás's characters seek to truly know their lived bodies, but the physicality of their bodies repeatedly curtails this project.

Millás's characters occupy private, hermetic places where they examine their subjectivities and question the verisimilitude of perception via their physical bodies and the texts that they read and write. The representation of intimate spaces like homes, brothels, and secret apartments in *El mundo* and *Cuentos* impacts perception *vis-à-vis* the characters' physical bodies and the textual bodies that they construct. Furthermore, Millás's characters seem to want to

experience home in a Bachelardian way and their bodies in a Lederian way, yet they almost are always unsuccessful in such a project. In other words, Millás's characters attempt, as they search for stable points of reference, to anchor themselves to their homes, a brothel, or an apartment where they meet secret lovers, yet they are continuously unable to recognize their subjectivities in such places. They attempt to transcend the geographic boundaries of place by negating the roles of their physical and textual bodies in transporting them to alternate realities. Ultimately, however, his characters tend to return to the original, negative places from which they first tried to escape. This cycle pushes them into an endless routine that they continuously try to flee, but that in the end leads them back to place and away from space.

As I have shown in the two previous chapters, the physical body is the first site of experience for many of Millás's characters. Our physical bodies permit us to negotiate with the world around us, and as both Bachelard and Leder remind us, they are one of our main modes of perception. Leder tells us:

It is through the bodily surface that I first engage the world. Only because my eyes and ears lie on the surface of my body are they capable of disclosing the events that take place around me. My hands, in order to explore and work upon the world, must extend outward from my corporeal "extremities." My expressive face can form a medium of communication only because it is available to the Other's gaze. No organ concealed in the hidden depths of the body could actualize intersubjectivity in this way. It is thus necessary that our perceptual, motor, and communicative powers cluster at or near the body surface. The surface is where self meets what is other than self. (11)

Leder and Bachelard both propose that the human body is the subject of experience and the experiencing object. Through constantly changing physical bodies subjectivities are able to be constructed and/or eroded, as I have shown in Chapters 1 and 2. It is not surprising, then, that our physical bodies, as primary vessels of experience, shape and are shaped by our perceptions of space and place.

Additionally, as I have outlined in the previous chapters, the textual bodies (along with the intercalated microtexts) that Millás's characters write and attempt to write echo the physical body's inherent temporal incompleteness. When characters write or read, their physical bodies register the innate disjointedness of language and often perceive textual and corporeal uprootedness in the places that they occupy. Also, characters most often create textual bodies within the intimate and hermetic place of the private home. Writing affects the bodies of Millás's characters and frequently transports them temporarily from a fixed place to space. In a similar fashion, modifying the physical body permits the characters to disconnect themselves from places.

Repetition often overtakes Millás's characters in *El mundo* and *Cuentos* when their physical and textual bodies fail to help them define their subjectivities. In previous chapters, I show that repetition works in Millás's texts in several ways. These include characters that are repeated and doubled and physical bodies that are divided in two. Repetition occurs as substitution and inversion in *El mundo* and *Cuentos*, which seems to point towards repetition as an endless cycle and to the concept of self as an inherent impossibility. In *El mundo* and *Cuentos*, characters substitute and invert places, and the physical and textual bodies of the characters affect and are affected by such distorted repetitions. Moreover, Millás employs repetitive techniques in these two texts that underscore human experience as a process rather

than a concrete, tangible product; these techniques highlight both textual and physical bodies as infinitely incomplete enterprises. By doing so, Millás seems to suggest that our interchanges in the world, both with our selves and with our texts, are driven first and foremost by perception. The process of being in postmodernity for Millás is based on individual perception, which he understands as flawed, and the concept of self in continuous negotiation with others and objects in the world.

In Millás's novel *El mundo* (2007), the young protagonist explores places and space first and foremost via his physical body and then, when he is an adult, via the texts that he writes. To understand the context of the story, it is worth noting that Millás creates an elaborate network of author, protagonist, and narrator in the novel. From his prestigious position as an adult writer, Juanjo, the novel's narrator and protagonist, recounts several events from his past that occur during his childhood and his successful career as a writer. Even though Millás (or one of his fictionalized voices) tells us on the back cover that the novel began as an autobiographical article that he was commissioned to write, we cannot assume that the novel is in fact completely autobiographical. Additionally, with this double authority of both recounting (as the author) and living (as the protagonist) the events in the novel, the narrator uses a parenthetical comment to inform us that he is not telling the truth. He writes, "Me convertiría en uno de aquellos héroes de las películas que veía en el cine López de Hoyos, un tipo de ninguna parte que huía de un pasado cruel (*y si quieren saber de mi pasado, es preciso decir una mentira*)" (213-14, emphasis mine). It is ironic that it is not until near the end of the novel that Millás mentions that he may or may not be conveying true events. The actual text of the novel is displaced from the outset with the note on the back cover and in the text, which sets the scene for the distortion of places that occurs throughout the rest of the novel.⁵⁵

In this chapter, I look at the representation of houses in the novel as both places and space. I analyze how places and space affect Juanjo and how his physical and textual bodies negotiate with the places and space that surround him. As Juanjo describes his second childhood home in Madrid, he subverts Bachelard's notion that the home is our first refuge, that it gives shelter to our bodies and our minds. Juanjo cannot avoid attempting to pinpoint such a place when he experiences memories of his first childhood home in Valencia, when he deliberately attempts to replace places with other places, and when he repeatedly tries to reach space in order to forget about his inability to locate points of reference for his self in places. The Bachelardian sense of home continuously beckons to Juanjo, yet he never attains his goal.

The story begins as Juanjo recounts the rooms in his cold childhood house on the outskirts of Madrid where he lived from around the age of eight until, as a teenager, he joined the seminary in Valladolid. Within the first several pages of the novel, he details the layout of his house:

El taller de mi padre estaba situado en la parte de atrás de la casa, separado de ésta por un patio de cemento. La parte de delante daba a una especie de jardín comunicado con el patio de atrás por un callejón sombrío en el que crecía un árbol con la corteza negra. . . . La casa, por su parte, tenía dos pisos y un desván. En el piso de abajo se encontraban al principio los dormitorios, el cuarto de baño y una habitación multiusos que durante una época fue la alcoba de los chicos. . . además de una especie de despacho en el que mi padre llevaba su oficina. En el de arriba estaban el comedor, la cocina, un aseo minúsculo y otras dos o tres habitaciones. Más tarde, la cocina y el comedor se trasladaron al piso de abajo y los dormitorios

se colocaron todos en el piso de arriba. Hacíamos continuamente cambios de este tipo sin encontrarnos a gusto con ninguno. (10-11)

His description of the house in Madrid, as evidenced in the passage above, is objective and sterile. As he defines where he lives, he does not mention how he distinguishes his presence in the house. Rather, he reports its concrete characteristics by outlining its tangible parts as if he were describing an architect's blueprint. He places emphasis on the fact that, even with the physical changes that his family made to the house, his experience in the place continued to be negative throughout his childhood and adolescence.

Much of the story of *El mundo* occurs within the walls of the constricting place of Juanjo's house in Madrid in the past. Herein lies a contradiction. If we assume, just as Bachelard reminds us, that the home is a refuge that allows us to exist peacefully in the present and to daydream about the future, then Juanjo's description of his childhood house in Madrid is the opposite of this serene space. It is a cold place that is less like a refuge for the young child and more like a prison because it is a memory in the past. In her article "The Experience of Home and the Space of Citizenship," Kirsten Jacobson writes that

Bachelard argues that it is in and through our childhood homes that we develop the habits of movement, attitude, and comportment that fundamentally shape our future way of being-in-the-world. These first experiences of home are ones in which we discover and in effect "gain" our bodies by matching them to the demands of our surrounding, since it is through such a pairing that the world makes itself available to us. (221)

As he remembers, from his position as an adult, not having a stable point of reference in his childhood house in Madrid, Juanjo's sense of subjectivity and his concept of his physical body remain incomplete and distorted well into adulthood.

Additionally, the state of the physical structure is a primary manifestation of Juanjo's perception of his dislodged position in the place of the house and within his family. Juanjo describes his Madrilenian house in negative terms in the following lines:

Pagábamos de alquiler mil pesetas al mes, que no era poco si añadimos que se trataba de una ruina. Tenía goteras. Las ventanas encajaban mal; el cemento de patio estaba roto; las paredes, desconchadas; las vigas, podridas. . . . Entre la puerta que daba al jardín de delante y la que daba al patio de atrás había durante el invierno una corriente constante (y cortante) de aire frío, un punzón invisible que llegaba hasta la médula de la vivienda. (12-13)

Juanjo's house is a static place that remains unchanged even with the passing of the seasons. Furthermore, his father is virtually absent from any narration in the novel; his mother is loving to Juanjo only occasionally and sometimes inappropriately; and Juanjo only mentions his eight brothers and sisters to make the point that he was invisible to his parents within the large group of siblings. Juanjo has no real connections to his family, yet according to Tuan the mother is the first and primary place for a young child (29). Without a stable connection to place, the place of his house or the place of his mother, Juanjo experiences trouble locating external points of reference to help him define his subjectivity. Instead he uses his body to search for them elsewhere in other places that he remembers when he is writing as an adult.

The protagonist-narrator contrasts the house in Madrid with his childhood home in Valencia where he spent the first six years of his life. Bachelard highlights our first home in a

positive way when he comments that “[t]he house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams” (15). Juanjo’s memories of Valencia, which are frequently linked to corporeal sensations, mostly occur outside the walls of the house where he lived. As he remembers his early childhood in Valencia, he recounts holding his mother’s hand on the way to the market and to school; he remembers playing in the sand on the warm Valencian beaches; and he recounts daydreaming at school about changing places with his coat inside the closet. Tuan writes, “To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible” (187), but Juanjo is never able to identify a stable point in his memories of Valencia because they are inherently intangible.

Juanjo repeatedly invokes memories of his first childhood home in Valencia in order to suppress the negativity of his house in Madrid. Bachelard states, “When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise” (7). Imprisoned in his house in Madrid, Valencia becomes for Juanjo “no sólo un espacio luminoso, cálido y con mar, sino en el Paraíso Perdido” (23). The place of Valencia transforms into the space where desire and nostalgia reside. According to Bachelard, “Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are. . . . For knowledge of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates” (9). Juanjo’s memories of Valencia cause him to feel nostalgia for his childhood, what he imagines as the comforting space of his first childhood home.

