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(Un)Masking Barcelona: Recontextualizing
Urban Interaction in Eduardo Mendoza's *El misterio de la cripta embrujada*, *El laberinto de las aceitunas* and *La aventura del tocador de señoras*

MELISSA GARR

The literary city has always enjoyed a privileged space in novelistic discourse, in part because no other space is able to afford the same plurality of places, eclectic range of characters, or opportunity for social interaction. Spanish theorist Juan Ramón Resina, who has written extensively on the role of the city in Catalan literature and in particular in the Spanish detective novel, claims that this intermixing is due to the fact that cities are essentially conceived by reason (*El cadáver* 147). I would also argue that the juxtaposition of this reasoned foundation with the many absurdities that occur any time large numbers of people congregate and cohabit is precisely what causes the city to be a productive literary medium. Resina especially points to the oxymoron inherent to the conception of “the city as social form” (*Barcelona's* 1). Couched in Bakhtinian terms, “social” implies contextual, immediate, embodied, dialogized and “centrifugal” (diversifying) processes, whereas “form” implies systemic, monologic, authoritative and “centripetal” (unifying) structures. Urban space, however, is far more than a mere dialectical synthesis between these two tendencies. Indeed, if, as Resina argues, “the city is readable and may be spoken of as a text, it is because it functions as the semantic space for a number of interlocking discourses,” including those that are monologic or dialogic in nature (*Barcelona's* 3). Resina’s definition of “city as text” provides a dialogized view of urban space as many cities within the city. Resina further argues that the boundaries between these many “cities within a city are kept apart by the consciousness of their inhabitants” (*Barcelona's* 3, my emphasis)— that the multiple discourses of the city are simultaneously interlocking and yet kept apart by boundaries “of air” (6). How do we resolve the apparent discursive paradox that stems from the very nature of the city?

This dichotomy plays itself out in Eduardo Mendoza’s detective trilogy *El misterio de la cripta embrujada*, *El laberinto de las aceitunas*,

and *El misterio del tocador de señoras*. I would argue that these novels demonstrate a complex technique of masking that provides a resolution for this dichotomy. The interaction of what can be termed “masked spaces” happens on the boundaries between the cities-within-a-city and creates a new context for them to interact and become dialogized. In this case, Barcelona’s unique mix of possibilities creates a unique polyphonic, heteroglot tapestry reflecting the complex nature of the city. I will define the mask as a neutral identity marker that transforms interpersonal interaction by establishing a set of rules or guidelines for the given context. Bakhtin might call such guidelines answerable “oughts.” He argues that the context of an interaction conditions these “oughts” so that the human image becomes more “multi-layered” and “multi-faceted” as it understands the particularity of interaction from a purely contextual point of view (“Discourse” 136). As multiple identity markers attached to each individual, these layers or masks interact dialogically at every level of human interaction. For Bakhtin, consciousness itself *is* the product of contextualized interaction (dialogue); the determinateness of an object is established through our relationship with it, and not the other way around (“Author” 5). The foregrounding of dialogic masks and masking becomes particularly important given the need to reduce the city to its elemental forms when represented in a novel (Resina, *Barcelona’s* 3).¹ The “interlocking discourses” that hold the city together are in actuality a complex dialogic interplay of changing masks. Though the “consciousness of its inhabitants” serves a separating function, the new dialogic contexts afforded by the different masks allow the consciousnesses of these people to connect and interact. Bakhtin describes this as typical of dialogic relationships (“Response” 7). By foregrounding masking in this trilogy, Mendoza portrays the mask as essential to understanding Barcelonan society with its multiple identities, voices, and languages. The fractured and arbitrary society thus exposed is simultaneously generalized and particular: its poorly-masked chaos could find a home in many large cities around the world, but the specific way of looking at the situations, and the situations themselves, rise out of the culture of Barcelona itself at particular moments in history. The narrator’s unique view exposes a multi-layered dialogic and progressive relationship of the protagonist to his city, through which the layers of masks may be peeled away to reveal a space of liberty which is only available to him. This will ultimately allow him, in the third novel, to achieve a resolution that is impossible in the first two novels.

