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TITLE: Articulating a Re-Emergence of Feminist Thought: Ana María Moix's *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* and the *Gauche Divine*

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ABSTRACT: I argue that from within *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* can be found an articulation of the re-emerging feminist thought of the late Franco years, especially as experienced by women of the *gauche divine*. The scholarly criticism on *Walter* is sparse, favorable, and, with regard to feminism, vague. By deconstructing masculinity as well as femininity, avoiding essentialist qualities in her characters and releasing them from the constraints of narrow gender roles, Moix anticipates the evolution of feminist theory to focus on the gender and sexuality of men, as well as women. Moix, both, subverts patriarchy (by entering the dialogue that patriarchy dictated should have been closed to women) and solves the problem of the referent. Rather than silencing women, she silences her male narrator, Ismael.

KEYWORDS: Ana María Moix, *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?*, *gauche divine*, feminist thought, gender, sexuality, referent, Contemporary Spanish Literature

RESUMEN: Sostengo que en *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* puede encontrarse una articulación del pensamiento feminista re-emergiendo durante los últimos años de la dictadura franquista. Este pensamiento está caracterizado por la experiencia de la mujer de la *gauche divine*. La crítica académica de *Walter* es escasa, favorable y, en relación con el feminismo, vaga. Al deconstruir la masculinidad tanto como la feminidad, evitar cualidades esencialistas en sus personajes y liberarlos de las limitaciones de los roles de género, Moix anticipa la evolución de la teoría feminista hacia el centrarse en el género y la sexualidad de los hombres, así como de las mujeres. Moix subvierte la patriarquía (por entrar en el diálogo que la patriarquía había cerrado a la mujer) y resuelve el problema de la referencia. En lugar de silenciar a la mujer, silencia al narrador masculino, Ismael.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?*, Ana María Moix, pensamiento feminista, género, sexualidad, *gauche divine*, referente, Literatura Española Contemporánea

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Articulating a Re-Emergence of Feminist Thought: Ana María Moix's *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* and the *Gauche Devine*

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Refusing any ideological categorization of *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* (1973), I argue that from within *Walter* can be found an articulation of the re-emerging feminist thought of the late Franco years, especially as experienced by women of the *Gauche Devine*. Moix infuses *Walter* with the ambiguous feminism of her bourgeois social group, the *Gauche Devine*. The scholarly criticism on *Walter* is sparse, favorable, and, with regard to feminism, vague. By deconstructing masculinity as well as femininity, avoiding essentialist qualities in her characters and releasing them from the constraints of narrow gender roles, Moix anticipates the evolution of feminist theory to focus on the gender and sexuality of men, as well as women. Moix both subverts patriarchy (by entering the dialogue that patriarchy dictated should have been closed to women) and solves the problem of the referent. Rather than silencing women, she silences her male narrator, Ismael.

Scholars have not analyzed *Walter* in the context of the practice and perception of feminism during the period of the *Gauche Devine* (1969-1975). The recorded history, section headings in literary histories and memories about Moix's feminism are ambiguous and contradictory. Moreover, while quite a bit of documentation exists about feminism after the *Gauche Devine* period (including *Vindición Feminista* and the scholarship about it), a systematic written history about feminism during and immediately preceding the period of the *Gauche Devine* (Moix's aesthetically formative years, Stovall 89-102) has yet

to be written. For these reasons, more direct documentation of Moix's feminist theory and practice continues to be necessary. To appreciate the specific qualities of feminism within the *Gauche Devine*, as seen from the perspective of the group's women writers, I interviewed Moix, Rosa Regás, and Esther Tusquets. In addition, I interviewed Lidia Falcón, an authority on feminism and a friend of the *Gauche Devine*. With a feminist lens, I analyze the characters, themes and narration of *Walter*. I argue that because *Walter* attempts to introduce new and feminist forms to the novel during a period in Spain when men dominated the discussion about how to write fiction, feminist thought characterizes *Walter's* form.

Roberta Johnson says that because of the post-war erasure of feminism, Spanish feminist thought before the transition must be culled from a variety of texts, especially fiction: "We should shift through novels for autochthonous Spanish feminist theory" (248). Because feminism is re-emerging in the period of the *Gauche Devine* and non-fiction texts about women in the years leading up to the *Gauche Devine* were not particularly theoretical, fiction is an important source for gleaming the feminist thought of the period: Catherine Davies says, "fiction (from 1940 to 1970s) provided virtually the only means by which women [...] were able to express their preoccupations, to affirm their identity, to arouse public awareness, and yet avoid [...] arbitrary censorship" (*Spanish* 208). Moix did not avoid censorship; nevertheless, when

read with a feminist lens, *Walter* reveals an underlying critical stance towards what Aurora Morcillo calls “true Catholic womanhood.” Rather than asking if *Walter* is a feminist novel, I examine how *Walter* expresses feminist thought.

