Disconnections and disappointments: daughters, mothers, and friends in the narrative of Carme Riera

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DISCONNECTIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS: DAUGHTERS, MOTHERS, AND FRIENDS IN THE NARRATIVE OF CARME RIERA

a dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT: DISCONNECTIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS: DAUGHTERS, MOTHERS, AND FRIENDS IN THE NARRATIVE OF CARME RIERA

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This study, which is dedicated to the analysis of three novels by Carme Riera: *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, *Cuestión de amor propio*, and *La mitad del alma*, investigates the disappointments and disconnections that the protagonists suffer in their relationships with other characters and the influence of culture on those relationships. This study demonstrates that the breakdown of the relationships between daughters and mothers and between friends is the result of the patriarchal society of Francoist Spain that is hostile towards women. The repression that Riera’s narrators, who are all women writers telling their stories in a personal, intimate first-person narration, suffer under such a society not only causes them emotional problems, such as depression, frustration, lack of self-esteem, feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, but also prevents them from having meaningful relationships with other women as friends and daughters.

I reference the work of several psychologists, sociologists, and literary critics, in particular Karen Horney, Jean Baker Miller, Judith Jordan, Janet Surrey, Adrienne Rich, Marianne Hirsch, Carol Gilligan, Carmen Martín Gaite,
and Gilda Lerner. This study relies on the work of historians such as David Herzberger and Jo Labanyi, who examine the role of myth and historiography of postwar Spain, and José Colmeiro, Ofelia Ferrán, Paloma Aguilar, and Ramón Buckley, who examine the “pact of forgetting” that characterizes the period of Spain’s transition to democracy. Among other studies which contribute to an understanding of the complexity of the narrative of Carme Riera is Annis Pratt’s study of mythological archetypes in women’s fiction and Linda Kauffman’s study of epistolary writing.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study will be dedicated to the analysis of three novels by Carme Riera: *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, *Cuestión de amor propio*, and *La mitad del alma*. With the notable exception of María Cami-Vela’s 2000 work, *La búsqueda de la identidad en la obra de Carme Riera*, no scholar has previously written a lengthy study focused solely on the narrative of Riera. My aim is to offer a new in-depth study of her work by investigating the female protagonists’ personal relationships with other characters, the influence of culture on those relationships, and the psychology of the disappointments and disconnections Riera’s characters suffer in those relationships. Through my analysis I particularly seek to establish a direct link between the Francoist culture of postwar Spain and the failed relationships of Riera’s protagonists. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the breakdown in the relationships between daughters and mothers and between friends in these three novels is the result of the patriarchal environment of Francoist Spain that is hostile towards women since it grants to the husband and father the authoritative control over his traditional family as a reflection of the power of the state over its subjects. The repression that Riera’s narrators suffer under such a society not only causes them emotional problems, such as depression, frustration, lack of self-esteem, feelings of unworthiness and of inferiority, but also prevents them from having
meaningful relationships with other women as friends and daughters. Consequently, the yearning for interpersonal connections is a central organizing principle in the lives of Riera’s protagonists, who also suffer from the unresponsiveness of important people in their lives.

Born in 1948 in Mallorca, Carme Riera is a writer and professor of Castilian literature at the Universitat Autónoma de Barcelona. For more than thirty years, Riera has been a prolific author of novels, short stories, and critical essays. She generally writes first in her Mallorquin dialect of Catalan and then rewrites, not translates, into Castilian Spanish. In the field of contemporary literature she is a learned, influential member of a generation of writers who reflect the culture of Spain through the portrayal of women mostly in relationship to other women, although, as we will also recognize in this study, relationships with men are equally important and central to Riera’s work. In “Ultima generación de narradoras,” the author links her writing with that of Montserrat Roig, Soledad Puertolas, Ana María Moix, Rosa Montero, and Esther Tusquets. Almost all of these writers were born during Spain’s postwar period and react in similar ways to their society. Riera states, “Sus libros, nuestros libros, son un poco un espejo en el que una mujer que lee quiere sentirse reflejada” (123). She also cites “nuestras izquierdistas inclinaciones” and their “lucha antifranquista, desencanto posterior” (120-1). Although she would prefer to be called a feminist citizen rather than a feminist writer, Riera acknowledges, “El feminismo, militante o no, subyace en nuestros textos […] y
The work of Riera and of these other women writers constitutes the authority which seeks to provide the strength and determination necessary to produce change in their society. They all reject the silencing of women as prescribed in *La perfecta casada* by Fray Luis de León, who wrote, “la naturaleza hizo a las mujeres para que, encerradas, guardasen la casa, así las obligó a que cerrasen la boca” (qtd. in “Femenino singular” 28). Just as Hélène Cixous urged women to use their femininity to write, Riera stresses the importance of the voice of the woman writer. She states,

reivindico para la mujer escritora, doblemente rebelde, la capacidad de transformar el lenguaje y la realidad, uniendo la voz de Casandra a la de madame Curie para devolver a las palabras de la tribu que nunca han sido: verbo encarnado en amor” (“Para continuar” 289-90).

Investigations of Riera’s work focus primarily on the literary techniques characteristic of Carme Riera’s narrative that are found in individual works, such as epistolary writing, narrative voice, and doubling, and they highlight the themes of transgression, seduction, eroticism, humor, and historiography. ¹

¹ During my study I will refer to these investigations, mainly focused on individually selected short stories and novels by Riera, which have been developed by notable scholars such as Akiko Tsuchiya, Kathleen Glenn, Kathleen McNerney, Geraldine Nichols, Elizabeth Ordóñez, Mirella Servodidio, Brad Epps, Kathryn Everly, Roberta Johnson, and María Vásquez. These studies have been published in literary journals and in two collections of essays about the narrative of Riera, namely, *Moveable Margins. The Narrative Art of Carme Riera* and *El espejo y la máscara: Veinticinco años de ficción narrativa en la obra de Carme Riera*. These books were published in 1999 and in 2000 and therefore do not include commentary about Riera’s 2004 novel *La mitad del alma*, an important recent work that I incorporate into this investigation.
None of these studies of Riera’s short stories and novels have approached the subject of relationships in a straightforward, thorough way. The findings of several scholars, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and literary critics provide essential insight into the relationship between culture and the psyche, as well as into the importance of relationships in the formation of the personality.\(^2\) Referencing their work I will question how and why Riera’s narrators in these three novels suffer from the disconnections and disappointments of failed relationships. I will argue that relationships in Riera’s works both reflect and reproduce the cultures in which they are embedded. My study will link the influence of culture on personality and demonstrate the subsequent significance of this link to interpersonal relationships in these novels.\(^3\)

I chose these three texts because the narrators have much in common. In each of these pieces, they are involved in different processes of self-investigation. During their searches for identity and self-affirmation, the

\(^2\) In particular, for example, Karen Horney, Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, Judith Jordan, Janet Surrey, Alexandra Kaplan, Adrienne Rich, Marianne Hirsch, and Gilda Lerner.

\(^3\) Scholars whose historical studies will serve to discuss the status of women during the relevant time period in Spain’s history include María Teresa Gallego Méndez, Carmen Martín Gaite, and especially David Herzberger and Jo Labanyi, who examine the role of myth and historiography in postwar Spain. Historians such as José Colmeiro, Ofelia Ferrán, Paloma Aguilar, and Ramón Buckley examine the “pact of forgetting” that characterized the period of Spain’s Transition to democracy, which, as we will see, has particular relevance to the role of the reader in La mitad del alma. Among other scholars whose studies will contribute here to an understanding of the complexity of the narrative of Carme Riera is Annis Pratt, who explores the use of mythological archetypes in women’s fiction. In addition, Linda Kauffman's study of epistolary writing will be helpful in exploring an important technique of Riera. Birute Cipliăuskaite, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Isolina Ballesteros, and Sidonie Smith, who describe the autobiographical nature of women’s writing, will be of help for our analysis of that aspect in Riera’s work.
relationships between these narrators and other women that play or have played an important role in their lives are problematic, resulting in disconnections and disappointments. Although Riera rightfully insists upon the clear distinction between author and narrator, she often attributes personal elements from her own childhood to the lives of her narrators, especially to Clara of *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* and to the narrator of *La mitad del alma*, female characters for whom Riera shows a deep affection. The childhood of these protagonists are reminiscent of Carme Riera’s description of herself as a young girl growing up in Mallorca:

> Cuando miro mucho atrás [...] y busco en el vasto y lejanísimo territorio de mi infancia [...] se me aparece la imagen de una niña de ojos tristes, que mira el mar lejano desde la ventana de una casa grande y vacía del barrio antiguo de Ciutat de Mallorca. (“Ambición” 24-5)

These protagonists are all women writers who are telling their stories in a personal, intimate first-person narration: Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* through stream of consciousness, Angela in *Cuestión de amor propio* in a personal letter, and the narrator of *La mitad del alma* in the novel she is writing. These narrators are also women who have suffered varying degrees of depression and have had difficulties in maintaining meaningful relationships. Clara has had a broken engagement and many disappointing friendships and affairs. Her mother, who has been forced to
accept the subservient position as a woman in a patriarchal society, is powerless to help her. Clara yearns for but does not find the support and understanding of a good friend. Angela, who has grown up in postwar Spain, has had a failed marriage and a humiliating love affair. As I will claim, she abuses the mutuality inherent in an ideal friendship by attempting to manipulate a friend for selfish reasons. The narrator of *La mitad del alma* suffered the loss of her mother at a young age and has had a failed marriage. She is searching for the truth about her mother, her biological father, and her own identity. These narrators did not live through the trauma of the Civil War in Spain but still suffer from its aftermath. The older Angela in the novel *Cuestión de amor propio*, most likely born at the end of the Civil War, is forty-eight years old. She is a neurotic, unfulfilled woman, because she has been unable to overcome the rigid standards of the repressive culture of postwar Spain in order to live an authentic life. Clara, born ten years later in the late 1940s, suffers from her upbringing by a mother who was weakened and victimized by a paternalistic society which devalued women. The younger narrator of *La mitad del alma* was born in 1950. Even though her mother was a strong, rebellious fighter against the forces of a hostile society, the narrator was damaged by an unfulfilling relationship with a mother who neglected her while having an illicit affair and transgressing the norms of her culture.

I will develop my thesis by devoting a chapter to each one of these novels. In the chapter concerning *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, I
will begin by examining Botticelli’s painting *Primavera*. Through a close analysis of the painting and its significance to the life of Clara, I will show that the painting provides Clara with a means to delve into her subconscious to revisit her childhood in search of her authentic self. As I mentioned before, Clara, who grew up in a male-dominated society, is the daughter of a victimized, weakened mother. This has important consequences for Clara’s development, as I will demonstrate, because since childhood she has craved but not received support. Consequently, rather than relying upon herself to decide whether to keep the unborn child she is carrying, she looks for friends to support her. In describing Clara’s relationships with men, I will provide a new interpretation of the male character Alberto as an example of the androgyne, who represents the complete person both as related by Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium* and as described by Hélène Cixous in *La Jeune Née*. I will return to the painting *Primavera* that has been vandalized by Domenico Guarini and describe how this painting and the nonpatriarchal, androgynous Alberto guide Clara to reject old myths and discourses and transform herself into a self-sufficient, independent woman who is able to create her own meaning for her life.

In the chapter about *Cuestión de amor propio*, I will interpret the contrast between Angela and Ingrid as a result of the very different cultures in which they grew up, and I will speculate about the ambiguous nature of their early relationship, a key aspect of the novel that has not received critical
attention until today. I will suggest that the letter that Angela is writing to
Ingrid to lament her humiliation after a failed relationship with Miguel is
more complex than it seems. My analysis of the single letter that constitutes
this brief novel is original, for other critics who have discussed the narrative
seduction of the letter in this novel have not taken into consideration the
classical underpinnings of epistolarity and the ensuing authority that they
supply to the writer. I will interpret the letter as an appropriation by the
author Carme Riera of the traditionally male techniques of classical rhetoric,
which form an inherent link to the epistolary form of writing, an essential
characteristic of Riera’s narrative. As we will see, Angela calls upon the
authority of ancient rhetorical methods to abuse the friendship of Ingrid in
order to deceitfully manipulate and seduce Ingrid into exacting revenge for
her own selfish reasons.

In the chapter on La mitad del alma, I will describe the nameless
narrator’s questioning of the truth of her identity, as she hopes that a reader
will recognize some of the facts of the story she is writing so that he or she can
help her clarify the truth of her past. As a result of her fight against the
repressive forces of her culture, Cecilia, the narrator’s mother, neglected and
therefore harmed her daughter. The protagonist will search for the truth
about her mother but will not succeed in finding it. Her failed quest, as I will
claim, constitutes a metaphor of the inability to discover the lost and
deliberately hidden truth about the Civil War of Spain. My study will lead me
to conclude that Riera believes that only through an examination of the truth about the past can relationships be healed in the present so that daughters, mothers, and friends can live an authentic, fulfilling life in a future new Spain.
Carmen Riera’s first novel, *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, was published in 1981. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the protagonist, Isabel Clara Alabern, consistently disappointed in her personal relationships, yearns for but fails to find a close friend who will provide her with the support which she needs until she meets Alberto and understands his message: “No tenemos más que una vida, Clara, y nadie tiene derecho a vivirla por ti, a tergiversártela. No tengas miedo” (169). As I will show, this is the key message of the novel. In discussing it, I will present Clara as a woman who is afraid to be in charge of her own life. This fear produces “la incomprensión” and “la incapacidad de entendernos,” which Riera depicts as characteristic of human relationships and which she emphasizes as “el tema que me preocupa más” (Aguado 35). I will demonstrate that Clara’s fear of responsibility is a direct result of her upbringing in the patriarchal culture of postwar Spain, which was a hostile environment for women because it devalued them and relegated them to a subservient position in that society. Clara’s relationship with her mother, who was victimized and weakened by that culture, also prevents Clara from developing a strong sense of self that would permit her to be herself and experience meaningful relationships. I will

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4 Riera wrote *Una primavera per a Domenico Guarini* in Catalan, which Luisa Cotoner translated to Castilian Spanish as *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. Riera dedicated this first novel, which received the Premio Prudenci Bertrana, to her husband Francisco Llinás and to her friend and translator Luisa Cotoner.
show how Riera uses the mythological figures of Sandro Botticelli’s Renaissance painting Primavera to express the misogynistic nature of traditional Western civilization and to demonstrate how this painting creates a stimulus for Clara to delve into her subconscious to examine her childhood, her relationship with a neglectful mother and with the men and women in her life, so that she can discover her authentic self. The painting Primavera represents the dead springs that serve as masks described in the novel’s first epigraph by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Clara will make a journey to the center of her self, as described in the second epigraph by Luis Racionero, “viajes del yo a través de sus inevitables máscaras [...] que transforman la personalidad,” voyages which are “viajes cíclicos cuyo trayecto es el eterno retorno hacia el centro de uno mismo” (5).

The novel begins in the “Primera Parte” with Clara’s train trip from Barcelona, Spain to Florence, Italy and ends in the “Epílogo” with her return trip from Florence back home to Barcelona. We can deduce that this is a cyclical trip both geographically and spiritually, for Clara in fact travels to the center of her “I,” stripping away the masks of traditional discourses that had prevented her from living an autonomous, fulfilled life. These train trips illustrate the metafictional technique of a framing story, since they serve as a beginning and ending frame enclosing Clara’s story of metamorphosis. The “Primera Parte” shows us a pregnant Clara unable to decide whether or not to keep the baby she is carrying, and the “Epílogo” presents the decision that the
transformed Clara has made, to keep and bring up the baby on her own.

According to Elizabeth Ordóñez, Clara’s development is a result of:

- her acceptance of pregnancy as a source of transformation,
- and her existential solitude as a source of independent meaning,

[which] confer upon her the potential to fulfill one of Riera’s own fondest proposals for women: to cease being spoken and to begin to speak. (“Beginning to Speak” 291-2)

Although I will agree with the idea that Clara’s transformation fulfills Riera’s suggestion about women’s need to speak for themselves, I will challenge the opinion that “existential solitude” is “a source of independent meaning.” I will argue that, for Riera, on the contrary, “independent meaning,” that is, meaning found in accordance with who we truly are and not in accordance with the false dictates of society about who we are, produces healthy relationships rather than “existential solitude.”

In the “Segunda Parte,” the writer Clara is at work as a journalist in Florence as she reports the story of Domenico Guarini, who has vandalized Botticelli’s painting *Primavera*. Here I will describe Riera’s complex juxtaposition of a variety of storytelling techniques and narrative voices as she alternates the professional, impersonal, journalistic style of Clara’s newspaper articles with intimate, stream of consciousness personal revelations. I will analyze Clara’s relationships with the men of her recent past: her broken engagement to Carlos, her brief affair with Alberto, and her ongoing
relationship with Enrique. I will also study the other women that Clara looks to for support: the feminist María, the ex-nun Asunción, and the young rebel Marta. I will show that the discourses of radical feminism, of religion, and of rebellious transgression do not serve to provide Clara with the intimacy, support, and understanding that she is seeking.

Other critics have discussed the painting Primavera, but in my view they have not paid sufficient attention to its importance for Clara’s subsequent metamorphosis.\(^5\) In contrast, I will expand significantly its importance when discussing both the painting’s meaning as a symbol of classical art and this symbol’s influence on the protagonist’s search. As we will see, for Clara, Botticelli’s painting serves not only as a tool to explore herself but also an instrument to deconstruct the traditional education that she has received and as a way to re-inscribe the feminine presence in artistic expressions, a presence lacking in the conventional reading of Primavera provided in Riera’s novel by the fictional art professor. In the “Tercera Parte,” the novel juxtaposes this art professor’s lecture about Primavera with Clara’s evocation of her childhood. In this context, the professor is a symbol. He represents the “authority,” the person who holds the “truth” about the painting. In my interpretation, the professor does not recognize the

\(^5\) Although Akiko Tsuchiya agrees that the painting is the “locus where various other texts [...] converge” (“Seduction” 94), she refers only to the rape-trauma archetype epitomized by Zephyr’s rape of Chloris, which she analyzes primarily as a mirror of Guarini’s obsession with Laura. Tsuchiya makes no mention of the significant figures of the Three Graces or Mercury. Elizabeth Ordóñez does mention these figures but only briefly and perfunctorily, in passing. María Antonia Cami-Vela includes a description of all the important mythological figures of the painting but explains only briefly the symbols that they represent for Clara.
patriarchal ideology hidden under his discourse; he does not present his lesson as just another possible interpretation of the painting. I will study the dialogue the novel creates between his and Clara’s reading of the art work and apply key psychoanalytic techniques, psychological theory, and cultural influences to analyze Clara’s use of the painting to both find her authentic self and understand the role relationships have played and continue to play in her evolution.

When discussing the “Tercera Parte,” I will also examine Clara’s stream of consciousness as a technique to present the interior dialogue that her contemplation of the painting has evoked. In this dialogue, Clara travels to the remote past of her childhood and witnesses her upbringing in a repressive society where boys are valued more than young girls. I will interpret the death of her cousin Jaime as the central event of Clara’s childhood. As we will see, Clara feels responsible for Jaime’s death and needs to liberate herself from the guilt and anguish that plague her in order to embrace the freedom to make and assume her own choices about her future life. As Riera herself explains, “la historia del cuadro es la que liga precisamente la anécdota de Guarini y la historia de Clara [...] enlaza las dos historias” (Nichols Escribir 199). Certainly, Botticelli’s painting is the key that ties the novel’s seemingly disparate strands together and brings Clara to the center of her “I.” The painting is the reason Clara is making the train trip to Florence and the reason she is writing the articles. The painting helps Clara examine traditional myths
and discourses and serves as a mirror to evoke memories of her childhood so that she is able to come to terms with the relationships and events of her past. It is a complex mirror that leaves her free to transform herself into an autonomous woman who can make her own choices about her life.

*Primavera*, a large painting in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy, was painted towards the end of the fifteenth century by Alessandro Filipepi, better known as Sandro Botticelli, and restored in 1982.6 Describing *Primavera* as an “allegory of human life,” Umberto Baldini characterizes the painting as “one of the greatest, most authentic revelations of the Renaissance and its new message,” that of Neoplatonic philosophy (15).7 Joanne Snow-Smith indicates that the underlying theme of the painting, love between friends, “was intended as a terrestrial manifestation of the love which the human soul bore toward God.”8 Snow-Smith further suggests that the love between friends “was intended as a terrestrial manifestation of the love which the

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6 Art historians differ on the exact date of the painting, but most believe it was painted between 1478 and 1481. Some art critics believe that the painting was commissioned by Lorenzo il Magnifico as a wedding gift to celebrate his younger cousin Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici’s marriage to Semiramide d’Appiano in May of 1482, although most scholars now believe that Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco himself commissioned the painting (Snow-Smith 69).

7 The priest and philosopher Marsilio Ficino was sponsored by the Medici family as the leader of Florence’s Platonic Academy, whose main purpose was to reconcile the spirit of antiquity with that of Christianity.

8 According to Joanne Snow-Smith, “The underlying theme of this painting [...] was provided to Botticelli by Ficino as a visionary image expressed in terms of ‘dramas’ by whose completing the Divine Truths veiled in the secret language of ancient initiatory revelations of the pre-Christian mysteries might be revealed” (22). Snow-Smith believes that “Ficino’s programme for *Primavera*, destined for Lorenzo, was an expression of the spiritual bond between the Florentine philosopher and the young man whom he had long esteemed as his friend” (70).
human soul bore toward God” (22). The idyllic setting of *Primavera* is a pastoral *locus amoenus* or “pleasant place” in which, as Baldini indicates, “Botticelli has captured actual botanical truth,” depicting Tuscan nature exactly, particularly that of the spring months in the area around Florence” (94). According to Snow-Smith, *Primavera*, resembling the religious works painted during the period, “appears as a tableau vision, as if the curtains had just been drawn aside revealing all of the actors in place ready to act out their specific roles” (247). As the fictional art professor in Carme Riera’s novel *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* explains,

Botticelli nos presenta la magia de un momento encantado [...] todo parece próximo, como si también nosotros estuviéramos envueltos en la brisa que va más allá del cuadro. Pero al mismo tiempo, todo parece también alejarse: se trata de una visión sublime siempre a punto de desaparecer. (183)

His words remind us of Romantic poets who saw the magic moment of platonic love as something sublime but evanescent, something that they had to constantly pursue because the “momento encantado” was a fleeting moment that seemed always located beyond their reach.

*Primavera* depicts a female figure to the right of center set slightly back from the others. The trees, some of which bend to form an arch above

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9 Ficino first referred to this “divine love” as “Platonic love” in a commentary of Plato’s *Symposium De Amore*, in which Phaedrus emphasizes that “Love is the oldest and most glorious of the gods, the great giver of all goodness and happiness to men” (qtd. in Snow-Smith 70).
her head, form natural columns behind her and permit us to see the blue sky. Above her and slightly to the left is a nude winged boy, blindfolded, who is aiming a flamed arrow at a female figure. To the right of this pair, from our perspective, is a trio of figures. A young woman fully clothed in a flower-printed dress, gently smiling while strewing roses from her lap, seems oblivious to the transparently draped girl with flowers coming out of her mouth who seems to be seeking support by grasping at this flower-bedecked figure. The terrified girl is trying to escape from the dark-blue male winged figure above who is breathing heavily onto her. To the left of the central figure is a contrasting trio: three smiling and graceful young women wearing diaphanous robes with hands intertwined who are dancing in a circular motion. To their left, indifferent to this trio, stands an isolated young man with winged sandals, who is looking up, one arm extended, holding a wand with which he seems to be dispersing the clouds above. In an 1893 study, Professor Aby Warburg identified the figures on the right as the West Wind Zephyr, the nymph Chloris who had been raped by Zephyr, and Flora, the goddess of flowers into whom Chloris was transformed. The central figure was Venus or “Love,” and above her was her son, the winged Eros. Warburg identified the dancers on the left as the Three Graces and the young man frightening away the clouds as Hermes, or the Roman Mercury (Snow-Smith 63). This is also how Clara interprets the young man, as we see in the “Tercera Parte” of *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*.

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5 Professor Aby Warburg saw analogies between *Primavera* and *De Rerum Natura* by
Here, Clara is seated on a bench in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence while the art professor lectures and interprets Botticelli’s *Primavera*. Students are crowded closely together in front of the painting as Clara is waiting patiently for the chance to contemplate the painting without obstacles. As the professor is talking, Clara is sometimes listening intently and sometimes lost in thought remembering scenes from her childhood. As fragments of the lecture remind Clara of events from her childhood, Riera juxtaposes the art professor’s lecture with Clara’s stream of consciousness evocation of her past that the Mercury of the painting has helped her remember by dispersing the clouds above. As Clara hears the professor describe Mercury’s ability “de apartar la neblina que ofusca las facultades interiores” (177), she imagines “una luz ardiente” (177) and realizes that “precisamente allí, en la antigua heredad, puedo reencontrar un sentido a mi existencia, escamoteada durante muchos años, una clave para las culpas, penosamente arrastradas” (178). This is when we understand that Botticelli’s *Primavera* serves as a mirror through which Clara is able to reconstruct her identity, uniting the fragments of her self. Clara speaks to herself in an interior dialogue: “Tiembla tu propia imagen – todas las versiones de ti misma, todas las posibilidades de tu ser, todas las máscaras desaparecen –, se reconstruye en el calidoscopio del fondo de este espejo llamado *La Primavera*” (188). Clara finds the key to her identity in her childhood, to which Mercury leads her by clearing away the

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Lucretius, *Fasti* by Ovid, and works of the Florentine poet Poliziano, who studied the works of Ovid, and assessed the painting as “The Realm of Venus.”
clouds of guilt and fear that had previously hidden the meaning of the events of her life. Clara says,

Hermes, con el caduceo, señala un camino que conduce a las arboledas de tu infancia, impregnadas por la neblina suave que se cuela entre las ramas, que hay que dispersar para poder ver el estanque, para encontrar en sus aguas, olvidado el miedo, abolida la culpa, aquellos ojos azules que perdiste sin renunciar [...] Puede que ese sea un buen punto de partida para descifrar el misterio. (185)

Clara will use what she has learned from the ancient mythology behind Botticelli’s Primavera to plunge inward, delving back into her childhood so that she can decipher the messages of the past in order to clarify the present. Riera’s use of mythology reminds us of Carl Jung’s study of myths. He considered them to be “messages from the unconscious,’ pointing man in the direction of wholeness” (15), as Jo Labanyi has convincingly explained. Jung privileged the quest myth in which man acknowledges the repressed side of the self, “the shadow,” in order to be able to heal inner divisions of the self. According to Labanyi, the American myth critic Joseph Campbell considers Jung’s quest myth as “a universal structure of the human mind. Like Jung, Campbell interprets the hero’s descent into the underworld as a return to the womb of the unconscious in search of wholeness” (19). As Clara states, “es necesario zambullirse en uno mismo para buscar la respuesta” (189). Riera has also written, “Rememoramos la infancia que siempre es una vuelta hacia
uno mismo, nos observamos ante el espejo” (“Femenino” 31). Luis Racionero referred to this return to self in the epigraph to the novel as “el eterno retorno hacia el centro de uno mismo” (5). This is in fact an inverted repetition of what, according to the fictional professor, the painting does, but instead of searching for the self, it looks for God and his mystical “luz ardiente.” As Snow-Smith confirms, there are four different levels of meanings of *Primavera* – the literal, the moral, and the anagogical – all of which represent “the journey of the soul to God” (35).6

The art professor in Riera’s novel explains Botticelli’s *Primavera* with a conventional interpretation. This art professor follows the patriarchal tradition when he describes love as platonic in the painting. Since he does not deconstruct platonic love as Riera (and other critics) does, he perpetuates the violence and domination implied in the traditional idea of the love depicted in *Primavera*. He illustrates how, “La primavera estalla bajo la mirada complacida de Venus, diosa del amor” (194). The solitary Venus, to whom the month of April is traditionally dedicated, divides the two halves of the painting, turning away from the violent scene to our right and gesturing approval with upraised hand to the figures on our left. Although most art critics do identify this figure as Venus, according to Snow-Smith’s moral interpretation of the painting in which the scene on our right represents the rape of Persephone/Proserpine, Snow-Smith suggests that this female figure,

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6 Baldini stresses that *Primavera* is entirely allegorical and should be interpreted as “a symbolic reference to the Platonic cycle: the passage from the active to the elevated, more contemplative life, from the temporal to an eternal plane” (90).
“who is embowered within a leafy niche of myrtle with its underworld connotations, is, on this level, intended to represent Demeter/Ceres” (162).7 The art professor implies that this figure is pregnant, suggesting that “Venus aparece como diosa de fecundidad. Su figura [...] resulta sospechosa: entre los pliegues del vestido se adivina un vientre voluminoso” (141). This suggested pregnancy connotes this female figure as a mother figure, which would not be inconsistent with either the interpretation of Venus as the mother of Eros, the Roman Cupid, who appears above her prepared to discharge an arrow causing incurable love, or Demeter as the devoted mother of Persephone as well as a mother-goddess, the figure of the bountiful earth mother. We can also compare this idealized mother figure of a pregnant Venus with that of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.8 In other words, by interpreting the figure as a pregnant, smiling Venus, the art professor sees Venus in her traditional role of a “complacida,” the “ideal woman” who seems happy to represent the perfect lover (entirely devoted to her male partner) and the perfect mother (completely devoted to her offspring), following the convention set forth by Francoist ideology as well.

7 This moral interpretation is consistent with Levi D’Ancona’s explanation that, “It is said that the pomegranate loved the myrtle so much that the two plants could not live apart” (90).

8 Paul Barolsky suggests that in Primavera this figure “has the aura of the Virgin to whom Dante’s Beatrice and Petrarch’s Laura are similarly linked” (28). Levi D’Ancona notices in the painting the figure’s “dignity and gentleness,” characteristics of the Virgin Mary (107). Levi D’Ancona also points out similar symbolic attributes of each persona, the most common being the star, the rose, the garden, the mirror, the shell, and the dove (110). Snow-Smith also proposes in her anagogical interpretation that Botticelli is “depicting Venus as the Virgin Mary, an association made by many scholars, in her role as Divine Intercessor and Mediatrix” (199).
This gentle, smiling woman, like the idealized woman of the Renaissance poets, represents an image designed to please a man with her ability to invoke love and admiration. As the professor explains, “Ella engendra el amor humano que mora en el alma, el amor que capacita a nuestra imaginación y a nuestros sentidos para percibir la belleza” (144). We can compare this maternal figure to the idealized images of women propounded by the Francoist regime, such as the models set forth of the Isabel la Católica, Santa Teresa, and especially the Virgin Mary. We recognize this image in the description by Aurora Morcillo Gómez of the ultimate role model that Francoist ideology prescribed for women: “the Virgin Mary, in whom both virginity and motherhood coincided [...] redemption was possible only through suffering: suffering for God, the fatherland, their husbands, and their children” (57).

In the novel, Clara creates an interior dialogue with herself, the “yo” speaking to the “tú,” the detached, fragmented self, thus dividing the “I” and creating a mirror with the self being both subject and object. The stream of consciousness evocation of her childhood allows Clara to recover what had been suppressed, mirroring the psychoanalytic process with the final goal of uniting the fragmented self. From this perspective, Una primavera para Domenico Guarini follows the feminine novel of the postwar in Spain described by Margaret Jones, who writes, “La novela se interioriza y el enfoque se reduce al tamaño del individuo: problemas particulares suplantan
un antiguo interés social.” Jones describes the postwar feminine novel as, “estudio lento y detenido de la personalidad, proceder que remeda el psicoanálisis clínico. La memoria, o narrativa en primera persona, afirma esta idea, y la confesión se trueca en autoanálisis” (“Del compromiso” 132).

We can also categorize *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* as a feminine autobiographical novel as described by Isolina Ballesteros, who points out that in these novels, feminine space is constructed through autobiographical discourse through which a fictitious character recounts his or her life or a concrete period of this life with a precise purpose. The novel is the autobiographical text of the narrating protagonist who, “dueña del espacio textual, va construyendo página a página su propia realidad.” This autobiography becomes a way to understand her life and take control over her own identity, “un viaje de descubrimiento y un medio de reconciliación” (Ballesteros 24-5).

As Clara evokes her childhood, we the reader learn that she has no sisters, no female cousins and no female friends with whom she can identify. As she remembers her early childhood, she rarely recalls her emotionally absent mother. Rather, Clara remembers her aunt as the authority figure whose patriarchal conditioning has caused her to embrace an oppressive system and thus to train her niece Clara to comply with the requirements of this patriarchal society. Frances O’Connor asserts that patriarchy functions only with the cooperation of women who have been “socialized to believe that
they are good by accepting the dominant male view of how woman ought to act” (6). Clara’s brothers Alfonso and Luis and her male cousins who come to visit make fun of her, mock her name by calling her “yema” and tease and humiliate her. We can deduce that she reaches the turning point described by Carol Gilligan when the adolescent girl “comes up against the wall of Western culture” (102). As members of the dominant group in a male-centered society, her young male relatives act destructively towards Clara, who has become a member of the society’s subordinate group. Clara’s activities are severely restricted because she is female. One example that clearly confirms this idea occurs when one day, while she is playing on the swings, Clara tries to swing up high, lifting her legs so that she can pierce the clouds, just as Mercury is doing with his caduceus in the painting *Primavera*. Horrified at Clara’s immodesty, her aunt forbids her to swing. Tía Carmen warns, “Desde aquí se te ve todo. Baja inmediatamente [...] ¡No volverás a los columpios, Isabel Clara! [...] tampoco te puedes subir en el tobogán” (131). These words recall *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, in which Carmen Martín Gaité explains the “cultivo de la apariencia decente” (125) and the “represión de la sexualidad femenina” (143). Martín Gaité describes the harsh treatment that young girls received: “A las niñas se les reñía incalculablemente más que a sus hermanos si no dejaban su ropa bien doblada o tenían el cuarto revuelto” (120).
In his article “Sex,” Alfred Adler blames a male-centered patriarchal society for the “sharp division and pigeonholing of concepts” whereby “‘masculine’ signifies worthwhile, powerful, victorious, capable, whereas ‘feminine’ becomes identical with obedient, servile, subordinate” (35). Adler explains, “The belief in her inferiority is forced upon a girl by her environment” (42). Clara Thompson, in her article “Cultural Pressures in the Psychology of Women,” describes a patient of hers who has the same type of limitations placed on her as the ones imposed upon Clara. Thompson illustrates, “At the age of twelve suddenly a great change was introduced into the girl’s life. She was told that now since she was about to become a woman she could no longer go away with her brother on overnight trips. This was only one evidence, but one very important to her, of the beginning of the limitation of her activities” (55). In the same manner, Clara becomes aware at an early age of the secondary role that her society will continue to impose upon her because she is female. She learns that her brothers and male cousins can act freely and that she cannot. In her article entitled “Penis Envy,” Thompson explains that, “In a patriarchal culture the restricted opportunities afforded woman, the limitations placed on her development and independence give a real basis for envy of the male.” Thompson explains Sigmund Freud’s term “penis envy” as a woman’s envy not of the actual physical attribute of the male but rather her envy of the power that the penis represents, which is his greater freedom and opportunities, an envy which is
like that of any underprivileged and subordinate group towards the group in power” (46).