Barcelona is an ideal city in which to base the heteroglossia of novelistic discourse given its cultural and linguistic plurality. Mendoza frequently foregrounds these elements in his novels, and both he and fellow detective novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán have written monographs on the history, culture and diversity of Barcelona. Vázquez Montalbán's book is actually entitled *Barcelonas*, which he describes as a reference to the city's inherent plurality. Both monographs portray Barcelona as a city whose past and present are lived simultaneously in the consciousness of its people, both collectively and individually. Out of Barcelona's history rises the specter of a Catalan "schizophrenic social consciousness" caused by always trying to "lead a life torn between exterior dependence and interior independence" (Vázquez Montalbán 57). This tension is markedly apparent in its relationship to Madrid and the internal conflict between social classes (often exacerbated by the interference of Madrid). For example, Franco systematically attempted to purge the region of its culture and language, making the public use of Catalan illegal, even in naming people or places. If, under Franco, Madrid was the home of the nationalist reformation, Barcelona was the "city of three sins: separatism, communism and the Republic" (164-5). Barcelona has frequently been occupied by invading forces (both external and internal to Spain), not merely for the 40 years of the dictatorship but throughout its long and tense history with Madrid since the unification of Spain in the 1400s. This sense of being a constantly "occupied city" causes it to be "wracked by schizophrenia which split its geographical and existential identity" (165). To represent the tension, confusion and multiplicity of identity in Barcelona, Mendoza appropriately turns toward a schizophrenic, anonymous sort-of detective.

This "schizophrenic" Barcelona can be considered a chronotope in the Bakhtinian sense, a designation essential to understanding the interplay of masks that allows us to see a fully contextualized, living Barcelona. Bakhtin defines the chronotope as "the ability to see time in space" ("*Bildungsroman*" 30), in which "time, in all its essential aspects, is localized in concrete space, imprinted on it" (42). Distinct from a motif, the chronotope possesses a sense of space, which is inherently connected to a unique passage of time. Time affects all those who move through that particular space. Resina describes post-Franco Barcelona as a city without a sense of self "suspended in a bottomless present made of pure potentiality. Being no place in particular, it could be thought of as the threshold to all places," whose people keep their past at hand "for the sake of acquiring relevance in the present" (*Barcelona's* 8). The chronotope of

Barcelona, as a literary construct, would be a “threshold” space of possibility that creates a temporal context in which Barcelona’s past is immediate and immanent to the present. Again, the anonymity of the protagonist of Eduardo Mendoza’s trilogy seems remarkably appropriate to a city whose identity is a curious mix of potentiality and tradition. This mix also makes it an appropriate venue in which to set a detective novel where new spaces are scarce and, according to detective fiction historian Lewis D. Moore, in which spaces “lack an overarching moral framework for those who inhabit them, creat[ing]...a cessation of a progressive social movement” (128). Moore’s description is certainly apt for the rough venues of the hard-boiled detective novels Mendoza parodies. David Knutson, author of several monographs and articles on Mendoza’s detective fiction, calls Mendoza’s treatment of this hard-boiled city “bleak [and] hopeless... focusing on people who must struggle to survive in a society that reserves its privileges for a select few” (52) – it is an urban jungle in which only the fittest survive. The interaction between the Barcelona chronotope and the mask of an urban jungle chronotope in many ways defines and explains some of the sense of circularity in the trilogy. Indeed, several critics argue that the circular structure of each novel leaves no room for progression or character development except in a sarcastic sense.² A complete lack of justice results in the protagonist usually being returned to the mental institution after faithful services rendered, and being released only through random chance and through no effort of his own. The reader is left with a strong sense of nothing changing in Barcelona, in which the synchronic and diachronic cities always coincide in an eternal, unchanging present.

Despite the critical response to the trilogy as a cyclical view of an unchanging city, I would argue that the series actually warps and parodies the circular urban jungle chronotope, creating a double-voiced masked discourse. A closer examination reveals that the surface chronotope of the hard-boiled urban jungle with its cycle of non-justice masks a clear progression in the way the protagonist interacts with the city as a whole throughout the trilogy. This masked progression is two-tiered: on one level, the protagonist moves through different *types* of spaces in each novel; and on the other, the *accessibility* of the spaces to which he himself has access successively diminishes. In the sections that follow, I will first describe the spatial type progression, from a focus on public spaces in the first novel, to private spaces in the second novel, to what I will term *relational* spaces in the third. I use the terms “public” and

“private” fairly literally throughout, as terms denoting both ownership and access. A public space should be understood to be owned by no one in particular and/or accessible to virtually everybody (thus a café could also be viewed as a public space even though it is privately owned); private spaces are owned by individuals and access is restricted to a select few at the discretion of the owner.³ A relational space is one defined by the relationship of the protagonist to the space or the people connected with it, as opposed to being defined by its geography or accessibility. In the second section, I will examine the accessibility progression over the course of the series. As the novels progress, the narrator is afforded increasing access to more exclusive venues. I argue that this occurs because he is able to engage in masked discourse that allows him to bring new contextual spaces with him and redefine the codes of societal interaction. The understanding of these two types of progressions highlights the heavy criticism inherent in the character portrayals, in particular the ones involving public officials. In the third section, I will examine these characters and discuss why the protagonist is the most faithful identity marker for Barcelona, rather than the leaders and officials who present Barcelona’s public face. The masked interaction between the reader and the city *vis-à-vis* the protagonist is what allows for the double-voiced parodic discourse created by Mendoza to present a living, multifaceted, embodied city. This city is not a dead place continually doomed to repeat its own mistakes; it becomes a space of transformation and renewal for the protagonist, and for the people.