Juanjo is unable to physically occupy his home in Valencia from the position of his childhood house in Madrid, and his house in Madrid is not the nurturing space that Bachelard describes. On the contrary, it is an empty and disconnected place. Tuan contends that “[p]laces

are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied” (4). Juanjo’s Madrid house as a place does fulfill his basic needs but it does not provide him with space, or in other terms, with the refuge that Bachelard outlines. This lack encourages him to access space in smaller places, which include the nook below the stairs, his mother’s armoire, and the basement cellar of his friend’s house. He leaves the unfavorable place of his childhood house in Madrid when he occupies these smaller places.

One of the first places where Juanjo attempts to find comfort is located in a nook below the stairs of his house in Madrid.⁵⁶ There he is isolated from his family and the nook functions like a portal through which Juanjo can escape the negative place of his house and reach space. In such a place, he is able to experience his self without the constraints of the suffocating place of his house. The narrator describes the process of moving from place to space when he states, “[E]mpecé a dormir a escondidas, como los chicos mayores fumaban a escondidos. . . . Después de comer, me echaba debajo del hueco de la escalera, que tenía también algo de nicho. Muchas veces, el tránsito del sueño a la vigilia era tan insensible como el paso del estado sólido al líquido en el hielo” (52). The dream-like state between wakefulness and sleeping dislodges Juanjo from experiencing the place as concrete and his body as definite. When he is in this state, his body is not anchored to a specific place or to the demands of that place. In other words, when he negates the activeness of his physical body by sleeping, Juanjo is able to retreat to a space where he does not have to experience the stifling place of his childhood house in Madrid.

In fact, Juanjo experiences a lot of pleasure from sleeping during the day and daydreaming in the small space of the nook. When Juanjo suppresses his body’s role in perception, both activities seem to convert the small place under the stairs into a Bachelardian space. Bachelard states that “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the

house allows one to dream in peace. . . . The values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of autovalorization” (6). When Juanjo escapes the place of his house to daydream under the stairs, he accesses the sort of space that Bachelard describes in the above passage, and he recognizes himself only when he is in such a state.

When he is older, Juanjo sniffs ether under the stairs to help him experience the state between being awake and dreaming, which for him seems to be equivalent to the state between reality and fiction. In the hideout underneath the stairs, he experiences a physical sensation after he takes the drug similar to that which he experienced when he daydreamed as a young child.

The narrator remembers that

me tumbaba en el hueco de debajo de la escalera, en posición fetal, la misma que utilizaba para dormir, y me lo aplicaba [éter] a modo de mascarilla, entrando de inmediato en un sopor tan profundo que, al despertar y levantarme a media tarde, era como si me incorpora en el interior de un sueño. (56)

Here he requires a drug to propel his body into a state of stupor. Once again he quiets his physical body by positioning himself in the fetal position so that he can access space and escape from the place of his childhood home in Madrid.

With the experiences in the small, hidden places that Juanjo continuously occupies throughout the novel, he attempts to dislodge his self from his childhood house. In this sense, the substitution of places for other places is a type of distorted repetition. Kawin suggests that repetition is “not a concept, but an *experience*” (xiii). The place of his childhood house in Madrid does not comfort Juanjo, so he seeks refuge in different places, such as the nook under the stairs. These compact places allow him to daydream, or in other terms, they allow him to experience the space between reality (his life at home) and fiction (his dreams and his drug-

altered state) and between the physicality of his body and the abstract concept of space. In order to encounter space, he negates his body's role and instead uses mind-alternating techniques like falling into a deep sleep and taking ether. Tuan suggests that we experience space with three senses: movement, sight, and touch (12). However, under the stairs Juanjo experiences space by negating these three corporeal senses. He becomes still, he closes his eyes, and he does not touch anything. Tuan also writes that "[s]olitude is a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity" (59). Repeatedly being alone with his body and mind in the nook seems to allow Juanjo to at least temporarily inhabit the infinite space between what is real and what is not.

His mother's armoire is another place that functions like a refuge for the young Juanjo. Just as the nook underneath the stairs allows him to discover space in a Bachelardian sense, so too does the confined space of the armoire. Juanjo tells us that when he was a child, "[P]asé una tarde entera dentro del cuerpo central de aquel armario: una tarde entera al otro lado del espejo. . . . El otro lado, como el infierno, no era un lugar, sino una condición. Si ésa era tu condición, igual daba que estuvieras dentro o fuera del armario, delante o detrás del espejo, acompañado o solo" (34-35). Not only does he explicitly describe his mother's armoire as a body, but his experience of space ("una condición") encourages him to analyze his self, as evidenced in his reference to himself as "you." In the above passage Juanjo realizes that whether inside or outside the armoire, he has no stable point of reference in a place. In order to overpower the physicality of his body, he escapes the place and hides in a small location. Only then can he inhabit a space where he is able to ponder his subjectivity.

Juanjo underscores this fact by addressing himself directly as "you" when he hides inside the armoire: "Sabías que no pertenecías, que no pertenecíamos, al mundo al que habíamos ido a parar" (34-35). In this statement he splits his concept of subjectivity into "you" and "I" and then

glues it back together as “we.” Just as other Millasian characters experiment with their senses of self by creating antipodes or doubles, in *El mundo* Juanjo splits his concept of self and then re-adheres it, but he does this when he has escaped place and reached space. The distorted repetition of his concept of self exposes the explicit fragmentation of his subjectivity and seems to further disorient him from place.

The young protagonist also remembers escaping from his house during his childhood by visiting his friend. El Vitaminas lives across the street with his father who, in the same building as their house, runs a grocery store. Juanjo relates that el Vitaminas suffers from a physically debilitating disease, which ends up killing him when he begins to experience the rapid physical growth of puberty. The young Juanjo spends many hours with his sick friend, and the two boys observe the road from a small window in the basement cellar of the grocery store. The cellar functions like the nook underneath the stairs and the armoire at Juanjo’s house in the sense that all three are places where the young boy is able to escape. In contrast to his childhood house, the basement of the grocery store becomes a sort of refuge for Juanjo.

Bachelard points out the dual verticality that the attic and the cellar create in a house. He describes the cellar as “the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of depths” (18). Observing the street from below gives Juanjo a strange, surreal sensation. He experiences what Bachelard insinuates in the above passage as amicable disjointedness: the cellar attracts him at the same time as it repulses him. Juanjo tells us that the street “observada desde aquel lugar y a ras del suelo poseía calidades hiperreales, o subreales, quizá oníricas. . . . [S]entí que me encontraba en el interior de un sueño. . . . Más que mi calle, era una versión mística de mi calle” (48). The

point of view of watching from below, and the fact that the children remain unseen by passers-by, transport Juanjo to a favorable space where reality and fiction are not easily distinguishable.

Juanjo's ventures in his neighborhood streets emphasize his disconnection to places. The streets allow him to escape his cold house in Madrid and his disinterested family, even if only temporarily, and they always lead him back to the same house. In fact, the street where Juanjo lives as a child in the suburbs of Madrid becomes a symbol for his experience of uprootedness in the world. He tells us that "mi calle era una imitación, un trasunto, una copia, quizá una metáfora del mundo" (92) and later "la Calle era una especie de maqueta del mundo" (104). When he states, "Aunque he dedicado gran parte de mi vida a escapar de aquellas calles, no estoy seguro de haberlo conseguido" (24), he emphasizes his childhood street as a metaphor for the disorientation in places that he experiences during his life. He is never firmly anchored to any place nor can he get away from the disjointedness that is echoed in his physical and textual bodies. He is repeatedly and continuously trapped in his physical body and instead of rooting him to some point of reference, the textual bodies that he attempts to write end up further disorienting his self.

Symptoms of disorientation also manifest on his body when Juanjo is an adult. With the death of his mother, the adult Juanjo is metaphorically evicted from her body, the first place that he occupied in his life, and her death registers inside his body. He writes, "La enfermedad se movía por el interior de mi cuerpo como un fantasma por el interior de una mansión abandonada. Unos días estaba en los pulmones; otros, en el estómago, en la garganta, en la cabeza. . . . A veces, en los ojos" (38). The loss of yet another place, even though the place was inherently distorted, makes Juanjo physically ill, and he compares his own body to a haunted mansion,

which emphasizes corporeal separation. Furthermore, his image of the empty body echoes the split concept of self that Juanjo contemplated as a child in his mother's armoire.

Leder suggests that the body in such states undergoes what he labels "dys-appearance."

He writes that

the presencing of the body in dys-appearance is still a mode of absence—
etymologically, "to be away." . . . [T]he body is away from direct experience.
This could be called a *primary absence*. It is this self-effacement that first allows
the body to open out to the world. In dys-appearance the body folds back upon
itself. Yet this mode of self-presence constitutes a *secondary absence*; the body is
away from the ordinary or desired state, from itself, and perhaps from the
experienced "I." This presence is not a simple positivity. It is born from the
reversal, from the *absence of an absence*. (90-91)

Leder's concept of two absences exposes the disparity between the self and the body and simultaneously vindicates this gap. Juanjo experiences Leder's primary and secondary absences on his body. When he was a young child hiding in his mother's armoire and after the death of his mother as an adult, symptoms of loss of points of reference manifest on his physical body and in his concept of subjectivity.

Writing, or the production of textual bodies, is one way in which the adult Juanjo attempts to recognize place and stabilize his subjectivity. However, writing as an experience for Juanjo is similar to daydreaming or taking drugs in that all three disorient his physical body.

When Juanjo sits down one morning to write he tells us that

me pareció que la habitación tenía fiebre. Y no sólo la habitación, sino cada uno
de los objetos que había en ella. Toqué los libros y tenían fiebre, toqué mis

fetiches y tenían fiebre, acaricié el respaldo de la silla y tenía fiebre. Me puse a escribir un artículo y me salió, claro, con fiebre. (65)

He perceives the room that he occupies and the objects within it as ill, and his physical body is also ill when he writes. He also creates a textual body that “has fever,” which highlights that the act of writing has consequences in the physical body. In a sense, the process of writing dislodges him from his place in the room and transports him to space and, in this alternate space, his text and the objects in the room register the same physical sensation of fever that his body feels.