William Sherzer, Ignacio Soldevila, Linda Gould Levine, Andrew Bush, and Margaret Jones, among others, say that formally and thematically, *Walter* is more sophisticated and complex than Moix’s first novel, *Julia* (1970). *Walter* is about a group of bourgeois cousins who are disillusioned and unhappy as they come of age. In a 1993 overview of Moix’s work, Levine says, “Further criticism on both *Las virtudes peligrosas* and *Walter* would be a welcome addition to the substantive and often repetitive analyses currently in print on *Julia*, Moix’s most accessible novel” (“Ana María” 345). A search in the Modern Language Association database, which encompasses most of the scholarly criticism, results in at least ten articles of criticism exclusively about *Julia*, and one exclusively about *Walter* (Valis). Since Levine’s call for further criticism on *Walter*, not one scholar has published an article exclusively on *Walter*, while there have been five articles dedicated to *Las virtudes peligrosas* and many more focused on *Julia*. Critics frequently treat *Walter* and *Julia* together (see Cornejo Parriego, 99-120, for one effective way to do so), but this practice, if used by critics repeatedly, can mask important formative differences between the two novels. In addition, it is common for critics to omit *Walter* from literary histories or analyses that have included her male and/or female peers in fiction (some examples are Epps, Herzberger, Sobejano, and Davies, *Spanish*).

Moix’s cultural context, especially when feminist perception and practice are emphasized, informs the text of *Walter*. To this end, it is important for the feminist critic to ask how Moix perceived feminism, especially within the *Gauche Devine* (much has been written on the *Gauche Devine*—see Stovall, Villamandos, and Mazquiarán de Rodríguez). Examined in the context of a general re-emerging

feminist consciousness, as well as the unique feminist consciousness (and sometimes lack thereof) of the *Gauche Devine*, the reader can more fully appreciate the contributions *Walter* made to *escritura feminina*.

The one scholarly article dedicated exclusively to *Walter* (Valis) does not take a theoretically feminist approach, though Valis’s analysis of the deconstruction of language and reality may be readily applied to the constructed nature of gender. Valis says *Walter* is a “constant *vaivén* of narrative becoming and unbecoming” (48). As I will detail in this paper, Moix continually constructs and deconstructs the sexuality and gender of her characters. The novel’s title comes from *Walter* because his masculinity is fantastically imagined and re-imagined until it is completely deconstructed into the devout and feminine seminarian, cousin Augusto. Constructed elements of gender are revealed in contradictions: María Antonia pursues femininity in volunteerism, then later plays the masculine role of sexual initiator; Lea’s beauty is feminine, but her sexual assertiveness is masculine. The absurdity of Albina’s character, half-horse and half-woman, mocks the constructed nature of what Morcillo calls the “true Catholic woman.”

Critics of *Walter* address feminism briefly, indirectly, not at all, or with uncertainty. Levine recognizes feminist aspects in *Walter* (“Censored” 309-310); however, she was inconclusive in her evaluation of *Walter* as feminist: “The vision of women presented in this work is somewhat confusing and disturbing” (310). Like Lea, Moix was willing to elicit disturbing feelings in her readers, a characteristic that is consistent with feminism, which disturbs the patriarchal order. Cornejo Parriego cites several feminist sources (Adrienne Rich and Virginia Woolf, for example, 100-104) in her analysis of women’s friendships in *Walter* and *Julia*, but does not address the *Gauche Devine* or argue that there is a vision of feminism from within *Walter*. While an expression of feminism is not an intention or goal in Moix’s works,

I argue that the vision of women in *Walter*, especially when considered in its historical context, is an expression of feminist thought.

Levine says that the main female characters in Moix's early novels depict a very different reality from the protagonists of Moix's immediate precursors: Moix's "female protagonists very much reflect this new social and political reality and provide a different view, both sexually and politically, from that seen in Martín Gaité and Matute" (294). One of the differences between the earlier generations of Spanish women writers and women novelists of the *Gauche Devine* (for example Tusquets, Moix, and later Regás) is the re-emerging feminist consciousness that accompanies the new reality that Levine speaks of.

Re-emerging feminism refers to the various manifestations of feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s that had yet to congeal into a public, collective feminist consciousness. Re-emergence acknowledges the mostly forgotten pre-war feminist movement Franco suppressed. Levine and Waldman dedicate much of *Feminismo ante el franquismo* to the clandestine feminist movement of the 1960s and early 1970s (1979). Amparo Moreno has described the 1960s and early 1970s as the second stage of feminism in Spain, a time when women began to organize collectively, with loose feminist groups forming (17). As Levine says, "The writings of Martín Gaité, Matute, and Moix represent an important step in the attempt to express in fiction this feminist consciousness" (*Feminismo* 315). During this time, Moix practiced feminism and read feminist theory. Because *Gauche Devine* members traveled frequently, the group was a source of banned texts—feminist or otherwise (Moix, Interview). Before she wrote *Walter*, Moix had read the banned *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique* (Interview). These texts were translated to Catalan in 1966 (Moreno 201), one indicator of the beginning of a feminist consciousness. *Walter's* specific allusion to Simone de Beauvoir twice (226, 227) is significant in a novel with so few specific references to literary or historical figures.

The public and collective feminist practice after Franco's death was a continuation of the re-emerging, yet still suppressed, feminist consciousness of the waning Franco years. In interviews, Falcón, Regás and Tusquets remember the *Gauche Devine* period as having no collective feminist consciousness. Buckley has documented the absence of a collective feminist consciousness (129), which, it must be emphasized, does not indicate an absence of feminist practice: some women of the *Gauche Devine*, like Moix, self-identified as feminists and those who did not (for example, Regás) often affirmed women's rights or practiced feminism at a level greater than the general population or other bourgeoisie groups. Moreover, Levine and Moreno have documented clandestine feminist activism.