The Spatial Type Progression

The first novel, *Misterio*, opens during the protagonist’s lengthy incarceration in a mental institution for depraved criminal acts that remain unclear. He is released by a *comisario* to gather information regarding the disappearance of a young girl from a religious school. His investigation uncovers the previous disappearance, and equally mysterious reappearance, of Isabel Peraplana. Ultimately, the narrator suspects that Isabel’s father is conducting some nefarious business that he covers by temporarily kidnapping the girls, but this suspicion is highly suspect because it arises from hallucinations in an ether-filled labyrinthine crypt. The protagonist is unceremoniously returned to the mental institution with no firm resolution to the case or any suggestion that he will ever be released.

In this novel, the narrator traverses, almost exclusively, locations that are geographically plottable on a map of Barcelona,

public spaces on well-known streets. He details, for example, the metro stops on the line he travels, the end of which takes him near the Lazarist school. He also gives very specific information about his trajectory through the streets and neighborhoods of Barcelona: Calle Enrique Granados, Calle Muntaner, Calle Diputación, Pedralbes, Sant Gervasi, l'Eixample, the infamous Barrio Chino. Kalen R. Oswald describes this correspondence to “extra-textual locations in and around the city” as typical of the detective novels of 1979 Barcelona (“Detecting” 14). Several locations stand out, on the other hand, both for being private spaces and for their geographical anonymity. In a novel so heavily laden with geographic detail and heavily trafficked locales, private spaces on unnamed streets become remarkable and take on special significance. The mental institution emerges as one of these few private spaces; it serves a framing function in each novel as a generic space of state and scientific authority, outside the space of possibility represented by Barcelona. The narrator must be liberated from the oppressive space of the institution in order to move into the chronotope that defines his epistemological and ontological journey of discovery.

Another private anonymous space that appears is the Lazarist school in San Gervasio. There is no actual Lazarist religious school in that district, but there are two religious boarding schools in the neighborhood mentioned in Mendoza’s *Barcelona Modernista*: the Colegio de Jesús y María, designed by modernist architect Enric Sagnier in 1892, and Gaudí’s Colegio de Sta. Teresa, built between 1889 and 1894. Mendoza dismissively states that the former, like many other boarding schools of the time, merely imitates the British style, all “edificios neomedievales que no aparten innovaciones arquitectónicas,” whereas the latter “presenta en su interior soluciones constructivas de un absoluto vanguardismo” (75-6). Although the novel states that the Lazarist school was built as a private residence in 1917, its physical description of an imposing structure with high walls, a chapel and extensive gardens, as well as the proximity to the Sarrià metro station where the protagonist disembarked, corresponds quite closely to the Gaudí school. Considering Gaudí’s importance to Mendoza’s beloved *modernisme* and the whimsical labyrinthine structure of many of his other creations throughout the city, this connection seems particularly plausible. Gaudí’s spaces are places of magic where one could imagine a secret labyrinth hidden under a crypt in the chapel. Similarly, the school in the novel is a space of possibility where the narrator’s liberty and the resolution of the mystery are uncertain.

A third private space that bears mentioning is the Peraplana house. The private situation of the wealthy Peraplana family, however, transitions from home to street through the intervention of the protagonist, who indirectly causes Isabel to attempt suicide, thereby converting the private space of the home into a street spectacle forcing Manuel Peraplana to flee to another private space on private business— the dentist’s house. Through the intervention of the protagonist and the revelation of the mystery to the authorities and to readers, the dentist’s home becomes a crime scene and therefore accessible. Mercedes Negrer’s house might be another example of a private space in the novel, but it is an extension of a whole town owned by Peraplana - a public place owned privately, incorporating and twisting (carnivalizing, in the Bakhtinian sense) the very idea of public and private.

The apartment of the narrator’s sister Cándida, a prostitute, is similarly complex. Although ostensibly a private space, it more closely resembles a thoroughfare with people coming and going as they please, dropping off dead bodies secretly, or the authorities entering without grounds. The lack of privacy in her living space parallels Cándida’s relationship to the privacy of her own body, which is also laughable. Even her name plays into this perception. In each of the cases in which private space is trespassed, the intervention of the protagonist has the effect not only of individual trespass but also of converting the private to the public, in a collective trespassing. The private is presented as merely a masked public space.