Juanjo continues describing the mind-altering effects of fever when he states, “Ninguna de las drogas que probé luego, a lo largo de la vida, me proporcionó las experiencias alucinógenas de la fiebre. Deberían vender pastillas productoras de fiebre” (65). Furthermore, when he tells us, “Me han producido fiebre las anginas, desde luego, pero también la lectura de ciertos libros” (66), he emphasizes the intrinsic link between writing and reading, and he suggests that both actions affect our physical bodies. When Juanjo accesses space by writing, taking drugs, or suffering from a fever, his body becomes hypersensitive to the force of perception such that it displaces its sensations onto the objects that surround it.

As an adult, the narrator undergoes corporeal disorientation when he attends a party at his editor’s house, which he recalls and narrates from the present. His memory is intercalated in the novel in the form of an implicit microtext. When Juanjo is inside his editor’s apartment at the party, he feels the physical symptoms of claustrophobia. The suffocating place does not permit Juanjo any expansion. Tuan suggests that “primarily people crowd us; people rather than things are likely to restrict our freedom and deprive us of space” (59). In his editor’s kitchen, which Juanjo compares to a uterus (79), he quickly becomes overwhelmed by the large quantity of people in the crowded area and attempts to make his way to the balcony. He remembers,

“[B]usqué la salida del útero y comencé a parirme a mí mismo” (82). The place suffocates him, and he looks for a way to escape, a way metaphorically to give birth to his self.

Once on the balcony, Juanjo realizes that he can only escape the crowded apartment by jumping onto the next door neighbor’s terrace, navigating the unfamiliar place, and exiting through the front door. His entry into the new place, which is unoccupied and still except for the glow of a television set in the bedroom, allows him to leave his editor’s crowded home. Additionally, Juanjo notices that the apartment to which he escapes is a double and a mirror image of his editor’s apartment. He first transports his physical body by “giving birth,” an intensely corporeal and mental experience, and he then enters an empty place that has an inverted floor plan in relation to the suffocating place. Through both these activities Juanjo transcends the limits of his body and the boundaries of place, and he opens himself up to space.

Once he leaves the next-door-neighbor’s apartment, Juanjo feels an instant sense of relief through his experience of space, which he understands as an alternate reality. The narrator describes his relief in the following lines:

Y mientras caía y caía, las puertas de las casas pasaban ante mis ojos como construcciones fantásticas al otro lado de las cuales se repetían vidas idénticas, existencias clonadas, dificultades y rutinas semejantes a la de la vivienda de la que acababa de fugarme. Tuve en aquellos momentos de euforia la impresión de haber escapado no de un piso, sino de una forma de vivir, de una dimensión de realidad. (88)

Just as Juanjo fled the stifling place of his childhood house by hiding under the stairs and in his mother’s armoire, and by observing the street from the basement of his friend’s house, in the above microtext he escapes his editor’s house by entering a distorted place that ultimately opens

up to space. According to Tuan, “Spaciousness is closely associated with the sense of being free. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act. Being free has several levels of meaning. Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition” (52). As Juanjo leaves the apartment building, he feels like he has left reality and entered a different spatial dimension. He feels relief and he is happy.

After he exits the apartment building, he catches a taxi and goes to his childhood neighborhood. He recalls visiting his childhood neighborhood in the following lines:

Bajé del taxi transformado y recorrí mi calle, desde el principio al fin, en un estado de trance. Ya no era la misma, desde luego. Todas las casas bajas de mi infancia habían sido sustituidas por edificios de seis o siete pisos. Pero yo era capaz de ver los fantasmas de las viviendas antiguas y de sus moradores dibujados sobre aquellas fachadas. (94)

In her article, “A Developed Nature: A Phenomenological Account of the Experience of Home,” Jacobson writes that home “protects us temporarily from the interests and demands of others. In this way, home is a place of *self*-nourishment and *self*-development” (359). By contrast, returning to the place of his childhood house does not orient him. On the contrary, it emphasizes once again that he has no stable points of reference to places, which is reflected in his situation of leaving the party at his editor’s apartment. As he walks his old streets, Juanjo wonders how his life would be different if he had left from the party at his editor’s house through his editor’s front door instead of through the neighbor’s front door.

When he returns to the party, he realizes that perhaps he had never left his editor’s house; perhaps he had always remained there. At his editor’s house, Juanjo begins to experience the same series of events that happened before he left: the guests form a line to try some slices from

the whole leg of ham, his colleague offers him cigarettes, he is stuck in the kitchen with no way out, and so forth. Events that happened before he left are duplicated. He tells us that everything

se repitió todo de manera idéntica a la vez anterior. . . . Sabía a cada instante lo que haría al siguiente y me entregaba sumisamente a la repetición con la esperanza de que en algún momento apareciera un recodo, un callejón, una grieta que me permitiera escapar de aquella situación duplicada. (101)

He once again feels like fleeing the crowded place, an action that would surely lock him into a circular state of repetition.

The novel ends when Juanjo, from his position as an author and an adult, finally writes about an event that he has been avoiding for years because he does not want to remember what happened. He tells us that as a child, he was repeatedly physically abused at the private school that he attended. When he was a student at the school, Juanjo employed his body to allow him to stop attending classes. He walks around for weeks with a nail in the sole of his shoe that rubs against the skin of his foot. He writes that “[s]e trataba de un problema bastante común en el calzado de la época y su arreglo era muy sencillo, pero yo llevaba semanas alimentando aquella herida con la esperanza de que me atacara el tétanos, para morirme” (199). In purposefully hurting himself, he uses his physical body in order to avoid the negative place of the school.

At the end of the novel, Juanjo decides to enter the seminary in Valladolid and become a priest. He also uses the seminary to attempt to replace the suffocating place of his childhood home in Madrid. Even though he offers few details about this place, the seminary functions as another possible replacement, or a distorted repetition. In other words, for Juanjo repetition appears in the form of the seemingly endless substitution of one place for another.

As he composes the last chapter in the early dawn hours, Juanjo reflects on the house that he now inhabits as an adult: “La casa, a estas horas, parece otra, quizá ‘la otra’, la que hay oculta dentro de ella, su inconsciente. Es idéntica y distinta a la del día, como si fuera la casa que hay al otro lado del espejo grande que tenemos en el salón” (207-08). When he is an adult he continues to distort the places that he occupies, most often with inverted substitutions such as the other side of the mirror. As an adult he attempts to vindicate how his body reacts to occupying places through writing, yet by doing so he becomes more and more disoriented from his original sense of place (his childhood homes in Valencia and Madrid and even his mother). Likewise, writing about those places affects his body, just as inhabiting those places did when he was a child. Bachelard comments that

by approaching the house images with care not to break up the solidarity of memory and imagination, we may hope to make others feel all the psychological elasticity of an image that moves us at an unimaginable depth. Through poems, perhaps more than through recollections, we touch the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house. (6)

The construction of textual bodies as an adult is the means by which Juanjo attempts to pinpoint place, because it is through locating and defining stable points of references for his self that he might possibly escape the endless routine of distorted repetition. In the end, however, the act of writing does not reveal the resolution that he had imagined. Juanjo remains unattached to place and stuck in a continuous cycle of repetition.

If in *El mundo* Juanjo fails to establish his subjectivity in any place by suppressing the body’s role in perception, the adulterers in the short stories from *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* often attempt to recapture stable concepts of self by carrying out sexual desires in

secret places. The short stories in the collection examine the clandestine lives of adulterers, who often meet in enclosed places such as a brothel, a hotel room, or an apartment. I analyze the representation of physical bodies and the hermetic places that they occupy in four short stories from the collection: “La muela de Holgado,” “El adúltero,” “El sofá cama,” and “El adúltero como vocación.”⁵⁷ In these short texts, forbidden desire hides on and in physical and textual bodies and in the space that surrounds them.

The repeated motif of the physical body as a vessel of desire appears in many stories from *Cuentos*. The telling prologue, entitled “Adúlteros y (ad)úteros,” highlights the body’s necessary role in the repeated expressions of physical and textual desires. In the stories included in *Cuentos*, Millás examines the repetitive secret lives of adulterers, and he frequently focuses on the modification and objectification of the human body as a way either to expose desire or to cover it up. Additionally, adulterous acts in these microtexts frequently occur in the house: the lover’s house, the adulterer’s house, a house that is neither the lover’s nor the cheater’s, and even the brothel. All of these places expand into idealized space where adulterers attempt to redefine their subjectivities but, as in *El mundo*, their searches repeatedly fail.

The theme of adulterous desire within these stories and the concise textual space of the actual texts themselves exhibit tension. Desire, physical or otherwise, is itself repetition; one only has to remember that all expressions of longing are in fact citations. Belsey tells us that “desire is always derivative, conventional, already *written*” (no pagination, “Writing”). Just as the act of writing attempts to encapsulate a meaning, the projection of desiring subject is aware of its inherent repetitive nature. Belsey states, “Desire, even when it’s profoundly conventional, is at the same time the location of a resistance to convention. It demonstrates that people want something more” (no pagination, “Writing”). Millás maintains in *Cuentos* that adulterous acts

are the projection of the cheater's desire to return to his mother, which often takes the form of his wife. In fact, he equates the locations where adulterers secretly meet with their lovers to the human body, and specifically to the womb. In the introduction to *Cuentos*, Millás writes, "Cuando sale a la calle después de haber pasado la tarde o la noche con la amante es como si resucitara, o como si naciera, pues todos los lugares del adulterio tienen mucho de útero. El adúltero es en realidad un (ad)útero" (10). The "direction of the uterus" that Millás highlights in his term "(ad)útero" is oriented first and foremost by desire. Moreover, Brooks reminds us that "[t]he desire to know is constructed from sexual desire and curiosity" (5). Ontological seduction, which manifests in physical bodies, drives many of the characters in this collection of short stories.

In "La muela de Holgado" readers instantly recognize one of Millás's recurrent characters, Vicente Holgado from *Ella imagina* (1994) and many short stories. The story features two mirrored tales, one by Vicente's wife and sister-in-law and one by Vicente and his brother-in-law. Vicente and his brother-in-law employ their bodies, and specifically their teeth, so as not to get caught simultaneously entering (Vicente) and leaving (his brother-in-law) the taboo locale of the brothel.

Vicente develops a textual body from his physical body when he sees his brother-in-law leaving the same brothel that he is entering. He tells him, "Me está matando esta muela. [. . .] A ver si me la quitan una vez" (61), and his brother-in-law plays along with the story when he confesses that he just received a root canal. Here toothaches are cured by a trip to the dentist just as sexual desire is fulfilled with a visit to a brothel.