This envy can also be seen in Riera’s novel. As a young girl, Clara encounters one day in the park a paralyzed girl who mirrors her own feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Clara describes the girl’s “piernecitas delgadas, prisioneras en hierros ortopédicos.” This crippled girl “No juega nunca. Mira como juegan los demás.” Feeling helpless and powerless to change her situation, the girl has become bitter towards other children, staring at Clara “con rabia” and shouting, “¡Quiero que todos los niños lleven muletas!” Clara recalls the effect that this girl’s words had on her. She remembers, “Me echo a llorar como una Magdalena. Mucho después sigo llorando a pesar del helado que chupo entre lágrimas” (131). That night, identifying with the helplessness of the paralyzed girl, Clara dreams that she and all the children of the world are crippled, sitting passively and staring at empty swings and toboggans which had been previously forbidden for Clara because of restrictions placed upon adolescent girls in an effort to maintain their modesty and proper decorum. Both the paralyzed girl and Clara feel the same frightening sense of isolation, which is one of the most destructive feelings that a person can experience. But perhaps even worse is the feeling of envy this sense arouses, because this resentment can make one desire a generalized incapacitation instead of a health environment, as happens with
the paralyzed girl, and as we will see, also happens later with the resented friends of Clara’s mother.

In the “Tercera Parte” through her stream of conscious narration, Clara also recounts her attack by an unknown man in a movie theater. As we can see, the adolescent Clara becomes a victim of the archetypical trauma of rape, consisting in the male pursuit of an unwilling female, as in Botticelli’s painting *Primavera*, which depicts the rape of Chloris by Zephyr and suggests the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo, the abduction of Persephone by Hades, and the rape of Oreithyia by Boreas. The three figures on the right of the painting demonstrate the “rape-trauma archetype” which Annis Pratt describes as “the plot line in which a rejected male continues to pursue an unwilling woman,” which Pratt emphasizes as the most frequent plot structure in women’s fiction (*Archetypal Patterns* 25). The luxurious garden of *Primavera* evokes the mythological Garden of the Hesperides where the god of the west wind Zephyr raped the nymph Chloris. Ovid’s *Fasti* tells Chloris’s story: “‘Twas spring, and I was roaming; Zephyr caught sight of me; I retired; he pursued and I fled; but he was the stronger, and Boreas had given his brother full right of rape” (qtd. in Snow-Smith 62). The myth of Chloris is an allegory of seasonal change, of the transformation from winter to spring. While the springtime wind is usually gentle and calm, at times in the month of March the cold violent winds of winter persist. In the same way, the normally calm west wind Zephyr, upon sight of the nymph Chloris, was seized by an uncontrolled
passion like that of his brother, the cold, violent north wind Boreas who had also raped his own wife Oreithyia.

The painting depicts a fearful Chloris looking back towards the winged Zephyr who is grabbing her from above and breathing onto her as flowers flow from her mouth. These flowers are signs of the metamorphosis that Chloris undergoes as she is transformed into the goddess of flowers Flora, the alter ego of Chloris. As Chloris explains in Fasti, “I who now am called Flora was formerly Chloris.” The remorseful Zephyr, to make amends for his violence, marries his victim Chloris, making her “queen of flowers.” The now smiling and beautiful Flora says, “I enjoy perpetual spring [...] I have a fruitful garden fanned by the breeze” (qtd. in Snow-Smith 62).9 However, in spite of the beautiful springtime flowers that result, in Primavera Zephyr remains a malevolent perpetrator of violence towards an unwilling, frightened and powerless young female victim. In Primavera, the pursuing male exerts his power over a helpless woman in a Renaissance interpretation of repeated acts of classical mythology. As Akiko Tsuchiya states, “The exaltation and deification of the male perpetrator of violence [...] reveal the misogynistic underpinnings of Renaissance humanism” ("Seduction" 90-1).

Immediately after the professor tells the art students, “Observad cómo Céfiro entra por nuestra derecha persiguiendo a la ninfa Chloris,” Clara

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9 Baldini describes the dramatic effects of the 1982 restoration of Primavera on the figure Zephyr, revealing that Zephyr “breathes on Chloris” and that he “appears no longer as a ghostly shadow clutching at the nymph but rather as the deity of spring engaged in the act of generating life” (51). Snow-Smith explains that, “in classical literature the breath of a deity could [...] afford not only a harmful but also a beneficient result” (79).
reflects the same emotions that Chloris must have felt, emotions that are not mentioned by the art professor, who silences these feelings: “No sé por qué tengo miedo, mucho miedo. Me alejo deprisa, el aire me ahueca la falda, me enreda los cabellos... Me persigue. Anda más rápido que yo” (132). In the movie theater Clara is terrified, “horrorizada,” remembering, “Siento la presión de unos dedos sobre el muslo [...] intenta meterme los dedos entre los muslos por debajo de las bragas” (133). As the man tries to seduce her by offering her a doll and ice cream, Clara is not deceived but rather terrified. She tries to seek the protection of her brother Alonso, but Alonso ignores her. The frightened Clara tries to escape to the women’s bathroom, but her attacker aggressively pushes the door trying to follow her in.

Fortunately Clara escapes the fate of Chloris when a woman in the bathroom forces the man to leave. Clara’s aunt, unaware of Clara’s distress, unwilling to inquire about the reason for this distress and concerned only for Clara’s brothers, asks, “—Isabel Clara, ¿qué estás haciendo aquí tanto rato? Ven conmigo inmediatamente [...] Sal, date prisa, tus hermanos se han quedado solos” (134). The very society that limits the adolescent girl’s activities for the purposes of modesty and decorum does nothing to prevent an attack by a male pursuer of an unwilling, innocent female. As no one helps Chloris, neither her
privileged male siblings nor her aunt, the representative authority figure, come to Clara’s aid.

Also juxtaposed with the professor’s description of the rape of Chloris, Clara remembers herself as a young girl in her bedroom at night. Like Chloris who is attacked by Zephyr, Clara feels pursued by the hostile wind, which “continúa entrando y saliendo.” The wind, which frightens her with its “máscara deform de una sonrisa sin dientes,” enters through her window and approaches her bed. Clara remembers her fear: “Me estremezco, me rechinan los dientes, estoy temblando de pies a cabeza.” Like Zephyr who rapes Chloris, Clara’s pursuer is relentless. Clara describes, “Se pone a bailar a mi alrededor...Respiro su pestilente aliento. Se para a encender una tea. Me palpa buscando un lugar donde clavarla, escoge justo el lugar del pecado.” As a double of both Chloris and of the paralyzed girl in the park, Clara becomes powerless. As Clara describes: “No puedo gritar, no puedo moverme. Tengo las piernas paralizadas” (135).

We can deduce that the pursuing wind also represents for Clara the awakening of her sexual stirrings and physical desire, which connote shame and evil to her. She fears eternal damnation but still cannot resist, in spite of the “riesgo de morir en pecado mortal como castigo” (136). Her desire is such that she can neither stop it nor hide it. Even her family becomes aware of her masturbations and sends her to church to confess her sins. When Clara is in the confessional, we read only the words of the priest, not those of Clara.
This obviously suggests that she has been silenced. The priest questions her:
“– Dime cuándo lo haces. – ¿Por las noches? – ¿En la cama?” (137). The priest scolds her and categorizes her as an example of “las niñas impuras” (137). Here Riera seems to allude to Hélène Cixous, who describes the sexual feelings of what others call “impure children,” writing,

The little girls and their ‘ill-mannered’ bodies immured,
well-preserved, intact unto themselves [...] Frigified. But are
they ever seething underneath! What an effort it takes – there’s no
end to it – for the sex cops to bar their threatening return. (“Laugh” 877)

Because of her transgression, Clara loses any remaining privacy and freedom that she might have had. This is how she explains her state of being under constant vigilance: “A mí me persiguen, me espían, me acosan. No me dejan sola ni un segundo. No me puedo encerrar en el baño, tengo que dejar siempre la puerta abierta” (137). Clara is also terrified by the warnings that, if she sins again, she will die and go to hell where demons will devour her for eternity, where “Cada mordisco te quemará como un ascua [...] Te llenarás de heridas purulentas, como una leprosa y vomitarás sapos y culebras mezclados con rebuznos” (138). Clara thus reproduces what Annis Pratt calls, as the title of her book indicates, *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction*. In these works, Pratt mentions the limitations placed upon adolescent women, stating, “Young women growing up are shown becoming aware, simultaneously, of
their erotic desires and the price society exacts for erotic fulfillment” (79). Clara not only suffers from severe limitations on her activities, but she also suffers from confinement, lack of freedom, punishment in this life, and threats of punishment in the afterlife.

In the painting *Primavera*, the two laurel trees in the path of Zephyr, call to mind the myth of Apollo and Daphne, which Annis Pratt explains as the origin of the rape-trauma archetype.¹⁰ In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Daphne, to protect her body and escape from the pursuit of Apollo, with the help of her father transforms herself into the laurel tree, “leaving Apollo with an armful of bark” (Levi D’Ancona 8). Unlike Chloris, Daphne remains “forever unravished” (4), for nature has given her solace and protection. In her interview with Geraldine Nichols, Riera discusses the myth of Daphne, suggesting that, “Dafne convertida en laurel nos parece realmente una mengua, porque es mejor ser una persona que ser un árbol; pero para que Apolo no la coja, su padre la convierte en laurel, y en este sentido es positivo” (222).¹¹ In a discussion of the moral level of meaning of *Primavera*, Snow-Smith identifies the figures we have interpreted as Zephyr, Chloris, and Flora as also pictorializing the myth of the rape of Persephone, the Roman

¹⁰ Mirella Levi D’Ancona points out the two laurel trees in the path of Zephyr, one larger than the other, suggesting the laurel as an emblem of both Lorenzo il Magnifico and his younger cousin Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco.

¹¹ Mary Barnard also emphasizes the beneficent results of Daphne’s metamorphosis: “Daphne’s body is destroyed through transformation but in the process it gives birth to another living form, the laurel” (10). Barnard also illustrates how the Renaissance poet Francesco Petrarch adapts the myth of Apollo and Daphne, indicating that in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* “the modest Daphne becomes a figura of the elusive, disdainful Laura, and Apollo is a projection of the Petrarchan poet-lover” (6-7).
Proserpine, by the king of the underworld Hades, the Roman Pluto.

Persephone’s mother Demeter, the Roman Ceres, goddess of the harvest, threatened vengeance by refusing to let the earth bear fruit until Persephone was returned to her. Zeus sent his messenger Hermes to the underworld to plead for Persephone’s return, and Hades was forced to agree. Before she left his realm, Hades persuaded Persephone to eat pomegranate seeds, a symbol of his dominance over her, to ensure that she would return to him. Thus when Persephone returns for part of the year to the underworld, the earth is hard, cold, and barren. When Persephone is on earth with her mother, springtime and summer become months of rejoicing as the earth bears plentiful fruit and flowers. The flowered figure of Primavera becomes a representation of the joyful transformation from winter to spring, as evidenced by Levi D’Ancona’s identification of the flower of the pomegranate on the flowered wreath around her neck (94).12

Frightened for the future of her soul, ashamed of her own body, misunderstood by members of her family, and feeling isolated in a male-dominated society, the young Clara has no female friends or companions. She clings to her only ally, her cousin Jaime, who comes to visit during the summertime. The nonpatriarchal Jaime is unlike her brothers and her other

12 Whether these figures represent Apollo’s attempted rape of Daphne, Zephyr’s rape of Chloris, Hades’ rape of Persephone or Boreas’s rape of Oreithyia, Snow-Smith assesses these figures as images of abduction by the Devil of one of the figures of the Damned in her analysis of the anagogical, or mystical, level of meaning of Primavera. Snow-Smith stresses that the “Violation of a woman was a common Biblical simile for God’s judgment on the evil” and that the Roman goddess Flora, characterized as a harlot in fifteenth-century Florence, smiling calmly and pleasantly in the painting, is “oblivious to the ultimate fate that awaits her” (221-23).
cousins. Clara values his friendship and expresses her affection to Jaime:
“Me gustaría ser mayor muy deprisa para casarme contigo” (176). Clara remembers Jaime eating pomegranate seeds towards the end of the summer. She recalls, “Los granos rojos, sangrientos, se asoman quebrando la cáscara amarillenta en la piel. Se llena la boca de pepitas y pulpas [...] Un grano demasiado áspero le hace escupir” (179). Since this is a clear allusion to the painting *Primavera* and the myth of Persephone, we feel a sense of dread, for we know that Persephone was forbidden to remain permanently in the land of the living because of having eaten pomegranate seeds while in Hades.

In the painting, the isolated, solitary figure to the extreme left of the painting facing away from the other personages represents Hermes, or the Roman Mercury. An ambiguous, much-loved god with many functions, Mercury holds the secret of metamorphosis. Not only can he convert into gold anything he touches with his caduceus, but he also fulfills important functions as the messenger of the gods and the solemn guide of dead souls to the underworld.13 According to tradition, Mercury gently placed his wand on the eyes of those called to the underworld and then carried the caduceus as a staff in conducting the dead. As Zephyr appears to be entering from the right into the springtime scene of *Primavera*, it appears that Mercury on the left is

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13 In his function as messenger of the gods and of his father Zeus, Mercury represents for Levi D’Ancona the “pagan counterpart to Christ’s role as divine mediator for, and guide of, mankind” (120).
about to leave. As the son of Maia and the representative of the month of May, the border between springtime and summer, Mercury seems to be breaking through the clouds to allow the bright summer sun to shine through. To disperse the clouds, Mercury uses a gift from Apollo, his caduceus, a wand entwined with serpents and surmounted by wings, which has become a symbol of the medical profession. We are reminded of the painting when, juxtaposed immediately before the narration of the death of Jaime, we read the art professor’s comments on the significance of one of Mercury’s important roles. The professor explains,

“Para algunos, Mercurio, transformado en divinidad órfica, guía a las almas hacia ultratumba al mismo tiempo que las abre al amor, pasión, contemplación, éxtasis, al horizonte infinito del más allá, de la inefable y ultrarracional transcendencia. (180)

The professor again interprets Mercury in platonic terms as messenger of God’s revelation and epiphany. But as we will now discuss, for Clara, her recollection of Jaime serves as the Mercury who disperses the clouds of the past and allows the bright sun to shine so that Clara will be able to view her own childhood with clarity. Unlike the sea around Mallorca, always a symbol of life for Riera, the pond on the family’s property in Mallorca is a stagnant body of water symbolizing death. The orange trees that Clara sees reflected in the water also emphasize for us of the importance of the painting, for we
remember the orange trees in Botticelli’s *Primavera*. Clara describes a bird which drowned in the pond, which foreshadows the event in which a helpless Jaime will end in tragic death. She recalls, “Un gorrión desorientado bate las alas en el limo forcejeando por levantar el vuelo pero no puede y se ahoga. El agua apenas se mueve, un último círculo se aleja ensanchándose alrededor del cadáver” (174). Before the event, “la madona,” a caretaker, tells Clara that her eyes are turning blue, which is a physical characteristic of the idealized beauty of the fair, blond, blue-eyed Renaissance woman. Clara looks in the mirror hoping to capture that beauty, but she sees that her eyes are still brown and ordinary.

We can see that Riera adapts the myth of Narcissus to what happens to Clara and Jaime, for “la madona” brings Clara to the pond to see the reflection of her blue eyes in the water. In the myth related by Ovid in the third book of *Metamorphoses*, the youth Narcissus contemplates his image in a pool and is “seized by the vision of his reflected form. He is astonished by himself, and hangs there motionless,” mesmerized by his image. Devastated by his failure to capture his image in the pool, the young Narcissus “laid down his weary head in the green grass, death closing those eyes that had marveled at their lord’s beauty” (11-12). Clara wants to believe that her eyes are blue and that she is really beautiful, that she conforms to the ideals of her patriarchal society which highly valued female beauty. Just as Narcissus calls the pool “deceptive,” for Ovid describes, “What he has seen he does not understand”
(10), Clara isn’t sure whether her eyes are, in fact, blue in the reflection of the water. After all, the pond is stagnant with dark, murky water without the clarity of the blue sea. In a narcissistic way, Clara wants Jaime to confirm her beauty upon which she could build her self-esteem in traditional terms and invites him to the pond, saying, “Quiero que veas una cosa, pero no se lo digas a nadie […] Quiero que mires, en el agua del estanque, si los ojos se me ponen azules” (180). Jaime accepts Clara’s invitation and goes with her to the pond. When leaning over the water, reminiscent of the death of the young Narcissus, Jaime loses his balance and falls into the pond. Clara watches in horror as “su cabeza choca contra la pared, como se hunde entre las hierbas viscosas” (181). She looks for him in the water, but he doesn’t come up. Clara runs to awaken the sleeping adults, exclaiming, “¡Jaime se ha caído, venid!” Tomeu, “el gañán,” a household employee, runs to the pond, but he needs a knife to release Jaime’s foot which was stuck in the growth at the bottom of the pond. Tomeu takes him out of the pond and brings him to his room. Clara is crying and praying for Jaime to live, but eventually they bring Jaime’s lifeless body downstairs covered with a sheet. Clara’s family blames her, asking, “Clara, ¿qué ha pasado? ¿Os estabais peleando? ¿Le has pegado un empujón? […] Cuéntamelo todo” (181). Clara feels plagued by guilt because Jaime never would have fallen into the pond if she had not urged him to contemplate the beauty of her blue eyes. Just as the nymph Echo was silenced by Juno in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for “Echo only repeats the last of what was spoken
and returns the words she hears” (9), Clara cannot speak, for she has been traumatized and silenced by Jaime’s death. Clara remembers, “Ya no lloro, no puedo llorar. No me pueden sacar ni una palabra” (182). After the death of Jaime, plagued with guilt and fearing eternal damnation for her role in his death, Clara feels alone in the world. She remembers, “Yo añoraba a Jaime […] Mis hermanos me mortificaban […] Aquellos meses veíamos poco a papá” (147).

The tragedy that happens to Jaime at the end of an otherwise happy summer, when Jaime and Clara played often together, is the one decisive moment that defines Clara’s subsequent life, because since then she has blamed herself for his death by accepting the accusations of the adults who questioned her after the accident. Birutė Cipliauskaitė, in her study of the narrative of contemporary women writers, describes moments like this in the lives of female protagonists as “Un solo momento de la vida en el pasado que ha tenido influencia decisiva en la evolución de la protagonista, que es presentado como base para una epifanía” (35). Cipliauskaitė explains the significance of moments from childhood, stating, “Para saber quién soy debo saber quién he sido y cómo he llegado al estado actual” (34). Like other protagonists described by Cipliauskaitė, it is only as an adult that Clara remembers this event in detail so that she can free herself from its effects. It is only later that her memories of Jaime and the events leading to his death will help Clara delve into her subconscious so that she can confront and
overcome her childhood fears and guilt. Clara mentally asks Jaime, “¿Qué amarga culpa me persigue desde tu muerte? ¿Qué lastre de angustia me dejaste...?” She has been haunted by memories of Jaime, who has been calling to her. She asks Jaime, “¿Y por qué me llamas, ahora, tan fuerte?...No me ahogues con ese perfume de ternera antigua. Al fin y al cabo, tú eres un niño y yo me he hecho mayor. Ya no podemos hacernos compañía” (182). Jaime serves as Clara’s Mercury who disperses the clouds of the past and allows the bright sun to shine so that Clara will be able to view her own childhood with clarity. The idealized blue eyes that Clara hopes for, rather than representative of the idealized neoplatonic beauty, now become symbolic of the clarity of the cleared sky after Mercury parts the clouds that had obscured the blueness of the sky. Clara has understood that Jaime’s death was an accident, not her fault, that she did not push him, as her family suggested. She realizes that the guilt and self-blame she had been feeling for years were unfounded and unnecessary, because she did not intentionally cause Jaime’s death.

Soon after the death of Jaime, the young Clara desperately seeks the intimate companionship of a female friend with whom she can share mutual support and understanding to cope with the devalued role of a young girl in a male-dominated culture. As Carol Gilligan writes in “Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls and Women,” for adolescent girls, “the overwhelming desire for human connection – to bring one’s own inner world
of thoughts and feelings into relationship with the thoughts and feelings of others – feels very pressing to girls who fight for authentic relationships and who resist being shut up, put down, turned away, ignored” (118). In order to fill the void that the lack of Jaime’s supportive relationship leaves, Clara develops a childhood crush on her teacher, the nun Asunción. Because Clara describes the romantic feelings of a student for her teacher, we are reminded of the taboo sexual relationship between the teacher María and her student Marina that Riera described in her early short story “Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar” when we read the adolescent Clara’s words to Asunción, “mis ganas de acercarme a ti en la inconsciencia aún de gestos prohibidos, de palabras proscritas” (146). Clara uses the familiar form of address as a way of seeking intimacy with Asunción. The young Clara is disappointed when her teacher discourages a close personal relationship of any kind and continues to respond to her coldly and formally. With no experience of romance and unaware that her teacher’s reaction is proper and expected, Clara laments, “Me dolía aquel «usted» como una bofetada en el alma” (146).

When the young Clara writes Asunción’s name in the sand on the shores of the sea, she tries to banish the connotation of death that she associated with the pond in which Jaime died. She substitutes the living sea, which has always been for Riera “una belleza inaprensible,” a “necesidad vital” (“Ambición” 26). The pond had been still, lifeless, stagnant, whereas the sea connotes fluidity, movement, and life. The sea around the island of
Mallorca is always a positive image in Riera’s fiction. The sea sometimes represents comfort, peace, and security. Clara remembers, “te sientes mecida por las olas en esta cuna” (16). At times the sea is sensual. Riera writes, “el mar invade tu vagina con su lamedura blanca y espumosa” (17). The sea can also invoke memories. In a stream of consciousness dialogue with herself, Clara evokes, “el mar que te regala algas y corales para que recuerdes siempre estos momentos [...] corales y algas que guardas en un recuerdo o en un cajón [...] en una caja pequeña con caracoles y piedras verdes de playa” (17). Here Riera follows a feminine writing tradition again since, as Birute Ciplijauskaité explains, other women writers had used the image of water in a similar way: “El agua, elemento femenino desde siempre, se relaciona con la fluidez y la transformación constante [...] lo femenino, cambiante como el agua” (223).

The student Clara addresses Asunción through a stream of consciousness imagined dialogue: “Escrebo tu nombre sobre la arena [...] Escribo tu nombre a la orilla de las olas.” Clara knows that she can hide this secret crush from her family so that she will not have to suffer the humiliation of confession that resulted from her first erotic experience of masturbation. She writes, “Si alguien se acercara, lo tacharía. No quiero que sepan mi secreto” (145). Her forbidden love for her teacher is a secret that the sensual feminine sea will understand and will help her hide. This memory of her first childhood crush returns to Clara as she remembers in a dialogue with the “tú” of her young self, “aquel día en aquella playa, que evocas golosamente, donde escribiste el
nombre de quien te enamoraste por primera vez, cuando nada sabías del amor” (18-9).

It is not difficult to assume that, in addition to a schoolgirl crush, Clara’s obsession with Asunción represents her search for a mother figure. Clara fell in love with her teacher as a substitute for the love she didn’t receive from her cold, distant mother who has ignored her after Jaime’s death. She describes, “Mi madre, más seria que nunca, se aburría bordando eternos juegos de hilo” (147). Clara lacks the nurturing relationship with a feminine figure that Judith Jordan considers of great importance to an adolescent girl:

the special quality of the early attachment and identification between mother and daughter profoundly affects the way the self is defined in women [...] The more frequent mirroring, mutual identification, and more accurate empathy may strengthen the girl’s relatedness, connection, and feeling of being directly, emotionally understood” (“Women and Empathy” 34).

Since Clara’s mother was unable or perhaps unwilling to fulfill this necessary role, the young Clara substitutes the figure of Asunción as an adult woman to mirror, identify with, and imitate as a role model of behavior. Clara remembers trying to copy Asunción: “Procuraba imitarte en todo y por todos los medios: las palabras que utilizabas, el tono de voz, tu manera de andar” (146). Although Clara is persistent in seeking Asunción’s comfort, support and advice, Asunción rejects her coldly. Clara describes, “Un día, después de
mucho rogar, conseguí que me escucharas [...] No me diste tiempo para que pudiera confiarte mis problemas” (147-8). Asunción offers no solace to Clara except to advise her to pray: “– Cuénteselo todo a la Virgen” (147).

Since Asunción has rejected any intimate relationship with her, Clara does pray to the Virgin Mary to send her a close, intimate friend, “que me concediera una amiga ¡tenía tanta necesidad de hablar con alguien que me comprendiera!” (149). Elizabeth Abel quotes from Helen Deutsch’s *The Psychology of Women* to describe the importance of friendship to the development of an adolescent girl. Abel indicates that, “Around the age of twelve, she often chooses a ‘best friend’ who is an alter ego, ‘an extension of the girl’s own ego, identical with her in respect to age, interests and desires,’ in order to feel ‘doubled’ and consequently stronger” (427). Friends become mirrors in which a girl sees the image of herself, a double who provides comfort and strength. Clara believes that her prayers have been answered when Alicia Moya seems to miraculously become her friend. Clara says, “Creí por un momento que me había escuchado: Alicia Moya, la niña más guapa y más inteligente de la clase se había hecho amiga mía” (149). However, Clara’s joy is short-lived, for one day after the beginning of her friendship with Alicia, Clara’s father dies in an automobile accident. Alicia disappoints her by not fulfilling the intimate, supportive role of best friend that Clara needs and desires. As she spends the summer with Alicia’s family, Clara is homesick, uninterested in the activities of Alicia and her playmates, and deeply
depressed. Alicia did not fill the role of supportive confidante that Clara had hoped for, and Clara’s feelings of deep depression did not permit her to enjoy the playful activities of a group of light-hearted children with whom she had nothing in common. She remembers, “La pandilla de Alicia me aburre. Me paso horas y horas al sol casi inmóvil, llorando. Pienso en papá y en Jaime” (150).

Clara’s father represents the dominant father figure in patriarchy. Her relationship with her father had been ambivalent at best. On one hand, she remembers the feeling of being “segura, protegida, como si […] no pudiera sucederte nada malo […] cuando paseabas por la Rambla cogida de la mano, grande y suave, de tu padre” (47). On the other hand, Clara suffers from her father’s frequent absences and resents the mistresses that he openly flaunts. Gerda Lerner explains the origins of paternal dominance under all patriarchal systems:

In its historical origins, the concept comes from family relations as they developed under patriarchy, in which the father held absolute power over all members of his household. In exchange, he owed them the obligations of economic support and protection.

(239)

Clara feels that her father is to blame for the humiliation of her mother and worries about the consequences that her father’s soul will suffer as a result of his sinful acts. She remembers, “Fue la primavera más cruel de mi vida. Le
había pedido a la Virgen que mi madre dejara de estar triste y que mi padre
estuviera más tiempo en casa y sobre todo que fuera a la misa los domingos”
(149). Even after the death of Clara’s father, it is evident that his affairs
continue to be hurtful to the members of his family as Clara’s brother ejects
from his funeral “cierta señora completamente vestida de negro a la que nadie
había confidado a las exequias” (150). Knowing the harmful effects that their
father’s actions and attitudes had on his family, we recognize the sad irony of
the statement by one of the mourners, obviously a male representative of the
patriarchy, “—Tu padre era muy simpático, Isabel Clara, una gran persona […]
Era una persona generosa y espléndida” (150).

When Clara asks her mother Catalina, “¿sabes que papá tenía
amantes?” (139), her mother acknowledges the unfaithfulness of her husband
but explains to Clara that his actions are not only typical but also acceptable in
the male-dominant society in which they live. Catalina interprets for Clara
the self-sacrificing role of a woman: “Nosotras hemos venido al mundo para
suffer y aguantar.” Catalina illustrates, “Un hombre te puede engañar [...] 
tenemos que perdonar siempre. Cuando tu padre llegaba tarde por la noche,
me hacía la dormida.” Clara’s father treated Catalina as a naive child,
patronizing her by rewarding her acquiescence with gifts. Clara’s mother
says, “A tu padre le gustaba que siempre estuviera de acuerdo con él...que no
hiciera nada sin consultárselo.” She explains the father’s role as “ganar dinero
y mantener con dignidad la casa, no a nosotras” (140).
Catalina’s beliefs and actions were in accordance with the tenets of the Regime of Francisco Franco in Spain, which, according to Margaret Jones, exalted the hierarchal family, understood as a microcosm of the national political structure, with a vertical chain of command that gave complete control and authority to the husband, including clear directives that the wife defer to him in all matters. ("Vindicación" 312)

In 1938, the liberal advances and rights that women had gained under the Second Republic were revoked with the reinstatement of the Napoleonic Civil Code of 1889. Akiko Tsuchiya explains,

Under patria potestad clause of this law [...] women were considered to be minors under the guardianship of their husbands or fathers, who had exclusive authority and proprietary rights over them. Married women had no legal authority over their children, nor did they have equal rights to joint property. Within the marriage contract, only the wife had the obligation to maintain fidelity. ("Women and Fiction" 212-3)

In 1939, the Sección Femenina that had been organized by Pilar Primo de Rivera, the sister of José Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Falange Española, and the daughter of dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, was given authority over Spanish women. Pilar Primo de Rivera, exalting the “magnífico destino de la mujer abnegada,” stated in 1944, “Que éste es el papel de la
mujer en la vida. El armonizar voluntades y el dejarse guiar por la voluntad más fuerte y la sabiduría del hombre” (qtd. in Usos 58). Pilar, preaching “la sumisión y la sonrisa” (qtd. in Usos 114), was held up as a role model for women to follow.

In Mujer, falange y franquismo, María Teresa Gallego Méndez explains that the Sección Feminina never considered the woman as a person, the subject of her own story, but rather consecrated her to the service of family and of the state (200). Gallego Mendéz discusses the sacrificial character of the fascism of Franco’s Spain, with “su culto al dolor, a la abnegación y a la entrega, su explotación de los sentimientos religiosos y de la maternidad” and characterizes fascism as “el más patriarcal de todos los sistemas capitalistas” (13). Clara’s father acts as a typical representative of the patriarchy, which Adrienne Rich defines as:

the power of the fathers: a familial-social-ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (Of Woman Born 57)

Rich explains the mother’s cooperation in this type of society, that she “serves the interest of the patriarchy: she exemplifies in one person religion, social conscience, and nationalism. Institutional motherhood revives and renews all other institutions” (Of Woman Born 45).
According to Judith Jordan and Maureen Walker, a patriarchal or “power over’ culture is itself an agent of disconnection that, left unchallenged, effectively diminishes the relational capabilities and confidence of all its members” (Complexity of Connection 6). Jean Baker Miller explains how women living in a repressive society become depressed rather than angry. Miller writes, “Women have generally been led to believe that their identity, as women, is that of persons who should be almost totally without anger and without the need for anger” (“Anger” 184). Miller continues, “Repeated instances of suppressing the anger can produce repeated experiences of frustration and inaction” and “lead to feelings of weakness and lack of self-esteem, which can increase the woman’s sense of feeling unworthy and inferior [...] If the anger is finally expressed, it often appears in exaggerated form.” The woman is often labeled as “hysterical” and she is “thereby discounted” (“Anger” 185). Clara’s mother Catalina, abused and humiliated publicly and privately by her husband and rendered inferior and submissive by the powerful patriarchal society of Franco’s Spain, suffers from a “tristeza contagiosa” (147), feigned illness evidenced by her constant “seudo-infartos” (161), her reliance on alcohol, and the “lassitude, self-negation, guilt, and depression” that Adrienne Rich explains are results of powerlessness (Of Woman Born 65).
The young Clara has been unable to resolve her relationship with her mother. Pilar Nieva de la Paz discusses the sadness and solitude of Clara’s mother, writing,

El sacrificio de aquellas madres no engendró, sin embargo, una familia feliz, como ellas deseaban. Clara recuerda su niñez en un hogar sin amor, recuerda la soledad de su madre, su sufrimiento, su tristeza durante los veranos en la playa sin el padre, su habitual refugio en el consuelo religioso. (230)

Although their position in the patriarchal society has caused depression in mothers, their mothers’ position has become even more traumatic for their daughters. Not only was Clara’s mother humiliated, devalued, and failed by her culture, but, as we have observed, Clara as well was damaged by the paternalistic system which deprived the daughter of the support of a strong woman as a mother whom she could admire and respect. As Adrienne Rich explains, “Many daughters live in rage at their mothers for having accepted, too readily and passively, ‘whatever comes’” (Of Woman Born 243). The same rage can be attributed to Clara, who considers her mother as a dreaded other, an example of powerlessness and victimization that she does not want to follow. Clara is impatient with her mother’s customary “crisis cardíaca” (167) with which she attempts to control the actions of Clara. Clara rejects the underlying pull towards her mother, epitomizing what Adrienne Rich describes as “matrophobia,” a term coined by the poet Lynn Sukenick, which
is “the fear not of one’s mother or of motherhood but of becoming one’s mother [...] a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely” (Of Woman Born 235). Like her protagonist Clara, the author Carme Riera does not sympathize with Clara’s mother Catalina. In an interview with Geraldine Nichols, Riera refers to Catalina as a “madre asquerosa” (205). We find further evidence of Riera’s disapproval of the weakness of Catalina when we contrast images of the victimized Catalina with Riera’s admiration for the work of María de Zayas, who, centuries before, “Denuncia y ataca la debilidad de las mujeres, que las lleva con frecuencia, a engañarse a sí mismas, o a dejarse engañar, cosa que a menudo coincide, o a perder la consciencia de su propia dignidad y estima” (“Personajes femeninos” 157).

Clara remembers a party at her home attended by her father’s mistress, “una muchacha guapísima a quien nadie conocía” (143). She remembers how her mother at first escaped to her bed but then reappeared, suppressing her emotions by greeting her guests pleasantly with the dutiful smile of the “good,” acquiescent Spanish woman, who demonstrates that, as Andrés Revesz wrote in 1941, “Sonrisa es benevolencia, dulzura, optimismo, bondad. Nada más desagradable que una mujer con la cara áspera, agria, malhumorada, que parece siempre reprocharos algo” (qtd. in Usos 40). Clara remembers the humiliation of her mother as she addresses her mother in an imagined conversation about this party, that “algunas señoras
cuchicheaban en voz muy baja que, a pesar del perfume, olías a vino” while “«ella» estaba bailando en ese momento con mi padre” (143). These other women guests are imitating the patriarchal model by marginalizing Catalina, treating her with disdain, and tormenting her. Their actions remind us of Frances O’Connor’s explanation of how some women under a patriarchal system try to appropriate power for themselves by seeking out another victim who can make them feel superior, even if by doing this they are victimizing another woman. The female guests at Catalina’s party epitomize O’Connor’s description of such women who have an “inherent need to put other women down,” to “work against solidarity,” even from the position of their own inferiority (127). Instead of rebelling against male authority, these women vent their resentment on other women, who then become scapegoats of their own forbidden desire to harm patriarchal men. In this way, these women show ambivalent feelings of hate and love (or respect) towards their oppressors. This is how patriarchal systems divide society into victims and victimizers, according to Riera, who shows that fear of both responsibility and social punishment that assuming this responsibility might entail are really the aspects hidden under women’s love for male patriarchs.