The second novel, *El laberinto*, again opens in the mental institution. This time, Comisario Flores has been requested by the Minister of Agriculture to find someone disposable to make a money drop in Madrid. The narrator is subsequently the victim of theft and attempted murder. Upon his return, he discovers that the Minister of Agriculture was, in fact, a B-movie actor named Toribio Pisuerga, aka Muscle Power, and he suspects that the crimes in Madrid were an attempt by Toribio to steal the money from his employers. The investigation inexplicably leads the narrator to an olive company, where the CEO attempts to kill him, again for unclear reasons. Later, he follows the “clues” to a monastery where he discovers a tunnel leading to a satellite emitter broadcasting a World Cup soccer match. He accidentally interrupts the feed and appears naked before the entire viewing public for several seconds before being apprehended and returned to the institution, leaving both him and the reader entirely perplexed about the crimes, some of which may or may not have happened, and the culprits.

El laberinto, in contrast to the public nature of space in *Misterio*, mentions very few specific streets, and those are large avenues one would be hard-pressed *not* to travel on while journeying throughout the city (the Diagonal, Via Layetana, the Ramblas). The smaller streets mentioned, such as the Calle Gaseoducto, do not exist on a map of Barcelona. The physical spaces the narrator visits are also different— there are far more private spaces in this novel (that actually stay private): private apartments, the talent agency, the olive company, the interior of the building housing the agency, the monastery, and the satellite emitter. In *El laberinto*, the narrator makes his only trip outside of the Barcelona environs. Traveling to Madrid extends the novelistic experience outward into non-descript public spaces of “others,” in the sense that for someone from Barcelona a *madrileño* would always be “other.” Transferring the focus from specific streets to generic locales undoubtedly has something to do with the fact that Mendoza was writing in New York. Indeed, he confirms that Barcelona appears in this novel “como pura invención” (Costa Vila 41). Still, the shift from primarily public to primarily private spaces cannot be explained away so easily. The action could have easily happened in unnamed bars, plazas, and neighborhoods of town rather than in “restricted” areas, to which the narrator often gains access fraudulently or criminally. Additionally, it is notable that in a detective novel, the only character who faces legal justice for his crime is Plutarquete Pajarell, who stole books from a local library. In essence, his crime is making private a *literary* space that once was public, mirroring the literary evolution from public to private space that occurs from the first novel to the second. The injustice of this arrest, considering the multitude of major crimes committed by others who are not brought to justice, parodies the notion of this public-to-private conversion being a crime at all.

La aventura, the third novel, again opens in the mental institution, but this time the narrator is released because the doctor in charge has decided to go into real estate. The narrator reconnects with his now-married sister and operates a hair salon. The intervention of *femme fatale* Ivet Pardalot suddenly makes the narrator a suspect in the murder of Ivet’s supposed father. The protagonist sets out to clear his name, leading him to Barcelona’s power elite. In the end, the narrator gathers all the likely suspects in the Pardalot home to reveal the name of the guilty party, leading to a shootout in which everyone dies but the protagonist and the mayor. The protagonist then returns to his quiet life as a hairstylist.

In this novel, not only is he not reintegrated into the penal system, but he also sustains dreams for the future beyond the comfortable life he has managed to create for himself at the beauty shop. For example, in the closing lines of the book, he considers working with a former inmate of the institution, Cañuto, on “ciertos proyectos” which could “imprimir a mi vida un sesgo nuevo” (382), emphasizing the linear chronology of progression for his life.

This novel reveals a further shift in the narrator’s relationship to Barcelona as demonstrated by the spaces in which he moves. The narrator returns to more specific locations, streets, and public spaces, but he moves through spaces that are *relational* to him rather than impartially plottable on a map: the pizzeria owned by Señora Margarita and her husband Señor Calzone, Viriato’s beauty parlor, the bar across the street from the beauty shop. It is less important to know where the locations are geographically than to know how the narrator is connected to them. Interestingly, the private spaces in which he moves have a similar association as spaces of the Barcelona elite, to which access is restricted based on one’s *relationship* to the wealthy and powerful. This is the first novel in which we see the narrator making any kind of profound personal relationships with people and the spaces they inhabit. Even his attitude toward Cándida has evolved from the offer to pimp her out to a stranger (“big fuck...not expensive” [*El misterio* 44, orig. in English]) to a desire not to be cruel to her with his disbelief over how she ever found a husband (*La aventura* 25). The evolving functions of Cándida’s apartment and its aforementioned “fake privacy” mirror the change in spaces in the third novel. The openness of her space is only mitigated when she ceases to be a prostitute, highlighting the correspondence between her apartment and her body, although in *La aventura* the apartment is not, in fact, hers; it belongs to her husband’s mother. In any event, in *La aventura*, her space, like her brother’s, is relational. Her “public” apartment is transferred in *La aventura* to her brother, and serves as the stage for a hilarious hiding of multiple characters who stop by to speak with him. The protagonist manages to progress in his relationship to Barcelona’s inner cities (public – *El misterio*, private – *El laberinto*, relational – *La aventura*) in spite of long institutionalizations in between these sojourns as Barcelona transitions to democracy. This progression corresponds to Vázquez Montalbán’s observation that during the Transition, “little by little...the city retreated to its refuges, to its private sphere” (189) – just as our protagonist does. He always manages to have his finger on the living pulse of Barcelona even