The mouth is a fragment of the physical body that contributes to the creation of text in this story. The image of the mouth carries erotic connotations that are encoded with both

pleasure and pain, which are themselves intrinsically linked to one another. They are not binary opposites; rather, they are varying points on a continuum of corporeal sensations that at times may overlap with one another. Blocker writes that the mouth is

the limen over which the breath routinely passes and words are pushed out in speech. More sloppily, it is the opening through which food is stuffed, masticated, and consumed. Also erotic, it is a zone of pleasure. A doubling of the female genitalia, it is threatening (for Freud, a lack) or beautiful (for Irigaray, a bountiful of multiple pleasures). (20)

The imagined mouths-in-pain of the two characters in Millás's story are simultaneously engaged with the pain of receiving dental work and the supposed physical pleasure that they encounter inside the brothel.

Later on in the story, and as the two men and their wives (who are twins, of course) eat paella together, Vicente's wife announces that she and her sister had run into each other in the gynecologist's office on the same day that Vicente and his brother-in-law had supposedly met at the dentist's office. The women's giggles make Vicente suspicious and he tells them, "A lo mejor coincidieron en un prostíbulo y quedaron de acuerdo en decir que había sido en el ginecólogo" (62). This statement may be interpreted as a confession of sorts, but even when Vicente explicitly tells the two women that he and his brother-in-law bumped into each other at a brothel, no one believes him.

Vicente's participation in clandestine and prohibited sexual acts pushes him to occupy a hermetic place, which then permits him to experience a space that disconnects him from the everyday. Millás says it well in the prologue to *Cuentos de adúlteros desorientados* when he tells us that the places in which acts of infidelity occur are like "una burbuja en cuyo interior

flotan dos personas que durante unas horas lograrán escapar a las determinaciones del espacio y del tiempo. Los adúlteros fornican, hablan, se pelean y lloran en el interior de un compartimiento estanco al que lo único que llega de la realidad exterior es el oxígeno” (8). The secret meeting places present an isolated location where the adulterers’ senses of self become more and more distorted; their subjectivities are stuck and exaggerated in these places.

Anchored onto the body, the dual creation of stories simultaneously occludes and reveals desire in this story. The story about meeting at the dentist links the textual body, or the meta-story created by the two men within the short text, and physical expression. At the end of the narration, the single-effect (to use Poe’s term) is abruptly revealed when the written text, in this case the fictional story of bumping into his brother-in-law at the dentist, moves into the realm of corporeal reality and Vicente realizes that one of his molars is, in fact, gone. Millás writes that Vicente “pasó instintivamente la lengua por el interior de la boca, como haciendo inventario de las piezas dentales, y advirtió con un movimiento de pánico que la faltaba una muela” (64). This realization arises only after, in the company of his brother-in-law, he hears the parallel story from his wife and sister-in-law. In effect, hearing another’s story enables him to discover in his body the reality of his own fictional creation. It seems that this sort of boundary-crossing carried out by Millás’s characters, this action of skipping back and forth between written text and bodily discourse, once again exemplifies the complex nature of human experience.

In “El adúltero” Millás geographically juxtaposes two places: the home where a husband and a wife reside and the apartment where the cheating husband spends time with his mistress. The protagonist is the cheating husband, known as only “the adulterer.” The story begins as the adulterer leaves the home he shares with his wife. He carries out his normal routine of saying goodbye to his wife and leaving his apartment building. Instead of leaving through the front

door, however, the adulterer makes his way back up the stairs to his lover's apartment, which is next door to the home that he shares with his wife. The narrator describes the scene in the following lines: "[T]ras subir de nuevo cautelosamente por las escaleras, golpeó con los nudillos la puerta de la vivienda pegada a la suya. Le abrió la adúltera, conteniendo la risa" (69). The two apartments, which are "pegada" or "glued" to one another, are also mirrored images of one another. The duplicated layout of the lover's apartment is a distorted version of the apartment that the adulterer shares with his wife.

The motif of symmetrical and inverted floor plans appears over and over in Millás's short texts and novels. This doubling of place emphasizes distorted repetition. Kawin comments that repetition is "the ultimate trap, and at the same time the way out of that trap; the cage and its key; the labyrinth and its solution" (83). The repeated location of his lover's apartment seems, on the surface, to give the adulterer a way to escape from the marriage with his wife. Yet, by visiting a mistress who lives in an apartment that exactly mirrors the one he shares with his wife, the adulterer seems to be stuck in the middle of two desires: the one that pushes him to escape the reality of his marriage and the one that pushes him to find refuge in the fantasy of his affair.

The symmetrical apartments perhaps bring the adulterer even more physical pleasure than his mistress's body. The narrator exclaims that

[e]l adúltero era un cazador de simetrías y valoraba mucho la relación especular que mantenía el piso de su amante con el suyo. Lo que más le gustaba de aquella aventura extraconyugal era el hecho de que las cosas que en su vivienda quedaban a la derecha estuvieran a la izquierda en ésta. Equivalía casi a pasar unas horas dentro del espejo. (69-70)

The space of the secret apartment, which he describes as the other side of the mirror, arouses him. Many of Millás's characters undergo similar transformations in duplicated places, such as when Julio occupies the next-door apartment of his wife's dying lover in *Laura y Julio*. Not only does occupying the "other side of the mirror" have fantastic or surreal implications, it also reiterates the distorted doubling of locations.

When the extradiegetic narrator describes their sexual encounters as "ejercicios amatorios," these words highlight the physical relationship between the two characters as less exciting for the adulterer than the mirrored spaces of the two apartments (71). The adulterer longs to occupy the essence of space, an infinitely intangible object of desire that is so desirable precisely because it is not comprised of tangible attributes. It seems that he longs to observe what Bachelard describes as the "poetic image," or the essence of space, but in a distorted way. The adulterer wants to experience home in a different way, an opposite way, which is reflected in the floor plans of the two apartments and in the two women, his lover and his wife.

As a corollary to the places that they occupy, the adulterer notices that each woman has an inverted nipple, but on opposite breasts. The narrator states, "Incluso entre su mujer y su amante había descubierto una curiosa relación reflexiva, pues las dos tenían un pezón retráctil, aunque en distinto pecho" (70). Carrying with them both maternal and erotic connotations, the inverted nipples echo the equal but opposite layouts of the two places. Even the position the adulterer takes in bed with his mistress emphasizes the inversion of the two places. The narrator tells us that "[y]a en la cama, y para acentuar la relación especular, el adúltero se colocó a la izquierda de la adúltera, pues en su casa solía acostarse a la derecha de su mujer" (71).

As we have seen with other Millasian characters, the adulterer requires a drug in order to attempt to disconnect himself from a place and to subdue his body's role in perception and

experience. After smoking marijuana, the adulterer tells his lover, “No sé quién soy . . . si yo mismo o tu marido” (70). The implications of this statement emphasize the tangled web of associations between the characters in the story. First, he recognizes that he is himself a doubled character as both a married man and an adulterer. He then tells his lover that he is her husband, whom we know is a married man and possibly also an adulterer. This statement seems to double his already doubled sense of self. In fact, the story is anchored to the adulterer’s lie: he has told his wife that he is on his way to Barcelona presumably for a business meeting. Yet it is the lover’s husband who actually arrives in Barcelona at the same moment when his wife and the adulterer secretly meet.

From the clandestine location that is his lover’s apartment, the adulterer hears his wife talking to herself through the walls. What is strange, however, is that she has a conversation with herself using two distinct voices, one of which corresponds to a woman and the other of which corresponds to a man. Hearing the male voice upsets the adulterer perhaps since the speaker of the voice, in a sense, replaces his role in the life that he shares with his wife. The disruption causes the adulterer to lose the sexual desire that his residency in his mistress’s apartment had previously offered him. The narrator describes the scene in the following lines:

El adúltero se derrumbó sin ganas de nada. No es que hubiera desaparecido la sensación de encontrarse al otro lado del espejo, que tanto le gustaba, pero se dio cuenta de que lo había atravesado por aquel agujero donde el azogue estaba desprendido, como la pintura de un cuadro viejo. Y eso le quitaba a la historia la magia simétrica. Así que saltó llorando de la cama y se fue a Barcelona. (72)

The other side of the mirror, or his lover’s apartment, no longer satisfies his physical body or his creation of the alternate reality with his mistress, as the above passage reveals. The act of

hearing his wife from the vantage point of the apartment next door dislodges him from the place of the secret apartment and anchors him back into the reality of the life that he shares with his wife, which is reinforced when, at the end of the story, he leaves his lover's apartment and takes his original trip to Barcelona.

The third short story, "El sofá cama," is a parody of forbidden relationships and comments on the destructive effects of the secret meeting places of adulterers. In the story two lovers meet at the studio apartment of a friend to fulfill their physical desires. The space of the apartment, composed of one room with a sofa-bed that functions as both the bedroom and the living room, constitutes a fragment of a traditional apartment. Additionally, the sofa-bed is in itself a distortion of a bed and a sofa; it is both, yet it is not completely one or the other.

When he notices the incomplete piece of furniture where the lovers will have sex, the adulterer "[c]onfesó que tenía miedo a esos muebles porque su primera mujer había sido devorada por uno de ellos" (82). He explains to his lover that his first wife had been eaten by a sofa-bed: "Estaba durmiendo la siesta cuando se cerró de golpe, como una boca. Luego se volvió a abrir, pero ella había desaparecido. Más tarde leí en un *National Geographic* que los sofás-camas necesitan cada cierto tiempo tragarse un cuerpo" (82). The adulterer personifies the sofa-bed as a sort of monster that consumes humans. When he refuses to sleep with his lover on the sofa-bed, she leaves the apartment because she is upset about her lover's irrational fear. However, soon she returns only to discover that her lover has disappeared "por un conducto gástrico hecho de sábanas" (84). The alternate, incomplete place of the secret apartment opens up the possibility of experiencing events that would most likely not occur at the apartment that the adulterer shares with his wife. Because the two participants in the adulterous relationship both occupy a forbidden place, objects like the sofa-bed are able to be transformed into strange,

violent bodies. The space of the studio apartment ends up not following the rules of any geographically set place.