Lea's character may be read as symbolic of *Gauche Devine* aesthetics and the isolated nature of feminism in the last years of Franco. Aesthetically, the *Gauche Devine* emphasized freedom. Freedom, however, was gendered because women could not be free in a nation that had institutionalized a vision of true Catholic womanhood (Morcillo 3-7). In testing the limits of women's freedom Lea sacrifices stable community, friendships, family, and presumably economic stability. However, even Lea, it would appear, desires some form of lasting relationship, as alluded to when Ismael thinks he sees Lea leaving flowers on Julia's grave and Ismael's conjecture that Lea paid for Julia's burial and tombstone. Lea is extreme in her unwillingness to conform. The feminism in Spain in the early 1970 was isolated, like Lea. Feminists paid a high price for feminism: risk of imprisonment, as Falcón attests (qtd. in Levine, *Feminismo* 78), and social isolation and derogation. If Lea is to do what she wants, she must do so alone and furtively, for there is no social support for her choices. She practices feminism by taking sexual freedom for herself and rejecting the feminine gender role of subordinate wife and mother. She clearly resents patriarchal social norms. Like feminism in the late Franco years, she's an outlaw.

While her post *Gauche Devine* work with *Vindicación Feminista* (Jones, “Vindicación”) indicates that after writing *Walter Moix* was a feminist, Moix’s experience with *Vindicación* is not a formative influence on the feminist thought of her fiction written during the *Gauche Devine*. For this reason evidence is needed to document Moix’s feminism during the *Gauche Devine*.

Immediately preceding and during the period that she wrote *Walter*, Moix identified with feminism more so than Tusquets and Regás, who did not yet identify as feminist (Moix Interview; Tusquets Interview; Regás Interview). Ironically, in interviews, Falcón, Moix, and Regás, perceived Tusquets, who is often credited with pioneering the feminist novel in Spain, as the least openly feminist in practice. Janet Pérez discusses Tusquets under the heading, “Publisher, Novelist, Feminist,” but places Moix under “A new poet, novelist, and story-writer” (*Contemporary* 159). Moix’s feminist consciousness is undisputed among the *Gauche Devine*. As Moix confirms, feminists Núria Pompeia (also of the *Gauche Devine*) and Carmen Alcalde were Moix’s friends and mentors (Interview). Moix and other *Gauche Devine* women knew Anna Sallés, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán’s wife, who co-wrote the important feminist text *La mujer en España* (1967). In addition, *Gauche Devine* member and photographer Colita would soon collaborate with Moix in *Vindicación Feminista*. Moix knew she was practicing feminism when she read feminist texts, accessed birth control, or practiced sexual freedom (Interview). There is no single feminism of the *Gauche Devine*: some were self-identified feminists, while others simply transgressed cultural norms about womanhood or, like Regás, took bourgeois women’s freedoms for granted (Interview).

Moix’s status as “mascot” for the *Gauche Devine* (Stovall 97) characterizes the group as tolerant—even proud—of the feminists within. Moix was mascot for literary, social, and documentary reasons. She edited *24 horas con la Gauche Devine*, collecting interviews

and photographs and writing non-fiction vignettes about the group. Her poetry was an exercise in the freedom that represented *Gauche Devine* aesthetics, and her novels, largely liberated from the referent that characterized social realism, embodied a new aesthetic. Ironically, Moix’s other role within the group, *la nena*, conflicts with feminist ideals that women are independent adults (96).

Several women were writing feminist nonfiction texts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, just before Moix began to write. Moix emphasizes that “Justo cuando empecé a publicar, empezaron a salir cosas feministas aquí en España. Lidia Falcón fue una de las primeras [...] Carmen Alcalde [...] María Aurelia Capmany [...] Anna Sallés[.]” (Interview). Between 1964 and 1973, these women whom Moix knew personally—they were friends of the *Gauche Devine*—published many feminist books, two of which focused on Catalonia. Because of her personal relationship with these authors and her exposure, through the *Gauche Devine*, to independent women and foreign feminist texts, Moix was exposed to the emerging feminist theory of Spain.

Publishers were not usually willing to print feminist writings that accounted for the full extent of misogyny women experienced. Falcón, for example, says that even if she had written an account of the *violaciones* (usually translated as rapes) she sustained while in prison, no one would have published it, and if someone had, it would have been so heavily censored as to become meaningless (in Levine, *Feminismo* 78). Fiction, such as *Walter*, was heavily censored as well. Because Moix personally knew feminist writers, she was familiar with the stories and did not have to rely on a censored press.

In interviews, Moix and Regás say that *Gauche Devine* women were more focused on doing the right thing under the dictatorship than verbally articulating a feminist consciousness. Falcón went so far as to say that *Gauche Devine* women, including Moix, were not feminists. Nevertheless, when interviewed, Moix confirmed that she was a feminist

during the period of the *Gauche Devine*: “Yo diría que sí [...] porque había una feminista, Núria Pompeia. Era muy feminista. Había más [...] había manifestaciones, por ejemplo” (Interview). Women members of the *Gauche Devine* had not yet integrated theory with activism; nevertheless, some defended women’s freedoms. Women (and men) of the *Gauche Devine* took for granted that they should protest on behalf of women’s rights. As Moix says in reference to the protests, “lo digamos por escrito” (Interview). Regás agreed with Moix. When interviewed, Moix and Regás maintain that their activism, lifestyle choices, and/or writings on behalf of feminism were more intense than that of the general population, which had not yet been reached by feminism.