though he is mostly away from it. He moves through the “cities within a city” completely unrestricted.

The Accessibility Progression

The issue of access determines the second type of progression the protagonist goes through *vis-à-vis* Barcelona. As he moves through the public-private-relational spatial type progression, the accessibility of spaces becomes increasingly restricted. In *El misterio*, the generally public and geographically plottable nature of the novel’s locations allows for all readers and characters to follow the narrator. Like Oswald, one can go to the majority of places represented in the text and actually take photos of them in contemporary Barcelona. In *El laberinto*, the privacy of residences and the semi-private spaces, like the olive company, the airplane, and the talent agency, involve a more limited access. Companies restrict access to the public at large, yet employees, clients and customers enter freely. Finally, in *La aventura*, once the protagonist becomes involved with Ivet Pardalot, he gains access to the most exclusive settings and the upper echelons of society. He finds himself at a party with the mayor of Barcelona. Later, in a Poirot-like denouement in the chalet, he rubs elbows with elites. The shootout at the end of this scene is crucial to the accessibility progression because in the end the protagonist finds himself in a universe of one where only he is left standing unscathed. With sole access to this space, he is above the law, liberated from marginalization, and able to look in the face the source of power, namely those who create and uphold the mask of social order resulting in such terrible injustice to him and the people of Barcelona. Perhaps the “new project” he considers at the end of the trilogy involves showing others the mask and allowing them to enter a context in which they realize that order itself is a mask.

The narrator’s increasing access to Barcelona’s cities-within-a-city defies all odds: he has continually been absent and yet knows exactly how to move through and within these widely divergent groups. The space of his absence from the city is also interesting in terms of the accessibility progression. The mental institution that frames the first two novels is reversely accessible: people can come in (the nun, Comisario Flores, the employees) but the patients may not leave. All three of the protagonist’s egresses from the institution occur under questionable legal circumstances, yet are always authorized by the authorities. The criminal act converts the inaccessible into the accessible – the entire city becomes accessible to

him upon his illegal exit from the institution. The novels' running gags highlight that he gains access to restricted spaces as he becomes more repulsive. He creates a new context for interaction among the many voices of Barcelona by bringing a new contextual space along with him, despite being filthy, naked or obnoxious. Since the function of a mask is to provide a new contextual space for interaction and discourse, the protagonist himself is a mask for Barcelona. He is the "image of the city" in Bakhtinian terms, a crazy representation of a not-always-logical or coherent society constantly masking itself and in dialogue with itself. While not a metaphor for Barcelona, he instead emerges as a living, breathing image of the city that provides a new context for the reader to enter into dialogue with Barcelona's various cities.

Leadership and Representation

Seeing the protagonist as an identity marker for Barcelona answers several apparent inconsistencies in the attitudes of the characters in the texts, particularly in the case of political leaders. The protagonist appears to represent Barcelona more fully through his lack of identity than the public officials who run the city. Critics point to the harsh social criticism that pervades the novels as Mendoza's disillusionment with the unchanging nature of social injustice. For instance, Renée Craig-Odders calls the parody and satire "heavy-handed" and "ridiculous" in that it "exploits every conceivable cultural and national stereotype" (59), although she does concede that some of the commentary is insightful. Ascensión Rivas Hernández goes so far as to list the modern problems criticized in the third novel of the trilogy (28), and Oswald affirms that in each novel the same people are running the show "with different masks" and that, "although politicians and urban spaces have changed, the same problems and inequalities continue to exist" ("Detecting" 16). Although the city has been cosmetically cleaned-up by the end of the series, Barcelona has become a generic location where people have lost a sense of national identity and unremarkable urban construction wipes out the city's architectural identity. The sense of being "generic" was evidenced early on and pointed out by Patricia Hart when she observed that Spain is the "Brand-X" country of Europe (*Spanish* 102) and also in the prominent absence in the novels of very particular features of daily life in Barcelona that people tout as signs of Catalanism (namely, as Vázquez Montalbán puts it, no mention of the Barça soccer team, *pá amb tomàquet*, *sardana* music, or the *pilota* dumpling [108]). This