In “El adulterio como vocación” sexual desire also disintegrates, and it shows on the physical body. It is difficult for the adulterer in the story to maintain an erection. The narrator tells us, “Él se decidió a poner en marcha la mecánica, ya que la química parecía fuera de servicio, y logró para salir del paso una erección que no satisfizo a ninguno de los dos” (40). Committing adulterous acts, like the clandestine sexual relations that he pursues in the story, has become for him a type of addiction that brings him no pleasure because his body does not function in the way that he wants it to. Unlike other adulterers in *Cuentos* and unlike Juanjo in *El mundo*, however, at the end of “El adulterio como vocación,” the adulterer succeeds in locating himself in place. As the rare success story in Millás’s narrative, the adulterer in “El adulterio como vocación” serves as a small glimmer of optimism regarding the possibility of the stable self.

The narrator begins the story by describing the place of the clandestine encounter as unhinged from reality: “Aquel apartamento, que alquilaba dos o tres veces por semana, le pareció de súbito una especie de burbuja fuera del tiempo y del espacio, fuera de la realidad” (40). For the adulterer in this story, just like for the adulterers in other stories in *Cuentos*, the hermetic essence of secret meeting places not only should free the adulterer from being oriented by his notions of reality (his wife, his home, and his job), it should also permit him to experience space via his body in a Bachelardian way. The sexual acts that occur in these secret places in theory should distract the adulterer from his routine places and transport him to a space where his physical sexual needs are fulfilled. Such disorientation, however, rarely occurs in these stories.

It seems that the more that the adulterers in *Cuentos* long for secret meeting places to divert them from their lives in pleasurable, positive ways, the stronger the roots to everyday places, such as their houses, and people, such as their wives, become. In “El adulterio como vocación,” the adulterer realizes this when he tells his lover:

Hace años estaba convencido de que la observación atenta de las nalgas de mis amantes acabaría por revelarme el secreto de los movimientos de la bóveda celeste y de este modo sería capaz de concebir el universo. Me he acostado con muchas mujeres, no por maldad, sino por ese afán de búsqueda, pero el universo, al cabo de los años, continúa resultando inconcebible para mi inteligencia. (41)

In this statement, the adulterer admits that the search for his self in places had sustained his long career as a cheater, which highlights the desire for the process over the final product. As he soon realizes, however, his search will never arrive at a concrete end. In this sense, he wants that which he can never attain, and he realizes this in the alternate place that he occupies with his mistress.

It is not surprising that throughout the story the adulterer relates adultery to religion since spiritual quests are often described in terms of the continuous search for that which is perpetually absent. At one point the adulterer tells his lover that “[e]l adulterio es como el sacerdocio” (39) and the Gregorian chants that emanate from the apartment next door reflect his observation. After his physical body is unable to satisfy either his lover or himself, he compares adultery to religion when he tells her, “Creo que ya no tengo vocación de adúltero. Una vez leí la historia de un sacerdote que dejó de creer en Dios y continuó ejerciendo, como si no fuera necesaria una cosa para la otra. Pero cuando se pierde la fe en el adulterio es imposible continuar

practicándolo. Perdóname” (41). He equates the loss of religious faith with the loss of his desire to continue searching for stability through cheating on his wife.

When he arrives home that night, he puts on a CD of Gregorian chants and successfully makes love to his wife. The sexual act between him and his wife is not described as mechanical and obligatory, as are the earlier attempts with his mistress. As he and his wife have sex, he seems to come closer to understanding what he had been searching for in his many previous extramarital affairs. The narrator explains that “aunque no tuvo ninguna revelación definitiva, le pareció que entre sus pechos se entendían mejor que entre los de la amante la sucesión de las noches y los días, la llegada de la vejez y de la muerte” (42). Finally, it seems that the adulterer recognizes his self within the place of his own home and not on the “other side of the mirror” where he had been seeking for many years. Jacobson reminds us that “[w]e are *responsible for* making our home, for making ourselves at home, and this is something we must learn how to do, and that we learn to do with and through other persons. . . . Though it is a passive dimension of our experience, home is an accomplishment—that is, it is dependent on our action” (“Developed” 362). When the adulterer gives up his search for self in alternate places with his lovers, he is finally able to perceive the life that he shares with his wife in a new and concrete way.

The adulterer in this fourth story is able to pinpoint a place once he ceases to substitute his house with other places. The apartments that he shared with his many lovers over the years become distant memories. The narrator tells us, “Cuando se acordó del apartamento, le pareció un lugar lejano: un asteroide flotando en medio del vacío universal” (42). By positioning those secret meeting places in their own hermetic containers, the adulterer is able to emphasize the presence of the place that he shares with his wife. Tuan notes that “thought creates distance and

destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence” (148). The adulterer connects his body to a place that he had previously ignored (but that had always been there) when he rejects the secret places that he had occupied in his adulterous past. Jacobson writes, “The home grounds the ‘absolute here’ of our body insofar as it allows the body a settled territory in which it finds itself—explicitly or implicitly—in its ‘here-ness’” (“Developed” 361). Once his physical body can no longer fulfill desire for himself or his lover, the adulterer is able to relocate his body within the home that he shares with his wife.

Unlike Millás’s novels, the spatial restriction of his short texts, combined with the characters’ confinement in places like houses, brothels, and hotel rooms within the text, seems to create a double contraction in spatial understanding. The parallelism of the concise space of the text itself and the clandestine places within the text seems to highlight the potency of the present since both the restricted textual space and the hermetic places within the texts frame experience, our experience of reading and the experience of being for Millás’s characters. Kawin comments, “We discover through repetition that the solution to time is outside of time. The present is always escaping us (time is passing); but on the other hand, we are never in anything but the present. And the continuous present teaches us that ‘permanence’ is a question not of duration but of intensity and being” (183). The defined limits of text and space emphasize being.

Bachelard reminds us that the home is “the topography of our intimate being” (xxxvi). In *El mundo* and *Cuentos* the characters inhabit hermetic and intimate places. Houses and secret meeting places like an apartment or a brothel affect and are affected by the physical bodies of characters and the textual bodies (both written and imagined) that they attempt to construct. Within these places, Millás’s characters frequently conceal their bodies’ role in perception in an

attempt to transcend place and access space. The search, however, most often fails since their original concept of place is inherently unstable and incomplete.

Juanjo in *El mundo* and most of the adulterers in the stories in *Cuentos* seem to ignore the role of the lived body in the perception of places and space. Leder states, “That the body is remembered particularly at times of error and limitation helps to explain the Cartesian epistemological distrust of the body. Largely forgotten as the ground of knowledge, the body surfaces as the seat of deception” (86). Not accepting the body for what it is, a continuously incomplete process, dislodges the characters from place and prohibits them space. In fact, the short story “El adulterio como vocación” from *Cuentos* is unique because the adulterer in the story succeeds at relocating his self within a place. When the adulterer finally accepts the failure of his physical body, he is able to give up his search for subjectivity in the alternate, distorted space of his lover’s apartment and return to the stable point of reference of place in the home that he shares with his wife. In this sense, he seems to resituate his self within his lived body.

Even with the brief sense of restoration of the adulterer in “El adulterio como vocación,” Millás continues creating characters that are either hyper-sensitive to their physical bodies, distrustful of the body’s role in perception, or both. This incomplete concept of self is also evident in the texts that his characters create. His characters attempt to conceive of the places and space that they occupy by repeatedly reverting to their physical and textual bodies. Kawin suggests that repetition is “the key to experience . . . [and it] may become the key to our expression of experience” (7-8). The characters in *El mundo* and *Cuentos* frequently substitute places with other places, which distorts their concepts of subjectivity over and over again. Except for the adulterer in the last story analyzed from *Cuentos*, Millasian characters yearn to dislodge themselves from negative places and inhabit Bachelardian space.

CONCLUSION

Bodies are in continuous process in the narrative works of Juan José Millás and they are the main modes of perception for his characters. As they modify their physical bodies and construct textual bodies in the attempt to pinpoint stable points of reference for their subjectivities, Millás's characters are often denied the possibility of forming concrete notions of self. His characters are constantly progressing. In *Beyond the Metafictional Mode*, Robert C. Spires contends that contemporary Spanish fiction is concerned with “the process of creating the product” (76) rather than with the product itself. In Millás's fictional worlds, processes are analyzed in and by physical and textual bodies, and because his characters repeatedly revert to their bodies to aid them in examining their selves and how they fit in the world, their definitions of subjectivity are rarely finalized and thus, they remain in indefinite construction.⁵⁸

Human and textual bodies are precarious since they are two of our most intimate and immediate vehicles towards awareness. Once sensibility in and of bodies enters texts, subjectivity becomes even more difficult to characterize since language simultaneously enables and impedes understanding. Like Jacques Derrida theorizes in *De La Grammatologie*, language as a representational system exposes the disjunction between the signifier and the signified. Therefore, one can never accurately convey experiences via language since linguistic systems cannot fully capture the understanding of a given event. In many of his fictional narratives, Millás examines our negotiations with our selves and in the world via the contradictory natures of our physical and textual bodies and the paradoxes inherent in our linguistic system. The physical bodies of his characters obstruct meaning even as they struggle to convey significance

by means of corporeal modification, and language represents a barrier between experience and knowledge when his characters strive to produce texts.

In order to highlight the complex relationships between human and textual bodies in Millás's works, in this dissertation I have looked towards theorists who find common ground between both types of bodies.⁵⁹ Peter Brooks finds that our human bodies seek to express and project meaning like texts. He investigates ways in which human bodies approach textual bodies and suggests that physical bodies may be read and written. In my current study, Brooks's notion of physical bodies as texts frames how Julia Kristeva and Gaston Bachelard envision physical and textual bodies. Kristeva not only accepts Brooks's definition of the physical body as text, she also contends that texts embody corporeal characteristics and behaviors. She conceives of both physical and textual bodies as visceral, transforming, and transformative vehicles that continuously desire to produce meaning. Likewise, Gaston Bachelard's thoughts on how physical bodies engage with places and space provide a context for Brooks's and Kristeva's bodies. Bachelard suggests that our physical bodies wish to inhabit the nurturing childhood home, which may also be expanded to all Millasian bodies in general. In Millás's worlds, bodies are always in motion. They desire to connect to places and to experience space in a Bachelardian way, but rarely do they attain this goal.