To counteract her mother’s victimization, Clara imagines her mother defying male domination by a subversive act of transgression so that she can reclaim her own dignity and self-esteem. Clara imagines “un final tan brillante y osado,” with Catalina’s announcement, “– Atención, amigos míos,
escuchadme un minuto. Todos sabéis con quién me engaña Perico, ahora os enseñaré con quién le engaño yo” (144). With these imagined words, in Clara’s recollection Catalina humiliates her husband by openly masturbating in front of the guests, an act which relates to the “jouissance” of the female body discussed by the French feminist writers Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous, who advocated a subversion of the dominant patriarchal order. Elizabeth Ordóñez has demonstrated how the work of several influential French feminists is present in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. She claims that Clara’s imagined recollection of her mother’s defiance gives voice to the silenced woman and:

Subverts, at least momentarily, the authority of the libertine father […] The mother, fleetingly transformed into a provocative rebel against the phallic order, literally unveils a sign (‘el sexo,’ autoerotismo) indicating woman’s own rewriting of her self through her body. (291)

Although Riera rejects the characterization of herself as a feminist writer, she acknowledges having read the works of these and other French feminists and admits that, “Seguramente *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* yo nunca la habría escrito si no me hubiera leído una serie de cosas feministas, aunque allí no se vea” (Nichols “Carme Riera” 192). As we have been noticing, the attentive reader can “see” the importance of feminist writings in Riera’s text.
in which numerous events can be analyzed as an artistic interpretation of these theories.

Ordóñez asserts that the “grandiose and subversive gesture” of the mother “seems incredible to Clara, and yet as she recounts it she affirms precisely its daring brilliance” (290). But however brilliant Clara deems this act of defiance, she realizes that it would fail to improve the life of her mother, who would be locked up as a hysterical madwoman both literally and figuratively because of the prohibitions against female sexuality. As Miller mentions in these words already quoted, if the woman finally expresses her anger, she is often labeled as “hysterical” and is “thereby discounted,” and this is precisely how Clara also imagines the reaction of the dominant males of the family: “Tu marido y tu cuñado Jorge se precipitaron a cogerte en volandas para llevarte a través de los salones a un dormitorio donde te dejaron encerrada” (144). Riera writes of Clara’s mother’s subversive event with ambiguity, so that the reader must approach the description many times to determine whether this defiant act really happened. As Mercury did in Botticelli’s Primavera, the reader must disperse the clouds of ambiguity to determine the truth behind the veiled description of the event. Ordóñez is not specific about how she understands the subversive gesture of Clara’s mother. Does she see it as a remembrance of a real event or as product of Clara’s wishful imagination?
Catherine Bellver believes that Clara “sees a self-sacrificing mother figure, who, nonetheless, was capable of a single public display of subversion” (238). I disagree with Bellver’s interpretation that Catalina was capable of such an act. My interpretation is that Clara’s evocation of this event reflects not a true memory of the past but rather Clara’s deep desire that her mother was not passive and silent in her humiliation. By reading carefully Clara’s sentence, “La verdad es que abandonaste la fiesta y eso fue todo” (144), I believe that the subversive defiance by Clara’s mother was only a fantasy expressing Clara’s disappointment in her mother’s meek acceptance and her fervent desire that her mother fight against her own weakness and victimization. I agree with María Antonia Camí-Vela, who explains: “Clara desea una madre Demeter, diosa de la tierra y poseedora de un erotismo liberador” (72), something that, in my interpretation, her mother represses completely. Mirella Servodidio explains Demeter’s strength, that “the joyful finding of Persephone emblematizes the feminine archetype as a vision of continuous attachment and transfigurative strength [...] expressing feminine filiation.” Discussing the universality of the maternal metaphor inherent in the myth of Demeter, Servodidio attributes this myth to women writers: “Locating themselves as mothers and daughters, they struggle, with Persephone, to loosen the hold of patriarchal seduction and assimilation, straining towards a reclamation of matrilineal unity” (“Demeter” 12). Unfortunately, because
Catalina does not possess the attributes of Demeter, she cannot pass on to Clara the model of strength and self-esteem that she herself does not possess.

But of course, I think it would be also unfair to expect Catalina to be a model of strength. Rather than blaming her, we should understand that she has become weakened by her marginalization, voicelessness, and victimization. Catalina’s weakening by the domination of the patriarchal system has deprived Clara of a wise, positive role model to emulate and leaves Clara with what, in her study about relationships, Judith Jordan sees as the “experience of chronic disconnection or isolation,” which Judith Jordan sees as a “primary source of suffering.” Jordan explains:

Relational images of incompetence and depletion interfere with our capacity to be productive, as well as to be in a creative relationship. They inhibit our engagement with life and our capacity to love and to move with a sense of awareness to meet others, to contribute to their growth, and to grow ourselves toward competence and connection. (“Toward Competence” 11-2)

Because of the lack of a positive relationship with a passive, weakened, and depressed mother and because of her own devalued position in a male-dominated society, Clara has been unable to maintain fulfilling, intimate, long-lasting personal relationships. Clara’s fruitless search for a close friend and her problematic relationship with a mother she sadly does not respect and is afraid to emulate are consistent with Riera’s belief that human
relationships are inherently based on misunderstandings. Riera explains, “una de las cosas que más me obsesiona es que las relaciones suelen estar siempre basadas en la incomprensión, en la incapacidad de entendernos” (Aguado 35).

Clara examines not only her relationships with women but also with men as she attempts to find her place in her society. In her recollections, Carlos is the first man with whom Clara develops an important relationship. Because the young Clara and her boyfriend Carlos began a sexual relationship, Clara agrees to marriage with Carlos, which she automatically accepts as the next logical step in their relationship. As she did with Jaime, expecting him to confirm her beauty, that is, her value in accordance with the ideology of patriarchal society, Clara is again following the feminine passive role prescribed by that society and modeled by her mother in order to avoid her own fear and comply with the norms and values of the paternalistic culture in which they live. Unaware of a way in which she could escape and not confident enough to rebel, Clara unthinkingly and passively agrees to repeat the role of her mother in the “trampa” (166), the trap of marriage, in the institution that Annis Pratt calls the archetypal “enclosure in the patriarachy” (Archetypal 39). Clara later realizes that she did not love Carlos, for “Carlos nunca me quiso. Tampoco yo supe quererle” (164). She became engaged to him because she felt guilty for having had sex with him, an act which should be reserved for marriage under the value code of her society.
Clara and Carlos were resigned to fulfilling the role that society had prescribed for them. They were “dos fantasmas con la máscara que cada uno se había fabricado para el otro. Los dos nos sabíamos el papel a la perfección y procurábamos representarlo de la manera más convincente, hasta sus últimas consecuencias” (164). Carlos would prosper “a la sombra de su padre.” Clara would fulfill her role of self-sacrifice: “en cambio, renunciaría a mis libertades, al fin y al cabo tan pequeñas, de ejercer la carrera, reunirme de vez en cuando con mis amigos de la facultad, salir sola de noche a dar un paseo o al cine” (165). Clara pictures herself in the future imitating the submission and humiliation of her mother. She imagines acting inauthentically, as did her mother and other women under the domination of the paternalistic society which required that a woman accept with a benevolent smile the infidelities of her husband, “la sumisión y la sonrisa” preached by Pilar Primo de Rivera, among others. Clara would act with “absoluta benevolencia hacia los eventuales devaneos de Carlos, con sonrisas a flor de labios, perfume «Calèche» de importación en los lóbulos de las orejas y – por descontado – ni la más leve queja” (165-6).

The imagined gift of imported perfume seems insignificant unless the reader is aware that the perfume “Calèche” is a real product of the French company Hermès, named for the Greek god who is banishing the clouds in Botticelli’s Primavera, as he will later do in Clara’s life. While she is engaged to Carlos, she meets Alberto, an acquaintance of Carlos, “ese amigo de Carlos,
inteligente y frívolo” (168), who now serves as Clara’s Mercury to help her clear away the clouds of self-deception. Thanks to Alberto, to whom Clara feels romantically attracted, she realizes that she does not want to marry Carlos. She remembers, “de repente su cara me pareció la de un extraño y tuve la seguridad de que ya nada volvería a ser como antes” (167). The presence of Alberto, as Clara declares “me empujó a la rebeldía.” She needed that push to reject the subservient role which her mother had played by saying “no” to a future life with Carlos. Clara rejects Carlos and addresses Alberto, saying, “Tú estabas allí, frente a mí [...] mirándome, y en tus ojos me pareció leer la misma palabra: «no»” (167). Here we see that it was Alberto who gave her the courage to do what she had to do in order to be honest with herself. This means that she probably would have married Carlos if it were not for the silent “no” that she saw in Alberto’s eyes.

Clara has an affair with Alberto when she visits him at his home in Florence, Italy. Clara recalls her happiness during that period, that “Fue la época más feliz de mi vida” (170). Unlike Carlos, Alberto becomes for Clara “una persona comprensiva y sensible en la que podía confiar,” someone who provides her with the close relationship that she has craved. Clara expresses to Alberto her appreciation: “no esperabas nada de mí, que nada ibas a pedirme, que no estarías juzgándome cada cinco minutos, como hacía Carlos” (168). It is not difficult to understand that Alberto represents the opposite of the patriarchal Carlos, who would expect Clara to fulfill her role of the
subjugated, powerless woman by giving up her friends, her freedom, her self in the male-dominated society. With the nonpatriarchal Alberto, Clara feels free to set aside the subjugated role that her society tried to assign to her, to “arriconar, por un momento siquiera, mi «rol» de mujercita” (169). The open, accepting Alberto encourages Clara to live her own life freely, without fear: “No tenemos más que una vida, Clara, y nadie tiene derecho a vivirla por ti, a tergiversártela. No tengas miedo” (169).

In my interpretation, Alberto, a writer like Clara, is an example of the androgyne, who represents the complete person before the mythological Zeus split them apart, as Aristophanes related in Plato’s Symposium. As a complete person, the androgyne embodies both masculine and feminine traits. In fact, here Riera seems to allude to Hélène Cixous, who, in La Jeune Née, affirms that men who do not repress their femininity and both women and men who are “complex, mobile, open” are androgynous (qtd. in Penrod 32). In an interview with Geraldine Nichols, Riera relates the writer with the androgyne, as does Cixous, who redefines the writer as being “open to otherness” and “in constant metamorphosis” (Conley Hélène Cixous 38).

Riera writes, “Yo quería resumir el artista, es decir, el andrógino. Por eso decía que éramos dos cosas a la vez, y que la naturaleza y el arte son ambiguos por antonomasia” (211). Hélène Cixous’s definition of androgyny is interchangeable with her description of bisexuality, which she defines in La Jeune Née as “the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes [...] the
nonexclusion of difference or of a sex” (qtd. in Penrod 33). Cixous posits this form of bisexuality, which Alberto possesses, as an alternate to the destructiveness of the superior position of the male, which characterizes the ideology of Carlos. Clara is deeply disappointed that her romance with Alberto is short-lived. She had mistakenly hoped and believed that their relationship would last forever and that “nuestras relaciones serían fuertes y firmes, que perseverían por encima de todo” (170). The relationship does not last because Alberto does not want Clara to expect anything of him, just as he wouldn’t expect anything of her. Clara misjudges Alberto, who is not interested in a long-term monogamous relationship with her, and later discovers that he has a male lover, Piero.

Disillusioned after her affair with Alberto, Clara enters into a relationship with the cold, analytical Enrique. Her relationship with him, assuming again the typical self-sacrificing role of a woman as helpmate under the patriarchy, shows that Clara has not yet understood Alberto’s friendly message quoted earlier: “No tenemos más que una vida, Clara, y nadie tiene derecho a vivirla por ti, a tergiversártela. No tengas miedo” (169). But Clara, still afraid, thus follows the easy road since with Enrique she is not obliged to assume the responsibility of making her own decisions and taking care of herself. Of course, patriarchy, as a system designed to “protect” the “sexo débil,” is just a superficial appearance, and this is the irony of the situation: As a political leader in public, Enrique is a strong representative of the
patriarchy, “El político acreditado, la figura joven más popular entre la base, el infatigable líder dialéctico” (171). However, in private, that is, away from the public eye and from his authoritative role, Enrique is an insecure person who needs Clara’s encouragement and energy “para refugiarse en mi entusiasmo, en mi veneración hacia su persona” (171). Clara not only does his domestic chores and babysits for his children, but she also neglects her own work as a journalist to dedicate herself to Enrique’s work. She writes articles for Enrique “que todo el mundo atribuía a Enrique.” She becomes his protector, not the other way around: “Corregía sus discursos políticos, escuchaba los ensayos de sus intervenciones en el Congreso, le hacía los guiones de las conferencias, atendía al teléfono y contestaba las cartas.” With Enrique, Clara loses her own identity, as she herself admits, “Dejé de ser Isabel Clara Alabern para convertirme en la compañera de Enrique Rabasa, esa chica que vive con él, su amante, la amiguita del líder...” (171). When Clara becomes pregnant with Enrique’s child, Enrique insists that she abort the child. The subject Clara, speaking to herself as object, as “tú,” remembers his unfeeling reaction: “– sin mirarte – te dice que no, que es absurdo; y te aconseja, te impone, con una voz sin matices, su punto de vista, su análisis frío, su disección completa” (11).

In Primavera, the figure of the goddess of love Venus – or one of her doubles, Demeter and the Virgin Mary – with an upraised arm in a gesture of approval is turned towards three female figures. The fictional art professor in
Una primavera para Domenico Guarini calls the three dancing figures that we see to the left of Venus “servidoras de Venus” (151) and describes them as “los atributos de la mujer amada” (153). He follows the ancient Greek tradition about these Three Graces, identified as Agliaia, Euprosyne, and Thalia, daughters of Zeus and Eurynome, who were always together. Edith Hamilton calls them “a triple incarnation of grace and beauty.” According to Hamilton, they “give life its bloom” (37), an appropriate description of their appearance in this springtime scene. Their circular dance suggests harmony and what Snow-Smith calls a “pantomime of metamorphosis” into the newly-reborn purified human soul (169-70). The Three Graces dance palm to palm, hands interlocked, and illustrate, according to the Roman philosopher Seneca in De Beneficiis, a continuous process of giving, receiving, and restituting, or giving back, aspects of what Seneca called liberalitas, generous love. As Baldini explains, “divine love is given to mankind, mankind accepts and reveres it, and returns it to the maker as intellectual devotion raised to the height of adoration and contemplation” (90). It is this earthly manifestation of divine love, the reciprocal generosity and exchange of gifts between men and a superior being or god that were characteristic of the highest level of friendship: a relationship providing intimacy, nurturing and support. Hélène Cixous describes a dance that seems to evoke this exchange among the Three Graces and God. But in this dance, women exchange the gifts among themselves, on the same level, that is, not with a superior being: “Women
make up a *ronde* – in a movement neither *linear nor ascending*” (my emphasis) and “ceaseless flow into each other.” Giving to one another hand in hand, “In the women’s *ronde*, dancers hold each other by the hand, *mains tenant, maintenant* (holding hands, now) in a movement present and presence, dancing to pastoral tune of reparation” (Conley *Writing* 111). For Cixous, the Three Graces (also present in *Primavera*) now epitomize friendship, the desired mutuality and resultant intimacy described by Judith Jordan in her article “The Meaning of Mutuality.” Jordan states,

> In a mutual exchange one is both affecting the other and being affected by the other; one extends oneself out to the other and is also receptive to the impact of the other. There is openness to influence, emotional availability, and a constantly changing pattern of responding to and affecting the other’s state. (82)

Jordan further explains that when empathy and concern are mutual, “there is an intense affirmation of the self and, paradoxically, a transcendence of the self, a sense of the self as part of a larger relational unit” (82). Moreover, in “The Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women’s Development,” Janet Surrey indicates that reciprocity is a “source of mutual self-esteem” and “is related to the degree of emotional sharing, openness, and shared sense of understanding and regard” (57).

Clara, in an attempt to rely on the female friendship implicit in the figures of the Three Graces of *Primavera*, looks to other women to help her
decide what to do, whether to give birth to the child or to accept Enrique’s admonition that she have an abortion. Clara doesn’t feel strong enough to decide for herself whether to have her child out of wedlock, an act that would openly defy the patriarchy. Isolina Ballesteros quotes Adrienne Rich’s assertion that,

To bear an illegitimate child proudly and by choice in the face of societal judgment has, paradoxically, been one way in which women have defied patriarchy. Childbirth [...] has also been converted into a purpose, an act of self-assertion by a woman forced to assert herself primarily through her biology. (160)

Riera juxtaposes Clara’s narration of her search for help from the three women – Asunción, María and Marta – with quotes from the lecture of the art professor regarding the Three Graces in Botticelli’s *Primavera*. The professor explains “la figura de las tres Gracias: dar, recibir y restituir” (156). Like the liberalitas that the Three Graces epitomized in Botticelli’s painting, Clara is seeking the nurture and support provided by this highest level of friendship from her own Three Graces.

Clara writes a letter to ask for help from her former teacher, the object of her childhood crush, the former nun Asunción, who has left the convent, studied anthropology, and now works with the poor in Africa. Asunción makes excuses, saying that she would like to help but doesn’t know how: “Me siento impotente desde tan lejos” (161). Asunción realizes that Clara needed
her help when she was her student and that Clara believed that Asunción didn’t help her then, “que te negaba la ayuda que pedías” (161). Involved in her own life, indifferent to Clara’s needs, and unwilling to become involved with Clara’s problem, Asunción offers her now the same substitute for help that as she did long ago, her prayers. Asunción writes, “Ahora, como entonces, rezo, rezo muchísimo” (161) and blames “la falta de valores espirituales” (162) for the problems of youth. The prayers of Asunción did not help Clara in the past, nor do they help her now. As a former nun, Asunción represents the institution of the Church which is indifferent to the needs of petitioners who seek help. Gerda Lerner, tracing historically the origins of patriarchy, states that, “The contract between God and humanity assumes the subordinate position of women and their exclusion from covenant communities.” Lerner further posits, “This symbolic devaluing of women in relation to the divine becomes one of the founding metaphors of Western civilization” (10). David Herzberger describes the close relationship between the Franco Regime and the Church as a “narrow frame of Falangist/Catholic hegemony” (Narrating 24). Here, we can see that, through Asunción, the traditionalist institution of the Church offers a religious discourse which is useless to help Clara solve her problem.

Clara also turns for help to her feminist friend María, who gladly promises the support of feminism, saying, “No te preocupes, Clara, las feministas te ofrecemos un apoyo incondicional” (162). However, as
Asunción indicates, feminism is powerless to solve urgent problems of poverty and hunger that Asunción is working to overcome. Asunción writes to Clara, “Dile a María de mi parte que los movimientos feministas aquí no existen. Hay otros problemas más urgentes que solucionar” (152). María remains distant, preaching solutions that are too radical for Clara. María writes, “Es necesario, compañeras, abolir la familia” (151). María’s “palabras panfletarias, tan encendidas, tan demagógicas, tan discutibles” (153) are vague, inflammatory proclamations against perceived injustices towards women and do not address Clara’s issues with the close personal intimacy and empathy that Clara is seeking. Although Clara admires María for the strength of her beliefs, “esa utópica lucha que te inflama” (154), Clara rejects María’s brand of feminism, just as the author Carme Riera rejects the militant feminism of Spain’s Lidia Falcón, founder of Spain’s Partido Feminista. Riera explains to Kathleen Glenn, “Lidia Falcón wants power. What I want is authority, which is a different thing [...] Lidia Falcón’s attitude is one of control, of domination, which doesn’t interest me.” In the words of Riera, authority is “granted among equals, whereas power implies the oppression of one group over another” (Glenn “Conversation” 55). For Riera, power connotes dominance over a subordinate group, whereas authority is strength which is shared among equals.

While she is involved with Enrique, Clara picks up a young hitchhiker Marta Rodríguez Soler. Clara befriends this archetypal “bad girl,” an image of
transgression, but Marta does not reciprocate by providing Clara with the positive, empathetic benefits of friendship. Selfishly, Marta takes advantage of Clara and moves in with her and Enrique against his will. Marta defies all authority by robbing a bank, stealing money from Clara, leaving hashish in Clara’s and Enrique’s home. Clara is questioned by the police, who threaten to jail her as Marta’s accomplice and, since Marta is so young, for perversion of minors. In spite of the legal problems that Marta causes, Clara feels proud to be needed, to “sentirme necesaria, de ser casi indispensable para Marta” (159). Although she acts selfishly and uncaringly towards Clara, Marta acts authentically by being true to her own nature. Clara acknowledges that she is grateful for Marta’s unconventional example, “por su espontaneidad, por su aceptación de la vida: ocio, juego, placer; por su rechazo de tanta farsa, por su bien querido exilio del sistema” (162). Although Marta is not physically or emotionally available to help Clara, Marta indirectly facilitates Clara’s development towards the recuperation of the identity that she had lost with Enrique by providing a model of transgression and independence that Clara admires. Because of Marta’s influence, Clara is capable of recognizing her wish to have a child and purposefully decides not to take her birth control pills. Clara hopes that “no fuera sólo la rebeldía lo que me impulsa a tener el niño” (173). As we can deduce, it is not necessarily rebellion but a desire for intimacy and unconditional love that makes Clara desire a child.
Most of what we have learned about Clara’s childhood is in the “Tercera Parte” of the novel, which juxtaposes the lecture of the art professor regarding Botticelli’s *Primavera* with Clara’s stream of consciousness reconstruction of her childhood. The “Primera Parte” at the beginning of the novel chronologically follows the “Tercera Parte” and introduces the reader to the pregnant Clara who is still undecided about what to do concerning her pregnancy. The central dilemma of the novel is Clara’s decision whether to have the child and raise it as a single woman or not have the child at all.

Comparing her life to the popular fiction of the postwar period, “como si todo sucediera en una novela rosa o en la historia de una diva labrada a golpes de azar,” (13), Clara is grateful to be able to take advantage of accident of fate which sends her again to Florence, Italy, where she has been assigned to go as a journalist to investigate and report the trial of Domenico Guarini, who has inexplicably vandalized Botticelli’s *Primavera*. The “Primera Parte” describing her trip by train to Florence and the “Epílogo” describing the return trip back from Florence to Barcelona create a frame which encloses the “Segunda Parte” and “Tercera Parte” of the novel, thereby emphasizing the “viajes cíclicos” towards the “centro de uno mismo” (5) of the epigraph by Luis Racionero.

According to Esther Harding, the cyclical character of time is natural for a woman. Harding writes, “Life is cyclic [...] every woman experiences life through the medium of her own everchanging nature, hence to a woman the
experience of life is cyclic” (Harding 67). In the “Primera Parte” and “Epílogo,” time is a mixture of past, present and future, and the stream of consciousness images in these sections seem completely detached from and outside of the realm of time, just as both mythology and the subconscious relate a time without time. Images from the present mirror those from the past and jump ahead to the future. As Clara is looking out the window, her mind wanders, “Y de pronto, la imagen se difumina, tu proyector quema la película y […] adviertes que lo que se está quemando es otro paisaje mucho más lejano que se confunde con tu infancia…” (23). In the “Epílogo,” while her eyes are closed, Clara imagines giving birth in the future: “Y de repente tu reloj adelanta ocho meses […] como si en tu vientre se librara una lucha de escorpiones y la quemadura áspera de su veneno te royera las entrañas” (195). The fact that she committed what her society considers a sin, becoming pregnant outside of the bounds of marriage, and the dread of the unknown future evoke the same fears that Clara had felt when she was a young child fearing the punishment of eternal damnation for her sin of sexuality.

C.F. Keppler, in a chapter entitled “The Second Self in Time,” discusses the paradox of the relationship between two selves, the “Now-self” and the “Then-self” who are “simultaneously separate from each other in Space and continuous with each other in personality” (161). Keppler states that “Through the faculties of memory and anticipation every mind has had at least a faint taste of an existence beyond Time” where one can “fold Time
backward or forward upon itself and yield a glimpse of that sort of Timeless
identity of which we all have a sense, faint and confused as it may be” (164).

The “Primera Parte” and the “Epílogo” mirror each other in tone and
voice. Indeed, there are six paragraphs repeated word for word in both parts.
The opening words of the novel – “Alimaña grotesca, mariposa-reptil,
precipitada hacia las tinieblas, magnetizada por las sombras, oráculo de la
oscuridad, celadora de ruinas crepusculares, esqueletos de tarde, cajas huecas
de insomnio” (9) – are repeated word for word on the third-to-last page of the
novel on page 194. In these two sections, Riera underlines the theme of
metamorphosis through the body of the pregnant Clara. We read of “la
progresiva transformación de un feto” both on pages 10 and 195. In her
interview with Geraldine Nichols, Riera describes these sections as “Góngora
pura” (“Carme Riera” 223). Some of the baroque images in the “Primera
Parte” are violent and disturbing, as the fears of eternal damnation of Clara’s
childhood return to terrify her. As the train enters the tunnel, we read,
“vuelve la oscuridad, la boca negra de la bruma socavada a dentelladas por los
afilados colmillos de los lobos, ensordecida por los aullidos de los perros
salvajes” (15). On other occasions, the poetic voice is gently amusing, as when
Riera personifies the countryside passing by the window of the train. She
expresses the futility of trying to capture and retain the image of the
countryside she is looking at, because the countryside “te desprecia, te dice
que no, que no te ha elegido a ti y se aleja con rapidez como si tuviera que
Riera had originally planned to continue the novel in the same baroque style as in the “Primera Parte” but explains to Geraldine Nichols that “ya vi que no tendría un solo lector y lo dejé” (“Carme Riera” 223). Instead, Riera decided to include as many different styles of writing as possible, “una acumulación de elementos destrabados” that we see especially in the “Segunda Parte,” so that the reader is required to construct relationships among the various elements of the novel. Riera tells Luis Racionero, “Hay que convertir el lector en cómplice, porque la literatura la completa el lector” (Racionero 16). Although the technique of epistolary writing is a favorite of Riera, she explains why she uses various other techniques to write *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*:

En este caso pretendí emplear al modo cervantino cuántos recursos tuviera a mano: la crónica periodista, el diálogo teatral, el ensayo culturalista, el relato corto dentro de la novela, etc., para urdir un texto a través de diversas piezas que, como un inmenso rompecabezas fueran encajando y ajustándose al servicio de conjunto. (“Grandeza” 152)

We have already seen the juxtaposition of Clara’s stream of consciousness evocations of her past with the lecture by the art professor in the “Tercera Parte.”
In the “Segunda Parte,” there are chapters lettered A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H which alternate with chapters numbered 1 through 9. The lettered chapters represent the newspaper articles that Clara is writing for her newspaper back home in Barcelona, *La Nación*. These chapters all begin with an italized epigraph summarizing the most recent events of the Guarini case and end with the signature of the writer “Isabel Clara Alabern.” They all use the impersonal, professional style of objective journalism, using the collective “we” to refer to the writer, for example, “según nuestras fuentes de información...” (45). The tone is clear, objective, without ambiguity and sometimes includes ironic professional commentary, judgment, or interpretation. We read, “Pese a que muchos florentinos no hayan pisado jamás los Uffizi, todos consideran *La Primavera* como un patrimonio que debe ser conservado a toda costa” (41) and “Italia es el país más rico del mundo no sólo en obras de arte sino también, quizás, en capacidad de fabulación” (111). At times, these articles imitate detective fiction in a search for the truth by solving a puzzle, deciphering codes and secret messages. Clara’s editor had told her to give the story “un cierto aire de intriga” (35). Why did Domenico Guarini vandalize Botticelli’s *Primavera*? Did Guarini kill Laura Martuari, the object of his obsessive desire, as he said he did? In writing, Clara keeps in mind “la proverbial afición italiana por el melodrama” (66). In these articles, the culture of the masses – that of “el ciudadano medio, el hombre de la calle” (46) – contrasts with the high culture of art that
the painting represents. The most startling example of “kitsch” that the journalist Clara refers to is the “llavero con la reproducción plateada del pie de Flora” (72).

Each of the numbered chapters of the “Segunda Parte” includes a different technique of writing. Chapter 1 is a mixture of narration and dialogue between Clara and Alberto when Clara first arrives in Florence. Clara’s narrative voice is more direct, less lyrical than in the “Primera Parte,” although she continues to refer to herself in the second person rather than in the first. Clara continues to mirror elements from the present and from the past. She hopes to duplicate “el verano italiano de tu recuerdo” (47) with Alberto as a lover. Alberto gives her a card with the saying, “Bendigo la hora, el día, el mes” (35), which is probably something he casually gives to people he is acquainted with. But it is especially meaningful to Clara, for it is an exact replica of a card she has been carrying in her wallet for five years as a memento of her time with Alberto. In a lengthy dialogue, the nonpatriarchal Alberto, in a role reversal evocative of Clara’s previous help to Enrique, contributes to Clara’s preparation in writing her articles by discussing with her his interpretation of the motivation of Domenico Guarini. He concludes that it is impossible to determine why Guarini attacked the painting as he did, predicting that, “Inocente o culpable, nadie sabrá nunca qué motivo de agravio o de amor le dieron los personajes del cuadro” (40).
By misinterpreting Alberto’s support, Clara tries to recapture their romance. Chapter 2 continues with an interior monologue of Clara relating her disappointment, her “deseo frustrado” (48) that her affair with Alberto will not be resumed. Alberto tells her, “Perdóname, Clara. Las cosas no son como antes” (48). After they do make love, Alberto leaves her alone in his apartment. Clara realizes that he will not fulfill the supporting role that she had desired and that she must accept him “tal y como es” and that she cannot “obligarle a compartir nada que él no quiera” (50). In the same café that they frequented five years before, “en el café de antes, en el de siempre” (51), Clara tries to relate to Alberto as a friend, not just as a romantic partner. She asks Alberto for help in deciding what to do about her pregnancy. She asks, “Pero tú en mi lugar, ¿qué harías?” Alberto tells Clara, “eres tú la que debes decidir, sólo tú” (52). Alberto continues, “Quiero compartir tu miedo, Clara, tu angustia, pero no me pidas nada más. Cuando hayas escogido estaré a tu lado, pase lo que pase, pero, ahora, te pido que decidas, yo no puedo hacerlo por ti” (53). Again, here Alberto is acting as a true friend, one who understands her fears but also encourages her to overcome them and assume the responsibility to decide for herself. He will not help her decide but will support her decision and be there for her no matter what, that is, even if something goes wrong.

The entire Chapter 3 consists of a letter that Clara writes to María from Florence. As we will see in the next chapter, epistolary writing is a mode of
writing characteristic of much of Riera’s work. This letter in Chapter 3 changes the narrative voice, since Clara is the “yo” writing the letter and the recipient is the “tú,” which now refers to the destinatory María rather than to Clara when she addresses herself as “tú,” acting as her own interlocutor. In the letter, Clara complains to María that the particular feminists that María recommended that Clara contact in Florence are superficial, theoretical rather than practical, and “se limitan a [...] odiar a los hombres y despreciar a las demás mujeres, montar un par de manifestaciones al año y vestirse de lila...” (60). It is clear that Clara, as a pregnant single woman who still has not made a decision about whether to have her child or not, appreciates a more useful and valid brand of feminism, such as that practiced by the feminists of Milan, women who have been contributing to a better life for other women, such as organizing day-care centers and family-planning clinics. It is evident that the work that they are involved in now would provide necessary help and support to other women who have decided to change, to transform, to choose to have a child out of the bounds of matrimony. Clara explains that these feminists: “están montando una especial de albergue-comuna para mujeres que pasen por circunstancias familiares difíciles o que hayan decidido cambiar de vida” (60). We understand that Clara’s choice would be easier if she knew that she could count on the type of support from other women that the feminists of Milan could offer her.
Through Clara’s interior dialogue in Chapter 4, we read of Clara’s deep disappointment when she discovers an unconscious, drugged Alberto. It is not the fact that he uses drugs that disturbs her, but rather her disappointment that Alberto does not share with her the intimate details of his life, as she has shared her innermost thoughts with him. Selfishly, Clara doesn’t worry about the harmful effects that drugs might have on someone she cares about but rather is disappointed that her desire for intimacy is not reciprocated. She thinks, “No te molesta que se drogue, lo que te molesta es que no te lo haya dicho, que se niegue a hacerte partícipe de sus deseos, de sus sensaciones” (68). Still unable to make a decision about her pregnancy and without the support of a close friend to help her decide, she becomes depressed and briefly contemplates but quickly rejects suicide as a simple way to avoid making a decision: “Todos los problemas hubieran terminado, todas las decisiones estarían definitivamente tomadas” (70). In Chapter 5, Clara discovers that Alberto and Piero are lovers and thinks that it is Alberto’s bisexuality that explains why the romance between herself and Alberto didn’t continue. Jealous of Piero, Clara compares him to Laura Martuari, the object of desire of Guarini, and projects her own egoism onto them by imagining that both Piero and Laura are shallow because of their “imposibilidad de establecer una comunicación que va más allá de las palabras y de los gestos, más allá de la piel para anular el egoísmo, diluir los límites en un único contorno, conjurar la muerte en una evaporación densísima, en el eterno
misterio del «polvo enamorado»...” (78). Here, Clara shows that she does not understand that, more than friendship, she was looking for unity, identification, but in that unity, the other as an independent person disappears to become an image of the self. Clara must also learn to accept and respect “difference,” and this is what Alberto will help her to understand when he will read her piece concerning Domenico Guarini’s destruction of the painting *Primavera*.

The entire Chapter 6 is a fictionalized short story within the confines of the greater fiction of the novel consisting of the writer Clara’s invented version of the events regarding Guarini, his unrequited love and obsession for Laura Martuari, the doubling of Laura and the Flora of the painting *Primavera*. The entire chapter is ambiguous because, at first reading, it seems to be a continuation of events that are happening in the novel itself. The reader is not immediately aware that it represents a separate fictionalized account, the product of the imagination of the fictional Clara, imbedded within the work of fiction being read. Although at first view the chapter seems completely separate and irrelevant within the larger fiction of the novel, we can deduce the importance of the fictionalized account, because it provides a parallel interpretation or what could be called a fictional double of the nonfiction newspaper articles, both of which were written by Clara, although in contrasting styles. Whereas the newspaper articles are written with a direct, impersonal, professional style, in the story Clara attributes to Guarini the
poetic description, “Mi vida seguirá dependiendo para siempre de una mirada violeta, de un iris teñido con lilas de unos ojos color de glicinias moradas” (87). In the next chapter, we can see that the internal reader of Clara’s story, Alberto, is impatient with and dismissive of Clara’s story when he says, “Sí, sí, depende de una mirada violeta... Eres muy poética” (104). Clara’s fictionalized account juxtaposes different narrative voices, as she alternates from the “yo,” the first-person voice of Guarini, to the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator who repeats the obsessive nature of Guarini’s attraction to Laura, saying, “esa imperiosa necesidad de verla, mil veces más ponderosa que el deseo le llenaba de ansiedades y zozobras” (86). Clara, as the author of Guarini’s story, is projecting onto Guarini her own problems: her own obsessions, her frustrated desire for Alberto, her own disappointments, her “ansiedades” and “zozobras.” The significance of the eyes of the object of desire of Guarini mirrors the significance for Clara of the eyes of Alberto, her own object of desire. As we have observed before, in Alberto’s eyes she saw what she needed to do with Carlos in order to be truthful to herself.