diminished presence of Catalan identity highlights the “generic” nature of the city in its sense of uniformity. Mendoza attributes this loss of soul to “essayant de correspondre coûte que coûte à l’image que le tourisme attend d’elle au lieu de rester soi-même” (Cortanze 32). Ultimately, the complexity of Barcelona makes her “entertaining and seductive,” yet also keeps her from being “able to effectively define her identity” (Oswald, “Detecting” 25). If the protagonist is a mask for Barcelona, his anonymity is eminently appropriate to this vision. This creates a contrast to political figures such as the Minister of Agriculture, with his over-the-top attention-grabbing behavior, and the mayor, who frequently points out his own importance by saying, “Soy el alcalde de Barcelona y me presento a la reelección,” (294) even among his friends.

Despite all the supposedly generic feel of the place, however, the novels maintain a sense that they could only occur in Barcelona. The general *rauxa*, or rage, inherent in the pervasive social critique stands against the extraordinary Catalan *seny*, common sense and practicality (Vázquez Montalbán 45). This odd mix results in a fierce pride in the Catalan spirit of ingenuity and national identity, even given social criticism so pervasive that almost every line contains a barb. One example of this curious intermixing is the highly critical portrayal of the Minister of Agriculture in *El laberinto* by Toribio Pisuerga, a.k.a. Muscle Power. His actions such as picking his nose, yelling “Yeepa!” at the opening of a bottle of champagne, drinking the champagne out of the bottle, and doing a chicken impersonation after being covered with feathers from a couch hardly inspire confidence in his leadership. His words are even more ignorant as he confesses that each Minister does the job of another “para eludir responsabilidades,” and further reveals that he cannot fire an incompetent secretary because he may have impregnated her (28). Despite the ridiculousness of his attitudes and actions, he manages to convince not only the protagonist but also a police commissioner, who should at least know whether the Minister of Agriculture is named “Ceregumio Lavaca.” This belief in his identity speaks to the perception of the Barcelonan public, and its ignorance, concerning central Spanish government leadership. This ignorance must also extend to the upper classes that hired Toribio believing that he would be able to portray a minister “accurately.” Mendoza underscores this heavy criticism by making him a supposed *madrileño* who recruits a Catalan to do his dirty work, then double-crosses him. One must admire, however, the creativity and ingenuity of Toribio’s portrayal. He is acutely aware of the public perceptions.

He shares their ideas about government and tailors a character to that ignorance, which is met with approval by his audience and serves as the catalyst for the novel's plot.

The narrator, like Toribio, shows remarkable ingenuity when it comes to dealing with, or deceiving, people. In *El misterio*, he laces a bottle of wine with psychotropic drugs in order to get information from the school gardener, and gains access to the Peraplana house by wrapping two sardine tins in newspaper and posing as a jeweler. In *El laberinto*, after being robbed and left with an empty suitcase that is supposed to be full of money, he fills it with toilet paper so it at least will not feel empty. He later poses as a Chinese "rice paper" salesman to explain to the authorities why he has a briefcase full of toilet paper. Finally, in *La aventura*, he shows excellent business sense in the running of his brother-in-law's beauty shop, which had formerly been a cover for Viriato's sojourns to gay porn theaters. Under the control of the narrator, the shop manages to turn a small profit. Examples of the protagonist thinking outside the box abound.

The mayor of Barcelona in *La aventura* also serves as a foil against which to compare the narrator as leader and representative of Barcelona's identity, exemplifying, as did Toribio, that curious mix of *seny* and *rauxa* in his role as a political leader. As the mayor explains, "un alcalde ha de ser un artista del equilibrimo" (152-3). As a gifted orator, the mayor knows all the watchwords that will make people believe in him. His speech at the party at Arderiu's home is full of championing rhetoric such as "no nos moverán", "necesitamos actos...[y] hombres capaces de llevarlos a cabo", "ciudadanos y ciudadanas de mi alma" (134), and an invocation of the repressive history of the past:

Hubo una época en que el poder nos parecía un sueño inalcanzable. Éramos muy jóvenes, llevábamos barba, bigote, patillas y melena, tocábamos la guitarra, fumábamos marihuana, íbamos salidos y olíamos a rayos. Algunos habían estado en la cárcel por sus ideas; otros, en el exilio. Cuando finalmente el poder nos tocó en una rifa, voces se alzaron diciendo que no lo sabríamos ejercer. Se equivocaban. Lo supimos ejercer, a nuestra manera. Y aquí estamos. Y los que nos criticaban y dudaban de nosotros, también. El camino no ha sido fácil. Hemos sufrido reveses. Algunos de los nuestros han vuelto a la cárcel, bien que por motivos distintos. Pero, en lo esencial, no hemos cambiado...seguimos con las mismas convicciones. (134)