To sum up, I use the theories of Brooks, Kristeva, and Bachelard to construct a theoretical framework that carries out several goals. First and foremost, all three theorists highlight bodies, but in different ways, thus reinforcing my conceptualization of the plurality of bodies in Millás's works. For Brooks, physical bodies may be understood like texts; Kristeva analyzes texts like physical bodies; and Bachelard situates our selves, in which he includes our physical and textual bodies in search of ideal space. It is productive to examine the bodies of

Millasian characters according to all three theorists because their bodies are inherently heterogeneous. Characters' physical bodies interweave with textual bodies and vice versa, and the two kinds of bodies are frequently interchangeable and sometimes indistinguishable. Furthermore, the places and space that bodies occupy in Millás's worlds muddle the negotiations between different bodies and accentuate repetition. I employ the combination of ideas from Brooks, Kristeva, and Bachelard in order to underscore the back-and-forth of bodies, or the constant compartmentalization and reduplication of bodies, in Millás's works.

Repetition is central to all of the theories of the body in my current study. As I have investigated in previous chapters, repetitive techniques may be both beneficial and disadvantageous in Millás's narratives. Repetition articulates self-consciousness, and it intensifies the insecure subjectivities of Millasian characters even as they tend to repeat bodily modifications while they struggle to stabilize and situate their selves. Without repetition in all of its forms, and without repetition understood as contracting and expanding, Millás's characters could not be so driven towards self-awareness. Kawin underscores the constructive and destructive characteristics of repetition when he writes:

The sun comes up every day (and we receive it) in perfect attention; it does not fear that it is being repetitious, nor presumably does it remember what it has done before or consider what it will do in the future. It is the strength of assertion, the assurance of identity, that is the force of repetition; it is the apologetic consciousness squeezed between past and future, unsure of itself and its intentions, wavering, faltering, that gives sense of the repetitious to recurrence.

(185)

This passage represents the repetitive behaviors in the bodies of many of Millás's characters. The act of performing something over and over again creates habits, which may be productive or counter-productive, charming or neurotic. As examples, María José continuously divides her body in half to negotiate her world from the left side in *Dos mujeres en Praga* and the protagonist of *El orden alfabético* repeats the same phrases. Characters execute repetitive activities with the ultimate goal of self-awareness, and they often want the performance of corporeal changes or the repetition of certain phrases to bring them closer to subjectivity. However, as evident in many of the works that I have examined in my study, repetitive bodies tend to lock characters in a disconcerting, flawed cycle in which they try to, but do not, succeed.

For the most part, Millasian characters fail to know their selves because, as my current study has sought to show, both physical and textual bodies are fickle operations that lock characters in repetitious cycles. Even though several of the characters, such as Elena in *La soledad era esto*, Julio in *Laura y Julio*, and the adulterer in "El adulterio como vocación," seem to achieve the quest for subjectivity, the stability of self might be a volatile experience, one that may expose human vulnerability and lead to violence. In his 1998 interview with Cabañas, Millás suggests:

Quizá sea más fácil hacer literatura sobre el fracaso que sobre el éxito. El problema es que asociamos el éxito a un modo de relación no conflictiva con el mundo y ahí no hay literatura posible, porque la literatura nace de un conflicto, de un choque, de una puesta en cuestión con la realidad, uno hará otras cosas, pero no escribirá. (107)

In the aforementioned passage, Millás admits that literature is rooted in failure. Physical and textual bodies fail over and over in his works, but the processes of attempting to construct

subjectivities in bodies persist. The act of writing, according to Millás, may be a considerable achievement and a massive defeat at the same time. Language in Millás's fictional worlds exposes a dichotomy of success/failure and emphasizes the process rather than the product.

The novels and short stories that I analyze are told by a first-person narrator, one who frequently writes and/or reads, or by an extradiegetic third-person narrator who sets his sights firmly on one character. Whether narrated in the first- or third-person perspectives, Millás's fictional narratives tend to relate intimate accounts of everyday human interactions in the world and they frequently, but not always, present a protagonist who is approximately the same age as the author himself when he writes a given work. Self-consciousness is promoted by the repeated alterations, both corporeal and textual, that characters perform. Bodies are modified over and over again; they are halved, they are doubled, and they are, in general, repeated in children, antipodes, and lovers. Such bodily adaptations present a type of corporeal and textual back-and-forth of multiplying and dividing. The search for self must be never ending in Millás's fictional universes in order to emphasize the process over the product.

With the distortion of his characters' physical bodies and the erosion of the texts that they read and write, Millás seems to suggest that we can only rely on our subjective awareness in moments when we intentionally examine our experiences in the world. Many of Millás's characters consider their selves, objects, and others in the world repeatedly and intentionally examine their routine experiences of the everyday in their bodies via their first-person perspectives. By attempting to regulate their bodies at particular moments, Millás's characters ostensibly recognize their subjectivities. Rather than understanding their selves more completely, however, continuous corporeal and textual modifications tend to further expose the disconnect between first-person experience and the interpretation of that experience. Bodies

process in the intervals between action and recording. Unlike protagonists of the philosophic novels of 1902, including Azorín and Fernando Ossorio, Millás's characters keep searching for their selves. Nihilism puts an end to Azorín and Fernando Ossorio's quests for knowledge in *Árbol de la ciencia* and *Camino de perfección*, respectively, but many Millasian characters seem too obsessed with the journey or the process to give up, and they tend to attempt to anchor their unstable selves in the world even though they are habitually unsuccessful.

While Millasian characters continuously struggle to define their subjectivities, another motif emerges in his works, namely the friction between reality and fiction. Beilin reminds us, "En la narrativa de Millás, los recuerdos, las ideas y las fantasías se mezclan con las sensaciones físicas, y cada emoción tiene un lugar determinado en el cuerpo. . . . El cuerpo es la patria, la frontera de la realidad" (65). The same statement could be made about Millás's textual bodies: they are the border between worlds, or to express it another way, between places and space.

Along the peripheries in Millás's works, what Beilin classifies as "fronteras," and what Barthes labels "appearances-as-disappearances," exist several types of invited and/or welcomed invaders and invasions. The physical bodies of some of Millás's characters are thresholds in the sense that they vacillate between the lived body and the physical body, and they frequently situate and disconnect themselves in places and space. Illnesses, the consumption of drugs, and different types of corporeal remodeling frequently invade the physical bodies of Millás's characters, and in many cases, characters plan and even embrace such transgressions. Textual bodies simultaneously affirm and disguise desire as characters aspire to produce texts. In the Millasian universe, the repetition of phrases, the doubling of diaries, and the disappearance of words from linguistic systems interfere with the certainty of written text.

Kristeva contends that attempting to recognize our unstable subjectivities in the world is the basis of literature and that literature itself resides on the fringe. She writes:

On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to be rooted, no matter what its socio-historical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphed, altered, abject. (*Powers* 207)

In his narrative works, Millás's characters negotiate their selves on the edge of the border that Kristeva elucidates in the above quote. More often than not, however, characters fail to stabilize their selves, and they continue their searches. It could be assumed that in his characters' repeated quests for self-consciousness, Millás may underscore the ambiguity of existence. Searching for meaning in postmodernity is a perpetual journey, just as physical and textual bodies are always in flux. As bodies repeatedly deteriorate in Millás's works, the disparity between what we think we know, or reality, and what we question and dream of, or fiction, becomes more pronounced.

Juan José Millás deserves our attention as readers, scholars, and critics. His works, including his journalistic articles, communicate his view of Spanish reality, which, according to him, seems to be affected by an unstable past and an uncertain future. He situates the everyday Spaniard in the middle of these two forces in his works. His realism is deeply intimate and subjective; his characters are sensitive to the places and space that they occupy, and they are also keenly aware of their bodies as the vehicles for their engagement with their selves, with others, and with the world that surrounds them.

NOTES

¹ Various authors explicitly and implicitly employ the term “textual body” to refer to particular ways in which bodies intersect. Resonances of the physical body as text can be traced to Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (three volumes written between 1976 and 1984), in which he defines the physical body as in continuous construction. Feminist scholars, such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler, utilize the concept of “textual body” to refer to the construction of female bodies and “feminized” writing. Furthermore, as I discuss in the forthcoming chapters, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva analyze the idea of text in other forms, including that of the physical body. In *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism and Print* (1994), Michael Kaufmann explores the materiality (or corporeality) of text in some Modernist novels, and the authors of the 1997 collection of essays titled *Textual Bodies: Changing Boundaries of Literary Representation* examine corporeal alterations in literary works from Ancient Greek to the 20th Century. I investigate the physical body and the textual body as analogies of one another.

² For further insight into Ulysses’s scar, see the first chapter of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.

³ Mercedes Agulló y Cobo has recently identified the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* as Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, yet scholars continue to debate the authorship of the work.

⁴ In the first chapter of *The Body Hispanic* (1989) and in his article, “Writing Women in Golden Age Spain: Saint Teresa and María de Zayas,” Paul Julian Smith takes a psychoanalytical approach to analyzing the representation of the female body and the act of writing in texts written by women. Smith advocates that his reader “attempt (provisionally at

least) to experience *all* writing as an alternating place of continuity and rupture, stasis and impulse” (“Writing” 239), and he suggests that the works of Teresa of Ávila and de Zayas not be read according to male hegemonic norms. Although my current study does not examine the physical body from a gendered perspective, Smith’s article and book serve as two among many invaluable guides to the works of Teresa of Ávila and de Zayas.

⁵ San Juan de la Cruz’s well-known poem “Cántico espiritual” explicitly describes language’s inherent flaw in the following lines: “que no saben decirme lo que quiero [. . .] y déjame muriendo / un no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo” (6-7). “Balbucear,” or muttering, in itself is a speech act, one that will never achieve meaning even as it approaches signification. Millás also notes the insufficiency of language on many occasions and specifically in his interview with Cabañas.

⁶ Reducing the working of the body, human and textual, in *Don Quijote* (1605, 1610) to a brief paragraph is an insurmountable task. For further reading on this topic, see Ruth El Saffar and Diana de Armas Wilson’s collection entitled *Quixotic Desire: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Cervantes, Cervantes and his Postmodern Constituencies*, edited by Carroll B. Johnson and Anne J. Cruz, and Julio Baena’s *Discordancias cervantinas*.

⁷ For further insight into the complex textual bodies in *Novelas ejemplares*, see *Novelas ejemplares: Las grietas de la ejemplaridad*, edited by Julio Baena.

⁸ The distinct narrative frames in *Desengaños amorosos* include Lisis and her servant Isabel, the ten narrations in which both men and women tell stories about relationships, the audience who listens to the narrations, and the actual readers outside of the text. In “Fleshing Out Feminism in Early Modern Spain: María de Zayas’s Corporeal Politics,” Lisa Vollendorf argues that de Zayas’s *Desengaños amorosos* “feminize and materialize corporeal discourse”

whereas in her earlier collection of short narrations, *Novelas amorosas*, de Zayas encourages us to think about the body's "meaning and forging an affinity between readers and text" (102).