In Chapter 7, there is no narrator, no narration, no commentary, but only a conversation between Alberto and Clara in the style of a theatrical drama. Alberto plays the role of reader and critic of Clara’s story, clarifying for Clara the false nature of platonic love, that “Laura no es más que un reflejo de Guarini, un objeto fabricado por él” and that “La puede adorar y venerar
poco no la quiere. El amor es aceptación, comprensión” (105). Alberto compares the relationship of Guarini and Laura to the poet Petrarch and his object of desire Laura, explaining that the troubadours, Dante, and Petrarch “buscaban el poder a través de su amada” or that they, like Guarini who invented the Laura of his imagination, “se la inventaban, de un personaje real creaban otro ficticio” and their love was not true love because they just played at love, “jugaban a amar” and that “todos se paseaban espejo en mano...Lo único que les preocupaba era su propia imagen. Eran incapaces de amar a nadie porque la única persona que les producía amor era su propia persona” (107). As Riera confirms, “toda la descripción de Laura Martuari es la Laura de Petrarca: “Yo volví a vaciar Petrarca y el Cancionero y administré a Laura todos los rasgos que daba Petrarca a Laura” (Nichols “Carme Riera” 218-9). Akika Tsuchiya demonstrates that in the portrayal of Laura in her short story of the “Segunda Parte,” “Clara has effectively created a discourse in which the woman has no story, no voice of her own, but rather acts as the impulse (the desire) that generates the narrative of the male quest” (“Seduction” 88). Tsuchiya explains:

Through the figure of Alberto, who calls attention to the phallocentric nature of Clara’s narrative, the implied author exposes the patriarchal nature of the entire Western literary tradition, from the troubadours to Dante to Petrarch, which is predicated on the female’s submission to the male-authored
text. (“Seduction” 88)

In my interpretation, it is because Alberto is the nonpatriarchal, bisexual model of the androgyne of Hélène Cixous that he is equipped to explain the obsessive idealization inherent in the concept of Renaissance love and thereby tear down the male-centered ideology of the dominant class.

After her discussion with Alberto, Clara clarifies in her factual newspaper article that Guarini did not kill Laura by writing in an epigraph to the article, “No se han encontrado restos humanos en el sitio en el que Guarini asegura haber enterrado a Laura Martuari” (116). Rather, Clara writes in her article that Guarini, “Enterró los recuerdos de su Laura, la que él había creado” (119). In a box with the initials “L.M.” Guarini buried not the body of the living Laura but representations of his idealized object of desire: “Los objetos enterrados, fragmentos de su diario íntimo, cartas de amor, divagaciones sentimentales, apuntes y bosquejos del rostro de Laura, un mechón de sus cabellos, el Cancionero de Petrarca” (117). In this way, Guarini symbolically buries and therefore rejects the woman (Laura) of the platonic tradition and deconstructs it as a “false” image, in contrast with the art professor, who promulgates the traditional ideology of Platonism. Guarini has learned that the traditional concept of so-called “love” is flawed and deceptive. By symbolically burying Laura, Guarini proves that he has changed, as Clara herself must. Alberto serves as Clara’s Mercury again by setting forth Guarini as a double of Clara, making it clear to Clara that both
she and Guarini idealize a false image of the person they claim to love. We realize that Clara understands and absorbs Alberto’s explanation, for she acknowledges Guarini as her mirrored double: “Domenico Guarini, c’est moi” (108). Just as Guarini has rid himself of the platonic tradition, Clara must rid herself of the false myth of idealized love by imitating Guarini. Like her double Guarini, Clara must deconstruct the influences of the ideology of the painting in order to understand how woman has been traditionally defined, by the sacrifice of her authentic self in giving herself over to patriarchal power and authority. Clara acknowledges the important role of Guarini: “alguien te dio una pista, una clave, un cabo: Guarini” (189). The cut which Guarini made on Flora’s feet in the painting is in the shape of a butterfly, a symbol of metamorphosis, “símbolo de cualquier renacimiento, metáfora del alma según los griegos” (187).

Chapter 8 repeats the style of Chapter 5, as it mixes the interior monologue of Clara, brief interruptions in the words of Alberto, and adds a telephone conversation between Clara and Enrique. As in the confessional of the “Tercera Parte” when Clara was an adolescent where we read only the words of the priest, this conversation is one-sided. Rather than reading the words of the interlocutor, we read only the words of Clara and not the words of Enrique, although we can infer that he has called to ask Clara’s help to take care of his children. In contrast with the scene in the confessional when we heard only the priest’s voice, now we hear Clara’s voice, and she is angry
because she has realized that Enrique doesn’t really love her, that he is taking advantage of her. After the dialogue with her Mercury in Chapter 7, Alberto, who clears the clouds of deception for her, Clara acknowledges the true nature of her relationship, that Enrique “no te añora, te necesita simplemente [...] en cuanto tiene problemas se acuerda de ti” (115). Alberto has helped Clara realize that she didn’t really love Enrique either. When referring to Clara’s relationship with Enrique, Alberto asks her, “— ¿Tú quieres a Enrique tal como es o también fabulas?” (108) We realize that Clara doesn’t love Enrique as he really is, for she realizes, “Es demasiado cartesiano, frío, analítico... Quizás le quiero porque me he acostumbrado a él” (108). Her feelings for Enrique do not rise to Alberto’s standard of true love, which “nos transforma en otro y borra nuestros límites” (107).

In Chapter 9 of the “Segunda Parte,” Alberto’s lover Piero asks Clara if she is still in love with Alberto. She answers sadly, “No, creo que ya no, ahora ya no...” (121), for she has accepted the reality that she will not have a romantic, intimate relationship with him. Clara has understood that Alberto has helped her realize that she alone is responsible for her own life, that “eres tú la que debes decidir, sólo tú” (52). Thanks to him, Clara has learned to live authentically and create her own meaning for herself. She now realizes that she must abandon traditional myths and discourses that have caused her pain but have also provided a false feeling of security. In this way, Una primavera para Domenico Guarini becomes a novel of a female quest for authenticity.
In the chapter of *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* entitled “Rebirth and Transformation,” Annis Pratt states, “the elixir or goal of the rebirth journey is androgynous, nonsexist, in tune with both inner being and the natural world” (137). There is no doubt that, in this quest of Clara, Alberto played the role of what Pratt calls the “Green-World Lover:” “an ideal, nonpatriarchal lover sometimes appears as an initiatory guide and often aids at difficult points in this quest,” and this figure “is less likely to dominate the hero than to constitute a phase through which she must pass” (140). In order to experience a transformation of the self, one must turn away from societal norms, discard old myths and replace archetypes with prototypes, which Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes as “original, model forms on which to base the self and its action” (134).

By rejecting Enrique, Clara rejects the traditional role of woman in a traditional marriage and the myth of the ideal woman and perfect mother as set forth by Francoist ideology. She rejects what Adrienne Rich has called the “lie of the happy marriage” and the “fiction of a well-lived life” (“On Lies” 189) that her mother endured. Clara imagines a conversation with her mother, explaining that she will have her child outside the bounds of marriage: “Espero un hijo y no pienso casarme, aunque me lo pidas de rodillas” (141). Clara further explains that she will defy what Jane Gallop explains as “patriarchal law, the law of the father” which “decrees that the ‘product’ of sexual union, the child, shall belong exclusively to the father, be marked with
his name” (Gallop 71). Clara explains, “quiero que lleve mis apellidos, no los de él [...] ¿Qué me dirá la gente?...Me da lo mismo, que digan lo que quieran” (142). Clara will decide to be a mother through her own personal choice, not through an imposition by culture. She will become a mother because she wants to be, not because she must. She has thus become the rebellious woman that Esther Harding praises and who is “allowing herself to act according to instinct without conscious criticism of what she does and without paying attention to the implication of her words and deeds” (118).

Until now, Clara has been constantly looking for support in the wrong places and has progressively gained the courage to reject false discourses and fears: the religious discourse epitomized by “las terribles admoniciones de San Pablo” (167) as well as the admonition of Asunción, “—Cuénteselo todo a la Virgen” (147); the myth of Eve by letting go of the guilt she had been carrying over the death of Jaime; the discourse of the militant brand of feminism, as she sadly thinks of her feminist friend: “María, María, tu voz, tan lejana, es ahora una derrota infligida al olvido” (158); the nonconformist, rebellious culture of the “bad girl” Marta, the third of Clara’s own Three Graces, for Marta acted with disregard for the consequences of her actions on the life of Clara. Most importantly, Clara has been able to recognize and demystify the male-dominated character of classical myths and archetypes. While riding in a sports car, Clara says to Piero, “no pongas la capota. Me gusta el viento” (120). The now-self, the transformed Clara, rejects the rape-
trauma archetype exemplified by her then-self, the frightened child Clara who was scared by the pursuing wind that was mirrored in the painting Primavera by the frightened Chloris fleeing the pursuing west wind Zephyr.

As we can see, this Renaissance painting (allegorizing mythological figures from antiquity) is used as an intertextual reference that is re-evaluated from an ethical standpoint, which is consistent with the author’s statement about her own literature: “yo no me considero una postmoderna sino una antigua, en mi literatura sí hay un componente moral [...] No se trata de dar al lector normas de conducta sino de mostrar nuestra perplejidad ante la condición humana” (Farrington 82). In general, theorists of postmodernism celebrate decentered, multiple, and fragmented models of self and society as cultural and political resistance against the holistic models previously exalted by modernist paradigms. As we can observe, Riera does not see postmodernist models as effective constructs to address the experiences of her protagonist Clara because these models cannot help her move towards the unity necessary for healing the incapacitating fragmentation she felt as a result of the injuries she suffered under the patriarchal system. Instead, Clara presented her perplexity and her agonizing internal struggle for understanding without which she was not able to function as an independent human being, as a person who is relatively in charge of her destiny and responsible for it.
Examining the painting *Primavera* while her own pregnant body is in a state of metamorphosis, Clara recognizes change as a necessary, basic part of life. As Riera says to Geraldine Nichols, “La vida es una eterna metamorfosis” (Nichols “Carme Riera” 222). Clara realizes that Chloris has had to change in order to become Flora, no matter how painful that change has been. She recognizes the secret power of metamorphosis of the Mercury of the painting, the ability to convert into gold “todo aquello que toca con su caduceo” and that that secret “será revelado a los que, como Chloris o las Gracias, tienen capacidad de transformarse” (187). Clara speculates that Guarini attacked the painting as a purifying rite of a secret sect which used some of the rites of the Knights Templar, destroying what he loved most in “un intento desesperado de avanzar por el verdadero camino de la metamorfosis” (187). Clara learns from Guarini that “Sólo destruyéndose, el ser se transforma en un ser nuevo, sólo la transformación de la materia y el espíritu que pasa de un mundo inferior a uno superior, de lo transitorio a lo permanente, nos puede llevar por el camino de las tinieblas hacia la luz” (187). But the act of deconstruction of Guarini and his modern emphasis on change or metamorphosis, instead of timeless divine eternity, as the principle of existence was not enough for Clara, for Guarini’s acts attacking the painting do nothing to restore the feminine voice. It is Clara as a woman, as a mother who has freely chosen motherhood, and especially as a writer, who has the power to use her voice.
Therefore, it is Clara who will go beyond what she has learned from Guarini and succeed in giving voice to woman.

In the “Epílogo” which represents the train trip back from Florence to Barcelona, Clara realizes that,

no hay nadie, ni tu madre ni Enrique ni María ni siquiera la sombra de Alberto. Nadie. Pero a nadie necesitas, no te hacen falta. Estás sola. Esta es una experiencia hecha a medida de tu soledad. Intransferible, tienes que asumirla plenamente. Sólo así, te sentirás transformada. (196)

Clara is here evoking Alberto’s lesson and, although she says that she is alone, she knows that her friend is with her and that he will always be there as a true companion if she needs him to help her deal with the unpredictable consequences of her decision: “Cuando hayas escogido estaré a tu lado, pase lo que pase” (53). As we can see, Clara’s words do not necessarily imply “existential solitude,” as Ordóñez has argued. Alberto can now love and respect Clara truly because she is also able to love and respect herself. She does not need him to confirm her value as a person or to make decisions in her place and can therefore sincerely reciprocate his friendship. They are finally equals, two independent human beings who stand on the same level.

It is evident that Clara has become a transformed woman, freed from old myths, empowered to bravely face her future. As a mother, she will be able to have a loving, caring, meaningful relationship with the baby she is
carrying because she has freely chosen to be a mother. We can safely assume that this relationship with her child will be very different from the unfulfilling relationship which she had with her own mother, because she will be an authentic, strong person able to take charge of her own life without the restrictions which were passively adopted by weakened, victimized women like her mother. As a writer, she will also speak as her mother could not, as Hélène Cixous urges the woman to speak,

She must write her self [...] An act that will also be marked by woman’s seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression [...] how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public. (“Laugh” 880)

Clara is a writer, as are the protagonists of Cuestión de amor propio and La mitad del alma. Riera, as the creator of these writers, also understands that women can free themselves from repression by the transgressive act of writing.
CHAPTER 3

CUESTION DE AMOR PROPIO

_Cuestión de amor propio_ is a brief, deceptively simple novel consisting of a single unanswered letter from the Catalan writer Angela Caminals to her Danish friend Ingrid, in which Riera explores the themes of friendship, love, seduction, and power through the techniques of rhetoric, epistolary writing, ambiguity, intertextuality, and mirrorings. The relationship between Angela and Ingrid does not resemble the traditional idealized view of friendship consisting of a mutually empathetic, supportive, and nurturing bonding between two people who are alike. Angela’s upbringing in the repressive patriarchal society of postwar Spain caused her to become a neurotic, depressed person and therefore prevented her from living a free, open, secure life as a woman with a strong identity and sense of self. I will demonstrate that although Angela is a writer like the other protagonists I have studied, unlike them she does not engage in an inner search in order to recuperate the power to live authentically and autonomously. Rather, I will show that Angela’s purpose is to manipulate her friend. She attempts to fight back against her society by appropriating the authority of the male classical writers, using their tool of rhetoric to exert power over Ingrid, her supposed friend.

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19 _Cuestión de amor propio_ was originally published in 1987 in Catalan as _Questión d’amor propi_.

The novel begins clearly and simply with Angela’s recognition that she is now forced to write this letter to Ingrid. In it she says that Ingrid has been sending letters to her for a year and, since Ingrid did not get a response, she has threatened to end their friendship if Angela does not write immediately. Angela answers this latest letter, making excuses for her year-long silence and seeking Ingrid’s sympathy. Angela acknowledges that they know each other very well – “tú, que tan bien me conoces” (11) – and, although she had intended to write – “te he contestado mentalmente” (11) – she presents many explanations for not having done so. In the letter that constitutes the novel, Angela describes to Ingrid her brief relationship with the famous writer Miguel Orbaneja, his rejection of her, and her subsequent outrage, anguish, and depression. Riera calls this love story “tan trivial,” “tan déjà vu,” “un asunto tan banal – los hombres mienten y algunas tontas les creen” (“Grandeza” 157). In my interpretation, the major focus of this novel is not a disappointing love affair, but rather is an examination of the relationship between the repressed Angela, who grew up in the oppressive, stifling society of postwar Spain under Franco’s Regime, and Ingrid, who grew up in the open, accepting society of Denmark. Rather than being a novel celebrating an intimate relationship between these two women, *Cuestión de amor propio* tells the story of Angela’s abuse of friendship through her conscious attempt to manipulate and
deceive Ingrid. Angela doesn’t reveal until the end the true purpose of the letter, which is to seduce Ingrid by persuading her to act on Angela’s behalf as a weapon to exact revenge upon Miguel by humiliating him, just as Angela has been humiliated by Miguel. Since the structure of the novel is a single letter from Angela and we do not read Ingrid’s letters to Angela, we learn about Ingrid only from Angela’s point of view. According to Angela, Ingrid is a successful, influential Danish writer who is well-known in the Scandinavian intellectual community and who lives in her home in Stjaer, Denmark. Like Angela, Ingrid is well-educated and very interested in Spanish literature, especially the drama of Spain’s Siglo de Oro. From Angela’s perspective, Ingrid is self-sufficient, intelligent, and very attractive. In Angela’s mind, Ingrid, a strong woman in complete control of her emotions, is not only unembarrassed by but indeed proud of her attitude towards sex. Angela quotes Ingrid: «Yo no renunciaría a ninguno de mis amantes, ni siquiera a aquellos cuyos rostros y cuerpos he olvidado. Todos aportaron experiencias positivas a mi vida, la enriquecieron» (21).

Because of the nature of the brief novel as a single letter and since Angela does not describe her past in detail in this single letter, we must deduce the nature of Angela’s childhood from the clues that Riera provides. We know that Angela was born in the late 1930s in
Catalonia. We can assume that Angela was brought up in an upper-class family, for we learn that she receives an inheritance from her father. We learn about Angela’s personality by her own description of her “carácter cerrado” (13) and “cobardía” (20). Because of Angela’s repressed personality, we know that she was brought up in accordance with the Francoist vision of the subservient role of women in society. She confesses to Ingrid her need for affection by writing that, “una de las cosas que más he deseado toda mi vida ha sido que alguien me llamara pequeña, pequeñita mientras me abrazaba” (22). Since Angela is still starved for affection as an adult, we can infer that in her childhood Angela was deprived of the affection that a young child needs in order to grow up with the feeling of being loved and protected. Angela looks back with idealistic nostalgia to the Paradise Lost of a childhood of her imagination, seeking the feeling of tenderness, searching for “ternura, esa sensación que nos devuelve al jardín siempre azul de la niñez, en el que cualquier pesadilla desaparecía [...] ahuyentada por la tibia voz de mamá que nos acunaba” (21). These words and her craving for affection lead us to believe that this nurturing, comforting mother never existed for Angela.

It is not difficult to assume that Angela lived a solitary childhood, for she never mentions siblings or childhood companions. When she speaks about her adolescence, she emphasizes her devotion to writers with the “culto
devoto” (26) that she rendered to them. She speaks with pride of her devoted practice of maintaining writers’ autographs in a “cuaderno impecable” (26) and the correspondence she had with several writers. In this way, we can safely deduce that she spent much time in the solitary pastime of reading literature. In secret, Angela aspired to marry a young promising writer whom she would support and “ayudaría a triunfar” (26), in anticipation of fulfilling the accepted role of a woman in the ideology of the patriarchal society of Francoist Spain, that of woman as helpmate to a man. Rather than believing that she herself could be a writer, she assumed that it would be her role to help a man as he wrote, because she grew up in a culture in which the writers were traditionally male. We know that Ingrid does not share Angela’s view of a woman’s secondary position in a patriarchal society, for Ingrid did not grow up in the traditional culture of the postwar world of Franco’s Spain. I believe that Ingrid’s gift to Angela of a pen many years ago was significant, because the pen represents the traditional male tool for writing. We are reminded of two of Riera’s articles, “Femenino singular” and “Vindicación de Teresa de Cepeda,” in which she explains how women can use the authority of their written words as a weapon to challenge the patriarchal society which is trying to subjugate them. In both articles, Riera cites the German critic Hans Mayer, who states that, “hasta nuestros días, cuando una mujer escribe se convierte en una Judith armada de pluma y la pluma puede ser una arma tan peligrosa como una espada” (“Femenino singular” 29). Just as the biblical Judith
appropriated the male weapon of the sword to save her people, Riera
demonstrates that the woman writer can take up the male tool of the pen in
order to appropriate the power and authority previously set aside for men.
From this perspective, by choosing a pen as a gift for Angela, it is not difficult
to assume that Ingrid wanted Angela to free herself from and to reject the
traditional, accepted role of woman in Spain’s male-dominated society and
appropriate for herself a dominant role by realizing that she should not aspire
to help a male writer but rather that she should become a writer herself. We
can infer that, unlike Angela, Ingrid did not grow up in a paternalistic society
which repressed female sexuality, for Ingrid does not share Angela’s
inhibitions. Whereas Angela has been unable to maintain free and mutually
enriching romantic relationships, Ingrid is sexually open and has had many
lovers, both men and women.

In depicting the relationship between the two women in Cuestión de
amor propio, Riera repeats the ambiguity she used as a technique to hide the
true relationship between the two female lovers of the title story of her first
short story collection, Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar. In the same way,
Riera veils the ambiguous nature of Angela’s past relationship with Ingrid
with hints and suggestion rather than with clear description. Since the pen
that Angela is using to write the letter is old and was a gift from Ingrid, we
know that Angela and Ingrid have had a long-term relationship. We are led to
believe that Angela and Ingrid met in Denmark a long time ago, for Angela
remembers “nuestros largos paseos por el campus de Aharus” (20). Were these long walks during their student days when both were very young university students? If so, their relationship began more than twenty-five years ago when Angela was between eighteen and twenty-two years of age. Angela describes intimate conversations during the long walks that she and Ingrid took on the campus of the University of Aharus in Denmark when Ingrid used to reproach Angela for her “actitud pusilánime frente al amor” (20) and advised her to adopt a more open attitude, to consider sex as a physical and mental necessity providing an enriching and pleasurable experience.

Angela describes an obsessive memory of a romantic encounter on a beach. Here, like the recurrent motif of the sea in much of Riera’s narrative, the sea is linked with eroticism. Angela recalls an encounter on the beach, asking that Ingrid also recall the same encounter: “Acompáñame de nuevo, querida Ingrid [...] junto a un mar sumido y una playa feliz, la huella de nuestros pasos acompasados sobre la arena húmeda y la sombra entrelazada de nuestros cuerpos” (35-6). Whose steps and whose bodies is Angela remembering? To whom does the adjective “nuestros” refer? In her letter to Ingrid, Angela has just been describing to Ingrid the beginnings of her relationship with Miguel in Valencia. Is Angela describing to Ingrid a recent memory with Miguel? It is more likely that Angela is describing a distant memory of Angela and Ingrid on the Danish coast near Aharus during their
student days, for Angela invites Ingrid to accompany her again to this beach. If Ingrid had not already been present during that erotic encounter on the beach, then the exhortation to accompany Angela again would not make sense.

No other critics mention the possibility of an early lesbian relationship between Angela and Ingrid, although such a relationship would clarify many of the ambiguities of the text. It is likely that Ingrid knows through first-hand knowledge about Angela’s inability to resolve and to accept her sexuality. Angela recalls Ingrid’s commentary of Angela’s novel *Interior con Figuras* when Ingrid wrote to Angela, «Tus novelas [...] ganarían mucho si fueras capaz de resolver por ti misma [...] tu vida sexual, si fueras capaz de aceptar con naturalidad y sin cortapisas el deseo» (20-1). If Angela and Ingrid had had a romantic relationship, that relationship would explain the force that Angela felt of the “verso de Salinas que había martilleado reservado desde siempre para una ocasión semejante:”

*Miedo de ti.*

*Quererte es el más alto riesgo.* (36)

If the “ti” of the poem were Ingrid and Angela had rejected a lesbian relationship with her, Angela’s fear of loving Ingrid would be understandable in light of the “carácter cerrado” and “cobardía” that I already mentioned. In this context, Angela would be afraid of taking the great risk of transgressing the heterosexual standards of her traditionalist culture, because
homosexuality was unacceptable in light of the Franco Regime’s exaltation of the hierarchal family with the father holding ultimate power over all members of his household. This power is reflected in Gerda Lerner’s explanation in *The Creation of Patriarchy* that, in a typical patriarchal society, the young woman is the property of her father until he hands her over to her husband. Lerner writes, “the subordination of female children and of wives is lifelong. Daughters can escape it only if they place themselves as wives under the dominance/protection of another man” (239).

Angela’s fear of transgressing these acceptable social conventions would explain her insecurities, repression, closed nature, frustration, and her claimed “desinterés por el sexo” (21). Denial of the nature of her own sexuality would explain Angela’s description of “experiencias adolescentes [...] negativas” (19), her failed marriage to Jaime – “hermosamente fracasado” (19), according to Jaime – and her fear of establishing any serious relationships, which resulted in seven years without a sexual relationship.

Because of her own “cobardía,” Angela has felt a “rechazo visceral a establecer cualquier relación seria” (19-20). Knowing that only Ingrid knew the truth about her most intimate feelings would explain Angela’s statement, “Sé que tú, Ingrid, eres una de las pocas personas de mi entorno afectivo capaz de entender este miedo. Nuestra vieja amistad te ha dado las pautas necesarias para ello” (18-9). Angela’s insecurities and fears are consistent with those caused by growing up as a devalued, inferior young girl forced to comply with
the norms of a paternalistic society. As a result, she displays the compulsive
neurotic trends described by Karen Horney in *Self Analysis*: the “neurotic
need for affection and approval” and “indiscriminate need to please others
and to be liked and approved of by others” and has the “dread of desertion”
and “dread of being alone” which are what Horney calls “neurotic trends”
which, when frustrated, cause anxiety and feelings of panic and fright in the
neurotic person (55).

After her initial relationship with Ingrid, Angela returned to Spain,
where she met and married the banker Jaime. Since Jaime was not a writer,
Angela could not fulfill her childhood dream of being behind the scenes as the
woman responsible for the success of a writer. Her marriage to Jaime failed,
and Angela was once again deprived of the love and tenderness she has craved
since childhood. Perhaps influenced by Ingrid’s gift of a pen, Angela began to
write fiction, in part to compensate for her lack of love. Angela quotes her
own words during interviews and round-table discussions: “Toda escritura es
una carta de amor”, “Escribo para que me quieran”, “El ansia de pervivencia
nos empuja a amar del mismo modo que nos empuja a crear”, “El texto no es
más que un pretexto amoroso” (24). Like the external author Riera herself,
Angela writes in Catalan, and her books receive a wider audience after also
being published in Castilian. Like Riera, Angela has a successful career as a
writer. She is well-known in literary circles, grants interviews, and
participates in literary conferences. However, the protagonist Angela is not
the author Riera. Indeed, Riera takes seriously the distinction between author and narrator and warns us of the error of confusing author and literary character. She states, “Una cosa es la novela y otra cosa es el autor, porque aquello es un mundo autóctono y es distinto” (Nichols “Carme Riera” 208).

Unlike Riera, Angela is timid, insecure, unfulfilled, repressed, and unhappy.

When writing about the difference between her own view of love and sex and that of Ingrid, Angela emphasizes the contrast between them, referring to Ingrid’s openness about sex, her promiscuity and her bisexuality. Angela writes:

Para ti el contacto íntimo con otros cuerpos es enriquecedor [...] Yo en cambio pertenezco al tipo de mujeres [...] que son incapaces de entrar en otros brazos sin estar enamoradas, y jamás hubiera podido dedicar un libro «A los hombres y mujeres de mi vida», como hiciste tú, dando además una larga lista de nombres. (20)

The idealistic Angela, rather than respecting Ingrid for this openness, hints at her own moral superiority over Ingrid, explaining her own search for a true, great love: “el único destinario que me interesaba, un tú que justificaría a partir de entonces mi existencia y a quien, sin saberlo, había guardado tantas ausencias en una virginidad si no física al menos espiritual” (24). Angela is looking for what Riera has explained as a search for the lost half of the soul. Riera cites the account of Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium in which Zeus separated once-whole humans into two halves in an attempt to “enfeeble their
strength,” because, when they were whole, “Terrible was their might and strength.” After they were divided, the two parts clung together, “each desiring his other half.” Aristophanes explains the “intense yearning” for this coming together as the origin of love. He explains, “when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself, [...] the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy.” Through this magical power of love, the two halves are fused together “so that being two you shall become one” (Jowett). To describe the force of this indestructible love, C.F. Keppler explains, “its flame is in the soul from birth [...] it will not cease with death” (132).

We recognize Angela’s search for a perfect love in Karen Horney’s description in *Neurosis and Human Growth* of the neurotic person’s attitude towards love, an attitude that is intimately tied to his or her “deeply ingrained feeling of being unlovable.” Like Angela, the neurotic tends to “hold on to the illusion [...] that sometime, somewhere he will meet the ‘right’ person who will love him” and expects only the “perfect love,” “expecting something different from what it can give” (299-300). According to Horney, the neurotic person overvalues love “because ‘love’ is supposed to solve all problems” (*Self Analysis* 55). We have seen how, in her search for “ternura,” Angela also fits Horney’s description of the masochistic person, one who is in constant need of affection, attention, and reassurance. According to Horney, the masochistic person is:
very emotional in his relations with people; easily attached
because he expects them to give him the necessary reassurance;
easily disappointed because he never gets, and can never get, what
he expects. The expectation or illusion of the ‘great love’ often
plays an important role [...] Where he has had sexual relations [...] he has been deserted, disappointed, humiliated, badly treated.

(“Feminine Masochism” 27)

We have seen how Angela has been and will continue to be emotional in her relationships, how she has been searching for her “great love,” how she has been and will continue to be disappointed and even humiliated in her sexual relationships.

We have seen that Angela and Ingrid possess widely divergent personalities, emotional strengths, views, values, and attitudes towards love and desire. In my interpretation, their differences are a direct result of their upbringing in different societies, Angela in the repressive society of Francoist Spain and Ingrid in the open, accepting society of Denmark. Angela contrasts the countries in which she and Ingrid live. She emphasizes the distance which separates her from Ingrid, writing, “esos miles de kilómetros que nos separan” (11) and focuses on the differences between these two countries, “el paisaje que contemplo, tan distinto del tuyo” (13). Angela speculates that the distance between these two countries is the source of their differing attitudes. She writes, “Tal vez esos miles de kilómetros que nos separan – que, frente al
Mediterráneo, parece inviter al paganismo del goce sin culpa – nos ha hecho ver cuestiones de un modo diferente” (21). Perhaps Angela was able to free herself temporarily from the expectations of the traditionalist society of Francoist Spain while she was in Denmark with Ingrid. The “goce sin culpa,” the guiltless pleasure which Angela appears to have been able to feel through her suspected intimate romantic relationship with Ingrid long ago in Denmark disappeared when she returned to Spain, for her closed society again prevented Angela from living openly, freely, and authentically. Angela uses contrasting images of light, the accepting light of Denmark and the harsh light of Spain, in order to contrast the two cultures. Angela writes, “los tonos difuminados […] La suave palidad de vuestros días neblinosos me parece mucho más acogedora y revierte en mí de un modo positivo” (15). In contrast, Angela refers to the light of Spain as a “rabiosa luz” (14), a “poderosa luz” (15), even a “furiosa luz” (15), which treats its inhabitants cruelly, which “nos muestra con crudeza lacas, aristas, protuberancias, y sin disimulos, con la máxima precisión, nos hace caer en la cuenta de que los objetos tienen perfiles ásperos” (15). Under the harsh, cruel, and powerful light of Francoist Spain, Angela is not strong enough to transgress the standards of her society by maintaining a romantic relationship with another woman, as she could perhaps do in Denmark.

It is difficult to determine what has held together their friendship over such a long period of time, although they have maintained a correspondence
with one another over the years, very likely discussing the literature they both loved and their respective writing careers. They have visited each other and even planted a garden together at Ingrid’s home. However, Angela and Ingrid are very different from one another and do not relate to Janet Todd’s assertion that, “Female relationships are ties between likes; in them a woman learns to mirror herself, not a man” (413-4). Elizabeth Abel’s definition of friendship as the “definition of self through other” (435) is also lacking in the relationship between Angela and Ingrid, as Angela consistently focus on the differences rather than the similarities between the two. Elizabeth Abel cites sociological studies which suggest that “female friendships are emotionally deeper and involve a higher level of self-disclosure” when compared to friendships between males (415). After citing the “intensity of identification” evident in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Abel emphasizes the mutuality, reciprocity and empathy inherent in friendship, stating, “Through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation with an other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self” (416).

Riera describes the idealized version of friendship according to classical writers such as Aristotle and Cicero as “un sentimiento elevado y noble, desinteresado, como es la amistad que está por encima – dentro de la preceptiva digamos clásica – del amor” (Nichols “Carme Riera” 207). In *Friendship: An Exposé*, Joseph Epstein describes Aristotle’s concept of
friendship in the *Nichomachean Ethics*: “Perfect friendship, for Aristotle, is ‘the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue;’ [...] At the heart of friendship for Aristotle is the love of a friend’s character or of his moral virtue” (13). In his treatise “On Friendship or *Laelius,*” Cicero defined friendship as “a complete accord on all subjects human and divine, joined with mutual good will and affection” (9). Pliny the Younger “saw friendships in the context of Roman concepts of justice and honor” (Epstein 62). In *The City of God,* Saint Augustine quotes Horace as he describes his close friend: “for he was my ‘other self.’ Someone has well said of his friend, ‘He was half my soul’” (qtd. in Epstein 63), which reminds us of Aristophanes’ description of the origin of love.

It would be an error to expect Angela and Ingrid to conform to the idealized vision of friendship of the classical writers, one obvious reason being that Aristotle and Cicero omitted women in their discussions of friendships, thereby focusing only on friendships between men. We can relate Angela and Ingrid to woman friends, such those described by the English novelist Sue Lamb, who writes in her essay “Female Friendship” that, “at the heart of most female friendships is ‘a mixture of sympathy and instruction: of a loving heart and a shrewd eye’ [...] a willingness to expose their vulnerability.” They “shoot straighter with one another than do men” (Epstein 97). Certainly, if we apply this criterion to Angela and Ingrid, we see that Ingrid seems to have a “shrewd eye” and seeks to give advice to Angela, and Angela does expose her
vulnerability to Ingrid. However, the fact that Angela does not “shoot straight” with Ingrid will be clear in a later discussion of Angela’s motives in writing the letter to Ingrid. We will also see that Angela seeks the sympathy of Ingrid but doesn’t reciprocate by showing a “loving heart” to Ingrid. Angela seems focused only on herself and seems to be unaware that other people would judge her to be a bad friend. Because of Angela’s neurotic tendencies and unfulfilled needs, Angela and Ingrid do not share the reciprocity which is necessary between friends. We can contrast the friendship of Angela and Ingrid to Heinz Kohut’s model of the mutual empathy characteristic of friendship: “Empathy is a fundamental mode of human relatedness,” “the recognition of the self in the other,” “it is the accepting, confirming and understanding human echo,” “the resonance of essential human alikeness,” “a psychological nutriment without which human life as we know and cherish it could not be sustained” (qtd. in Women’s Growth 34). Judith Jordan further explains:

When empathy and concern flow both ways, there is an intense affirmation of the self and, paradoxically, a transcendence of the self, a sense of the self as part of a larger relational unit. The interaction allows for a relaxation of the sense of separateness; the other's well-being becomes as important as one's own.