Beyond his rhetorical ability, the figure of the mayor further embodies the spirit of Catalan ingenuity and *seny*. He is extremely

astute when it comes to his own self-interest. Although he is comfortable telling the entire party about his sexual arousal at the sight of a Roman soldier in his “miniskirt” and using crude language (135), he is also highly efficient in cutting off any threat to his personal gain or his electoral campaign. When a man approaches him at the party with a shady business offer, the mayor says, “éste no es el momento ni lugar...éestas no son cosas que yo deba oír” (130). Rather than saying the offer does not interest him, the mayor merely points out the necessity of waiting for a more appropriate time and place in which to consider it. The phrase “éestas no son cosas que yo deba oír” becomes a refrain for him by the end of the novel. Likewise, the mayor is quick to offer his assistance to the protagonist in exchange for the latter’s silence on the mayor’s involvement in the events surrounding the death of Pardalot and the shootout. His comment that “los catalanes de las piedras sacan panes duros como piedras” (372) could easily apply to either man in the situation, or all Barcelonans portrayed here.

The mayor of Barcelona and our unnamed protagonist embody Barcelona in different ways on distinct textual levels, but there are striking parallels that suggest that Mendoza places the narrator in a representational leadership position in regards to Barcelona in order to compare it to the mayor’s literal leadership. The mayor’s speech cited above, for example, appears to describe the story of the protagonist through the three novels. The protagonist in *El misterio* receives power in the form of liberty, wears a false beard, does drugs, and smells terrible. The authorities thought he would not be able to handle freedom, but he does, just in his own way. He returns to the asylum on two occasions. He remains essentially the same person even though his circumstances, the city, and his relationship to the city have changed. The mayor’s references to his own unstable mental status as suffering from “jodidas alucinaciones” and “el desdoblamiento de personalidad propio de los esquizofrénicos” (134), while still proclaiming that he is not crazy no matter what others say about him, parallel the narrator’s first-person references to his own questionable sanity. In both cases, their actions seem to ambiguously confirm and undermine their statements, thus highlighting the arbitrariness of labeling people as miscreants and undesirables. The mayor is equally a criminal and self-described *loco*, but he has the advantage of being wealthy “in a society that reserves its privileges for a select few” (Knutson 52). Like the narrator, the mayor manages to survive the violent confrontation at the end of the novel, although not without an appropriately symbolic injury for his

rhetorical manipulations - the bullet shoots him in his anus and comes out his mouth (364). During their encounter in Viriato's beauty shop, readers see two sides of the mayor: the one on camera and the one that appears when the equipment experiences an electrical failure (243). On camera, he appears as a polished but corrupt electoral candidate. In his private conversation with the protagonist, he reveals himself as a man who, despite overwhelming self-interest, also fears being blackmailed over his business dealings with Pardalot. The mayor, like the narrator, was "scheduled" to meet with Pardalot the night he was murdered, thereby implicating him in the affair (246-7).

Both the mayor and the narrator serve to represent Barcelona within the text, which accounts in part for the similarities between these characters. However, two important differences exist in their functions *vis-à-vis* the city. First, the mayor's position as representative of the city is conferred upon him not because he is organically part of the city at every level, but rather because he is a son of privilege. Throughout the novel, his contact with the lower classes remains limited to a shameless ploy to glean their votes in their "barrio de mierda" (242), or an act of self-interest to prove his innocence in the Pardalot affair. The narrator, on the other hand, speaks on equal footing with all echelons of Barcelona society regardless of time, space and social class, and nothing is ultimately restricted for him. This is even true of the language he uses, which juxtaposes the erudite with the vulgar and profane. Second, although both men act in self-interest to extricate themselves from suspicion of murder, only the protagonist has any desire to help the other people involved – Ivet, Reinona, Magnolio – or to see an actual resolution of the case merely for the sake of knowing what happened. The mayor is not interested in the resolution of the case at all; he merely seeks to ensure that his name will not be associated with it. Finally, the mayor merely represents Barcelona at the textual level. Conversely, the protagonist's embodiment of the city not only allows him greater interaction at the level of the text, but also puts him in extratextual dialogue with the reader, which the mayor is not able to do without the narrator's mediation. The first-person narrative technique facilitates this effect, and the function of the protagonist as the identity marker for Barcelona provides a different context for the reader to engage dialogically with the city as a whole. Similarities between the protagonist and Barcelona's mayor superficially indicate that both characters embody the city equally, but the similarities are a mask hiding a more profound representational relationship. The narrator's social freedom and

ability to negotiate the plurality of voices and languages in Barcelona, as well as his ability to reach the Barcelona outside the text, make him a more representative leader than the mayor and show him to be the mask of Barcelona herself.