Physical and textual bodies are battered in *Desengaños*. Human bodies are tortured and textual boundaries are violated in all ten narrations.

⁹ Emilia Pardo Bazán, as one of the most prolific of Spain's nineteenth-century writers, often employs the physical body as a symbol of social and gender inequalities to incite change. Physical bodies in her narratives tend to challenge hegemonic stereotypes. Tina Pereda's study "Sniffing the Body-Politic in Emilia Pardo Bazán's *Insolación*" offers keen insight into how the Countess treats bodies in her 1889 novel.

¹⁰ Ignacio-Javier López makes an interesting correlation between the adultery of several nineteenth-century characters, including Ana Ozores, and the characters of Millás's 1977 *Visión del ahogado* in his article "Novela y realidad: En torno a la estructura de *Visión del ahogado* de Juan José Millás."

¹¹ Thomas R. Franz draws parallels between the brothers in Millás's *Visión del ahogado* and the male pairs in Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla*, *Abel Sánchez*, and *El otro*. Franz suggests that Unamuno's work influences the acts of writing and reading by Millás's characters as the means by which the latter strive to establish an awareness of self.

¹² Spires stresses of the importance of the novel when he writes that "[e]l impacto de *Tiempo de silencio* sobre la novelística española se debe a su éxito en transformar en experiencia estética la nueva realidad no sólo de España, sino del mundo occidental" (*La novela española* 200-01).

¹³ Chapter 4 of Scarlett's *Under Construction: The Body in Spanish Novels* examines physical bodies in *Tiempo de silencio*, *La familia de Pascual Duarte*, and *Entre visillos*.

¹⁴ With the arrival of the millennium, other literary trends have appeared in Spanish literature. Some authors, such as Enrique Vila-Matas, are explicitly concerned with the problem of language; other authors revisit the years of Franco's dictatorship, like Soledad Puértolas in her 2008 novel *Cielo nocturno*. A large group of contemporary Spanish authors, who are known as the Nocilla Generation, piece together fragments of pop culture in order to accentuate the immediacy of images and the fleeting nature of the present. Authors who belong to this group, including Jorge Carrión and Javier Calvo, use different mass media such as blogs, music, and film clips to create textual bodies that are markedly influenced by the experimentation of the early twentieth-century Avant-garde movement in Spain. See Antonio J. Gil González's 2008 article, "El proyecto nocilla y la nueva narrativa," for a general introduction of the Nocilla movement.

¹⁵ Key articles about *Visión* include Brad Epps's "Battered Bodies and Inadequate Meanings: Violence and Disenchantment in Juan José Millás's *Visión del ahogado*," Jennifer Kakuk's "*Visión del ahogado*: Doble visión modernista-posmodernista," and Ignacio-Javier López's "Novela y realidad: En torno a la estructura de *Visión del ahogado* de Juan José Millás." *El desorden de tu nombre* is perhaps Millás's most studied novels from the 1980s. For more insight into the 1986 novel see "Desire, Psychoanalysis, and Violence: Juan José Millás's *El desorden de tu nombre*" by Yaw Agawu-Kakraba, "Teorías que cohabitan con la ficción: Síntomas posmodernos en *El desorden de tu nombre* de Juan José Millás" by Rebeca Gutiérrez, and "The Pleasures of Oedipal Discontent and *El desorden de tu nombre* by Juan José Millás García" by Vance R. Holloway.

¹⁶ Critics such as Irene Andres-Suárez, Caragh Wells, and Domingo Ródenas de Moya highlight the parallel development of the contemporary periodical article and the rise of democracy in Spain.

¹⁷ “The embodied text” in this study refers to the written text as representation and/or extension of the human body. Text as body, similar to the human body, is a fluid agent and object that constantly and repeatedly negotiates its meaning with that which surrounds it. When I refer to the body as text I mean to indicate that the physical bodies of characters are the sites of physical alteration and corporeal fragmentation. When I refer to the text as body, I stress the materiality of written discourse, either the architecture of a primary text or the intercalated texts that characters produce within Millás’s primary text. In his narrative works, Millás combines and confuses the two types of bodies, the representation of physical alteration to the human body and the creation, destruction, and/or consumption of written text.

¹⁸ Elena Rincón is also the protagonist of Millás’s 1999 novel, *No mires debajo de la cama*.

¹⁹ In the first part alone, Millás makes reference to Elena’s one waxed leg at least a dozen times (pages 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 29, 32, and 39 some of which have various references).

²⁰ Although the ending of the novel is ambiguous, the changes that Elena undergoes cannot be denied. She is physically and mentally renewed, just as Isolina Ballesteros argues in *Escritura femenina y discurso autobiográfico en la nueva novela española* (159).

²¹ It must be mentioned that it is her husband Enrique, and not Elena, who reads *The Metamorphosis* when he is vacationing in Valencia with his mistress.

²² Detective Acosta’s reports also function like letters, ones in which Elena is the editor, the detective is the writer, and Elena is also the reader.

²³ In a typically ironic Millasian move, when Laura and Julio visit Manuel, who is in a coma in the hospital, the nurse assures them that “el paciente dormía como un niño” (58).

²⁴ Granted, the doubling of identity is not new for Julio. As a child he imagined taking on the physical body of a blind child as both walked down the street. The narrator describes the scene in the following lines:

[S]e dirigía al colegio de la mano de su madre cuando se cruzaron con un niño ciego que iba también de la mano de la suya. Julio observó al niño con curiosidad, incluso con impertinencia, y en ese instante, como si en el interior de su cráneo hubiera estallada la luz procedente de una explosión nuclear, la realidad se llenó de un aura blanca tan intensa que los transeúntes devinieron en fantasmas y la calle en un decorado. La experiencia no debió de durar más de dos o tres segundos durante los que Julio se vio a sí mismo desde el niño ciego. (16)

This passage describes the imaginary physical sensation of becoming someone else that Julio feels again as an adult when he lives in Manuel’s apartment. Once again, Millás reverts to repeating experiences in order to construct and develop his characters since Julio will again imagine being someone else when he is an adult.

²⁵ Turning the tables, when Julio ventures back to his apartment to pick up some of his personal items, he takes one look at his wardrobe and thinks that his clothes look like those of a dead man (98).

²⁶ Millás himself writes microtexts, which are short pieces of fiction that, due to their concise textual space, quickly grab readers’ attention. His microtexts can be what Millás denotes as “articuentos,” a hybrid genre of journalistic article and short fiction; short commentary that

accompanies pictures, photographs and drawing; traditional short stories; and, most relevant to my dissertation, the short intercalated texts that Millás inserts into his novels.

²⁷ Spying on Manuel's intimate life via his computer reminds Julio of the movie for which he is creating a set. In the movie a cashier enters the house of an elderly customer by using the key that the old woman gave her in case something were to happen to her. She sees that the woman has passed away in front of the television, and she steals money from her. The twist is, however, that the elderly woman is not dead, and soon, through several more precipitative events, the cashier and the woman move in together.

²⁸ Although it may seem unlikely that Julio is able to access Manuel's email without having to enter a user name and password, especially given the several weeks during which Manuel's account had not been active, it is possible that Manuel had saved his login information on his computer, making it easy for anyone to access his emails from his personal computer.

²⁹ In a message to Manuel, Laura says, "Criaría a este niño como si te criara a ti, lo amasaría como si te amasara a ti, le daría forma como si te diera forma a ti" (133). This exclamation not only highlights Laura's role as creator but also her desire to keep Manuel alive in any form possible.

³⁰ Laura even notes Julio's desire to be Manuel's neighbor in one of the emails that she writes to the latter. She tells him, "No sabes como [Julio] te detesta, porque le gustaría ser como tú" (131). By moving into Manuel's apartment, by reestablishing his marriage, and by taking on the role of father to Laura and Manuel's child, Julio does, in fact, fulfill her desire.

³¹ Theorists like Judith Butler argue that neither corporeal bodies nor subjective identities are ever truly completed. In the case of these two novels, even though the stories end we can

assume that the physical bodies of the characters will continue to be defined and modified through their interactions with other members of their societies.

³² Leon S. Roudiez writes in the Preface to *Revolution* that the book “is the most wide-ranging metalinguistic elaboration of Kristeva’s theories” (ix).

³³ In Beilin’s interview with Millás, the author echoes Kristeva when he states, “[Y]o siempre he pensado que el cuerpo es una medida de todo” (68).

³⁴ Kelly Oliver describes the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic well when she writes that

[w]ithout the symbolic we have only delirium or nature, while without the semiotic, language would be completely empty, if not impossible. We would have no reason to speak if it were not for the semiotic drive force. So this oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic is productive and necessary. It is the oscillation between rejection and stasis, found already within the material body, that produces the speaking subject. (no pagination)

³⁵ Even though Brown does not explicitly define the concept of expanding symbols, he does offer various examples that lead me to make a correlation between his concept expanding symbols and Kavin’s theory of repetition. An expanding symbol, such as the white whale in *Moby Dick*, encourages readers to read between the lines, to make connections that are not explicitly made for us, and essentially to go beyond the text to construct meaning (Brown 52).

Brown writes:

By the use of an expanding symbol, the novelist persuades and impels his readers towards two beliefs. First, that beyond the verge of what he can express, there is an area which can be glimpsed, never surveyed. Second, that this area has an

order of its own which we should greatly care to know—it is neither chaos, nor something irrelevant to the clearly expressed story, persons, and settings that fill the foreground. . . . The use of the expanding symbol is an expression of belief in things hoped for, an index if not an evidence of things not seen. (59)

Kawin's concept of repetition and Millás use of repetition have a similar function in that both persuade readers to make connections between seemingly disparate repetitive texts and bodies.

³⁶ The novel has gone virtually unstudied except for an article by Pepa Anastasio, which analyzes the loss of language in the novel, and a chapter of Dale Knickerbocker's book, which examines the main character's alienation and his creation of alternate realities.

³⁷ Millás often names his male characters Julio. Even though we cannot suppose that all Julios are the same Julio, Millás's insistence on reusing names is a technique that forces those who read more than one of his works into a pact with him. We cannot escape his need to repeat since the abundance of repetitions (names, telling time, plot, characters, and so forth) is too obvious to ignore. To use Brown's term, the symbols keep expanding within particular works by Millás and across his entire *oeuvre*.