In addition to public protests, Moix was conscious of practicing feminism on a personal level, “Era una época en que al nivel personal empezaron a practicar la libertad sexual sin esconderse [...] o, por ejemplo, usaba anticonceptivo, que estaba prohibido, y se separaba sin existir el divorcio” (Interview). In *Walter* she probes the question of sexual freedoms with such audacity that the regime made 45 cuts to her original manuscript (Levine, “Censored” 293). In this period before the transition to democracy, young people—and this was especially so within the *Gauche Devine*—carved out personal freedoms. The *Gauche Devine*’s emphasis on aesthetic freedoms (Stovall 90) in their creative professions paralleled the group’s emphasis on personal and sexual freedoms, which were and are essential aspects of feminism.

Levine documents that professional women in Spain were slow to practice solidarity with each other (“Censored” 303). Moix, however, recalls a practice of solidarity among women writers of the *Gauche Devine*: “Si había una escritora,” says Moix, “yo creo que sus libros los leían más las mujeres que los hombres de la *Gauche Devine*, eso sí” (Interview). When interviewed, Regás and Tusquets confirm the assertion that women writers of the *Gauche Devine* strengthened one another and championed each other’s work. A

broad and general thread of feminist thought emphasizing the power generated from women supporting one another runs through contemporary and historical feminist theory and practice. By encouraging each other’s writing, women novelists of the *Gauche Devine* were emerging as feminists.

Ironically, the *Gauche Devine* did not collectively acknowledge the fact that women’s freedoms were more limited than men’s, or that women of the working class bore the burden of misogyny more so than bourgeois women. This consciousness, says Regás, would come later: “fue poco a poco cuando yo empecé a darme cuenta de que lo que yo estaba haciendo era feminismo, pero el feminismo solo por mí. Es a partir de mi propia ansia de libertad que yo fui consciente de la necesidad de libertad para todas las mujeres” (n. pag.). While Regás practiced personal liberation during the waning Franco years, she didn’t talk about feminism with the *Gauche Devine*: “No se hablaba de feminismo. Se hablaba sobre todo de asuntos de política, éramos profundamente anti-franquistas, pero anti-franquistas del todo, por la falta de libertad” (Interview). When interviewed, Moix, remembers being more aware than other *Gauche Devine* members that women’s freedoms were more limited than men’s.

Myths about feminism sometimes discouraged women of the *Gauche Devine* from consciously identifying as feminists. Moix says that feminists were believed to be bossy, overly masculine, and unfaithful: “la burguesía tradicional: decía el ‘marimacho’ de la mujer masculina; te quería mandar o de mujer pues que era infiel [...] asustaba” (Interview). The *Gauche Devine* associated feminism with an overpowering, masculine woman, or the woman who exercised her desire for sexual fulfillment by cheating on her husband. These associations are ironic given that the group’s principle feminist, Moix, does not fit any of these stereotypes. Neither of these types conforms to the expectations of a woman in Spain: as Morcillo documents, “The state Catholic version of femininity stressed

asexuality, exalting either virginity or motherhood, and called for different forms of subordinate behavior” (72). As both feminist and *Nena*, Moix’s role within the *Gauche Devine* is a seeming contradiction: her acceptance of the little sister role may have been a strategy for making her feminism less threatening and the feminist aspects of her fiction more palatable.

Sometimes feminism was ridiculed from within the *Gauche Devine*. In reference to a feminist consciousness-raising group, Regás says, “Yo me acuerdo que yo misma llegué en aquel momento a hacer chistes [...] pregonaban a los cuatro sentidos que no habían tenido un orgasmo —pues que hacían reír un poco, ¿no?” (n. pag.). Within the *Gauche Devine* some were prejudiced against feminism or, at best, did not take it seriously. From Regás’s perspective, the most negative stereotype associated with feminism was dogmatism. Regás says that feminism “estaba mal visto porque había un grupo de mujeres feministas muy exageradas. Nos daba un poco la impresión que estaban solo interesadas en esta lucha, pero no en las luchas por los presos, por las ideas, por la manifestación” (n. pag.). The gendered mistreatment of women prisoners, the censorship of feminist ideas, and the prohibition of feminist organization were not yet visible.

Women’s sufferings were invisible partially because men’s freedoms were so restricted. Franco’s constraints on everyone’s freedoms leveled the playing field and narrowed the gender gap: everyone lacked civil liberties, and while censorship was supposedly gender-blind, it uniquely and severely affected women (Levine, “Censored” 2). The sex scenes cut from the original edition of *Walter* were particularly offensive because women were not supposed to write about sex, especially in the non-normative way that Moix does.

The *Gauche Devine*’s bourgeois composition masked women’s second class status. Regás says that women of the *Gauche Devine* enjoyed personal freedoms and professional

opportunities as much as their male contemporaries: “No me di cuenta de lo necesario que era una actitud feminista porque en el ambiente en que yo me movía no hacía ninguna falta” (n. pag.). The *Gauche Devine* accepted women professionals and even made light of their nontraditional roles. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán asserts that there is only one true characteristic of the *Gauche Devine* —that its women members don’t cook (23). When interviewed about this comment, Moix and Regás said that Vázquez Montalbán, who supported feminists and was married to one, was a great cook who made this comment in jest, but also as a compliment about their ability to transcend the boundaries of true Catholic womanhood.