The masking of Barcelona in a character is not unique to these three novels. Instead, it appears throughout Mendoza's work. In particular, critics such as Patricia Hart recognize Onofre Bouvila of *La ciudad de los prodigios* as the quintessential Mendoza parallel between protagonist and Barcelona. Bouvila so fully embodies the city that he cannot survive the death of its glory days of *modernisme*. However, the anonymity and circumstances of the protagonist in *El misterio*, *El laberinto* and *La aventura* make him a more versatile and appropriate mask for a Barcelona in transition. He is able to change with the times and to more fully embody the polyphony of the city. Transitional and post-transitional Barcelona is a strange place: a "great circus" (Vázquez Montalbán 182), "structurally unhinged, architecturally disgraced, socially torn apart, and culturally split" (Resina, *Barcelona's* 179), and "an abstract supermarket with ideologies on display in perishable packets" (Vázquez Montalbán 190). Understanding and accessing this peculiar urban chronotope requires a special dialogic tool that enables readers to enter its context. This anonymous protagonist emerges as a perfect fit for Barcelona's fractured, schizophrenic face. Entering his mind enables us to step into the embodied context he represents of the transitional city at its best and at its worst. In that context, readers access the pride of the Catalans, their unique ability to take advantage of immediate opportunities, and their ingenuity in difficult circumstances. The multiplicity of languages and voices, the harsh social conditions of the lower classes, the extreme filth of the poor neighborhoods juxtaposed with the clean quiet streets of the wealthy, and the corruption rampant in authoritative bodies becomes apparent through the trilogy. In the space conditioned by the protagonist's perception, and our perception of him, we clearly see Barcelona's progress through time as well as the progression of its residents toward a new world of freedom with its corresponding goods and ills. We hear the polyphony of the city and its people as the protagonist listens and interacts; we hear the juxtaposed languages and jargon that form the textured heteroglossia of an authentic people, not a hypothetical, idealized city. Barcelona appears as an embodied chronotope wearing a mask that allows us to share its space-time and to see the interlocking discourses and masks that frame the layers of the city. The protagonist's ultimate

achievement of liberty within that multifaceted space allows us to perceive it as fractured yet beautiful. Mendoza's Barcelona is a place of severe contradiction in its physical spaces, its people, and its politics. Only in the dialogical, recontextualized spaces, masking makes it possible for the people to enter into truly meaningful dialogue, which may ultimately lead to resolution and liberty.

NOTES

1. Resina appears to coincide with Bakhtin here. The idea that the city that appears in a novel is only a reductive "image" of a city corresponds to Bakhtin's discussion of the "image" of the author in a text – namely, that "everything that becomes an image in a literary work...is a created thing and not a force that itself creates" ("Forms" 256). The creative power of Barcelona resides in the inspiring city that exists in the level of our world; what is left in the novel is an image that allows us to see that city represented in a particular, embodied, meaningful context – which Resina rather vaguely calls a "representational configuration in the social imaginary" (*Barcelona's* 5).

2. José María Marco is emphatic that "no hay progresión en lo que a la vida o al carácter del protagonista de refiere" (10). Similarly, Knutson acknowledges the risk Mendoza takes of repeating himself by putting the protagonist in a situation in which there is a "lack of progress... despite tangible socioeconomic development" whose ultimate effect is "a tired resignation, an increasing disappointment, and a building outrage" (57). Moore calls this "cessation of a progressive social movement" typical of hard-boiled detective novels (128). Colmeiro also emphasizes this circularity in his thorough and unmatched history of Spanish detective fiction.

3. That being said, both types of spaces would fall into Edward Soja's "Thirdspace," itself a broadening of Lefebvre's "espaces de representation." This paradigm is particularly apt to our discussion because "Thirdspace" is a *lived* space defined by the *interaction* of the users to the material space itself. Nuria Benach points out that physical spaces are often used in ways conflicting with the intention of their designers, and that they can be "spaces of contact and of conflict, spaces of socialization, of entertainment, of fear" (152). I would further argue that the shift in usage of a single space is conditioned by the mask (identity marker) of the person interacting with it; a different mask will change the context in which the space is used, thereby changing the interaction of the user with the space and creating a *new* "Thirdspace."

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