(“Meaning” 82)
When I analyze in detail the letter from Angela to Ingrid, it will be clear that, rather than participating in a relationship in which “empathy and concern flow both ways,” Angela subverts the mutuality and intimacy of friendship through conscious manipulation and deceit.

It is impossible to explain the present relationship between these two women without discussing Angela’s relationship with a man that has caused her anger and frustration. Only by first examining Angela’s struggle for power and attempt at seduction with Miguel does it become clear how Angela attempts to mirror that same attempt at seduction by manipulating Ingrid, thus abusing her friendship. As we read Angela’s account of her relationship with Miguel, we must be careful not to take her interpretations at face value. Riera herself hints at the possible untruth of what Angela writes, suggesting, “no sabemos si la historia fue así porque solamente tenemos una voz […] no siempre tiene la razón la persona que escribe. Yo no sé si, pues no he llegado a saber si él realmente fue tan malo como dice Angela que fue” (qtd. in Everly 184). Riera indicates here that Angela should be considered as an “unreliable narrator,” which is a well-known term created by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Ingrid, as the reader of the letter, and we, as the external readers of the novel, should not accept as truth and as fact what Angela has to say. Riera tells us that, in an epistolary novel, the author is absent, for the author must cede completely the voice and the point of view. Riera explains that even though the author knows that what is in the letter...
might not have anything to do with reality, the author must remain silent (“Grandeza” 156). Since there is no third-person omniscient narrator and no authorial voice in this epistolary novel, there is no external proof that what Angela says is true, accurate, and real. Everything that Ingrid reads in the letter and that we read in the novel comes through the filter of a person who is psychologically unstable, as I have demonstrated that Angela is an insecure, neurotic person in constant need of affection, reassurance, and approval. In this context, then, Angela could be unaware that her observations about Miguel and the events of her encounters with Miguel are possibly erroneous and that she could be mistaken. However, I believe that Angela is an unreliable narrator and should not be trusted because she is deliberately lying to Ingrid through her own self-interest and vanity. I will discuss later in more detail the precise seductive and rhetorical techniques which clearly demonstrate that Angela, in her letter to Ingrid, should not be believed. I agree with Kathryn Everly’s affirmation that “the truth of the story lies outside the text” (184-5). In my interpretation, the truth outside the text consists of Angela’s deliberate misuse of her friendship with Ingrid. When Ingrid reads this questionable account, she should be wary of taking Angela’s words as truth. Likewise, as we read Angela’s account of her story with Miguel, therefore, we should interpret the narration of an unreliable narrator with care and suspicion. It is our task as the external readers of the novel to sift through Angela’s account and decide what part of her story is true, if any, for
In her letter to Ingrid, Angela narrates her own version of her relationship with Miguel. The first meeting between Angela and Miguel occurs when Angela is forty-eight years old, single and unattached. In fact, Angela has not had an intimate, romantic relationship with anyone since she and Jaime divorced seven years ago. Angela describes Miguel as a very successful writer five years older than Angela who lives in Madrid. He is married and has children. One month before their meeting, Miguel had been named director of the important Fundación para el Progreso de la Cultura. An intelligent, well-known and influential representative of the dominant male culture of Spain, Miguel is a speaker at a five-day conference of writers in Valencia, which Angela attends at the urging of her editor. Angela is attracted to Miguel because of his brilliance and success. She writes, “Su ponencia fue la más brillante, lúcida y redonda de cuantas escuché.” Angela describes Miguel as “uno de los escritores de moda mejor tratados por la crítica – y admiraba la agudeza petulante de sus declaraciones públicas” (27).

Angela’s prestige as a writer would be considered inferior to Miguel’s, first because of her being a woman writer who is trying to complete in a field dominated by men. Her inferior position is consistent with Akiko Tsuchiya’s indication that, “Spanish critics have tended to denigrate modes and genres that have been identified traditionally with women’s writings such as
autobiography and confessional writing.” This categorizing of women’s writing as personal and private is considered less literary than “the supposedly transcendent and universal nature of men’s writing” (“Women and Fiction” 218). Angela herself expresses “la falta de interés de los españoles por memorias y epistolarios,” characterizing what “un tipo tan misógino como Unamuno” called “literatura de confesión” (15). In this context, the word “interior” of the title of Angela’s novel Interior con figuras indicates that it is a novel which would fit into the less respected category of introspective, confessional writing. Compared with Miguel, who is a man from Madrid writing in Castilian Spanish, Angela is doubly marginalized by being a woman from Barcelona who writes in Catalan, a language that is considered secondary and indeed rejected by publishers. In her article “Cómo se escribe una novela,” Riera discusses the “dolorosa y absurda cuestión” and “modo estúpido” of the publishing world, that “editores castellanos son reacios a publicar libros que han aparecido en catalán porque el público los rechaza” (55). Riera laments the marginalization of the Mallorquin dialect of Catalan, the language in which she first writes, and of the Catalan language of Barcelona where she lives, because “un país es más rico cuántas más lenguas tenga” (35). In spite of her marginalized position as a woman writer of a type of literature that some consider inferior and writing in a language that is considered secondary and unacceptable by the publishing world, Angela still feels proud of her own intelligence, talents, and success as a writer.
Emphasizing her own “amor propio,” she boasts, “Yo era la persona más interesante del congreso, la primera mujer que en un debate público le ponía los puntos sobre las íes [...] Nunca me había sentido tan segura de mí misma” (30). Confident that she can attract with her own intelligence someone as talented as Miguel, Angela employs seductive strategies to pursue Miguel.

Cuestión de amor propio is a novel of mirrored seductions. In writing of the seductions of the novel, most critics focus on the seduction of Angela by Miguel and the later seduction of Ingrid by Angela. It is my position that the first seduction of the novel is the initial seduction of Miguel by Angela. I will discuss later the subsequent seduction of Angela by Miguel, the resultant seduction of Ingrid by Angela, the proposed seduction of Miguel by Ingrid, and the narrative seduction of the external reader by the author Carme Riera. Ross Chambers defines the power of seduction as “the power to achieve authority and to produce involvement.” He continues, “Seduction is, by definition, a phenomenon of persuasion.” Chambers further states that seduction “is, precisely, a means of achieving mastery” (212). The “mastery” of seduction is the power and control that each of the seducers of the novel seeks over the other. Angela’s later attempted seduction of Ingrid is an attempt to manipulate her supposed friend with dishonesty and deceit. We can see that the first seduction in the novel is Angela’s attempted seduction of Miguel. When she first meets Miguel, Angela deliberately sets out to attract him. She writes, “decidí poner todos los medios para que fuera él quien se
interesará por mí, sin intermedios” (28). She plots to impress him with her intelligence and to capture his attention during a conference on Leopoldo Alas’s nineteenth century novel La Regenta. According to Miguel, whose opinions mirror Ingrid’s, this novel represented for the first time in Spanish literature the importance of eroticism and the triumph of matter over spirit. For Miguel, the problem of the protagonist Ana Ozores was not that she was a “personalidad inadaptada” (28) but that her problems were the result of an unsatisfied libido. Miguel’s description of this literary character mirrors Ingrid’s opinion regarding Angela’s problematic sexuality. In a game of intertextuality, Angela, according to both Miguel’s and Ingrid’s interpretations, becomes the mirror image of the literary character Ana Ozores – and vice versa. In order to capture Miguel’s attention and dazzle him with her own intelligence, adeptness at literary criticism, and knowledge of nineteenth century literature, Angela boldly argues an opposite interpretation of La Regenta. Angela repeats the same argument that Riera had written in a 1984 article in La Vanguardia, “Ana sólo quería un cuento.” According to Angela, Ana Ozores grew up without affection in her childhood, and one of her only pleasant memories from childhood was the first time someone told her a story. Angela’s personal interpretation of Ana Ozores mirrors her own lack of affection in childhood, her own yearning to be hugged and called “pequeñita.” For the rest of her life, Ana told herself stories using
her own imagination to keep herself company, which is what Angela has been
doing as a writer of fiction.

Angela had succeeded in capturing Miguel’s interest, for he saved her a seat at his table at dinnertime. She led him to believe that she was a strong, self-sufficient, independent woman because she stood up to him in public and challenged him intellectually. But was it the kind of romantic interest that Angela had anticipated? Or rather, had Angela’s argument injured Miguel’s “amor propio” and male pride? After all, she did embarrass him by contradicting his carefully-presented thesis in front of his colleagues. Does Miguel trap Angela and set her up in order to prove himself right? As we will see, his future actions show that he intends to prove the point of his argument to Angela while recognizing that she too, just like Ana Ozores, suffers from an unsatisfied libido. After succeeding in capturing his interest, Angela deliberately flirts with Miguel, speaking “Con intención coqueta” (32). She continues her plan to seduce him: “yo me empeñaba en cruzar con demasiada frecuencia para sentir sobre mi codo la leve presión de su mano” (32). Miguel and Angela become constant companions for the duration of the conference discussing literature and exchanging notes and commentaries on the conferences they attend together. The gullible Angela believes Miguel’s expression of desire for her and his vows of undying love: “Mi deseo de ti es más inmenso que el océano, más profundo que los simas abisales. Te amaré mientras viva porque nadie, jamás, me ha calado tan hondo” (34-5). Angela
looks forward to a lasting relationship with Miguel, foolishly dreaming that their shared intimacies would be transformed into the future words of biographers who would write their story: “intercambiábamos notas que comenzaron por ser apuntes tontos y acabaron en «actos fundacionales de nuestro amor», según designación suya, documentos valiosísimos para futuros biógrafos” (33-4).

The idealistic, unrealistic Angela believes that she has found in Miguel an irresistible love, the perfect, predestined love: the mythical lost half of her soul described by Aristophanes, her soulmate, which she describes in her letter to Ingrid. Describing the predestined nature of the love bestowed by the mythical Cupid, which we saw in Botticelli’s painting Primavera, Angela writes, “noté el momento en que el arquero divino disparaba sus flechas doradas y mi mitad perdida, tras la catástrofe que nos condenó a una larguísimas escisión, se soldaba por fin con mi ser” (23). Angela’s attitude towards love epitomizes Karen Horney’s description in Neurosis and Human Growth. Horney explains that, for the neurotic, “Love then becomes a feeling so exalted and so celestial that any realistic fulfillment seems by comparison shallow and indeed despicable” (305). Angela writes of “nuestra fatal predestinación,” believing, “No sólo preferíamos los mismos autores, pintores o músicos sino que, además, nos gustaban los mismos libros, cuadros y sinfonías y nos impresionaban idénticos pasajes, trazos o tempos” (24). It is unlikely that Angela and Miguel really did agree so extensively. It is more
likely that their supposed similarities were another instrument of seduction on the part of either Angela or Miguel.

When Angela feels confident that she has captured Miguel’s interest, she attempts to be the one to hold the power in the relationship so that it is she who will decide how their relationship will proceed. Angela relates to Ingrid how, the last night of the conference with only four hours left before their planes leave, Angela suggests that they defer their lovemaking until a later date: “Nos quedaban cuatro horas, un tiempo absolutamente insuficiente para que el tránsito funcionara conforme al ritual que yo pretendía establecer [...] le pedí que dejáramos para un posterior encuentro, el que había de ser definitivo” (37). In spite of her own desire to be held and protected, Angela wants to control, capture, and trap Miguel, “calculando minuciosamente una estrategia válida para desarmarle” (52). However, we can see that Angela’s perception of Miguel’s presumed weakness and her assumption that she could easily conquer and control him prove to be erroneous and lead instead to Miguel’s ability to seduce Angela herself. She explains to Ingrid, “creí adivinar tras esa máscara una vulnerabilidad y una fragilidad enfermizas. Fue ese lado supuestamente débil lo que de verdad me sedujo” (73). However Angela is mistaken, because it is clear that it is Angela and not Miguel who is weak, vulnerable, and able to be dominated.

Angela explains to Ingrid that, after they separate, Miguel and Angela correspond through letters and telephone conversations. Angela receives
from Miguel an orchid encased in plastic. The orchid, a flower symbolizing desire as opposed to the rose as a traditional symbol of love, is accompanied by a note with the words of love «Te amo ya para siempre» (40). Ironically, the orchid is dead. Miguel, who travels a lot for his work, sends other orchids with similar notes from different cities, but Angela misinterprets the symbolism of the cruel gift of the dead orchids. Finally one month after the conference, Miguel says that they can now spend the weekend together. Angela, thinking that she is in control, makes detailed plans for the weekend. Miguel usurps her power by changing the date to a single night. After one night of lovemaking, Miguel leaves abruptly at dawn. At the airport, Miguel sends Angela another orchid, this time with the puzzling, ironically cruel note, «Muchas gracias» (46). Miguel disappears from her life. He doesn’t call, he doesn’t write, nor does he send flowers. She is shocked when she sees in a magazine a photograph of him with another woman. Angela obsessively continues to pursue Miguel, but she gradually becomes aware that he is avoiding her and going on with his own life as if their relationship never existed. Disillusioned and slowly becoming aware of her powerlessness over him, she calls him repeatedly by telephone without being able to reach him. Finally, “tras perseguirle durante varios días [...] logré dar con él” (53). He’s deceivingly jovial on the telephone, but his tone is cool and professional. They talk about the possibility of dinner together, but he is unavailable. Miguel feigns innocence, pretending to not understand why she is angry. After her
initial disbelief, Angela finally becomes painfully aware of the truth, that her conquest of Miguel was an illusion, that he didn’t really love her, despite his words of undying devotion. Miguel, the writer – the magician of words – used the power of words to seduce Angela, since Angela believed that these deceitful words were true. We can relate Angela’s situation to Jean Baudrillard’s explanation: “The strategy of seduction is one of deception. It lies in wait for all that tends to confuse itself with its reality” (69-70). The deceptive seduction of Angela by Miguel is a foreshadowing and mirroring of Angela’s later attempt to seduce Ingrid. As a writer herself, Angela was seduced by the power of the written words that Miguel used in notes to her and in his literature. Angela says, “Y me sedujo, como siempre, el habilísimo manejo de los registros linguísticos” (49). Angela sadly compares herself to depictions of other women her age throughout Spanish literature. She writes, “en la literatura hispánica [...] una mujer de casi cincuenta años no tiene ningún derecho al amor, ni mucho menos al deseo físico” (51).

The final attack on Angela by Miguel is his new novel, El Canto del Cisne, a copy of which Miguel sends to her with the ironic dedication, «Con la seguridad de que tú serás mi mejor crítico» (68). Angela feels used, ridiculed, and humiliated when she recognizes in the novel parallels to their conversations, correspondence, and relationship. The cruelest blow to Angela is Miguel’s mockery of their lovemaking. Angela writes, “En las páginas de la novela no se describe una noche intensa, bella y pletórica como yo la
recuerdo, sino vergonzante, fracasada y estéril” (69). Again, this is an ironic game since, although the book is fictitious, Angela recognizes herself in the female protagonist, Olga. Angela writes, “Y me di cuenta que el personaje de Olga, la madura escritora catalana […] si no es mi retrato es, por lo menos, mi caricatura […] Olga, prisionera de sus prejuicios, se comporta de una manera ridícula, noña, fuera de lugar” (69). Angela explains to Ingrid that she is now fully aware of her mistake in believing Miguel. As a dedicated reader and student of literature, Angela compares her own foolishness to the stupidity of heroines of nineteenth century literature: “soy consciente de mi estupidez, de lo ridícula que le debí de parecer […] compartándome como si tuviera quince años y los hubiera cumplido no en 1985, sino en el siglo pasado, en plena efervescencia romántica” (38). Angela’s story is an intertextual one, as she recognizes herself not only in Miguel’s protagonist Olga, but also in:

las estúpidas heroínas del más sinestro folletín, seducidas y abandonadas por tontas, por no haber tenido un mínimo de perspicacia, y […] me convertiría en un simple objeto, un plato, un vaso o una servilleta de papel que, tras ser usada una sola vez, va directamente al cubo de la basura. (50)

Angela’s illusions are shattered when she realizes that she was a victim of words rather than the heroine that she thought she was, that their relationship itself and Miguel’s duplicitous words were merely rough drafts of the future words that he would use in his literature. Angela realizes, “Quizás
nuestra historia [...] no fue otra cosa que un ensayo general previo a la escritura, a la escritura misma en forma de experiencia de laboratorio” (50).

Miguel, rather than living their relationship, wrote it instead. Angela writes that perhaps the story of Angela and Miguel had only words as a referent, not reality: “Tal vez ni él ni yo éramos otra cosa que un montón de palabras” (49).

Angela is outraged at Miguel’s worst lie, that he defended her to a critic, falsely quoting the insult of the critic. Angela discovers his deceit: that is was, in fact, the critic who defended her against Miguel’s words «Angela Caminals es una escritora acabada» (61). As we see through Angela’s eyes Miguel’s cruelty and malicious arrogance, we see how Angela’s shows Miguel’s attempts to destroy Angela’s reputation as a writer. Angela explains that it was Miguel who attacked Angela’s reputation as a writer. According to Angela, it was Miguel “quien puso en duda, entre bromas y veras, el interés de mi obra y vaticinó frivolamente [...] mi defunción literaria” (62).

Angela’s self-esteem, her “amor propio,” has been severely damaged. She explains, “No mantengo relaciones demasiado buenas conmigo misma, de manera que apenas valoro lo que soy capaz de hacer” (27). As a person who constantly craves affection and approval, Angela experiences the realization of her worst fear, that of appearing ridiculous. Before she told Ingrid the whole story of her “desamor,” Angela excuses herself for not having written sooner because she did not want to lost Ingrid’s respect and approval. She writes: “el miedo de aparecer ante ti, frágil, inerme, llena de prejuicios y, sobre todo,
ridícula” (14). Angela becomes clinically depressed as her loss of self-esteem robs her of her abilities as a writer. She writes about her inability to continue the manuscript she has been working on: “Me sentía absolutamente incapaz de escribir una sola línea, porque me parecía que, entre sus páginas, me esperaba una trampa llena de púas venenosas que me cercenaría los dedos” (63).

The “amor propio” of the title of Cuestión de amor propio refers not only to the self-esteem of Angela but also to the narcissism of Miguel. This follows Noel Valis’s interpretation of the mirrored nature of the “amor propio” of the text:

Miguel’s amor propio, his excessive self-love or narcissism, is increased or gratified, at the expense of another kind of amor propio, Angela’s self-respect as a woman and as a writer [...] another form of amor propio called pride, not exempt from malice [...] different forms of amour propre mirror each other. (321)

There are varying connotations of the expression “amor propio,” which is defined by the Real Academia Española as “El que alguien se profesa a sí mismo, y especialmente a su prestigio.” The Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado defines “amor propio” as “inmoderada estimación de sí mismo” (63). The “prestigio” of the Real Academia’s definition as well as the “Self-Esteem” of Roser Caminal-Heath’s and Holly Cashman’s translation of the title of the novel into English as “A Matter of Self-Esteem” give a positive connotation to
the expression as self-esteem, self-respect, pride in oneself, whereas the “inmoderada estimación” of the Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado gives a negative connotation to “amor propio” as inordinate pride and excessive love of oneself. In the novel, I believe that Riera emphasizes the negative connotation of the meaning of “amor propio.” In the epigraph to the novel, Riera quotes Jaime Gil de Biedma, a Catalan poet who writes,

!Oh! Innoble servidumbre de amar, seres humanos,
y la más innoble
que es amarse a sí mismo! (9)

In Cuestión de amor propio, Angela characterizes the “amor propio,” the self-love of Miguel, the innoble trait of loving himself too much, by comparing him to the mythical Narcissus who falls in love with his own image reflected in the water:

Narciso inclinado sobre el lago apaga la sed, lo que, por supuesto, no consigue inmerso en él. La imagen que busca no es otra distinta de sí mismo [...] Si se acerca más, si cae en la tentación de fundirse en ella, cometerá el error de destruirse” (64).

We recall that, in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, the young Clara also, with inordinate pride, sought an idealized image of herself in her reflection in the water of the pond, an incident that ended in tragedy. Angela recognizes the seduction implicit in the myth of Narcissus, with the
accompanying danger of self-destruction. She seems aware of the self-destruction of Narcissus described by Jean Baudrillard, who writes:

Bending over a pool of water, Narcissus quenches his thirst. His image is no longer ‘other’; it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond [...] The mirror of water is not the surface of reflection, but of absorption. (67)

Angela explains, “No le queda otra alternativa que permanecer alejado, ensimismado, jamás enajenado. La ilusión desaparecía de repente y con ella moría mi capacidad seductora, aunque la suya permaneciera incólume” (64).

Mary Vásquez reiterates Angela’s interpretation, that Miguel has seen himself reflected in the mirror image of Angela but must separate from her to escape seduction. Vásquez describes “Miguel as a Narcissus who sought in her his double, a repetition of himself. Unlike Narcissus, he drew back from the reflection of himself in her, thus saving himself from self-destruction” (352).

I disagree with this interpretation. In contrast, I believe that Miguel was never in danger of being seduced by Angela, that Angela’s seduction of Miguel was doomed to failure from the start, that Miguel deliberately used their supposed relationship as a basis for his upcoming novel, and that Angela’s perception of Miguel’s weakness was an illusion. The struggles between Miguel and Angela, which foreshadow Angela’s upcoming power play with Ingrid, are attempts to exert power, control, and authority of the subject over the “other.” However, I do agree with Mary Vásquez’s interpretation that
Miguel, in rewriting Angela as the protagonist of *El Canto del Cisne*, reasserts masculine authority and that “By casting her as a ‘washed-up writer,’ he took control of her” (355).

Angela, following the literary convention of picaresque literature, presents herself as a supplicant dependent on the good graces of Ingrid, who represents an authority figure who will decide Angela’s fate, for Angela cannot succeed in her plan without the positive verdict of Ingrid. Duplicitously, without revealing her plan and without revealing how Ingrid will eventually play the role of judge, Angela writes, “quiero que la tengas muy presente a la hora de juzgar mi conducta” (17). She anticipates Ingrid’s negative reaction and asks her to withhold judgment until she has heard all of Angela’s arguments. She writes, “tendrás, de momento, que disimular tu desagrado, querida mía, y dejar para más adelante tus reprimendas [...] Luego ríñeme todo lo que quieras. Grítame como sueles” (38). Angela assigns to Ingrid the role of priest as the particular authority figure who will judge Angela, as Riera makes use of religious vocabulary and images. This is consistent with Noel Valis’s characterization of the novel as an act of confession, calling it a “self-conscious reflection of and on the forms of confessional literature, particularly as practiced in Spain” (314). Riera herself has related the beginnings of her own writing to telling stories or confessing to a priest. She writes, “Empecé a escribir cuando hice la primera comunión [...] a partir de entonces podría confesar, es decir, contarles historias al confesor, aquel placer de hablar sin
ver y sin ser vista” (Racionero 14). When the character Angela writes, “estoy de rodillas frente a la rejilla” (21) and “Te confieso, Ingrid” (52), she temporarily places Ingrid in a position of power. Seeking Ingrid’s approval, Angela writes, “lo que quería era que tú le dieras el nihil obstat” (25). After Ingrid judges her, Angela explains how Ingrid will decide Angela’s fate. Angela writes, “Estoy dispuesta a cumplir la penitencia que gustes imponerme” (38).

Since Angela cannot retaliate directly against Miguel, this male with his inherent power in a patriarchal system, she employs the seductive power of epistolary writing to fight back indirectly. Through the writing of the letter which constitutes the novel, Angela attempts to exert power and control over Ingrid, so that Ingrid will act as Angela’s instrument to, in turn, exercise power and control over Miguel. The epistolary form of this novel allows the author Riera to juxtapose past, present, and future times. Her protagonist Angela, writing the letter in present time, describes to Ingrid the recent past, the events over a year ago, which include Angela’s meeting with Miguel, their short-lived relationship and breakup, and Miguel’s subsequent humiliation of Angela. The reader can also discern the more remote past through suggestions about Angela’s childhood, youth, and her early relationship with Ingrid. The internal reader Ingrid will read the letter at an implied
future time, which will also include Miguel’s planned visit to
Scandinavia and Ingrid’s hoped-for retaliation and revenge on Miguel.
Describing the epistle as “una de las características de mi obra,” Carme
Riera defines “epístola” as, “texto literario configurado en los moldes
de la carta que implica, por tanto, un sujeto emisor que escribe a un
receptor ausente a quien se dirige y cuya presencia se configura en el
texto” (“Grandez” 150). The character of this absent interlocutor,
although important to the letter, must be inferred or imagined. This
follows Emilie Bergmann’s description of epistolary fiction: “In fiction,
letter-writing paradoxically gives the illusion of an intimate and
complete disclosure of the characters’ feelings and experiences,” but it
is an “incomplete form of communication” (22). In Cuestión de amor
propio, this communication is incomplete because we do not read the
reactions or responses of Ingrid, the internal reader of Angela’s letter.
In spite of being incomplete, the epistolary discourse itself in the novel
itself is between an “I” and a “you,” between the letter writer and the
internal reader who is, as Janet Gurkin Altman tells us, “a specific
character represented within the world of the narrative, whose reading
of the letters can influence the writing of the letters” (12). This internal
reader – in this case, Ingrid – has a reciprocal role in the writing of the
letter, both affecting the letter writer and being affected by him. The
first-person writer of the letter always has in mind the second person,
the “you” of the letter. However, the final destinatory of epistolary fiction is the reader of the novel, but this external reader is outside the text and has no direct effect on the writing of the letter.

Riera explains that the purpose of a letter is to persuade its reader, “captar su atención y, si es posible, atraerle y aun persuadirlo” (“Grandeza” 148). In Cuestión de amor propio, Angela’s words to Ingrid are not sincere expressions of intimacy between friends but rather a deceitful attempt to capture Ingrid’s attention and to persuade or convince Ingrid to do what Angela wants her to do. We can trace this persuasive purpose of the epistle to the work of the Roman poet Ovid, who was the first to expand the epistolary form. As Linda Kauffman convincingly explains, the “specifically political strategy of persuasion” appears in Ovid’s 5 B.C. work Heroides (22). In Heroides, Ovid wrote 21 fictitious letters by mythological women to their lovers who had abandoned them. Kauffman explains how each heroine “comments on the fate of other heroines” and “draws attention to the repetitive structure of desire, seduction, and betrayal” (42). We can compare Angela’s letter to these letters of Ovid. In both cases, the “heroine proceeds from denial of the reality of her betrayal to doubt of her lover’s intentions and then to jealousy, outrage, and despair” (43).

Riera, calls attention to the seductive nature of all writing, but especially of epistolary writing:
el escritor debe ser un buen seductor y la escritora una buena
seductora, y que para seducir al lector lo que hay que hacer es
encontrar un tono confidente, cómplice, envolvente, y ese tono
suele darse precisamente en la carta [...] Cuando se escribe una
carta se intenta explicar el punto de vista personal e intentar
convencer, de la mejor manera posible, al destinatario, que
siempre es el lector. (Aguado 36)

In my interpretation, the art of persuasion used by Angela in her letter
to Ingrid can be traced back in history through the Enlightenment, through
the Renaissance, to the period of Classical Antiquity. In her study of an
important work of the Enlightenment, Rosa Perelmuter Pérez in “La
estructura retórica de La Respuesta a Sor Filotea,” analyzes the techniques of
classical forensic rhetoric used by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in her well-known
letter to her accuser. Perelmuter Pérez explains how “Sor Juana disimule [...] encubre su identidad de oratio bajo el disfraz de confidencia, de carta
familiar” (51). William Crane, describing the popular writing of letters during
the Renaissance, references Libellus de Conscibendis Epistolis, the 1521 work
of the Dutch humanist Desiderato Erasmus, and demonstrates how Erasmus
added the familiar letter to the established deliberative, demonstrative, and
judicial classifications of epistolary writing. Crane explains that, “The
Renaissance treatises on letter writing were almost entirely restatements of
the rules of ancient oratory” (77). These techniques described by Perelmuter
Pérez and Crane are the same techniques that Riera uses in Angela’s personal letter in *Cuestión de amor propio*, a letter intended to persuade and seduce Ingrid.

In this context, these techniques of persuasion used by Angela can be traced further back in history to the period of Classical Antiquity. In the fourth century B.C. in *The Art of Rhetoric*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits” (74). Persuasiveness became “a fully systematic and even scientific exercise” and “an important component in the general study of man” (Lawson-Tancred 8). Aristotle identified three important aspects of rhetoric: the speaker (ethos), the listener (pathos), and the subject matter (logos). *Ethos* describes the projection of the character of the speaker in order to show himself as trustworthy and credible. In this way, the speaker tries to gain the good graces of the audience by demonstrating his own virtue. *Pathos* refers to emotion felt by the listeners. Later rhetoricians broadened *pathos* to include the attempt by the speaker to stir the emotions of the audience. The speaker tries to evoke the sympathy of the audience by highlighting the difficulties and suffering he has undergone. Through *logos*, the speaker convinces the audience through logical reasoning, so that the audience will easily accept the truth of the subject matter. Aristotle defined both oratory and rhetoric as being associated with persuasion and distinguished three separate categories: deliberative, demonstrative, and
forensic oratory, which dealt with judicial matters and in which the audience consisted of a judge or jury. Later, the word “oratory” was used to refer to oral speech, and the word “rhetoric” was expanded to include written expression.

In the first century B.C., Cicero and Quintilian, owing a great debt to the writings of Aristotle, were the most eloquent and influential writers on the techniques of rhetoric. Cicero divided the oration itself into sections. The *exordium* was the introduction, which was designed to obtain the benevolence of the listener. Cicero described it as an “address bringing the mind of the hearer into a suitable state to receive the rest of the speech” (*De Inventione* 7). In the *narratorio*, the speaker clearly explained the facts of the case, and in the *proposito*, he stated his purpose. The *argumentatio* included the *confirmatio* or logical arguments, the *refutatio* or refutation of anticipated arguments by the opposition, and the *peroratio*, a persuasive and convincing appeal to the listener, reinforcing his ties with the speaker. Cicero further divided the *exordium* into two parts:

- first of all a beginning, and secondly language calculated to enable the orator to work his way into the good graces of his hearers [...] an address which employs a certain dissimulation, and which by a circuitous route as it were obscurely creeps into the affections of the hearer. (7)
In the *exordium*, Cicero suggests causing the character of the adversary to be condemned: “They will be brought into hatred, if any action of theirs can be adduced which has been lascivious, or arrogant, or cruel, or malignant” (8). Since forensic rhetoric involved legal matters, the audience was both judge of past actions and judge or jury with the power to determine a future verdict. The speaker had to present and prove a convincing case, as if he were arguing a legal matter in a courtroom before a judge and jury.

Using the techniques of classical rhetoric in her letter to Ingrid, Angela responds directly and immediately to Ingrid’s latest letter with its implied threat of the withdrawal of her friendship. Angela begins her letter, “Tienes razón. Acepto tu rabioso ultimátum” (11). Angela apologizes for the long delay, promising to explain her silence of one year, but her excuses are weak and unconvincing. She claims to have had good intentions, but she blames the untrustworthy character of letters. She mistrusts “este intermedio convencional [...] no confio en exceso” and explains that it is “mucho menos cómplice que la voz” (12). Angela also conveniently rejects communication by telephone, which “me resulta todavía más incómodo: me obligaría a ser breve” and complains of “el agravante de que podría sonar en un momento inoportuno” (12). Angela promises clarity – “he pretendido, en todo momento, ser directa y explícita” (13) – but the letter is highly ambiguous, manipulative, and insincere, since she reveals the purpose of the letter only at the end.
Rosa Perelmuter Pérez explains how Sor Juana used ethos to praise the character of her reader and lessen her own importance by using a “fórmula de modestia afectada,” “fórmulas de empequeñecimiento,” “fórmulas de humildad,” and “protestas de incapacidad” (153-4) to gain the benevolence of her reader. Riera describes the same feigned humility when writing that:

Teresa de Avila necesitaba demostrar que la pluma, aunque tan peligrosa como la espada en manos femeninas sería usada con tiento. De ahí también la insistencia en su falta de letras, en sus escasas dotes, en lo descuido de sus escritos [...] cuando una mujer escribe [...] debe, por lo menos hacerlo humildemente.

(“Vindicación” 5)

In Cuestión de amor propio, Angela duplicitously employs the ancient techniques of persuasion to convince Ingrid to agree to the favor she will eventually ask of her. Following the suggestions of Aristotle and Cicero to earn the good graces of the listener, Angela tries to mellow Ingrid’s anger at Angela’s long silence by evoking memories of their past intimacy, writing of “nuestra vieja amistad” (19). She feigns deep affection by employing throughout a personal, intimate tone, calling Ingrid “queridísima mía” (76) and using the nickname “Gridi” (17). Angela reminds Ingrid of the pen Ingrid gave her as proof of their longstanding friendship: “esta vieja pluma que tanto me gusta emplear” (13). Angela expresses how much she has suffered as a weapon to evoke Ingrid’s pity. We can also compare Angela’s expression
of weakness to Elizabeth Todd’s description of how eighteenth-century heroines use weakness as a weapon: “Sickness is a mark of female debility, a temporary surrender in the fight for love and self-esteem. It is also an excuse for inaction [...] illness is a weapon of the weak” (407-8). Certainly Angela tries to evoke Ingrid’s sympathy by focusing on her own weakness, helplessness, and self-pity. Angela invokes “mi timidez infinita,” (13) and “una enfermedad moral” through “alcohol y barbitúricos” and thoughts of suicide, wondering “qué distancia debía mediar entre la ventana y el asfalto” (18). She complains of the negative romantic experiences of her youth, her failed marriage, the “carencias dolorosas” (22) of a loveless life, and her attempts to protect herself from “previsibles sufrimientos futuros” (20). We can also compare Angela’s expressions of self-pity to Linda Kauffman’s description of: “a specifically female subcategory of *ethopoiiiae*, which relies on pathetic monologues, pure sentimentality and self-pity” (44).

As Cicero suggested, so that Ingrid will condemn the actions of Miguel and take Angela’s side in their adversarial positions, Angela details the cruelty and arrogance of Miguel’s behavior. In order to prove to Ingrid that her desire for revenge is justified, Angela repeats the deceitful words of undying love that Miguel wrote to Angela: “Me muero pensando en el momento en que volveré a verte, porque te amo como nunca imaginé que sería capaz”; “Quiero casarme contigo”; “Nadie podrá separarnos, amor mío, Angela, ángel mío, porque soy definitivamente tuyo” (40). Angela dates and directly quotes
Miguel’s letters to prove their validity to Ingrid, as she shows that his words are insincere, deceitful, and seductive. Similarly, Kauffman writes of the women in Ovid’s *Heroides*, “The abandoned heroine accuses her seducer of infidelity, impugns his motives, demands justice, threatens vengeance, and justifies herself. The language of the genre is not just a dialogue but a trial, a contest, a debate” (44-5). Angela admits to Ingrid that Miguel’s insincere words of love “eran frases triviales” but that she was completely fooled by them: “Olían a tufo de seminarista sudado y sonaban a retórica de sacristía, pero a mí me supieron a gloria” (35).