In the last Franco years, progressive sex-integrated groups were more feminist than women-only groups. Monica Threlfall’s analysis of the women’s movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s helps explain why the *Gauche Devine* did not affirm feminism as consistent with its anti-franco and pro-freedom ideologies, and why the group’s women were not interested in sex-segregated political activism:

A final obstacle for the early women’s movement was the underlying dislikes among *la progresía* —particularly women— of any sex-segregated activity and a strongly negative image of political women acting together. Sex roles, segregated schooling and Catholic moral codes had kept the sexes apart for so much of the Franco period that feminism’s all-women groups gave the impression of backtracking to ghettos from which the progressives had just emerged and contradicted the trend towards greater mixing in private life. (47)

Some *Gauche Devine* women were more comfortable with practicing feminism when men were involved: when Moix protested publicly in favor of abortion, she recalls that men were there (Interview).

Considering that the *Gauche Devine's* preference for sex-integrated groups was consistent with feminism, the variation of gender balance in the scenes in *Walter*—many among males and females, some between males, and others among females—should be understood as a feminist characteristic as well. Gender-integrated scenes are feminist because they transgress conservative expectations that for girls and women to remain pure they must socialize and attend school in same-sex groups (Morcillo 42). As Morcillo documents, the Franco regime believed girls and boys should be separated, as evidenced in the prohibition of coeducation (42). Moix's choice of mostly sex-integrated settings in *Walter* is consistent with her feminism. In the few scenes among only females, Moix disrupts essentialist notions that girls and women are either asexual or heterosexual: Lea seduces Julia and Maite, and María Antonia is seduced by her teacher. Male-only scenes are transgressive as well: they often depict seduction and sexual power plays.

During the time of the *Gauche Devine*, fictional scenes among women may not have been understood as feminist, as they would have conformed to the conventional norms of sex-segregated spaces. During the ideological transition of the early 1970s, the transgressive novel would integrate males and females, much like Moix's experiences in the *Gauche Devine*: the bar where *Gauche Devine* congregated, like the summer setting in *Walter*, was gender-integrated. By contrast, Tusquets, publishing after Franco's death, emphasizes scenes among only women, a factor which has contributed to the reputation of *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (1978) as a pioneer of the feminist novel.

Because of the range of attitudes towards feminism within the *Gauche Devine*, the group's aesthetic of freedom, and the fact that a collective feminist consciousness had not yet fully emerged, the possibility of writing a categorically feminist novel, like *El mismo mar*, was not available, or even desirable, to Moix. Many solidly feminist threads,

however, run through *Walter*. In the context of severe censorship, the male-dominated discussion of the novel, and other cultural factors, *Walter* expresses a high level of feminism in both form and content. A more definitively feminist novel in Spanish would not be seen until after the death of Franco. And while Moix says Montserrat Roig was expressing more feminism in her novels than Moix was (Interview), Roig wrote in Catalan and was not a member of the *Gauche Devine*. Like the feminist movement, feminist themes and aesthetics in the novel emerge along a continuum.

According to Moix, when a feminist writes, regardless of intent, some manifestation of her critical approach is likely to be revealed. The re-emerging nature of the feminist consciousness of the early 1970s is characterized by a feminist viewpoint that Moix acknowledges in retrospect: "Nunca me he sentado a escribir pensando 'voy a escribir un mensaje feminista o social o político.' Lo que ocurre es que después surge. Claro, a un editor de la izquierda no le va a salir una novela de la derecha" (Interview). While Moix did not intend to write a feminist novel, she accepts that her novels written during the *Gauche Devine* express an underlying feminism: "no me parece mal que las califiquen así, pero quiero decir que no es adrede" (Interview). Moix's strategy for entering the male-dominated debate about the novel was to assert that the author is not obligated to send a political message: a politically feminist work would have contradicted this aesthetic. *Walter's* feminism is more subtle and theoretically forward-looking.

The demise of Lea and María Antonia may be seen as a feminist protest. In women, agency, especially when sexual, is condemned. Lea and María Antonia choose to pay for freedom with isolation and sullied reputations. Their other choices—conformity and submissiveness—are a form of death. The elusive, independent, bisexual, sexually empowered, and feminist Lea embodies an alternative to essentialist gender roles, but she

is ostracized, never assimilating or belonging. Lea is an agent because she acts on the world. María Antonia also acts upon the world with her political activism. The description of her sexual experience with the truck driver is more about pleasure than victimization. By contrast, under patriarchy, male characters aren't punished for leaving their mark on the world; rather, they are punished if they don't.

Julia is much more than the powerless little cousin or sister she may appear to be. Julia acts as an agent who intervenes with fate. First, she has the power to transform Ismael. As Valis says, "Julia converts her cousin Ismael into 'el primo Walter,' to act for the last time as a messenger in Lea's love affairs" (56). Secondly, by committing suicide, she intervenes in the Catholic God's plan and decides for herself when she will die. Suicide is the ultimate sin not because it causes death, but because it constitutes an intervention in God's will—in this sense suicide is a protest against Catholic Spain and true Catholic womanhood, which is passive to God's will.

In addition to granting her female characters agency, Moix expresses feminist thought through the descriptions and implicit criticism of essentialist sex and gender roles. She contrasts gender expectations with the lives of the cousins and their parents. In *Walter*, everyone is expected to marry someone of the opposite sex. Males must achieve financial success and support a family, while females should be chaste and devout housewives and mothers, like Maite. The sexual experiences of her characters rarely conform to the essentialist ideal of married, heterosexual monogamy. Ismael, Lea, María Antonia, and Julia do not marry or practice exclusive heterosexuality. Aunts and uncles appear to fulfill the duties of husband and wife, but fall short: Ricardo's father deals with a brothel and either raped or had an affair with the maid. Because he is the maid's superior, the sexual interaction, even if consensual, is an abuse of power. Julia's parents, largely absent in *Walter*, lived separately in *Julia*. Ricardo achieves the progressive marriage among equals, but is not happy.