³⁸ Interestingly, the narrative structures of *La soledad era esto* and *El orden alfabético* are inverted. In the former, Elena usurps the narrative voice in the second part of the novel and essentially "finds her voice" as she writes in her diaries. In the latter, however, Julio loses his narrative voice in the second section of the novel. This inversion points towards Millás insistence on repeating themes and structures throughout the corpus of his literary works, but always with a slight twist. Furthermore, the inverted narrators also highlight Kawin's concept of constructive versus destructive repetition. I maintain that Elena does transform by the end of the

novel (she literally “finds her voice”), yet Julio destructs and he is never able to regain his voice. All that is left by the end of the second novel is the repetition of several phrases that obsess him.

³⁹ Julio tells us that, before his father becomes ill, he “continuaba utilizando la enciclopedia como un medio de transporte con el que llegaba a lugares que nosotros no podíamos ni imaginar” (14).

⁴⁰ Paralleling this worry, in the second part of the novel Julio’s mother wonders how his father’s aphasia will affect her husband’s understanding of objects in the world when she asks Julio, “¿Pero cuando olvida la palabra *mesa*, por ejemplo, se olvida también de la utilidad del objeto?” (180).

⁴¹ We are reminded of the many illnesses that Saint Teresa of Jesús experiences as she transitions to becoming a nun. In *Libro de su vida* (1535), she writes:

La mudanza de la vida y de los manjares me hizo daño a la salud, que aunque el contento era mucho, no bastó. Comenzáronme a crecer los desmayos, y diome un mal de corazón tan grandísimo, que ponía espanto a quien lo vía, y otros muchos males juntos; y así pasé el primer año con harto mala salud. (125)

Just as Saint Teresa experiences the transition from laywoman to nun via her body, so too does Julio experience the liminal phase from child to adult in his physical body. The first time that he leaves home after being sick in bed for days he feels weak, just as Saint Teresa feels when she leaves the walls of the convent. Julio tells us, “Al salir de la casa, tuve la impresión de que utilizaba mi cuerpo por primera vez para desplazarme. . . . Sentía en todos los miembros una debilidad extrema” (83).

⁴² Once again, readers are reminded of Saint Teresa and her mysterious illness which remains undiagnosed. At one point, she writes that “*algunas veces . . . era grande la diligencia que traía mi padre para buscar remedio; y como no le dieron los médicos de aquí*” (125).

⁴³ The transformations that are taking place occur through Julio and Gregor’s bodies; both are ill and both bodies change, although Gregor’s physical change is more drastic. Perhaps the transition that Julio undergoes is the physical manifestation of his separation from his mother. We have already seen that he daydreams that the word “mother” is violently rejected from the system of language and now here we observe that as he transforms, his body also finalizes its separation from his mother as he undergoes the beginning of the stages of puberty.

⁴⁴ When Julio reads the encyclopedia, readers presume that he holds the book in his hands, which are, in one sense, the opposite of the feet, yet they are similar in structure. Both hands and feet function as corporeal pathways for Julio to his alternate reality.

⁴⁵ Another object of fetishism is the shoe of Julio’s miscarried younger brother, which echoes Millás’s repeated insistence of utilizing body parts to express meaning and expands on Julio’s obsession with feet. Language takes on a role here as well since Julio speaks to his aborted brother by means of the encyclopedia. Not surprisingly, Millás employs the human body to attempt to understand the gap between the signifier and the signified, or in this case, the encyclopedic entry about “abortion” and the cadaver of the deceased fetus.

⁴⁶ Several scholars have studied *Dos mujeres en Praga*, including Samuel Amago, Joanne Lucena, and Branka Kalenic Ramšak. In the second chapter of his book Amago examines the metafictional process of the characters as a means to attempt to define their authentic selves. Lucena’s brief article discusses the process of writing in the novel as an allegory for the novel

itself. Ramšak's chapter examines the interior reality of characters in Millás's novel and the 2002 collection of short stories, *Las llamadas perdidas*.

⁴⁷ Amago states it well when he writes that “[I]like Elena in *La soledad era esto*, Luz Acaso *wants* to be narrated” (87-88, emphasis mine). I posit that desire in Millás's narrative underlines the process of writing and the correlation to the human body.

⁴⁸ Readers know that Luz and Álvaro's stories will be intertwined from the first line of the novel, when the narrator writes, “En el instante en el que Luz Acaso y Álvaro Abril se conocieron, sus vidas se enredaron como dos cordeles dentro de un bolsillo” (7).

⁴⁹ In this sense, María José can be categorized as what Kristeva refers to as a “borderline patient,” which she defines in accordance to the separation from the mother:

Constructed on the one hand by the incestuous desire of (for) his mother and on the other by an overly brutal separation from her, the borderline patient, even though he may be a fortified castle, is nevertheless an empty castle. The absence, or the failure, of paternal function to establish a unitary bent between subject and object, produces this strange configuration: an encompassment that is stifling . . . and, at the same time, draining. The ego then plunges into a pursuit of identifications that could repair narcissism. (*Powers* 49)

Both María José and Julio have been separated from the mother, and both are unable to successfully produce biological families. Instead, they accept substitutions for biological reproduction: María José positions Luz in the role of the fictional mother (one that is also reflected in Álvaro's relationship with Luz) and Julio attempts to replace the hegemonic norms of producing biological children with the endless, empty repetition of phrases.

⁵⁰ The process of writing for Álvaro is also often anchored to corporeal sensations. When he is able to write, he drinks a bottle of carbonated water “con un placer extraño, ya que todos sus sentidos se hallaban especialmente receptivos” (32-33).

⁵¹ *El mundo* and *Cuentos* function well together not only because of their similar negotiation of bodies in places and space, but also because of their inverted and yet mirrored structures. *El mundo*, which is presented as Millás’s autobiography, begins as a novel, but ultimately condenses itself with the inclusion of microtexts. Likewise, the structure of *Cuentos* functions oppositionally: it begins as a series of pieces of short fiction that end up forming a coherent collection of stories that share repeated themes.

⁵² It is difficult to separate the passage of time from the analysis of places and space, but the analytical limits of this chapter prohibit an in-depth examination of time in Millás’s narratives. Although time figures prominently in Millás’s *oeuvre*, in this third chapter I limit my focus to space and places and how bodies negotiate within them.

⁵³ Bachelard’s “rupture épistémologique” emphasizes the perception of experiences via a continuum of possibilities, instead of as a fixed set of dichotomies. His existential philosophy is instrumental in understanding the twentieth-century paradigm shift. He begins his early career by studying scientific themes, but his interests soon turn towards individual perception and away from scientific thought as purely objective. In the 1930s Bachelard publishes several works that highlight his shift from the study of scientific reason to the study of the psychology of science. These include *Le nouvel esprit scientifique* (1934), *La formation de l’esprit scientifique: contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective* (1938), and *La psychoanalyse du feu* (1938) (published in English as *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* [1938]). Bachelard attempts to

understand the essence of objects and his phenomenological approach emphasizes perception as a combination of individual subjectivity and objective scientific thought.

⁵⁴ The concept of “lived body” in Philosophy can be credited to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In the 1940s he and Jean-Paul Sartre helped define what we now know as modern-day Phenomenology. For Merleau-Ponty, the “lived body” encapsulates corporeal perception and ontological consciousness, in keeping the German term *Leib*. For additional information on Merleau-Ponty’s ideas see his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).

⁵⁵ The story paradoxically, however, often includes “true” events from Millás’s past, such as his move to Madrid from Valencia as a child, his nine siblings, and Millás’s childhood nickname (<http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/clubescritores/millas/cronologia.htm>). The narrative voice is so convincingly intimate that it often seems like the protagonist must be Millás himself. In her article “El mundo de Juan José Millás: Una escritura entre lo novelesco y lo autobiográfico,” Natalia Vara states it well when she indicates that the novel

funciona como una autobiografía novelada o una novela autobiográfica que surge de la exploración de los límites a la que Millás somete a los géneros literarios. . . . Asimismo, esta narración le sirve para poner nuevamente en entredicho los límites y los estatutos de la historia y la ficción, de lo real y lo novelesco. (21)

El mundo is neither purely autobiographical nor completely fictional. Autobiography and narrative fiction emphasize the focus on individuality in the novel, and the mixture of genres highlights the improbability of the text as a final, concrete product.

⁵⁶ Tuan reminds us that young children often search out spaces that fit their small size, and this seems to be the case with the protagonist of *El mundo* (32).

⁵⁷ The short stories in *Cuentos* and the intercalated stories in Millás's novels might all be defined as microtexts. In fact, Millás has noted in an interview that microtexts are a way to “salir de esa habitación asfixiante de la novela” (Rosenberg 149). In contrast to his novels, the concise space of his microtexts restricts extensive plot and character development, and the singular plot of these short texts tends to progress quickly because of the reduced space. Edgar Allan Poe highlights the “single effect” of a short piece when he states that a skillful author who constructs a tale “has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique *single effect* to be wrought upon, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect” (572, emphasis mine). The reader of a short story responds at a heightened level due to the brevity of the narrative space, which creates an intense tempo of reading. By housing the narrative in a tight space, Millás condenses the story, which causes it to build at a quicker pace than that of a longer narrative like a novel.

⁵⁸ I undertook this study to investigate how Millás presents bodies in his narratives, and ultimately I discovered that there are also several other potential projects regarding Millás's works. It would be worthwhile to examine the motif of misogyny and misandry in some of his narratives. What might be learned from the strange interactions between male and female characters in many of Millás's works? Additionally, an analysis of the role of insects, other invertebrates, and small vertebrates in some of texts would also be valuable. Other than the influence of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, what else could we extrapolate from the presence of bugs and birds in so many of Millás's narratives?

⁵⁹ The three analytical chapters of this dissertation create a coherent dialogue about the role of bodies in Millás's narratives. Rather than underscore the differences between works, I

emphasize the similarities among them as a type of repetition. These include the names, ages, and situations of characters, their struggles with their human bodies, and their desires to produce written texts. Such are the projects that Millás continues to develop in his recently published works, which include a collection of short fiction titled *Los objetos nos llaman* (2008) and a novel titled *Lo que sé de los hombrecillos* (2010). Not surprisingly, the bodies in both texts could also be analyzed according to the theoretical framework set forth in my dissertation.

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