In order to provide proof of Miguel’s arrogant betrayal, Angela will immediately send to Ingrid a copy of Miguel’s novel. In this way, Angela wants Ingrid to further sympathize with Angela and hate, as Angela does, her adversary Miguel and therefore be prepared to act by proxy as Angela’s “avenging angel,” as Brad Epps characterized the hoped-for role of Ingrid (143). Angela tries to persuade Ingrid to avenge her honor, reminding Ingrid of the restoration of honor sought in the drama of Spain’s Siglo de Oro,” No es en vano te has divertido con las vengadoras de su honra del teatro español [...] ahora tienes una oportunidad por persona interpuesta para interpretar ese papel” (74). Although she does not discuss Angela’s use of the techniques of classical rhetoric that Angela uses to accomplish her seduction of Ingrid, Akiko Tsuchiya’s article on “The Paradox of Narrative Seduction in Carme
Riera’s *Cuestión de amor propio* does provide a clear insight into the “duplicitous discourse” of Angela’s letter. She writes:

Angela’s epistolary activity represents her final attempt to recuperate her narrative authority. By generating her own ending to her story, she seeks to subvert Miguel’s text and to regain mastery over her fictions. In order to accomplish this end, however, she needs the collaboration of another, through whose narrative seduction she will confirm her authority. (282-5)

Brad Epps reiterates Tsuchiya’s interpretation of Angela’s manipulation of Ingrid. He writes:

Angela invokes failure and weakness in order to justify herself and, better yet, to direct, if not control, Ingrid into forgiving her. In doing so, Angela also appeals to Ingrid’s pride, her “amor proprio,” by setting Ingrid up as an example of feminist fortitude. For the reader, denied direct access to Ingrid’s words, Ingrid’s exemplarity is an effect of Angela’s writing and may be yet another tactic of seduction in a text suffused with seduction. (119)

Sandra Schumm disagrees with Tsuchiya’s interpretation, suggesting, “In contrast, I feel the letter is an intimate, relational communication with Ingrid that demonstrates Angela’s transcendence of the learned submissiveness imperiling her autonomy in a patriarchally-oriented society” (“Borrowed Language” 212). I do not agree with Schumm’s characterization of Angela’s
letter, for Angela does not in any way communicate in an intimate, sincere manner with Ingrid. Rather, Angela is manipulative and deceitful. Although her own limitations may prevent her from being fully aware that she is deceiving Ingrid, I agree with Tsuchiya, Epps, and also Vásquez, who points out that “Angela is now quite willing to use and abuse a friend in the name of female solidarity” (350).

However, I do agree with Schumm’s interpretation that Angela acts as a model of female resistance who fights back against a patriarchal society, because we see how Angela attempts to fight back against Miguel, who is a representative of the dominant male. From this perspective, Miguel has inherent power as a male representative of a patriarchal society which has assumed the privileged position of superiority over women since its ancient beginnings. Gerda Lerner asserts that historically women have been devalued by traditional religion and Aristotelian philosophy, which are:

- two metaphorical constructs, which are built into the very foundations of the symbol systems of Western civilization, that the subordination of women comes to be seen as ‘natural,’ hence it becomes invisible. It is this which finally establishes patriarchy firmly as an actuality and as an ideology. (10)

In my interpretation, Angela fights back indirectly against the privileged Miguel by recuperating and appropriating for herself the traditional male techniques of classical rhetoric to use against her supposed friend. Angela
attempts to exert power and control over her friend Ingrid, hoping that Ingrid will succeed where Angela has failed in destroying the power and authority of Miguel. Riera herself, using her own intelligence and the methods of Aristotle, refutes the “filosofía de Aristotles quien considera que la inteligencia sólo se transmite por vía masculina” (“Femenino singular” 28). In *Cuestión de amor propio*, by appropriating the discourses of rhetoric used by the male voices of Aristotle and Cicero, Riera invokes their power and authority and thus challenges the patriarchy.

Using these ancient techniques of rhetoric and also with tactical devices associated with storytelling, the first seducer Angela, having now been seduced and abandoned by her proposed victim Miguel, attempts to seduce Ingrid. In *Cuestión de amor propio* and, as we will see, in *La mitad del alma*, Carme Riera uses ambiguity as a strategy to seduce the reader so that he or she desires to continue reading. Ross Chambers states that the storyteller’s authority “derives almost totally from the interest of the tale [...] the storyteller’s authority must first be obtained, then maintained, until the end of the tale by means that are essentially discursive” (213). It is evident that the successful narrator of a story uses ambiguity, suspense, and secrecy to hold the attention of his audience. Chambers calls this ambiguity “a refusal to divulge.” It is a “smoke screen, behind which the essential fact [...] may remain undivulged” (215). Riera’s protagonist Angela employs the same seductive technique used by the author to engage her reader. If Angela
divulged her intent too soon, it is likely that Ingrid, the reader of her letter, would immediately reject Angela’s request. Indeed, Angela is extremely slow in getting to the point of the letter by withholding crucial information from her destinatory Ingrid. She does not even mention Miguel until page 25, almost one-third of the way through the letter. Angela deliberately delays until page 73 of a 77-page letter her request to Ingrid, which is the true purpose of the letter. Angela writes, “Hace unas horas te anuncié que te pediría un favor. Creo que ha llegado el momento de decirte de que se trata” (73).

Angela uses her knowledge of the upcoming plans of Miguel to plot her revenge against him. She knows that Miguel will visit Denmark to give several conferences and write a series of reports for the newspaper, which he will then publish in a travel book. She predicts that Miguel will try to meet Ingrid, for Miguel is ambitious and Angela has spoken to Miguel about Ingrid’s influential relationships with Scandinavian intellectuals, “y en especial de tu gran amistad con Lunkvist, eternal puerta del Nobel, al que por supuesto [...] él aspira” (72). Consistent with the classical technique of ethos, which is a technique designed to earn the good graces of her destinatory, Angela flatters Ingrid by citing “tu inteligencia” and “tu enorme atractivo” and predicts that Miguel “buscará en ti otro espejo en que pueda mirarse” (72). She warns Ingrid of his duplicitous machinations but knows that, having been forewarned (as Angela was not) and having had extensive experience with
men (as Angela had not) and being a secure person (as Angela was not),
Ingrid will not be deceived. Angela writes, “El juego es definitivamente tuyo
[...] Seducirle sería para ti un juego de niños” (73).

We now learn that yet another seduction is what Angela seeks, this
time Ingrid’s seduction of Miguel. In her careful study of Miguel’s work,
Angela has noticed that Miguel often appropriates ideas of others and
expresses them as his own original ideas, that he intertextualizes and actually
plagiarizes the work of others. She recognizes descriptions from Michelin
Guides, mistaken references to music, and a “retahila de falsedades” (48) in
his literary references. Angela employs this alleged flaw of Miguel as a writer
to formulate her plan for Ingrid’s seduction of Miguel, which she does not set
forth until the next-to-last page of her letter. Angela suggests that Ingrid lie to
Miguel, to distort the facts just as Angela has distorted the truth for Ingrid,
and that she deceive him with “ciertos aspectos de tu país a través de una
lente distorsionada” (76). She imagines that Miguel will appropriate Ingrid’s
distorted information about her country as his own in “su primera crónica
repleta de observaciones agudísimas sobre vuestra idiosincrasia, de
referencias históricas y literarias brillantes y sobre todo originales que tú
habrás ido sugiriéndole” (75). She explains to Ingrid, “los reportajes de
Miguel plagados de gazapos [...] que, a buen seguro, enfurecerán a Lungvist,
mermando así las posibilidades de que Miguel se vista un día de frac frente al
rey de los suecos para recibir el Nobel” (76). Angela wants Miguel to be
ridiculed just as he ridiculed her. She wants to be sure that he never will receive the Nobel Prize to which he aspires, but she also wants ensure that he knows that it was a woman who deceived him, that his vanity and conceit have been wounded by a woman he disdains and that he receives, as Angela ironically states, “una moraleja misógina: no hay que fiarse – porque no lo tienen – del criterio de las mujeres” (76). Just as Miguel has drawn his fictional heroine Olga as a mirror image of Angela, Angela is now attempting to use Ingrid as her double, not solely gazing at Ingrid as a passive reflection but calling upon Ingrid to play an active role to avenge Angela’s honor. Angela seeks to humiliate Miguel and destroy his honor and pride, mirroring his humiliation of her. She seeks to trick Miguel, just as he has tricked her. To shame him, she will use the weapon she has available to her as a writer, the power of words, through sabotaging his proposed new articles and book.

Angela’s duplicity reminds us of one of Janet Todd’s categories of friendship, which is “manipulative friendship” in which “one woman uses another, controls her and joys in the control” (4). Since Angela manipulates Ingrid and attempts to use her as a means of exacting revenge, then their friendship cannot be considered an example of true friendship, in the classical sense. As Cicero emphasizes in his treatise “On Friendship,”

But friendship by its nature admits of no feigning, no pretence

[…] I gather that friendship springs from a natural impulse rather than a wish for help: from an inclination of the heart, combined
with a certain instinctive feeling of love, rather than from a deliberate calculation of the material advantage it was likely to confer [...] We may then lay down this rule of friendship – neither ask nor consent to do what is wrong. For the plea “for friendship’s sake” is a discreditable one, and not to be admitted for a moment. (9-12)

By her lack of “mutual good will” towards Ingrid, by her “feigning,” “pretence” and attempt to persuade Ingrid to do something wrong, to lie to Miguel in order to do him harm, and by her “deliberate calculation,” Angela is transgressing the classical rules of friendship. As we keep in mind the unreliability of the narrator Angela, when she asks Ingrid for this favor, we the readers now question the sincerity of the confessional aspect of Angela’s letter and begin to ascertain her true selfish motivation. Rather than being concerned with the feelings of her supposed friend, we realize that Angela is self-centered, self-absorbed, and interested only in her own problems. She easily fits Janet Todd’s description of the narcissistic woman who “cannot easily enter an equal friendship” because she is “constantly concerned with her self-image” (406).

Riera describes the many intertextualities of her novel, whose characters are all writers: “la carta está plagada de referencias literarias [...] citas y plagios que actúan como remora en parte y en parte como estímulo del mismo hecho de contar” (“Grandez” 157). The title itself, Cuestión de amor propio, reminds us of the title of a sixteenth century “sentimental romance” of
vanities, rivalries and power plays, *Questión de amor* (Valis 327). Angela writes repeated and exaggerated imitations of Romantic texts with their many descriptions of nature, which reflect the emotions of the characters. Angela writes:

La lluvia, una lluvia menuda, lamía mansamente los cristales... como si toda la tristeza del mundo, apenas sin ruido, imperceptible casi, viniera también a fusionarse con la mía. Bajo la luz cenicienta del atardecer el tiempo estaba cambiando: en el aire latía ya el corazón del otoño a ritmo lento. (57)

The aging Angela reiterates from Baroque poetry the themes of physical decadence and loss of beauty: “Tenía miedo [...] Y sobre todo miedo a mi cara, que el abandono del amor dejaría sin fin el maquillaje que disimulara el rictus de la boca” (36). Angela quotes Salinas, discusses Clarín, Galdós, Unamuno, Goethe, Proust, *La Celestina’s* Calixto and Melibea, Cervantes’ Alonso Quijano, the lyrics of tangos, and even evokes the monsters of the *Danza general de la muerte* of the Middle Ages. She writes, “aquellos días fueron unos días espantosos, poblados de terrores a cuyos conjuros aparecían espectros que ejecutaban a mi alrededor danzas macabras, monstrous que entre risotadas y cabriolas se mofaban de mí” (62). Imitating Miguel, who used the facts of his relationship with Angela to give his new fiction verisimilitude, Angela uses literature intertextually as a seductive tactic designed as a claim to authority. As Ross Chambers explains, this authority
is: “derived authority [...] put forward to bolster the interest of the narrator’s own adventure [...] the message it delivers boils down to saying, ‘What you have enjoyed before, in Hoffman or Rousseau, you will enjoy again in my own narrative’” (215). However, the referent of Miguel’s novel El Canto del Cisne is reality, the actual relationship he has experienced with Angela, whereas the referents of Angela’s words are other words, which have no basis in reality.

We, the readers of the novel Cuestión de amor propio and the external readers of Angela’s letter to Ingrid, never learn whether Ingrid agrees to grant the favor to Angela. We do not read the response of Ingrid, nor do we even know whether or not Ingrid actually responds to the letter. We do not know whether Ingrid has questions to ask of Angela, nor do we know if Angela has succeeded in her seduction of Ingrid. We do not know whether Miguel is punished for having deceived Angela. We know nothing about the true nature of Miguel’s character, since we have seen him only through Angela’s eyes. As Riera has written, “La carta permite que quien escribe cuenta únicamente lo que quiere contar” (“Grandeza” 158). In fact, we do not know whether any of what Angela says really happened. Riera reminds us of the unreliability of Angela:

¿quién nos asegura que lo que cuenta Angela Caminals haya sucedido? ¿no será sólo un pretexto para llamar la atención de su amiga? Y aunque sea verdad, conocemos el caso a través del filtro de sus sentimientos, de sus emociones, de su rencor.
Quizá Miguel está deformado por la mirada despechada de Angela. (“Grandeza” 156)

From this point of view, what we do know is that the personal tone of the letter and the allusions to the friendship and past intimacy between Angela and Ingrid are deceitful attempts to gain the confidence, sympathy, and complicity of Ingrid so that Ingrid is willing to persuade and seduce Miguel. We do hope that Ingrid can avoid the trap set by a duplicitous person who claims to be a friend. We know that Angela’s selfish manipulation of Ingrid abuses the true nature of friendship, which ideally involves a mutual caring, reciprocity, and empathy. However, we try not to completely disdain Angela, because we do sympathize with her position, because we are aware that she has been victimized by a society which has damaged her sense of self-worth and self-esteem and prevented her from living authentically.

In conclusion, Cuestión de amor propio portrays Angela as a neurotic woman who is unable to maintain an intimate and supportive friendship because she has been emotionally paralyzed by a repressive society which imposed a “stamp of unworthiness” on young women growing up under its authority (O’Connor 127). While she is disappointed by a relationship with a man, she does not seek the solace and support of a friend. Rather, she subverts the solidarity of female friendship by deceiving that friend. It is also interesting to speculate that the entire brief novel is a complex literary game by its author Riera. Perhaps the novel Cuestión de amor propio is an
epistolary novel by Riera about the writing of an epistolary novel by Angela Caminals, a novel which has no referent in reality. Perhaps Ingrid and Miguel don’t even exist in the real world for Angela and are no more than literary inventions of the writer Angela Caminals, who has written a novel disguised as a letter to a friend.
In *La mitad del alma*, Carme Riera further examines the theme of the difficulty of relationships between women by depicting the unfulfilling relationship that the narrator had had with her mother, Cecilia Balaguer, who died in 1960 when the narrator was ten years old. As we will see, even though her mother seems like a strong woman, as a person able to fight back against the forces of her repressive society, the culture of the Franco Regime is still damaging to both mother and daughter. The narrator still suffers from a disappointing disconnection in her relationship with her mother, a disconnection which causes her emotional problems and a yearning for meaningful interpersonal connections. In this novel without chapter breaks that Riera dedicates “A mi madre,” the narrator is a nameless writer who tries to reconstruct the past in order to uncover the truth about her identity. Just as Riera did in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, here she again depicts a narrator who goes back to examine her distant childhood to answer questions about the present. This narrator feels compelled to question her true identity when an unidentified stranger hands her a folder containing letters and photographs while she is signing books in Barcelona on the day of Sant Jordi, April 23, 2001. I will study how the narrator goes back in time

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14 Carme Riera wrote the novel *La meitat de l’ànima* in Catalan and rewrote it in Castilian Spanish as *La mitad del alma*. Published in 2004, this novel received the Premio Sant Jordi 2003.
more than forty years to investigate the truth about her mother, in order to unravel the puzzle of her past in an attempt to understand her own truth. I will show that this search serves as a metaphor for the quest for the hidden truth about Spain’s Civil War and postwar period during the long dictatorship of Francisco Franco and the Transition to democracy which occurred after his death in 1975. I will analyze how Riera involves the reader directly by pleading for the reader’s assistance in what she defines as “una novela de intriga interactiva que trata de recuperar la memoria histórica de la posguerra” (“Carme reflexiona”). As in *Una primavera para Domenico* Guarini, here Riera again employs themes of mythology and regression to childhood using techniques of first-person stream of consciousness narration, ambiguity, metafiction, intertextuality, epistolarity, and a mixture of fiction and historical reality in order to write a novel of memory which seeks to recuperate what was lost in the history of Spain. But, as I will argue, in this novel the truth is unverifiable; the narrator will not find a definitive answer to her questions because, just as the truth about this period of Spanish history remains hidden, the truth about the narrator’s past eludes her. In spite of her exhaustive search of the truth about the past, the narrator tells the reader, “Necesito más datos, datos fiables y contrastados que me permitan basar mis hipótesis en argumentos de peso” (213).

As I mentioned, here Riera uses the ambiguity and seduction that are characteristic of her fiction, what she calls “el maravilloso juego de
ambiguëdad” (Racionero 15), when she slowly and gradually involves the reader into her story to create suspense, so that the reader is eager to learn what the story is about. Riera describes her own seductive purpose in creating this suspense: “Escribo para seducir al lector, para conquistarle, desde la primera línea, si es posible, atrayéndole, excitándole para que no me abandone al menos hasta el final del relato” (“Para continuar” 288). Riera’s intentions to temporarily withhold the important essence of the story can be perceived already in the cover of the book, which portrays a woman carrying a suitcase in a train station. We cannot see her face, for she is shadowed and standing with her back to us. This scene in a train station reminds us of the train trip of Clara in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, for this narrator tells us that this train station is like any other, “semejante a cualquier otra [estación] de la época” (9). In the opening scene of this chapter’s novel, the first-person narrator also mentions her presence in a train station in Portbou, France. Riera has acknowledged the cinematographic influences present in this train station, especially that of David Lean’s film Brief Encounter (“Riera analiza”). Because the narrator states very specifically that this scene in the station occurs on a cold winter day on December 30 of 1959, it takes us by surprise that she seems absolutely uncertain of the situation. To describe the scene she uses expressions like “probablemente,” “no sabemos,” and speculates whether “el andén está vacío[...] si el andén está lleno” (9). We gradually learn that the narrator is not the woman in the train station, nor
is she depicted on the cover. Despite her precision with dates, she does not know the truth because she wasn’t present. We understand that she is recreating a scene in which she is speculating on the actions of her mother, who apparently went to this station more than forty years ago. We slowly become aware that the narrator has returned to the same train station in Portbou, France, as she tries to retrace the steps of the woman, attempting to recreate the scene she is imagining. This is when we see that the narrator is acting as a double of the “mujer del abrigo azul” (11), as the narrator writes, “Pero ahora es de noche [...] como ha podido comprobar ella en su reloj y yo en el mío” (10). When she explains, “Así, camino de Portbou, con la intención de buscar unas coordenadas parecidas [...] empecé a escribir esta historia” (11), we understand that this narrator is not only orally telling her story but also writing the text that we are now reading: the narrator is laying bare her process of writing this metafictional story. *La mitad del alma* illustrates well Phyllis Zatlin’s explanation of a metafictional novel:

> By calling attention to the artifice of its own construction, the metanovel suggests to the reader that the external world, too, is a construct. If the characters in the novel may create for themselves a fiction within the fiction or respond in their lives to the influence of popular culture, then people in the world external to the novel may also entrap themselves in the
myths that they or society have created for them. (“Women Novelists” 37)

The reader to whom the narrator is speaking is not only the external reader of Carme Riera’s novel but also a very specific destinatory that the narrator wishes were there at the train station, a specific internal reader, the unknown man who had handed her the folder with the letters and photographs. However, it is evident to both the narrator and the readers that it is “poco probable, casi diría que imposible, que usted [el hombre desconocido y/o el(a) lector(a)] estuviere allí [...] hace más de cuarenta años” (10-11). In other words, we understand, as does she, that it is wishful thinking on her part that either we, the general readers, or this particular reader, through an “azar maravilloso” – “tal vez pudiera ser usted,” “quizá usted,” usted que me lee” (12) – witnessed this woman in the train station. This scene in the train station is not new for the narrator. She has been haunted by it since she was a child: “Durante una larga etapa soñé casi cada noche con una mujer que bajaba de un tren” (13). The narrator tells us that when she later started writing fiction, the character of a woman who had just gotten off a train appeared mysteriously in her stories. The narrator tried to banish her but always in vain. It is not difficult to assume that this woman is a representation of her lost mother, a woman who “solía cruzar mis relatos [...] conseguía colarse en mis narraciones sin que lo hubiera previsto” with her “inútil presencia” (14). The narrator seems to have been haunted by a
mystery related to this woman of her past, a mystery that she did not want to face but could not expel from her mind. At the moment of writing her story, the narrator is attempting to rid herself of her obsessions. As a writer, she is attempting to banish the clouds of uncertainty about her past, just as Mercury did in Botticelli’s painting *Primavera*, so that the truth about her mother’s past becomes clear. The narrator, as does the author Riera throughout the novel, ponders the relationship between literature and reality when she thinks of this woman, who, although she appears in the narrator’s fiction, is a real woman, her mother, whose unclear image has haunted the narrator’s mind: “esa mujer no era un personaje de mi invención sino alguien impuesto desde fuera, un ser real, de carne y hueso” (14). Because of the narrator’s unresolved issues about her deceased mother, the narrator has suffered from the feeling of a lack, a void, an emptiness in her life that her absent mother has left. The narrator displays signs of clinical depression as she expresses her inability to function as a writer. The narrator confesses that, “pasaba por una racha infame y [...] me sentía incapaz de seguir escribiendo y más aún publicando, a veces también hasta de seguir viviendo – por eso había abandonado a medias un libre de narraciones” (22).

It is not until five pages into the novel that the reader discerns the story line of the novel. The first-person narrator is a protagonist who is a writer like Angela of *Cuestión de amor propio* and like Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. Here, in *La mitad del alma*, this narrator is writing a
story that is a mixture of autobiography, biography, and speculation. She is simultaneously acting as a detective to investigate what really happened to her deceased mother and attempting to discover the truth about her identity. We later learn that the folder that the mysterious stranger gave to her include love letters in Cecilia’s handwriting and photographs of Cecilia. Riera clarifies the initial ambiguity about the story we have slowly been drawn into when we read the words of the narrator, “hace casi dos años que me dedico exclusivamente a buscar el rastro dejado por una mujer llamada Cecilia Balaguer entre el 30 de diciembre de 1959 y el 4 de enero 1960, fecha de su muerte” (13). In this way, we finally learn that the woman in the train station is Cecilia, the mother of the narrator. Since the mementos she received seem to prove that what she had believed about her own past was untrue, she now feels forced to examine the true nature of her mother’s identity, and therefore also her own. Because of the importance of a mother figure in a girl’s life, the narrator has always felt a sense of loss of her absent mother. The void of a missing mother has always been an unconscious preoccupation for her, but until now she has been avoiding a direct confrontation with her past.

Cecilia, the younger sister of five-year-old Anna, was born in 1930 to Pere and Clara Balaguer of Barcelona.15 On July 18 of 1936 when Cecilia was six years of age and Anna was eleven years old, their family home in Barcelona

15 It is interesting but surprising to note that Cecilia’s surname is the same as that of José María Escrivá Balaguer, who founded the religious organization Opus Dei in Spain in 1928, although ironically the Pere Balaguer family has nothing to do with the Catholic Church or the Regime which had such a close relationship to the Church.
was bombed. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Republican politician, the “diputado de la Generalitat” (30), Pere, and his wife Clara fled Barcelona and escaped into exile into France, where Clara died in 1939.

*La mitad del alma* shows that exile to a foreign country, prison in Spain, or death in Spain were the only options available for Pere Balaguer and many other “perdedores” of the Civil War.\(^1\) The narrator found verifiable proof of some of the facts of the Balaguer family’s exile in France. She discovered Cecilia’s name listed as a political refugee in archives in Paris, as well as a photograph of Pere Balaguer with a group of exiles at Isle Adam, four kilometers from Paris, and a photograph of the Durands with Cecilia.

Although she could verify some facts, it is difficult for her to ascertain the complete truth of what happened during the Balaguer family’s exile in France, for she finds different and contradictory versions of events. For example, one of Cecilia’s letters describes a scene in the family’s apartment in Nanterre, France, in 1941 while Pere Balaguer is questioned by the German authorities. According to one of Cecilia’s letters, in this scene Pere is forced to choose between the lives of his two young daughters. This description is questionable because it reminds us too vividly of the fictional movie *Sophie’s Choice*, a similarity which also occurs to the narrator: “Al leer de nuevo la carta de mi madre para transcribirla me he dado cuenta de que coincide, en parte, con el inicio de una película [...] *La decisión de Sophie* creo que se

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\(^{1}\)Giles Tremett estimates that, during the 1939 exodus of those who opposed the Franco Regime, 400,000 Republicans went into exile.
llamaba” (36). In this letter Cecilia is describing the scene about Pere’s choice to a lover, remembering “el otro día entre tus brazos” (32). We wonder whether Cecilia has invented this dramatic scene to impress her lover, who seems to have been a famous writer, as Cecilia’s letter also imply.

We soon read another version of the events from Neus, the daughter of Cecilia’s only cousin Lola, who was an authority on her family before her death in the nineteen-eighties: Lola “llevaba el inventario exacto de las desgracias familiares” (33). Lola had earlier explained to the narrator that because Pere was suspected of belonging to the French Resistance, both Pere and Anna were detained in a concentration camp, where Anna died in a gas chamber. Lola claims to know the truth because of letters that Anna had written to her from the concentration camp before she died. Since Lola died and could not be consulted for confirmation of the facts, her daughter Neus vividly describes to the narrator her own version of the events. According to her, the Germans found Anna’s hiding place but not Cecilia’s, who fortunately escaped, and “esperó durante horas con el agua al cuello que el pelotón se marchase para salir del depósito que había en la azotea y por eso no había corrido la misma suerte que su pobre hermana” (34). Interestingly, both this description and Cecilia’s are vivid, dramatic, and easy to imagine as suspenseful scenes in films depicting the era. The lines between reality and fiction are blurred and indistinct again. We have nagging doubts about Lola’s and Neus’s version because we know that it was impossible to send such
letters from a concentration camp. We wonder why Lola and Neus embellished the truth, as Cecilia might have done also, perhaps for dramatic effect. Therefore, the only aspects that seem certain are that Cecilia’s childhood was shadowed and profoundly affected by the Civil War in Spain, by her family’s exile in France, and by the losses of both her mother and her sister. As we will see, because of the repressive nature of the patriarchal society of Franco’s Spain, the negative consequences of the Civil War continue through the life of Cecilia and deeply affect her daughter’s life, as well. By reading Riera’s description of her own childhood during the postwar period in Spain, we recognize the profound effect that this period had on its citizens. Riera describes the time and place of her childhood as “un espacio blanco y negro, lleno de tonos grises,” and she adds, “No viví la infancia como algo diáfragma, sino ensombrecido por la postguerra. No eran buenos tiempos al faltar la libertad” (“Me he reconciliado”).

Apparently, Riera wants us to become aware of the impossibility of discerning the truth about the past when she places her protagonist in front of contradictory versions of events, which show how difficult it is to establish what has really happened. The narrator constantly expresses her frustration at not being able to confirm or prove the truth: “De ahí que resulte difícil, a estas alturas diría que imposible llegar a saber,” “eso no prueba nada. Sólo indica,” “no llegué a ninguna conclusión,” “saqué unos cuantos datos más bien contradictorios,” “no he conseguido llegar a saber, y a estas alturas quizá me
resulte ya del todo imposible” (35). The narrator laments, “Por desgracia no conozco a nadie que pueda confirmarme si las cosas sucedieron tal y como se las cuenta mi madre a su amante, si ella se salvó gracias a que la pobre Anna fue sacrificada” (36). Forced to speculate about the version of the story that she reads in her mother’s letter, the narrator is inclined to believe that it’s true: “Pero sea o no cierto, yo me inclino a pensar que sí lo es” (36). The narrator repeats exact dates, times, and locations throughout the novel, in an attempt to convince herself and the reader that the exact truth can be ascertained through verifiable data. She discovers through her investigations that, in 1946 at the age of sixteen, Cecilia returned to Barcelona while Pere Balaguer and his daughter remained in France with the Durand family with whom they had taken refuge. Cecilia met her husband while she was working in Barcelona as a restorer of paintings. The narrator’s father told the narrator and she repeats to us that, when her father saw Cecilia for the first time, she was with her friend Emilia in the middle of the Rambla de Canaletas in Barcelona on a Sunday afternoon at exactly four o’clock on the second day of February of the year 1947. The narrator compares her father’s first sight of Cecilia with Petrarch’s first view of Laura, by citing the exact date and place of that meeting: “fue el 27 de abril, Viernes Santo de 1327 en Notre-Dame-des-Doms” (183). This reminds us of Guarini’s initial impression of Laura Martuari. Like him, the narrator’s father idealized Cecilia, the “perfección de su cara” that left him “frente a ella embobado” (110). He asked Cecilia if he
could accompany her, but she ignored him, “ni le miró” (110). Here Riera alludes not only to Laura’s rejection of Petrarch but also to Laura’s rejection of Guarini in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. The narrator’s father justified Cecilia’s rejection saying that she didn’t like uniforms of any type because they must remind her of the German invaders in Paris. However, the uniform he was wearing was proof that he was a member of the “vencedores” of the Civil War, whereas she belonged to the “perdedores.” It is not difficult to suspect that her rejection was because they were on opposing sides of a war which had caused her own exile, her father’s exile, and her mother’s and sister’s deaths.

The narrator’s father followed Cecilia but lost her in the crowd. He had told the narrator that “se había pasado meses buscándola” (113). The next time her father saw Cecilia was by chance a year later when he went into the studio where she was working. Then he vowed never to lose her again, as he later explained to his daughter, “se juró a sí mismo que esta vez no la perdería” (113). He made excuses to visit the shop often in his capacity as an antiques dealer. While keeping secret the extent of his obsession, that he would follow her “hasta el fin del mundo si era preciso” (113), he persisted and learned all he could about her and her family. They developed a relationship and finally contracted matrimony. It seems that Cecilia married him for convenience, because she was poor, without a family in Spain, and coming from exile herself. Perhaps the patriarchal society in which she lived
also influenced her decision to marry him, for being single and working was difficult for women in Spanish postwar society. This follows Carmen Martín Gaite’s explanation in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* that the unmarried woman was marginalized and regarded with suspicion. It was the prevalent belief that a man did not marry “porque no quería” but that a woman did not “porque no podia” (*Usos* 45). With the exception of a woman whose fiancé was killed in the war, in films or radio stories or literature, the single woman, the “solterona,” was caricaturized as “un tipo rancio, anticuado, cursi” (*Usos* 51).

Initially we are led to believe that both Cecilia and Rosa Montalbán, her friend at the time, who also belonged to the group of “perdedores,” played the role that the Francoist society expected of them. The narrator relates how “tanto ella como mi madre no tuvieron otro remedio que pasarse media vida representando, haciendo comedia, puntualizó, para ocultar que habían perdido la guerra” (70). Both also married “vencedores” and could not be true to their Republican roots: “tenían que manifestar que pertenecían al Régimen, que eran adictas al Glorioso Movimiento Nacional” (70-1). Rosa adds that “En la sociedad barcelonesa de entonces Cecilia hizo muy buen papel. Siempre elegante, cordial, cálida, amabilísima...” (72). This seems to illustrate how and why Cecilia wore a mask of acquiescence. In order to help her husband succeed in his business, Cecilia had to “relacionarse con las
fuerzas vivas de la ciudad, con falangistas y oligarcas del Régimen, con
los que mi padre estaba muy interesado en estrechar lazos que le
permitiesen extender los negocios” (72). One defining scene in the
novel takes place on October 20 of 1957, after the narrator’s parents
attended a dinner in honor of Francisco Franco at the former
Republican Palau de la Generalitat, renamed the Regime’s Palacio de la
Diputación. The narrator stresses the accuracy of this date, as she
carefully documented the events confirming the date in a newspaper.
In an attempt to clarify the truth, although many try to deny it, the
author Riera stresses that Francoism was very present in Barcelona
during the postwar years. When, referring to this novel, Oscar López
tells Riera that “Es una de las cosas que el libro deja claras – que
Franco tuvo más aliados en Barcelona de lo que se suele comentar,”
Riera responds, “Cataluña también fue franquista...y Barcelona sobre
todo.” Riera adds, “Mucha gente que ahora pasa por demócrata de
toda la vida, antes vestía el uniforme azul de Falange” (“Palabras”),
which we think is the same uniform that the narrator’s father wore
when he saw Cecilia for the first time. When discussing this novel,
Riera herself has expressed the need to ask, “de dónde venimos.”
When the interviewer asks the author to expand her answer by asking,
“De dónde?” Riera responds, “Pues de los vencedores y de los
vencidos.” Mi personaje tiene un padre, o un supuesto padre, que es
falangista, y una madre que probablemente fuera espía republicana”
(“La novelista mallorquina involucra”).

It appears that Rosa considered Cecilia to be a true friend and shared with Cecilia her innermost thoughts and feelings. As Rosa says, “Cecilia era la única que podía entenderlo, la que más se parecía a mí [...] siempre procurábamos ir juntas... Yo para ella no tenía secretos” (76). One concrete evidence of their friendship is the crystal vase which Rosa has kept, a gift from Cecilia, who presented Rosa the vase with a bouquet of roses and a note that read, “Me gusta regalar flores [...] en jarrones. Es como si le diera posibilidades de otras flores” (73). These words of Cecilia echo the sentiments of Hélène Cixous in her 1979 Vivre l’Orange: “For a true rose gives to a true woman the need to give to other women. A rose par excellence gives itself to be given” (qtd. in Penrod 90). Cixous in “Clarice Lispector: The Approach” also states that, “the soft giving of a rose today helps us to take the giving of all presence [...] To receive sharing. Our loving souls are descendants of roses” (Coming to Writing 74). In remembering the floral gifts in Cuestión de amor propio, we see an ironic contrast between Miguel’s cruel “gifts” to Angela of dead orchids and this apparently sincere gift between two female friends of a living rose.

We are also led to believe that, in contrast with her authentic friendship with Rosa, Cecilia’s relationship with Esther Brugada was insincere and existed solely as a way for Cecilia to feign allegiance to the Franco
Regime. As the hostess for political gatherings that Cecilia and her husband attended in postwar Barcelona, Esther represents the close relationship of Church and State, evidenced by the paintings on the wall of her home, “un gran retrato de Franco y otro de Pío XII” (66). It seems that Cecilia and Esther were never close friends but only casual acquaintances. Esther does not even remember how they met, “si nos hicimos amigas a través de mi hermano o si fue el general Ungría quien trajo a tus padres a la tertulia” (67). The narrator emphasizes how Esther speaks inauthentically with “frases estereotipadas, sacadas de un libro de pláticas” when she tells the narrator, “Teníamos la misma ilusión: la prosperidad de la Patria” (67). The narrator suggests that, as a member of the “vencedores,” Esther does not know the truth about Cecilia, and everything that we have learned up to now about Cecilia contradicts Esther’s interpretation of Cecilia’s principles and ideals. Esther’s memories do confirm what Rosa had told the narrator, that Cecilia was outwardly loyal to the Regime and followed the role that her society expected of her. As Esther says, “Nosotros ayudábamos en el Auxilio Social” (67). Esther did not marry, but she was representative of a woman’s secondary role of dedicating her life to the dominant males of the Regime. After three of her brothers died in the Civil War, she played the role of their widow, “en función de viuda, aunque no lo fuera, o quizá sí […] casta viuda” (65-6). After their death, she continued to serve as a helpmate to powerful members of society, acting as mother to her remaining brothers, “un
falangista incorrupto y un canónigo de la catedral” (66), two representatives of the powerful Church and State.