Moix undermines the essentialist notions of woman as mother that the Franco regime endorsed (Morcillo 104). *Walter's* mothers are not the supportive, self-sacrificing ones called for by the Franco regime (Morcillo 144). Lea, María Antonia, and Julia show no interest in motherhood, the factor that essentialists often say makes one a woman. Grandmother Lucía, the most controlling woman, is not nurturing, another characteristic that is understood as essentially feminine. Parents are largely absent. Ismael's mother, having abandoned him, is in France. When mothers of the other cousins visit the summer home, they do not appear in the attic or other spaces where the cousins congregate.

Male characters display little of the toughness, strength, and success that depict essentialist masculinity. David Gilmore characterizes masculinity of the Iberian Peninsula as extreme: if a male measures up to acute standards of manhood he is *muy hombre*, *muy macho*, or *mucho hombre*. If not, says Gilmore, he is "*flojo*, a weak and pathetic imposter. The polysemous term *flojo* literarily means empty, lazy, or flaccid" (32). The narrator often describes Ismael in these terms—he is empty, like a ghost, lazy in his lack of ambition, and flaccid in his lack of ability to attract a "real" woman. He performs masculinity only in the ironic form of a circus act. Ricardo, by contrast, possesses some qualities of masculinity that might be thought of as essentially male, like strength of will and intelligence, but these qualities do not guarantee him happiness.

Fantasies about *Walter* represent masculinity in its most essentialists: he is imagined independent, strong, and a modern-day Robin Hood. He is the manliest of Hollywood characters. Women love him. In excellent feminist legerdemain, however, Lea initially conceals her knowledge that masculinity is constructed. The novel's title asks why *Walter*, the "real" man, went away. Ironically, this heroic *Walter* never existed. Lea created him by hinting about his existence to the cousins, who then proceeded to construct and

reconstruct him. He is deconstructed when his true identity is revealed, that of cousin Augusto who is preparing to enter the priesthood, only to be reconstructed in Julia's letters to Lea.

In contrast to the successfully masculine, but imagined Walter, the novel's male characters do not neatly conform to their assigned gender or sexual identity, are thwarted from fulfilling their roles, or are not allowed happiness. Lucía says that Catholic school will make the overly-sensitive and unconfident Ismael a man (183), implying he lacks masculinity. Ismael's masculinity is doubted in his circus act and role as a courier between women. Assigned gender and sexual identity obstructs happiness. Ricardo's punishment at school is emasculating: the priests read embarrassing passages from his diary (see quote below) to the other students and he is made to wear short pants. His masculinity takes the form of rebellion and hatred towards his father and the priests, as if manhood were a battle of wills. Virility is constructed upon harshly judging women: he views Marisa as a sexual object and in this diary, symbolically dismembers her by criticizing her breasts and knees. As an adult, he seems to have more egalitarian views about women, for he is in a marriage of supposed equal partnership with a psychologist; nevertheless, he is unhappy because he had preferred to marry his cousin, María Antonia.

Moix deconstructs sexuality as well as gender and depicts a range of sexual possibilities. Lea, who should be sexually submissive, seduces males and females, single and married people, children and adults, and the seminarian. The narrator acknowledges that Ernesto is gay. Maite, one of Lea's sexual partners, eventually conforms to marriage, but not without Lea commenting that Maite had become ugly and fat. Moix satirizes the way schools teach the male cousins that women are temptresses of evil, denying the reality of homosexuality in men and women, or of women being anything but men's sexual objects.

In what may be one of the most important feminist triumphs of *Walter*, gender is a circus act. The Great Yeibo, a cowboy clown, is a parody of masculinity, which is a guise. Ismael literally carries around this disguise in his red suitcase, making us acutely aware that masculinity is a performance and that Ismael doesn't want to perform constantly. In current time, he has removed his costume and is stripped of this faux masculinity, reducing himself to a phantom-like carrier of messages between two women. Ismael is supposed to act upon the world; instead, he allows the horse-woman Albina to rescue him repeatedly, while he fails to rescue her from death, and in general to leave any mark on the world, evidenced by his ghostly, rather than concrete presence. Moix strips Ismael of all masculine pretenses and asks who he is without the guise of gender.

The exposure of masculinity as a constructed gender (primarily through the construction and re-construction of *Walter*), rather than the biologically-determined fact it was generally assumed to be under Franco, moves *Walter* into the 21st century. In feminist fiction and nonfiction of the latter 1970s, women displaced men as the focus of inquiry, and feminists asked few questions about masculinity. Traditionally perceived as the norm, masculinity has not always been understood as a constructed gender to be examined—it is very much examined in *Walter* though: Moix demotes masculinity to the status of absurd (see Ricardo's diary entry in the next paragraph for one example). In the sense that Moix rejects essentialist portrayals of both, women and men, the feminist thought in *Walter* is more consistent with that of the 21st Century than that of the 1960s and 1970s.