Rosa, like Isabel Clara’s mother Catalina in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, suffered from having to act the self-abnegating role of the silent, uncomplaining, deceived wife. Rosa explains that her husband “solía hacerme buenos regalos [...] fruto de unas largas ausencias nocturnas pretextando negocios. El me engañaba y no me atrevía a decirle nada. No me atrevía a protestar, ni siquiera a lamentarme. Aceptaba sonriente los regalos” (75). We are lead to think that, in spite of Cecilia’s outward allegiance to the Regime, and unlike her friend Rosa, she rejected the role that Francoist society had relegated to her. We should assume that Cecilia was unlike the typical woman of her time when we hear that she often traveled alone, ostensibly to visit her sick father in Paris. The narrator remembers that Cecilia “viajó con frecuencia en una época en que las mujeres no viajaban y menos al extranjero, y cuando lo hacían era acompañadas por sus maridos, o parientes cercanos” (60). The narrator tells us that she has witnessed Cecilia acting in a cold and distant manner towards her husband, showing him no love or affection. In contrast to Isabel Clara’s mother in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, the narrator recalls the “falta de interés” of Cecilia towards her husband, her “indiferencia” and “comportamiento glacial” of her mother (40-1). Her mother, an extremely beautiful woman, used her beauty
as a weapon, an instrument of power. The narrator certainly suggests that Cecilia was the dominant partner in the marriage:

Creo que percibí [...] hasta qué punto era ella quien dominaba la situación, ella quien empleaba la fuerza de su aparente debilidad, sobre todo, la enorme fuerza de su belleza desparramada sobre el sofá y la dirigía, convertida en el cañón de una escopeta, contra mi padre. (41)

But this description, like many others in La mitad del alma, seems to represent a dramatic re-creation of an imagined or remembered scene of her distant past. Let us recall that Riera acknowledged the cinematographic influences of her description of the train station in the opening scene of the novel. Like Riera, her narrator recognizes the close relationship of the dramatic scenes of her life with the invented roles that actors and actresses play in the fictional medium of cinema:

Tiempo después, en la adolescencia, viendo alguna película hollywoodiana comprendí que aquella noche había asistido sin saberlo a una escena cinematográfica en que la heroína se comportaba como lo hacían las de las películas y entendí hasta qué punto el cine fue el referente que permitió estimular los sueños de toda una generación. (38)

This comparison of supposed real past events with a fictional medium distances the reader from the scene and causes the reader to doubt the
veracity of the narrator’s memory of the events, in spite of the narrator’s efforts at accurate documentation to convince the reader of the truth of the past. Because of this confusion, we question whether the narrator is trying to convince the reader and herself that her mother was a strong, nonconformist woman, who subverted the expected role of the subservient wife. Is this narrator trying to maintain a lovable image of her mother? Her characterization of Cecilia seems consistent with Riera’s admiration for certain heroines of María de Zayas: “las que reaccionan contra su infortunado destino con decisión, ya sea para salvar su vida o su dignidad de mujeres, o las dos cosas a la vez. Son activas, listas y valientes” (“Personajes femeninos” 153). But was Cecilia really unlike Catalina, the mother of Isabel Clara in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini? Was she “authentic” in accordance to Pratt’s description that the “freedom to come and go, which involves the right to make decisions about one’s own time, work, and other activities, is a basic element of authenticity” (Archetypal Patterns 45)?

The letters which the narrator finds in the folder are in Cecilia’s handwriting, obviously authentic and obviously letters to a lover that she met in France. The narrator reads in the letters the “apelativos cariñosos,” “amor mío,” “mi vida,” “corazón” and “chéri” (43). She reads of a planned rendezvous between the lovers: “Te estoy esperando en nuestro cuarto” (54), “con qué urgencia toda mi sangre gritaba – grita – mi deseo de ti...” (55). It is evident that for Cecilia, her lover and Paris are inextricably joined, for she
tells her lover, “París eres tú” (57). Although Cecilia’s letters unmistakably confirm her extramarital affair, her friend Rosa denies it vehemently, calling the idea “absurdo” and stating, “Cecilia fue siempre fiel a su marido. De lo contrario yo lo hubiera sabido, te lo aseguro” (76). As her apparently close friend, Rosa should have known the truth about Cecilia’s love life. Although the narrator has the impression that Rosa is hiding nothing from her, that she is sincere, the narrator continues to accept the letters as irrefutable proof of her mother’s affair. The narrator speculates that perhaps Rosa lied to her, “no por temor a defraudarme sino porque juró a su amiga que nunca revelaría a nadie sus confidencias” (77).

The narrator is stunned by a 1950 letter that Cecilia wrote to her lover alluding to her pregnancy and asking her lover for a decision regarding the child she was expecting: “sigo pendiente de tu decisión,” referring to “el hijo que espero” and stating that this child would need to know his or her father: “Me lo reprochará si no te conoce, si no conoce a su padre” (50). Now we wonder not only about the accuracy of the narrator’s story but also about Cecilia’s letter: Is she telling the truth to her lover? Is the child she expects his? Or is it a lie, a fraud, “una estratagema amorosa” (50) to trick her lover? If it’s the truth, since the narrator was born in 1950, then the man that the narrator has presumed was her father is not, in fact, her biological father. What she knows about her identity is false; she is not who she thought she was.
It is interesting to note that we do not know the name of the narrator, nor do we know the name of Cecilia’s husband, the person whom the narrator has presumed was her father. We know only that his name begins with the letter “L” and that the narrator’s name begins with the letter “C,” like the first initial of the author’s name. She speaks of “la C de mi nombre, que coincidía con la C del de mi madre, la C de Cecilia” (29). Riera is playing a game of intertextuality, which she calls “guiños” to her readers, with the letter “C” of the narrator’s name, as we recall Carmen Martín Gaite’s narrator in *El cuarto de atrás*, a well-known novel referencing the same era of Spanish history. Martín Gaite’s narrator writes that she will paint “Con la C. de mi nombre, tres cosas con la C.” (11). This reminds us of Geraldine Nichols’ observation that “las autoras más innovadoras de esta generación Riera y Tusquets […] suprimen el nombre de sus respectivas protagonistas, obligando al lector a ‘vivir en los pronombres,’ en palabras de Salinas” (*Des/cifrar* 332). I do not believe this is the only reason for Riera’s suppression of the names of the protagonist of *La mitad del alma* and that of her presumed father, because the author has named every other character in the book, some who actually existed historically as well as the other invented major and secondary characters. Certainly, Riera has even doubled the name of the narrator’s mother. Just as much of her story is uncertain and ambiguous, even Cecilia’s true name causes confusion, for the narrator discovers that Cecilia also had a false passport in the name of Celia Ballester, born as the daughter of Luis and
María Ballester in 1926. Likewise, we recall that in *Una primavera para Domenic Guarini*, the protagonist had several names according to who was talking to her. For Alberto, Enrique and María, the protagonist is named Clara, but Marta calls her Isabel. However, Isabel Clara is the name her mother uses, as well as the name the protagonist uses professionally to sign her newspaper articles and also the name that the author Riera herself sometimes, not always, uses in articles she has written that refer to this protagonist.

The lack of a name of the narrator and her presumed father underlines the uncertainty of the identity of the protagonist and that of her true father, since a proper name indicates identity, who the person is, who his family is, where he or she belongs in the world. A name becomes an essential part of the self. This interpretation follows that of James Olney, who in *Metaphors of Self*, defines the “self” as “the single concretion and the final reality of individual being.” Olney relates the self to the proper name:

That single and unique being, which is so odd to the individual and, I think, inconceivable to everyone else is what we designate by the proper name [...] And like the peculiar, private consciousness that it signifies, the proper name is something always there and essential to the individual, something that one cannot quite imagine being without. (326-7)
In addition, we learn more about the importance of the proper name when we read what Jane Gallop has written, that the “Legal assignation of a Father’s Name to a child is meant to call a halt to uncertainty about the identification of the father [...] the Name of the Father must be arbitrarily and absolutely imposed, thereby instituting the reign of patriarchal law” (39). If Cecilia’s story is as we are led to think it is, then she has transgressed not only the prohibitions against sexuality (by having an affair with one man while being married to another) but also patriarchal law, the Law of the Father, which, according to Gallop, “decrees that the ‘product’ of sexual union, the child, shall belong exclusively to the father, be marked with his name” (49). Again, if Cecilia’s story is accurate, her transgression will accord with Gallop’s characterization that “Any suspicion of the mother’s infidelity betrays the name of the father [...] Infidelity is not outside the system of marriage, the symbolic, patriarchy, but hollows it out, ruins it, from within” (48).

When searching for the identity of this Parisian lover, the narrator gradually becomes convinced that he was the famous French writer Albert Camus. She makes this deduction after considering a letter dated November 14, 1957, in which Cecilia expressed her pride in her lover for his “éxito extraordinario, ese reconocimiento incuestionable a tus muchos méritos” (42). The narrator discovers that Albert Camus received the Nobel Prize for Literature on October 16 of 1957. This, along with other clues she discovers, lead her to think that Camus was Cecilia’s lover. Riera writes that in *La mitad*
**del alma**, “El homenaje a Albert Camus es evidente [...] Es un autor importantsísimo para mi generación, honesto, muy vinculado con España” (“Palabras”). Riera’s explanation of the likelihood that the historical Camus had extramarital affairs convinces the reader even further of the possibility that Camus is Cecilia’s lover. In an interview, Riera states also, “Durante mi infancia, venía a planchar una señora que tenía una hija trabajando en casa de Camus. Y la hija le comentaba que la mujer del escritor siempre lloraba porque éste le ponía cuernos” (“Palabras”). Just as Riera did, the narrator acknowledges that “el escritor tenía fama de ser un donjuán” (189).

Through further investigation, the narrator learns that her mother Cecilia was not only visiting her ill father on her trips to Paris but was possibly a resistance fighter in France, possibly a member of the “maquis,” who were bands of guerrilla fighters against Franco from 1937 to 1952 in Spain. The narrador speculates that “La razón por la que mi madre ayudó al movimiento anarquista podría tener que ver con su enamoramiento de Camus en 1949” (211). In France, the “maquis” were guerrilla warriors against the forces of German Nazism. Among the “maquis” in France were many Spanish Republicans who fled Spain after the victory of Franco. If this is accurate, then Cecilia, as a resistance warrior, represents the androgynous female counterpart of the character Alberto, the nonpatriarchal, androgynous male of *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. We can relate this concept of androgyny to Adrienne Rich’s argument that “an androgynous undercurrent
runs throughout Western humanism, which if recognized would help us to free ourselves and society from the role-playing and division of labor required under patriarchy” (Of Woman Born 77). In addition, we can compare this concept to what Annis Pratt tells us about androgyny: “Androgyny results from the negation of gender stereotypes, the absorption of positive qualities of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ into the total personality, and thus the development of a selfhood beyond gender dichotomies” (Archetypal 57-8).

Riera herself said in a conversation with Kathleen M. Glenn: “I believe that the complete person is the androgyne.” Riera continues, “what does exist is a feminine way of seeing the world, as well as a masculine way. Joining these two gazes in a single being would offer a much more complete vision of the world than is possible from a single perspective” (44).

We are led to believe that Cecilia has the traits of strong women whom Jean Baker Miller praises, “Women who are particularly advanced in their own sense of who they are.” They have a “strong conviction of their own worth and of their own right to self-development and authenticity. Some have a background of high accomplishment; others have a strong sense of fighting for a valuable cause” (Toward 113). If we accept the apparent truth of Cecilia’s appropriation of a dominant male role in her society, then the patriarchal culture in which Cecilia lived and against which she fought did not cause in Cecilia the crippling depression felt by Isabel Clara’s passive, victimized mother in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini. I believe that
Riera intends that we, the readers, accept that this characterization of Cecilia as a strong, independent woman is most likely true. Riera herself has said that the narrator of *La mitad del alma* had “una madre que probablemente fuera espía republicana,” as I quoted earlier. But by the use of the word “probablemente” with the subjunctive mood, as well as through other expressions of uncertainty throughout the novel, Riera intentionally leaves a small doubt in the reader’s mind as to the truth of Cecilia’s identity. As I will discuss in more detail later, one of Riera’s major intentions of this novel is an expression of the difficulty of discerning the absolute truth about the past.

In my interpretation, even though it seems that Cecilia was able to overcome her subordinate position in this society by being a rebel, a transgressor, a fighter who appropriated for herself the masculine role of power over her own actions, the society still failed Cecilia because it caused Cecilia to expend all her efforts valiantly resisting against the Regime in Spain and against fascism in France, where she became involved in an obsessive love affair and which left her with little interest and energy to dedicate herself to her daughter. It is clear that Cecilia was emotionally and physically unavailable for her daughter and that she withheld from the narrator the love and acceptance that her daughter craved and needed. We can see clearly how this interpretation follows Alexandra Kaplan’s explanation of how an emotionally detached parent can negatively affect a child and cause depression in the child, placing her in a “sustained state of profound
disconnection for a parent who is affectively not available,” causing a “major disconfirmation of her core sense of self-worth” (“Implications” 212).

We can relate Riera’s depiction of the relationship of Cecilia and her daughter to Adrienne Rich’s characterization of motherhood as “the great mesh in which all human relationships are entangled, in which lurk our most elemental assumptions about love and power” (“Motherhood” 260). In my interpretation, the mother-daughter relationship which Riera describes in La mitad del alma subverts the image of the ideal mother-daughter relationship described by Hélène Cixous, who tells us that, “In woman, mother and daughter rediscover each other, preserve each other, childhood enters into maturity, experience, innocence, the daughter in the woman is the mother-child who never stops growing” (Coming to Writing 51). For Cixous, the ideal mother is the person who “makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation” (“Laugh” 882). Many psychologists also emphasize the importance of the mother-daughter relationship starting from early infancy. Nancy Chodorow explains that, “The infant’s mental and physical existence depends on its mother,” as the infant “experiences a sense of oneness with her.” Chodorow continues:

The infant comes to define itself as a person through its relationship to her, by internalizing the most important aspects
of their relationship. Its stance toward itself and the world of its emotions, its quality of self-love (narcissism) or self-hate (depression) – all derive in the first instance from this earliest relationship. (78).

Similarly, Judith Jordan reiterates the importance of the mother-daughter relationship, stating, “the special quality of the early attachment and identification between mother and daughter profoundly affects the way the self is defined in women as well as the nature of their interpersonal relatedness” (“Empathy” 34). Also, Judith Kegan Gardiner explains how the infant forms his or her identity through identification with the mother. Gardiner writes that:

each child very early forms a ‘primary identification’ in response to the expectations implicitly expressed by its first caretaker, usually the mother. This core identification sets the pattern according to which the person thereafter relates to other people and to the world. (“On Female Identity” 350)

In this context, Gardiner defines the self as “the total potential range of all possible variations of the individual which are compatible with its primary identity” (350).

In contrast to the ideal of a nurturing mother-daughter relationship described by these scholars, in La mitad del alma the relationship between the narrator and her mother was characterized by indifference, neglect, and even rejection from the moment of the narrator’s birth. The narrator recalls
her father’s description of the day she was born when Cecilia rejected her daughter for the first time. The narrator makes this neglect obvious as she explains that it was her father, assisted by a young maid, who cut the umbilical cord, that it was “El quien me acunó en sus brazos por primera vez, ya que mi madre, agotada por el esfuerzo, durmió veinticuatro horas seguidas” (109). Because of a claimed infection immediately after the protagonist’s birth, Cecilia was unable to care for her. The narrator laments, “No pudo criarme. Sobreviví a base de leche en polvo” (109). As the narrator looks at a photograph of Cecilia and herself when the narrator was a young child, she characterizes Cecilia’s look towards her daughter as “un aire triste, de convaleciente” (110). The narrator interprets her mother’s attitude in the photograph as rejection, noting the “apatía de su cara y también la de su gesto, puesto que me observa como si me rechazara,” as she describes the coldness, aloofness, and “dislicencia” of her mother (110). When Cecilia was preparing to return to France again, the narrator remembers her perfunctory goodbye as an example of the lack of affection on the part of her mother: “Mi madre me dio un único beso, en la frente, como hacía siempre” (101).

In this way, the narrator recalls her mother as a cold, indifferent, uncaring woman who was not her first caretaker. It is clear that for the narrator, Cecilia does not provide the feelings of security, protection, and acceptance that Ann Belford Ulanov describes as “the positive expression of motherhood” (158). Rather, Cecilia epitomizes Ulanov’s definition of the
negative expression of motherhood, “depriving, rejecting” and “indifferent to 
individual consciousness and development” (158). Cecilia is, as Hélène
Cixous describes in “Coming to Writing,” an example of “mothers who are not 
maternal” (Coming to Writing 50), for the narrator remembers her mother’s
coldness, “su incapacidad para el afecto, su frialdad – no recuerdo que jamás 
me diera un beso o un abrazo espontáneos, ni siquiera que me contara un 
cuento” (35-6). Riera intertextually reminds us of Cuestión de amor propio 
and Angela’s interpretation of Ana Azores of La Regenta, that “Ana sólo 
quería un cuento.”

When the narrator was seven years old, Cecilia brought her on a single 
trip to Paris, ostensibly to visit her grandfather Pere Balaguer, still in exile in 
Paris. However, the narrator learns that the real purpose of the trip was to 
introduce Cecilia’s child, probably his child also, to her lover. While they were 
in Paris, when Cecilia was about to leave for the evening, the narrator begged 
her not to leave, but Cecilia, impatiently pushed her aside: “se deshacía de mi 
contacto y prometía castigarme si no me callaba de una vez.” As the narrator 
continued to beg, “implorándole que no se fuera, que no me abandonara,” 
Cecilia became furious and said, “Debería haberte dejado en Barcelona [...] 
mirándome con despego” (45), as we see that she regrets having brought the 
narrator with her. The narrator is later disillusioned by learning from one of 
Cecilia’s letters that Cecilia’s motives in bringing her to Paris were not because 
her mother wanted to be with her but that Cecilia was using her as a pawn in
her efforts to procure a lasting relationship with her lover, that her mother “me utilizó para conseguir un intento de aproximación más perdurable” (47). The fact that Cecilia’s desire for a long-lasting romantic relationship failed follows Linda Chown’s assertion that: “Spanish women authors have studied the meaning and consequences of the quest for love and they repeatedly convey its sterility. Rarely do the novels’ conclusions affirm love as a positive alternative for the heroines” (105). We see that Cecilia’s efforts were in vain, for the narrator writes, “Mi ida a París fue inútil porque él no quiso conocerme” (45).

Judith Jordan, along with many other psychologists, believes that it is important to the growing child to be able to identify with her mother. As Jordan states, “The more frequent mirroring, mutual identification, and more accurate empathy may all strengthen the girl’s sense of relatedness, connection and a feeling of being directly, emotionally understood” (“Empathy” 34). Unfortunately, we can see that the narrator has never felt the mutual identification, reciprocity, and mirroring that a close relationship with her mother would have provided. Rather, she feels that her own appearance and demeanor are in direct contrast to those of her beautiful, graceful, and elegant mother when she writes, “Admiraba demasiado su belleza para no sentirme encogida y mínima en su presencia, insignificante y asustada ante su gesto, casi siempre de reproche, difícil de disimular, puesto que yo era una niña fea, gordita y desmañada” (28). The narrator, describing
her own contrast with her beautiful mother, continues: “Por desgracia fui una niña torpona que andaba a trompicones y calzaba zapatos ortopédicos […] que nada tenía que ver con ella, alta, de cintura estrecha […] figura estilizada y piernas largas […] según los cánones de la más estricta perfección” (29).

Again, we remember the standards of beauty praised and highly valued in patriarchal societies that we read about in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, which we can contrast also with the lack of beauty of the aging protagonist Angela of *Cuestión de amor propio*.

The abandonment by her mother that the narrator felt on that one evening in Paris when she was seven years old became a permanent loss when she learned of her mother’s death. Cecilia Balaguer died in Avignon, France at nine p.m. the evening of January 4, 1960, a victim of a hit and run, either by accident (a victim of a hit and run), murder, or suicide, according to the different versions that appear in the narrator’s investigation. The narrator remembers her initial grief, “en la infinita tristeza y la sensación de frío – el frío con un machete abriéndome las carnes, penetrando en los huesos” (169).

Sadly, in spite of her ambivalent feelings, the narrator suffers greatly from the absence of her mother, following Adrienne Rich’s belief that, “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy” (*Of Woman Born* 237). Even though Cecilia was not a good mother, the narrator still suffered a painful and difficult loss. We understand how the narrator has been fighting against contradictory feelings of love, guilt, and
hate, with no chance of reconciliation, no possibility that Cecilia can soothe
the narrator by expressing her regret. In this context, the relationship
between the narrator and her mother remains forever painfully unresolved.
We can relate the feeling of loss of the narrator with the words of Hope
Edelman in *Motherless Daughters. The Legacy of Loss*, “negative emotion
can bind people together as tightly as positive emotion does, which is why
even daughters of abusive mothers need to mourn the loss” (17).

When Cecilia died in 1960, the narrator’s father brought her to
Mallorca to live with his mother Lluqueta and his sister, the typical
embroidering Spanish woman, the “bordadera” tía Francisca, where the
narrator lived until she was fifteen years old. In my view, these older women
fulfilled the nurturing role that her mother Cecilia had abdicated even before
her death, although the narrator learns later that they may not have been her
blood relatives. The narrator reminisces, “me sentía atada a las dos por un
vínculo indestructible [...] mi vida estaba arraigada en su ámbaro,” «com en la
nit les flames a la fosca,» which the author maintains in her native Catalan
and then translates in a footnote into Castilian Spanish, «Como en la noche
las llamas a la oscuridad» (131). Her grandmother, as surrogate mother and
representative of the archetypal wise old woman figure, nurtured and taught
the narrator, fulfilling the role that Cecilia had neglected. As the narrator
remembers, “La abuela [...] me decía siempre que no podía sentarme con las
piernas separadas [...] En cambio mi madre jamás mencionó tal cosa” (135).
The narrator’s grandmother, like the Mallorcan grandmother who was so important in the life of the author herself, “me transmitió su capacidad de contar historias.” The narrator writes, “Yo me sentía heredera directa de mi abuela, de sus historias, que había tratado de continuar en mis narraciones con la sensación de que, de ese modo, ella se prolongaba en mí y con ella pervivían otras mujeres, bisabuelas y tatarabuelas remotas, a las que me creía unida” (133). Like her narrator, the author Riera writes in “Para continuar los cuentos de mi abuela,” “Ahora sé que empecé a escribir, en primer lugar, por culpa de la abuela, incitada por su capacidad de contar historias” (288).

The narrator’s grandmother replaces Cecilia in the generational chain of mother, daughter, mother, daughter, through which women recreate a timeless sequence of relationships. The narrator’s memories answer affirmatively the questions that Carol Gilligan asks about the importance of women in culture. Gilligan asks, “Are women vessels through which cultures pass? Are women oracles of the disciplines, like the priestess who was the oracle of Apollo, the wisdom of male gods?” (“Joining” 129) Julia Kristeva also cites various myths of female resurrection, “vestiges of an anterior or concurrent maternal cult” (“Woman’s Time” 17). Unfortunately, since Cecilia is absent from the life of the narrator, it follows that she is also absent from this female heritage and therefore breaks the female generational chain discussed by Gilligan, Kristeva, and by Marianna Hirsch, who writes that, “Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her
mother [...] Every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter” (“Mothers” 209). In my interpretation, *La mitad del alma* subverts this chain of relationships, thus subverting the theory of Nancy Chodorow, who believes that mothers pass on to their daughters mothering capabilities and the desire to mother. Chodorow explains:

> Because women are themselves mothered by women, they grow up with the relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition of self-in-relation, which commit them to mothering [...] Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother.

(209)

However, sadly, we know that the narrator will not mother. She has no children and will have none, a fact for which she blames Cecilia, who has not passed on to her the capacity to mother. She writes, “He condenado a Cecilia a no tener nietos, quizá de manera inconsciente he querido castigarla” (79). We know that Cecilia has died, broken the matrilineal line, and that there will be no one left to remember Cecilia after the narrator herself dies, as in like manner there will be no descendants to remember the narrator. She writes, “Cecilia se iría diluyendo en ausencia para acabar siendo una pequeña mota de polvo en la solapa de la historia doméstica, de la historia familiar que también con mi muerte sería aventada” (79). As I have mentioned before, the narrator suffers from depression because of unresolved feelings of resentment and loss towards her absent mother. Perhaps the reason that the
narrator wants to believe that her mother was a hero of the resistance, a strong woman dedicated to a meaningful cause, was because it would provide to the narrator a valid reason for her mother’s neglect and give to the narrator a reason to be proud of her accomplished mother and to admire her, rather than to continue resenting her.

We can compare Cecilia to other literary women described by Annis Pratt, characters “who commit the crime of female sexuality” (Archetypal 169) and the “degradation accorded both married and unmarried women who make love out of wedlock.” According to Pratt, “to seek Eros [...] is to cast oneself beyond the bounds of the enclosure” of marriage under the patriarchy. Eros “flowers in a new, inevitably apatriarchal space” (74). We remember other crimes against female sexuality in other novels of Riera. We recall that, in Una primavera para Domenic Guarini, Clara felt the prohibitions against Eros for women when she was an adolescent feeling sexual stirrings for the first time and, as a result, was condemned by her family and by the priest in the confessional. Also, as a young, unmarried woman, Clara felt guilty after having made love with Carlos and felt that she needed to atone for her sins by marrying him. In Cuestión de amor propio, we believe that Angela suffers from the prohibitions against female sexuality by rejecting a possible lesbian relationship with Ingrid and thus lives with sexual frustration throughout her life. We understand that Cecilia was also punished for her crime of sexuality when we read Pratt’s description of the punishment for adulterous women in
literature. She writes, “The severity of modern punishments parallels the traditional death from childbirth, hanging, or drowning” (78). In like manner, Rachel Blau DuPlessis reiterates the punishment of death for “a female character when she has a jumbled, distorted, inappropriate relation to the ‘social script’ or plot designed to contain her legally, economically, and sexually” (15). In La mitad del alma, the adulterous wife Cecilia was indeed condemned for her eroticism. In my interpretation, Cecilia received severe punishment, the punishment of death, from the repressive patriarchal society of Franco’s Spain for having committed the crime of female sexuality, transgressed the name of the father, and assumed the masculine role of warrior as a resistance fighter and/or spy. We can interpret her death as a symbol of that of the mythological queen Clytemnestra and compare it to Marianne Hirsch’s explanation of Luce Irigaray’s interpretation, that she “must be killed because she is not the virgin mother who had become a cultural ideal: she is passionate and sexual […] and, worst of all, she is politically active and aware” (Mother-Daughter Plot 30). It is evident that Cecilia, who was neither virginal nor a good mother nor an ideal wife, was passionate, sexual, and politically dedicated.

In contrast with the figure of Cecilia, the mother in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, Catalina, was typical of the figure of the mother who represented the repressed, self-abnegating woman victimized under an authoritarian, traditionalist, patriarchal society. We saw that it was difficult,
even impossible, for Clara to value a mother who was a weakened victim in a patriarchal society. We saw that Clara was both impatient with her mother’s passivity and frightened to follow the model of her mother. We discussed and interpreted the scene which Clara imagined in which Catalina speaks for herself. Clara tried to give voice to her mother, to make the mother speak, to overcome the silence of the biblical Eve, who was punished for having spoken. This punishment of Eve is described by Sedonie Smith: “Eve’s entrance into the realm of public discourse eventuates in the catastrophic expulsion of man and woman from paradise. It also eventuates in the identification of Eve’s word with the speech of the serpent: she is double-tongued, captious, evil-speaking” (29). Catalina’s situation recalls the punishment of Eve, as Eve and her descendants receive the punishment of silence, of submission to the male, and of a secondary role in a male-dominated world. We are reminded of the “Laugh of the Medusa,” in which Hélène Cixous urges women to break the malediction of Eve by speaking, “taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus” so that:

women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned with accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (“Laugh” 881)
Just as Catalina in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* uses her body to speak in Clara’s imagined re-creation of her mother’s rebellion, Cixous calls upon women to “write through their bodies,” for “they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse” (“Laugh” 886). We see that in *La mitad del alma*, unlike in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, the mother Cecilia does indeed speak. But sadly, when the mother speaks, it is evident that she does not speak to her daughter, and the daughter suffers rejection by her mother.

We can see how both Isabel Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* and the narrator in *La mitad del alma* wish for a mother like the ancient goddess Demeter, who relentlessly fights for and rescues her daughter Persephone from the underworld. Unlike the narrator of *La mitad del alma*, Demeter succeeds in recovering her lost half, at least for most of the year. We can relate this to *Illa* in which Hélène Cixous tells us, “Demeter traverses and contains unlimited spaces of world, sea, and underworld.” For Cixous, Demeter is a powerful goddess who “both traverses the earth and is the earth.” Unlike Cecilia, who abandons her daughter at birth, according to Cixous, Demeter “never cuts the thread, does not know separation, detachment. Mother and daughter [...] do not betray each other; they infinitely exchange and pass into each other without cutting. The thread (fil)
that links mother, daughter, and sister is continuous” (Coming to Writing 110). Rather than the ideal image of Demeter, we can deduce that Cecilia represents for the narrator the mythological Medusa, who is for young women the “frightening power” of their own mothers, according to Annis Pratt (Dancing ix). Pratt explains that, “When we look at the Medusa we see in her eye our mother’s rage, a rage often visited upon us as daughters” (Dancing 3). The mother as Medusa is a metaphor for the mother-daughter conflict which involves ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards the mother. In this context, in La mitad del alma, the narrator is torn between these contradictory feelings towards her mother. She explains, “No me resulta nada fácil hablar de mi madre, que incluso en la infancia me suscitó sentimientos encontrados de amor y de odio” (28). We can relate this feeling to what Concha Alborg writes, that for the French feminists the mother is a contradictory being:

la madre representa un ser dividido: es poderosa y víctima; idealizada y menospreciada; capaz de nutrir y de castrar; sexual y virginal. El discurso maternal, entonces, tiene que ser uno plural y que además va a estar sujeto a factores sociales, políticos, biológicos y psicológicos. (17)

The narrator, deprived of her mother and then of her grandmother who died while the narrator was still a teenager, relied upon her presumed father as “la persona más importante para mí [...] habría de serlo para
siempre” (114). The narrator expresses a deep affection for her father: “Durante muchos años pensé que mi padre era el hombre con quien me hubiera gustado casarme” (108). However, when her mother died, he sent her to Mallorca to live with her grandmother and aunt and spent only a few days at a time with her. Although her father reminds the narrator, “acaso para justificarse” (92), that his business affairs prevented him from caring for her, she continues to maintain an idealistic image of him. She still remembers that, “Casi siempre me divertía más a su lado que con los demás” (117). Four years after Cecilia’s death when the narrator was thirteen years old, her father told her his version of how Cecilia died, that Cecilia was crossing the street and was accidentally hit by a speeding truck. During this conversation, the narrator and her father were in an elegant restaurant where she felt more like her father’s date than like his daughter, “no como una niña sino como una señorita con […] aquel señor tan elegante” (92).

The details of her mother’s death that she was learning for the first time affected her less than her father’s announcement in the same conversation that he was going to remarry. She acknowledges, “la noticia de la boda de mi padre me afectó mucho” (92). In my interpretation, the typical oedipal triangle that Nancy Chodorow explains as a girl’s love for her father and rivalry with her mother – daughter/father/mother – became for the narrator a similar love/hate triangle – daughter/father/stepmother. In addition to the normal affection of a daughter towards her father, the narrator
displays an unhealthy possessive attitude towards her father: “a pesar de vivir separados, los hilos de nuestra complicidad nos mantenían unidos y con nadie podría establecer una relación tan estrecha” (108). The narrator, referring to herself as an orphan, “huérfana de madre” (92), tells us that she refused to live with her father and his new wife because “No quería compartirlo con su mujer” (115). After his marriage, she is jealous of both her stepmother and also of her young stepbrother, the new offspring of her father, for the narrator fears that they would steal her father’s affections from her. The narrator writes that the hostility between them was mutual: “Mi madrastra, que era una mujer estúpida y maligna, para cumplir con el estereotipo, supongo, tenía celos” (115).

Even after his marriage, her father continues to bring the narrator to restaurants and on trips, which causes the narrator to view him as a suitor. She recalls a cruise to New York with her father when she realized just how important he was to her. It was on this trip that the fifteen-year-old narrator was attacked by a twenty-five-year-old man who, after dancing with her, insisted that she continue drinking champagne. We remember the attack on Clara in Una primavera para Domenico Guarini when we read in La mitad del alma what seems to be a cinematographic re-enactment of Annis Pratt’s rape-trauma archetype by which an aggressive male exerts power over an unwilling female by forcing his sexuality upon her. The narrator remembers, “De pronto noté sus labios húmedos y calientes sobre los míos, el contacto de
su lengua intentando abrirse camino dentro de mi boca, su mano intentando abrirse camino por mi escote.” She recalls vividly, “Me sentía sucia, las monjas me habían descrito mil veces esa sensación de impureza.” She is disappointed that, “Me habían besado por primera vez y lo habían hecho a la fuerza, bruscamente, sin delicadeza” (119). When her father calmed her after the attack, she felt protected and safe with him, as she did when she was a child. She writes, “Me besó en los cabellos mientras yo sollozaba en su hombro. Luego se sentó en la cama y tomó mi mano entre las suyas, como hacía cuando era pequeña” (120).