Ricardo's diary entry functions as a satire of essentialist and misogynist beliefs about women. The particular entry quoted here is definitely the work of an author with feminist awareness:

Las mujeres deben morir, o lo que sea,
por sus maridos. Dice mi padre que

un hombre es un hombre y es más libre que una mujer, que un hombre puede a veces echar canas al aire y no pasa nada, pero una mujer es otra cosa, tiene que ser seria, fiel y muy decente, y dar ejemplo a los hijos, como la abuela Lucía que siempre ha sido una santa. Así que eso mismo le he dicho a Marisa que aquí mando yo que soy el hombre y ella a obedecer, y cuando voy y le levanto las faldas y miro lo que me da la gana no peca: pecar sería desobedecerme. (159)

Ricardo's masculinity is constructed upon what De Beauvoir has shown to be the belief that man is the subject, the first, and the dominant. Man dominates woman and exercises the power to define her as mother and (a) sexual subordinate. He should act upon woman and she should obey.

Femininity, by contrast, is tied to the body. If woman initiates sexual activity, she sins, but if Ricardo makes the first move, Marisa must submit. Ricardo is allowed masculinity outside of his sexual and paternal function (ie. career success), but he may act upon his libido when and how he desires and be more of a man for it. María Antonia is a fallen woman for having acted on hers. Women are mothers, asexual, or sluts: they cannot be defined outside of the body. Lea and Julia negotiate an exit from this narrow definition of woman, but only at great cost.

In order to evaluate the extent to which a novel is feminist, critics sometimes turn to the gender of the narrator. As Christopher Soufas says in reference to *Julia*, *Nada*, and *Primera memoria*, "[t]he real feminism of these novels lies in their mode of narration" (155). Bush (137-138) and Kingery (106-122) have also emphasized narration as a measure of feminism. Writing an innovative and experimental novel, Moix faced a dilemma in choosing the gender of the protagonist and narrator: she does not want to repeat the feminine bildungsroman, but neither does she want to fall into the patriarchal trap of silencing women while men's voices are heard.

Whatever importance is assigned to Ismael because of his narrative role is muted by his ghost-like presence and function as courier between two women. Moix implicitly contrasts women's thwarted desire to speak and be heard with Ismael's struggle to silence himself. Moix must address the phenomena of silencing women very carefully: female authors, characters, and narrators already abide more than their share of ridicule and silencing. Because men are the privileged sex, Moix's feminist strategy is to force a male narrator to bear the burden of derision and silence. Moix forces Ismael to view the world from the "feminine" perspective. This strategy may serve Moix's particular feminist thinking better than what Bush refers to as Moix's more feminist option, giving women a voice as narrator. "A reappropriation of speech" says Bush, "could serve as a clear remedial gesture" for the "male suppression of the female voice" (137). Moix's novels do not remedy problems; rather, they force readers to recognize them. Because the female voice is already silenced in the Spanish literary tradition, a female narrator who struggled to be quiet, as does Ismael, would be a moot point: those with no voice can't be silenced. Levine ("Censored"), Bush, Buckley, and López-Valero Colbert repeatedly rely on the fact that society under Franco had already silenced women—both the author and the female character. Under *Walter's* formal conditions a female Ismael is redundant and might make sense only sense only if Ismael is understood as a "non-Julia."

The voices of Moix's female characters defy stereotypes (of females and of feminists) and are not shallow. Moix reverses the woman question by asking what happens when a man is suppressed. For Ismael, the silencing and humiliation are debilitating, making him like a ghost. Laura Mulvey says "The mythology of the feminine under patriarchy set up a series of problems in which the woman became a phantasm and a symptom" (xii). As a phantasm, woman is silenced and thinned, a one-dimensional character. Interestingly,

Moix places Ismael in the role of phantom. Referring to the post-war novel as well as the Post-Franco one, López-Valero Colbert says that in contemporary Spanish novels women's silenced voices are a thin presence like film: "Women constitute a collective of silenced voices that can barely be seen, that then come back as ghosts" (6). Moix explores this feminist perspective by reversing gender roles: in *Walter*, Ismael, a man, is a ghost, but traditionally, female characters are supposed to be the phantasms. Valís repeatedly calls Ismael "invisible" or a "shadow" (49, 53, 54, and 56). Ismael is like a woman, and it may be argued he represents the voice of a woman author, Moix (Bush 138).

By interrupting and silencing Ismael and quoting the extreme misogyny in Ismael's diary (above), Moix mimics, subverts, and deconstructs the traditional privileging of the masculine voice and silencing of the feminine one. The red suitcase, carrying a costume to be put on and off, is a reminder that Ismael's masculinity is constructed. A "masculine" voice (Ismael's) that appears to be the most frequent narrator reflects the privileging of the male voice in the Spanish literary tradition; however, by interrupting Ismael with other voices, often feminine or of unknown gender, Moix silences him more effectively than he is able to silence himself. Lea's monologue interrupts Ismael's narration for such length (251-253) that it blurs the line between monologue and narration, as does the frequent unpunctuated dialogue.

Many other types of interruptions permeate the text, but an early example follows one of Ismael's repeated statements that "Anoche soñé que había regresado a T" (15). Ismael immediately describes the decay of the summer home for a few lines until a third-person narrator interrupts him: "y actuaba sobre el ánimo del hombre, recién aparecido en el lugar" (15). In other examples, this mysterious narrator repeatedly silences Ismael to ridicule him, saying that Ismael belongs to a certain "clase de personas" (17, 18, 38, and 34).

While it has been suggested that a female narrator might make *Walter* more feminist, the recurrent interruptions in Ismael's voice would not have functioned as feminist had he been female: readers might have said *Walter* was anti-feminist because the female narrator was interrupted so often. In *Walter's* narrative form, to simply endow a woman with a principle narrative voice would silence her. Previous novels by women authors had given women principle narrative voices; for example, *Nada*, *Entre visillos*, *Primera memoria*, and *La Plaza del Diamante*, but that remedy would not be effective in *Walter*. Taking the feminist position that women are more suppressed than men under Franco, Moix mimics and confirms the silencing of women's literary voices.

If Moix had chosen the first-person feminine narration, *Walter*, in addition to being a very different work, would have been read as a "women's novel," and thus denied any possibility of contributing to the evolution of the novel in general. By avoiding the female first-person narration that marked the feminine bildungsroman in Spain, Moix disrupts the bildungsroman pattern that Spanish women novelists excelled in. *Walter* distinguishes itself from the Spanish, feminine Bildungsroman novels, complicating the discussion about how or where it fits within other Spanish women's novels (See Nichols 28 and Levine, "Censored" 294, for contrasting perspectives). Nevertheless, in *Walter*, Moix deconstructs gender and satirizes patriarchal aesthetics. While employing feminist themes and aesthetics, Moix points towards a possible new direction for the novel.

Since this male-dominated discussion about the novel was rooted in patriarchal theory, the female novelist was discriminated against doubly: because women's voices as authors and characters were silenced and because the nature of the theoretical discussion was patriarchal and male-centered. Buckley says, "El marxismo fue el último sistema de pensamiento que afirmó la patriarquía, y en él apenas tenía cabida la voz de la mujer"

(129). Patriarchy prevented feminist novelists of the late Franco years from crafting *escritura feminina*. In addition to the intense patriarchy that was extended in Spain more than in the United States and the democratic countries of Europe, the novelists' opposition to Franco, in the form of dialectic realism, was also patriarchal. Men's discussion about the novel was primarily characterized by Marxist theory, which Buckley says, silenced women and endorsed male rule. Bush says Moix was aware that "women's lot has [...] been silence" (137). If a woman entered the debate, it would be expected she would play by men's rules, which dictated that women be silent. Thus, it appeared theoretically impossible for Moix to contribute to the future direction of the novel.

Walter is a meta-novel in subtly feminist form. Despite the stifling context for women authors, with *Walter* Moix subverted both Franco and the patriarchal dialogue of the anti-Franco male authors. She criticizes their debate. Ismael and Carlos represent different sides of the argument and both perspectives are irrelevant: Ismael is interested only in romantic poetry, while Carlos argues that the social-political referent is necessary. Ismael is a failed sentimental poet, while Carlos is an overly political one. Neither approach will transform the aesthetic of the novel. From Moix's social location outside of the patriarchal debate, she is well-situated to critique the social, political referent. By more fully succeeding than her male counterparts in writing a novel resistant to the referent that characterized dialectic realism, Moix established a dialogic space for her and the future of the novel.

The anti-referential aspect of *Walter* may be understood as feminist. The patriarchal dialogue was dominated by a discussion about the extent to which novels should make reference to the specific political/social realities of the Franco regime (Stovall 97-101). *Walter* offers very few geographic references. An important exception to *Walter*'s resistance to the referent is the allusion to Franco's sex life that was cut from the first

edition (137), but this reference is as much personal in nature as political. References to political realities, such as the plight of labor, are either fleeting or discussed in a generalized way. The most acclaimed Spanish male novelists sought to reject dialectic realism by eliminating the referent, but *Walter* is the best example of the anti-referential novel (100).

In *Walter*, disturbing female characters who do not adapt to the world are an indication that women's development into full, autonomous human beings is incompatible with patriarchy. Moix does not write stereotypically feminist characters: *Walter* has no heroine, no woman who beats the odds, but she does not present her male characters as heroic either. A feminist approach to Moix's ambiguous female characters must be embedded in the context of patriarchy, which drives women *and* men insane. Disturbing female characters constitute an implicit, if unintentional, feminist critique of society under Franco.

Moix asks how women and men adapt to a patriarchal society. Lea survives by isolation and transgression, and Maite by rigid conformity. Lea is elusive and unexplained — she maintains freedom even from the reader and she evades definitive critical analysis. Julia and María Antonia do not adapt, though they are not completely silenced: María Antonia functioned as an agent, while Julia remains physically alive until the novel's close, and even then she lives in the letters to Lea that serve as Ismael's reason for existence (283).

For those women who survive, contentment is thwarted and authenticity, such as Lea's, must be bought with self-exile. Male characters also struggle to adapt and survive. By initially addressing the packet of letters to the imaginary *Walter*, Julia reminds Ismael of the constructed nature of masculinity and language. Unable to trust that gender is real, rejecting conformity, and lacking a full range of accepted possibilities of manhood, Ismael is symbolically as dead as Julia physically is at the novel's close. Ricardo, denied marriage

with his true love, is unfulfilled. Rafael dies early from illness. Ernesto adapts by charade: trying to avoid scandal, he marries a woman, but lives across the street from his lover.

Walter is a successful experiment. Moix deconstructs gender and effectively resists the referent that characterized the patriarchal debate about the novel. She addresses the problem of silencing women not by giving them a voice, but by silencing the male narrator. She explores the disconcerting and limited options for her female characters —conformity, self-exile, activism, and suicide— and treats her female characters as actors, rather than passive victims. She allows all of her characters, male and female, to be unhappy and disillusioned under Franco, though not without the possibility of some authentic self-expression. Moix writes during the period of the *Gauche Devine* and the re-emerging feminist consciousness in Spain, factors that shape and explain the underlying feminism of *Walter*.

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