The sexual undertones of the narrator’s words hint at a relationship desired by the daughter which go beyond the normal feelings of safety and security that a daughter feels in the presence of her father. The narrator often remembers vividly the images and events on this cruise ship because they represented the awakening of her adolescent sexual desires. Subconsciously, her feelings had changed from viewing her father as her protector and comforter to becoming the object of her sexual desires. Often in dreams, she re-created the dance on the ship, but instead of dancing with her attacker Mariano López, she was dancing with her father “como si nada nos importara [...] y era yo, en el sueño, quien buscaba sus labios con los míos, que quemaban, y confundía su saliva con la mía” (120). Years afterwards, the narrator marries and then divorces Guillem, who believed that the reason for their marital problems was that the narrator, who loved her father in spite of
his political affiliation, was a perfect example of the Electra complex, a woman who searches for the image of her father in all men. The narrator outwardly rejects that diagnosis of Guillem, calling it “trampas freudianas” (107), but inwardly she acknowledges that Guillem, who is a psychiatrist specializing in psychoanalysis, was probably right. She later admits, “Puede que [...] mi padre resultara un auténtico impedimento entre nosotros” (127). The narrator’s love for her presumed father became a disappointment for her after his remarriage, because she didn’t want to share him with his new wife and son. Even though her father continued to bring her to restaurants and on trips, the narrator felt abandoned and rejected by her presumed father because of his remarriage. As an antidote to this rejection that she felt, the narrator becomes excited in reading her mother’s letters when she learns about the possibility that her “real” biological father was Camus, an antifascist fighter, a heroic warrior and esteemed writer whom she could respect and admire, someone who shares her own political ideals:

la posibilidad de que mi padre fuera un republicano español o un resistente francés, luchador antifascista contra Franco, fue convirtiéndose en una certeza absoluta. Tenía la convicción de que era hija de alguien para quien los ideales políticos estaban por encima de su vida privada, su compromiso con la causa de la humanidad entera, por encima del amor que pudiera sentir por Cecilia. (155)
If the narrator’s parents were heroes with deep convictions who fought for a greater good, the narrator would be able to forgive her parents for having neglected and even rejected their daughter, because their neglect would have been insignificant in light of their commitment to an important cause which would have benefited all humankind.

As I have mentioned previously, Riera attributes many of the elements of her own life to those of her characters. Like Riera, Angela of Cuestión de amor propio, Isabel Clara of Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, and the narrator of La mitad del alma are writers of fiction. Both the narrator of La mitad del alma and Riera spent time as a visiting university professor in New Hampshire. The author and narrator are of approximately the same age. Riera was born in 1948, and the narrator was born in 1950. Ever present in the fiction of Riera are Mallorca and the surrounding Mediterranean Sea, for Riera believes that identity is related to place. As Riera writes, “Mi primera patria es la gente que quiero [...] la Segunda es el Mediterraneo [...] en los lugares donde hay mar, luz, unos sonidos y ciertos sabores, me siento muchísimo más enraizada. La patria es la raza” (“Palabras”). The narrator of La mitad del alma shares the same profound love for Mallorca. The narrator writes, “Las profundas raíces que yo aseguraba mantener con mi tierra, la vinculación con unos determinados lugares de la isla de Mallorca [...] como si mis libros llevaran [...] su incontestable calidad isleña” (133-4). Like the narrator of La mitad del alma, Carme Riera credits her grandmother with her
gift of storytelling. Riera’s description of her grandmother’s influence on her young childhood in Mallorca is also evocative of that of Isabel Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*. Riera describes her grandmother as, “una mujer muy culta que vivía recluida en una habitación de un inmenso caserón [...] yo era la única chica de una familia de varones, me pasaba el día con ella escuchando historias, pero no inventadas, sino que tenían que ver con su vida.” (“Palabras”). Like Riera, the narrator attended the same school, the Colegio del Sagrado Corazón in Mallorca. Riera acknowledges that sometimes the viewpoints of the narrator echo her own, especially their shared impatience with the “papanatismo” of the editorial world. Riera also confides that, “También, como yo, la protagonista es agnóstica pero piensa que si su abuela y su tía rezan por ella las cosas le van mejor” (“Palabras”). Even the central event of the novel, the book-signing on the day of Sant Jordi on April 23 of 2001 in Barcelona when a stranger handed the narrator a folder containing photographs and letters of her mother, occurred in real life. Riera tells us that while she herself was signing books on the day of Sant Jordi, someone handed a fellow author a folder containing letters from her father. This inspired Riera to wonder, “qué pasaría si me ocurriera a mí y así empezó la historia” (“Carme Riera pide al lector”), the story that Riera has written in this novel. Some of the secondary characters that appear in the novel are real, many of them friends of the author. Riera speaks of her amusement because, “Pedí permiso a mis amigos para sacarlos en el libro y curiosamente los que
Many real situations and historical personages appear in the novel, among them María Casares and Albert Camus himself, who actually did receive the Nobel Prize of Literature in October of 1957 and who actually did die in an automobile accident near Avignon, France on January 4 of 1960, events and dates which the narrator relates in the novel.

I believe that Riera includes elements from real life into the novel to give verisimilitude to the fictional plot, to make the reader believe what we are reading. It is clear that both Riera and the narrator carry out a thorough process of documentation so that the events that are described are precise and accurate. Riera indicates that she wrote *La mitad del alma* only after filling a “cantidad de cuadernos con notas de época” that were “absolutamente imprescindibles para captar los acontecimientos, la atmósfera, incluso los olores.” As a result, the book is “fruto de sus cuadernos” and “estancias en las bibliotecas” to accurately document the historical period of the postwar and Transition in Spain (“Riera analiza”). The general events of the novel are historical and happened in reality. We see that the narrator’s text is also filled with exact dates and times in an attempt to arrive at a definitive proof of what happened. In my view, she also cites precise locations, times and dates in order to convince the reader of the authenticity of her story so that the intended readers – both the specific man who gave her the folder and other possible readers of the protagonist’s narration – will feel the necessity of
involving themselves in the search for her mother. The narrator is careful to document the authenticity of the letters, that “la letra me fue en seguida familiar,” for she recognized “la impecable caligrafía inglesa de mi madre” (27). If the written words weren’t proof enough, the five photographs of Cecilia, one dated 1949 and in front of a French “épicerie” provide all the proof that she needs to accept their authenticity. As a secondary character later tells the narrator, “Las pruebas prueban, no hacen suponer” (199).

Riera also tells us that she uses elements of her personal life as a game to try to trick the reader into believing that the novel is autobiographical. In her opinion, if the reader believes that the novel is autobiographical, then it is successful in that it pulls the reader in to the story in order to make him or her care about what happened to Cecilia and to feel the suspense of wondering whether the narrator will be able to discover the truth. Riera writes, “el éxito de la novela es conseguir que los lectores crean que Cecilia Balaguer es mi madre.” However, consistent with Riera’s warning that we discussed in a previous chapter not to make the dangerous mistake of confusing the author with the protagonist, Riera warns the reader not to fall into her trap by mistakenly identifying the narrator as the author here: “Pues no. Mi padre luchó contra el franquismo y mi madre es una señora muy guapa, en eso sí es igual que la protagonista, aunque mi padre no la dejaba viajar sola y casi ni acompañada” (“Palabras”). It is interesting to note that here Riera identifies the mother as the protagonist and in other commentary about the novel she
names the narrator as protagonist. In our minds, she raises the question, is the narrator narrating her own story, that of her mother, or the mother she wanted to have? In fact, it is evident that she is narrating both the autobiography of her own life and an attempted biography of her mother’s life. I interpret the narrator’s attempt at writing a biography of her missing mother in light of Lynn Z. Bloom’s comparison of the female biographer to the figure of the mother Demeter, who tirelessly searches for her lost daughter Persephone (255). By writing autobiography which presupposes an attempted biography of her mother, the daughter, here the narrator, appropriates the role of the archetypal mother in search of her daughter, in a reversal of roles made possible by the act of writing.

We understand that her absent mother becomes for the narrator a permanent void, the lost half of her soul, the lost “mitad del alma” of the title of the novel. We see how she is still mourning the loss of her mother more than forty years later. The folder that the narrator receives on that April day in 2001 and doesn’t open until months later represent proof that her past was not what she thought it was, that she was not who she thought she was, and that the lost half of her soul represents not only her lost mother but her lost father, her lost past, and her lost identity. In my view, the narrator suffers from what Paul Ilie describes as “inner exile,” which Ilie defines as “an emptiness that awaits restoration, much the same that territorial exile is the absence that compensates itself by nostalgia and hopeful anticipation” (14).
In this context, we can see how both the daughter and her mother, the exiled Cecilia, suffered from the same lack, absence, emptiness, and “hopeful anticipation” that the void could be filled. Even before reading the letters, it is likely that the narrator already suffered from an inability to sustain close emotional relationships, as evidenced by her break-up with her ex-husband Guillem, her emotional disconnection, her low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, which are all characteristics of clinical depression. The loss of her identity she feels after reading her mother’s letters causes the narrator to fall into an even deeper state of depression. We can understand that she lost her sense of self when we read, “Desde que leí las cartas, todo se volvió más confuso e instable. Mi mundo, igual que mi persona, empezó a hacer aguas, a desvanecerse” (135). We read a description, which I believe is an intertextual reference to Carmen Laforet’s earlier novel Nada, “el miedo que el espejo me devolviera la nada, no el reflejo de mi cara, sino el vacío.” The narrator sought Guillem’s help to recommend a psychiatrist, because she realized that “sola no podría salir del pozo porque estaba a punto de enloquecer” (121). Powerless to act, with an “atracción por el vacío” (123), the narrator was suffering from a paralyzing depression which caused her to be hospitalized for two months. In my view, the narrator felt the alienation, “passivity, immobility and madness” that Phyllis Zatlin describes in referring to other postwar novels written by women, an inner
exile which “becomes total as the individual retreats within herself to the point of losing all communication with the outside world” (“Passivity” 3).

We see that Riera adds further ambiguity and uncertainty about Cecilia’s story when the narrator describes an old woman in the psychiatric residence, a woman named Cecilia who has been there for forty years. The woman, deaf and blind, sits down beside the narrator and begins to affectionately caress the narrator’s hand, as we believe the narrator would have wanted to be caressed by her mother. The narrator, remembering her own mother’s beauty, is struck by the beauty of this older woman, “el óvalo perfecto de su cara,” “su pelo luminoso, casi azul.” When the nurse explains to the narrator, “Quizá usted le recuerda a su hija, que murió hace mucho. Puede que la confunda con ella,” the narrator cannot deal with any more possible versions of the truth, with any additional cause of doubt and uncertainty. She writes, “la coincidencia con el nombre de mi madre me golpeó en pleno estómago.” The narrator decides to forget that she ever met this woman because, “No podía incluir ni siquiera una pizca más de duda en mi historia, en la historia de Cecilia Balaguer, que bastante sobrada andaba ya de ingredientes de folletín” (126). Both the “folletín” and her mother’s story are fictional constructs whose referent is not reality, but rather another metafictional construct. I believe that the narrator, by comparing her mother’s story to a romance novel, is highlighting the fictional aspects of her story by using literature rather than reality as a referent, which therefore casts
even greater doubt that the truth can be discovered. After months in the psychiatric residence, the narrator slowly emerges from her “estado catatónico” (122) and comes to realize that, in order to fill the void, “llenar el vacío” (123), she has to break out of her silence and recover her power to speak. She is aware that, “lo que más necesitaba era ser escuchada, que alguien aceptara que mi silencio angustioso era también una manera de comunicar. Claro que para recuperar mi yo en el espejo, para ahuyentar aquella chispa de locura, tenía que recobrar las palabras” (122). We understand that, like Hélène Cixous who urged women to dare to speak and like the author Riera who has celebrated the power of language and written of the importance of the word, of “la búsqueda del yo […] y la necesidad de su explicación a través de la verbalización” (“Literatura femenina” 12), the narrator comes to realize that “Las palabras me daban vida, me servían de punto de apoyo” (123).

One year after reading Cecilia’s letters for the first time, after finishing her stay in the psychiatric residential facility, with the encouragement of her psychiatrist Rosa Sender and following the clues provided by the letters, the narrator is now embarking on a search in a female version of the archetypal quest myth privileged by Carl Jung. When the male embarks upon this quest, he typically descends into an unknown land, undergoes a series of trials, and emerges matured and transformed. In contrast, the female quest is a search into the unknown realm of her subconscious. For the narrator, this
subconscious is represented by her childhood memories that Cecilia’s letters unlocked for her and the distant past which she will try to recuperate so that she can recover what she had lost. In Carmen Martín Gaite’s words, her subconscious is the “cuarto de atrás” of her forgotten childhood, and in the narrator’s words it is the “cuarto oscuro de mi infancia” (82). Like Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, whose subconscious was unlocked by contemplating Botticelli’s *Primavera*, the narrator realizes, “tuve que sumergirme en mi niñez, volver a ese territorio tan devastado por el tiempo, para tratar de recuperarlo con la mayor objetividad possible, casi como si no me perteneciera, como si fuera un lugar ajeno” (60). When the narrator takes on the role of detective to obsessively seek the truth about her mother, she has decided to confront the image that she has had of her mother. This reminds us of the description by Annis Pratt that, by confronting the negative image she has had of her mother, that she is fighting back against the “terrifyingly powerful female archetype” of the Medusa (*Dancing* 7). Pratt believes that, “a woman poet’s ability to break through the Medusa has to do with facing her mother straight on in order to negotiate a passage toward psychological maturity” (*Dancing* 73). Like Pratt, Hélène Cixous interprets the archetype of the Medusa as potentially empowering for women: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (“Laugh” 885). As in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, the narrator’s quest circles back in time so that that the protagonist
narrates back and forth between the present and the remote past, “the time without time” of mythology, as if time consisted of ever-repeating, spiraling circles. Julia Kristeva describes “women’s time” as cyclical, repetitive, and eternal. Kristeva writes,

> As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*. (16)

We have seen how *La mitad del alma* is a novel in which the narrator searches into the past to learn the truth about her mother. Through its nature as a first-person narration evoking past time in order to clarify the identity of the protagonist, we understand that the novel falls into the category of novel of memory. Therefore, we can relate this novel to the assessment by David Herzberger, that “novels of memory include those fictions in which the individual self seeks definition by commingling the past and present through the process of remembering [...] the self in search of definition, the definition of self perceived always within the flow of history” (*Narrating* 67). Riera
calls memory “la capacidad más maravillosa, la que nos permite recordar el pasado y enmendar los errores” (“Palabras”). Explaining the title of this novel, Riera writes that that “la memoria es la mitad del alma, o incluso el alma entera. Sin memoria estamos muertos olvidados” (“La memoria”). We can deduce that the narrator reiterates the Riera’s privileging of memory when the narrator writes, “Para mí la memoria es imprescindible. Sin memoria estamos muertos. La memoria es el alma de las personas y quizá por eso yo ando buscando la mitad de mi alma...” (158). From this perspective, we can compare this narrator to those which Herzberger describes as characteristic of the postmodern novel. Herzberger writes, “The narrator moves through time and space to regain contact with the past, to interpret it from the perspective of later experience” (Narrating 120).

Throughout La mitad del alma, we see that the narrator is seeking the lost truth in order to fill the void of her lost mother, her lost memory, and her lost identity. She searches her own subconscious for personal recollections of her past as she says, “son los recuerdos los que otorgan sentido a nuestra existencia” (132). We can compare the narrator’s search in the far recesses of the storehouse of her memory, “en las zonas oscuras de la memoria” (132), to the Confessions of St. Augustine, where he compares memory to “a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images [...] as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place” (214-5). In my interpretation, the narrator tries to remove the dust and clouds which obscure
the past, as did Mercury in the painting *Primavera*, so that eventually, “iban encendiéndose pequeñas luces.” From this perspective, the narrator embarks on a tireless search to rescue Cecilia from her world of darkness, to bring her to light, to rescue her from the underworld, as did Demeter for Persephone. Otherwise, “En su mundo de tinieblas, Cecilia Balaguer podía ser confundida con cualquier otro aspecto del pasado” (63), and Cecilia would be forever lost.

The narrator also seeks out the memory of others to fill the gaps in her own memory. We understand her disappointment with the recollections of Rosa Montalbán and Esther Brugada, because what they tell her about Cecilia is inconsistent with her own memories of her mother. The narrator writes, “La imagen que Esther Brugada me ofrecía tenía poco que ver con la que yo guardaba” (68) and “Tampoco lo que me contó Rosa Montalbán se aviene con la memoria que guardo de mi madre” (69). In a role consistent with that of a detective gathering facts, the narrator consults several other people who either knew Cecilia personally or knew of her, gleaning small bits of second-hand information that each one gives to the narrator that she tries to piece together to solve the puzzle of her mother’s past. The narrator goes first to the Hotel Esmeralda in Paris, retracing the steps of her mother. She says, “repetí tres veces el trayecto en taxi al que alude mi madre en su carta” (56), acting again as her mother’s double, as though she could become her mother by transposing Cecilia’s actions from the past into her own actions in the present. The narrator finds Pauline, the daughter of the doorwoman in her
grandfather’s apartment, who remembers Cecilia, the “*dame espagnole.*”

Pauline remembers that Cecilia was “muy estirada, adusta y poco propensa a las familiaridades” (83). Pauline also tells the narrator where to find the father’s nurse, Madeleine Lamartin, who provides the narrator with many clues as to Cecilia’s actions as a resistance worker. Madeleine remembers Pere Balaguer’s other exiled Republicans friends, “los visitantes más asiduos, un grupo de exiliados” who “mataban la tarde hurgando en el pasado” (88). Madeleine also remembers Vergés, who served as a link to the “maquis,” who used money that Cecilia provided. Madeleine recalls that “el dinero que venía de España a través de la señora era para la causa” (89). The narrator verifies this later when she finds “anotadas las cantidades que Cecilia Balaguer entregaba a los republicanos exiliados” (153). Madeleine also tells the narrator that Cecilia secretly brought from Spain objects that the antique dealer, el señor Mitterand, sold to his clients. It is evident that the narrator is disappointed at the possibility that her mother’s actions were illegal, “la posibilidad de que mi madre se dedicara al contrabando artístico” (153).

The most startling piece of information that Madeleine provides the narrator with is her belief that Cecilia committed suicide. Madeleine tells the narrator, “Casi siempre me hablaba de ti. Te adoraba…” (90) and “nunca entendí las razones de su suicidio” (91). The narrator believes that if Cecilia did indeed commit suicide, it was proof that confirmed what she had always believed, that her mother never loved her, instead of the contrary, as
Madeleine affirms, “Si, en efecto, se había ido de este mundo por propia voluntad debía de ser cierto lo que yo siempre había sospechado: que no me quería, que yo no le importaba en absoluto” (93). Madeleine wonders about Cecilia’s whereabouts between December 31, 1959 when Cecilia called the Paris apartment from Portbou and January 4, 1960 when she died in Avignon. Madeleine does not provide the truth of what happened to Cecilia, but rather adds to the mystery, admitting, “¿Qué pudo ocurrírle a tu madre? No lo sé” (97). Madeleine has few facts, merely suppositions or hypotheses: “Quizá de repente, en Portbou, había olvidado quién era, hacia dónde iba. O quizá se equivocó de tren, se confundió” (97). Madeleine’s memories serve only to confuse the narrator, who asks, “¿Qué hacía mi madre en Avignon? ¿Con quién iba a encontrarse? ¿Qué iba a buscar?” (102) The narrator returns to Spain exhausted by her search. She writes, “Estaba exhausta y, además, necesitaba serenarme, dejar de dar vueltas a la obsesión de saber por qué se había suicidado mi madre y, sobre todo, a la obsesión de saber quién era yo” (103).

The narrator returns to the native Mallorca of her father, where the narrator meets with the nephew of doña María Antonia, “la única persona en Mallorca [...] que todavía podía hablarme de mi madre” (165-6). Although he remembers Cecilia as “una preciosidad” (166), don Miguel provides her with no answers to her questions. She laments that don Miguel “no parecía tener ninguna información sustancial sobre mi madre” (167). The narrator returns
to France to continue her quest, this time to the city of Cecilia’s death, Avignon, to attempt to “reconstruir los hechos” (184). Rather than providing more answers, her search raises more questions and speculations. In Avignon, through reading a police report of the incident, she discovers that the driver of the truck which killed Cecilia was arrested and served jail time for speeding, for reckless driving, and for leaving the scene of an accident. The narrator learns from the report that the driver was Juan Pérez, that he was Spanish, and that he “entraba y salía de Francia por el monte porque era un luchador, un maquis” (181). Obsessed by the fact that the truck driver was a member of the “maquis,” as perhaps Cecilia herself was, the narrator is even more uncertain about the true circumstances of Cecilia’s death. She wildly speculates about the possibility that Juan Pérez “podía cumplir órdenes, órdenes precisas de acabar con Cecilia Balaguer” (185). Since Juan Pérez is now deceased, the narrator makes arrangements to meet with his nephew. Nervously, she wonders what Germinal Pérez will tell her. She writes, “Tenía la intuición de que de lo que me contara Germinal Pérez habría de depender mi vida, la pasada y también la futura” (185). Germinal knew of Cecilia and had overheard someone telling his father that Cecilia indeed was killed by the “maquis” because of being a spy, a double agent, that “Quienes lo decidieron tenían la convicción de que Cecilia Balaguer era un agente doble, que no sólo pasaba información y daba apoyo a los antifascistas, sino que como espía dependía del servicio de Seguridad de los franquistas” (186). The narrator
finds it impossible to believe Germinal’s version of what happened to Cecilia, finding it “inverosímil, fuera de cualquier lógica” (188) that her mother could be capable of a “doble juego, de vender a los suyos” (190).

Just as more questions have been raised for the readers, we see how the narrator has become even more confused about the past and wonders, “¿Quiénes eran exactamente los suyos? ¿Los vencidos o los vencedores? ¿A quién engañaba? ¿Para qué?” (190). The reader also has unanswered questions about Cecilia that the narrator does not mention. Why did Cecilia leave her father in France at age sixteen to return alone to Spain? Did she intend to act as a spy even at that young age? Was it a coincidence that she married a successful member of the “vencedores,” or was it part of a deceitful plan? How could she, an unescorted woman, have traveled so easily back and forth across the border from Spain to France? Was she really working for the “vencedores”? Was her mask even more deceptive than we, the readers, initially believed? The narrator, even more confused than before her trip to France, has been unable to discover the truth about her mother and admits that “el viaje no me había servido para aclarar nada sobre la personalidad de mi presunto padre y, en cambio, había añadido dudas sobre la de mi madre” (192).

After returning to Barcelona, the narrator decides to return to France, again “repitiendo los posibles itinerarios de mi madre” (194). She meets with an elderly “maquis,” Liberto Aramis, who didn’t know Cecilia personally but
remembers hearing about a woman like Cecilia called “La Guapa,” who passed information on to the “maquis.” Liberto acknowledges that the narrator may never know what happened to Cecilia. He says, “La muerte de La Guapa es un asunto turbio. Puede que nunca sepas qué ocurrió exactamente” (201). Liberto creates even more doubt in the narrator’s mind, as well as that of the reader, when he mentions another possibility, that it was Cecilia’s husband who paid to have Cecilia murdered, that “no sería el primer caso de que un marido deseara deshacerse de su mujer” (202). It is evident that the narrator returns to Spain more confused and befuddled than when she had initially set out on her quest to find the truth about her mother. She says about these new possible interpretations that have been presented, “en lugar de ayudarme a clarificar la historia de Cecilia y la causa de su muerte, lo complicaban todo aún más, enredando los hilos de la enmarañada madeja” (205). Since none of the testimonies about Cecilia’s past serve to prove the truth of what really happened to Cecilia and they present conflicting versions of the truth, it becomes obvious to us as readers that the narrator will never find about the truth about her mother, and we are led to believe that absolute truth about history does not exist and cannot be ascertained.

However, we, as readers, expect that history, which Herzberger defines as “the occurrence of events in time” (“Narrating” 44), will provide definitive answers to the question of whether past events really occurred that way. We consult historians for these answers, for we believe that history is real and has
the authority to uncover the truth of the past. However, Samuel Amell, comparing history and fiction, believes that, “los relatos históricos y las novelas, en tanto que artificios verbales, no se distinguen” (10). Herzberger informs us that narration about the past is usually co-mingled with personal stories and relationships, what he calls “interactions between the self and history.” Herzberger believes that the past evoked “is not static but dynamic and ever changing.” In this context, *La mitad del alma* co-mingles history and fiction and is an example of historiography, which Herzberger defines as “the inscribing of events into a narrative form” (“Narrating” 44). We can refer to the term “historiographic metafiction” that Linda Hutcheon uses to refer to novels like *La mitad del alma* which present “unresolved contradiction” about the past. Like *La mitad del alma*, these types of novels are “novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge” (54-5). Like what we see in *La mitad del alma*, which plays upon “the truth and lies of the historical record,” as Hutcheon states, the postmodern historiographic novel poses the question, “How do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it now?” (“Pastime” 64). In this perspective, in narrations dealing with authoritarian Spain, the history of Spain – particularly the Franco Regime and ensuing Transition to democracy – is the external referent of the text *La mitad del alma* and becomes, as Hutcheon claims, “an internal component of the self, and is thus open to re-
formation as the individual claims authority *not* over truth but against myth” (*Narrating* 69).

This time period in Spanish history has been described by David Herzberger, who explains how the Nationalists deemed the Civil War as a mythical “War of Liberation” in an attempt to return Spain to “La España eterna,” just as the Catholic Kings had reconquered Spain from the invading Moors in the fifteenth century (*Narrating* 36). Herzberger characterizes Castile as the “vital embodiment of Spain,” the “authentic and original Spain,” where the “birth of Spain as a nation” occurred during the reign of Isabel and Fernando (*Narrating* 24). The timelessness implicit in the desire to return to a “Paradise Lost” of the past illustrates the reason that the Civil War could convert itself into myth, which always denotes freedom from the constraints of time and space, as Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz suggests: “para que un hecho se transforme en mito debe salir del tiempo y del espacio históricos. Un mito siempre relata acontecimientos que han tenido lugar en un pasado lejano y fabuloso” (33). Jo Labanyi has studied the fascist “myth of the Crusade,” which defends that “the nation must undergo a ‘sacrificial death’ to hasten ‘rebirth’” (36). Francisca López further explains that, for the historiographers of the Regime, the mission of the Civil War was “un sacrificio que conducirá al renacimiento de lo auténticamente hispano o, en palabras del franquismo, como una cruzada contra los elementos extraños que habían contaminado al país” (19). María Pilar Rodríguez agrees that the ideals of the
Falange included “una patria española limpia, pura, incorrupta, estrictamente heterosexual y monogámica, asentada en los valores bélicos del valor de la hombría en términos exclusivamente masculinizantes” throughout diverse historical periods and which “se impone tiránicamente a sujetos marginales o descentrados” (Vidas im/propias 137). In spite of the “lofty” ideals set forth by the Regime, we know that the consequences of the Civil War were traumatic and included violence on both sides, condemnations to prison, concentration camps and death, poverty, hunger, the repression of a long military dictatorship, massive exile, and the cultural and political isolation of Spain.

We have learned from novelists as well as from historians that the Franco Regime in Spain was a male-centered, repressive, traditionalist society which subjugated women and which, in the indictment of Riera, “las convirtió [a las mujeres] en subsidiarias, en seres ocultos que sólo tienen que decir que sí y estar en casa” (“La novelista mallorquina involucra”). Beginning with the depiction of lonely, isolated characters in her first short stories of Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar, Riera has written about the effects of this repressive society on her female protagonists throughout her more than thirty years of writing fiction. My previous chapters also supply excellent examples of this. We have seen how, in Cuestión de amor propio, Angela grew up repressed, neurotic, and unable to live a satisfying and fulfilling life. In Una primavera para Domenico Guarini, Isabel Clara had to confront and then discard old
myths and traditions in order to transform herself. Clara had a traumatic relation with her mother who suffered under her repressive society. We can compare this suffering with the punishment of Eve, as explained by Sidonie Smith:

The malediction of Eve culturally embeds the appropriateness of woman’s subordination to man. Her postlapsarian curse is to be subject to and therefore subject of her husband’s authority. And so, intellectually and morally, she remains a misbegotten man, denied the possibility of achieving full intellectual, ethical, and moral stature. Additionally, she must bear children in pain and sadness. (28)

In this context, the repression of women under the Franco Regime causes them to be silenced, just as Eve was silenced. As Smith describes, “Even in the domestic space, the truly good woman would speak but little” (28).

Smith cites the silencing of women as a result of established authorities, such as biblical tradition, the Christian writings of St. Paul, of the Church fathers, of the Scholastic synthesizers, and of Renaissance theologians, which have all forbidden women to speak, not only publicly but also privately. It seems that, in _La mitad del alma_, the narrator’s mother Cecilia transgressed the standards of her society by refusing to silence herself, which is apparently what the narrator wants to believe. But, if this is indeed the case, Cecilia’s rebellion against the norms of her society did not make her a good mother to
her only child, the narrator of the novel. Rather, her dedication to a political cause distanced her from her daughter. This would suggest that the patriarchal society failed women, whether or not they passively accepted their victimization, as did Clara’s mother in *Una primavera para Domenico* Guarini, or whether they appropriated the role of valiant warrior against the repressions of this society, as perhaps Cecilia did.

We have seen how the official rhetoric at the beginning of the Franco Regime was filled with mythical references that characterized the Civil War as a struggle to return Spain to its heroic past and to protect it from harmful outside influences. In my interpretation and as Riera herself has discussed in interviews, just as the truth about what happened to Cecilia Balaguer is hidden and unknown, the historical reality of the Civil War and the Franco Regime is an unremembered period of history that José Colmeiro calls a “gran vacío de memoria” (37), “amnesia histórica” (4), “el tiempo de silencio y olvido” (19), and “el gran agujero histórico del pasado” (32-3). Colmeiro explains that the dictatorship and exodus of the long postwar disappeared from public consciousness, “como si nunca hubiesen ocurrido o hubiesen sido un mal sueño colectivo que nadie quiere recordar,” which were “borrando efectivamente los rastros del pasado” (28). As do many other historians, Colmeiro believes that the forgetfulness about the past, the “olvido,” the “desconocimiento,” the “desinterés por los años oscuros del pasado” were not accidental but rather were caused by an intended falsification of memory, a
“desmemoria” created during Spain’s Transition to democracy that began with the death of Francisco Franco on November 20, 1975. Colmeiro writes, “Olvidar sugiere descuido, accidente. Desmemoria, sin embargo, implica una falta de memoria histórica voluntaria.” Colmeiro explains that this intentional forgetting was a “falsificación del pasado de proporciones monumentales” determined by “los aparatos ideológicos y represivos del franquismo: la censura, la educación, los medios de comunicación” (35-7). Colmeiro describes a “voluntaria amnesia colectiva” about the collaboration of the political right with Francoism, the inability of the left to change history, and the passive complicity with the majority of citizens. Colmeiro writes, “Todos querían olvidar su participación,” that “El único consenso posible sobre el pasado parecía ser que era mejor olvidarlo” (20). Many historians agree with José Colmeiro’s characterization of this “desmemoria.” Salvador Cardús i Ros agrees that this “intentional forgetting,” the “production of false records of events,” constitutes the “manufacturing of a great lie” (19). Cardús i Ros blames the press for its “essential part in erasing the memory” and for not only keeping the “talk about the past to a minimum” but also for its “function of constructing a collective national mythology” (25-6). Ofelia Ferrán describes the silencing of the past as a “slow but steady creation of a ‘reino de desmemoriados,’ which guaranteed that no one should engage in any serious critique of the authoritarian practices that were being inherited from the past” (196). Paloma Aguilar cites the “omnipresent fear of any repetition
of the Civil War” (21) as a reason for the pact of forgetfulness. Aguilar explains that, looking back to the Republican government which was in power before the Civil War, feeling a collective sense of guilt because of its failure, believing that old resentments could easily be reignited with the return of exiles, fearing that the defeated might return to Spain seeking revenge for former injustices, knowing that no formal reconciliation had ever taken place, fearing that the Civil War could be repeated at any moment, the Spanish society entered into a tacit pact “to silence the bitter voices of the past,” making the choice “to hold back the tide of history and silence it, to pursue a sole objective: to never again endorse civil war” (7).

José Colmeiro expresses the necessity of overcoming the crisis of memory, the necessity to “superar el pasado,” to “rehistorificar la memoria colectiva” which Colmeiro believes is “una labor urgente y necesaria para evitar una sociedad perdida y desidentificada de sí misma” (25). Ferrán agrees, explaining Eduardo Subirats’ assessment of the dangers of this “desmemoria,” that no real transition will have taken place until Spain recuperates and re-evaluates its past. Ferrán writes that for Subirats, “a true democracy will have been established only once such a confrontation with the past is undertaken, for only a recuperation of Spain’s historical memory will lead to the overcoming of many of the dangerous ‘legacies’ of the Franco regime that the transition simply perpetuated” (197).
Ramón Buckley discusses the role of women writers who filled the void of the male writers whose voices were silent during the Transition. He writes, “El discurso femenino y feminista de la transición española nace de un silencio [...] el silencio de nuestros intelectuales [...] silencio de nuestros escritores” (xv). Buckley writes, “Lo que nos revelan estas voces feministas es precisamente el carácter ‘masculino’ de la transición misma, de aquella ‘patriarquía’ que continuaba vigente a pesar de haber muerto el ‘patriarca’” (xiv). Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in discussing the transgressive nature of women’s writing, clarifies the term “feminist,” a label which Riera rejects as a characterization of her writing. DuPlessis explains, “Hardly any of the writers describe themselves as feminists. These authors are ‘feminist’ because they construct a variety of oppositional strategies to the depiction of gender institutions in narrative” (34). In my view, we can compare Riera to other transgressive female writers who construct these “oppositional strategies” in her novels. Riera confirms that the recovery of lost memory is one of the themes of La mitad del alma. She writes, “Es uno de los aspectos temáticos en los que se basa, porque sin memoria no somos nada, estamos muertos, y la transición supuso cosas buenas, pero también la renuncia a muchas cosas, entre ellas volvemos amnésicos” (“Carme reivindica”). We can see that the narrator of La mitad del alma realizes that her family never spoke about the Civil War, that [...] nunca se hablaba de la guerra” (167). Now she believes that her parents, one that we presume was a member of the “vencidos” and
the other a member of the “vencedores,” had a tacit pact never to speak about the war. The narrator writes of this “pacto tácito: él no presumiría delante de mí su paso heroico por el frente, a cambio de que ella no mencionara la terrible muerte de su hermana o el confinamiento del abuelo en el campo de concentración” (167). We can see that, by participating in the conscious “desmemoria” of the past, the narrator’s parents tried to silence a past which the narrator has been trying obsessively to recuperate without success.

Riera calls upon other writers to question the myths of the Transition in order to close the open wounds of the past. She writes of the “necesidad de algunos escritores, que tenemos familiares que vivieron en esa época de reflexionar sobre un pasado que nos pertenece. Franco murió, la Transición ya ha terminado y hemos decidido adentrarnos en nuestra memoria, a lo mejor para ayudar a cerrar definitivamente las heridas que aún quedan abiertas” (“Palabras”). We can compare this search for the truth through writing to Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing, in which Hélène Cixous asserts that, “Writing, in its noblest function is the attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us” (qtd. in Penrod 152). This revision of the past reminds us of María Pilar Rodríguez’s analysis of Riera’s novel En el último azul, in which Rodríguez describes how, in her literature, Riera is involved in the revision of incomplete versions of history and her “rescate de espacios alternativos, borrados por discursos previos” (“Exclusion” 241). This follows what Herzberger
discussed, the failure of social realism to cause political change in Spain, as it had intended. Riera has participated in the shift to the past undertaken by novelists which Herzberger describes, for the purpose “not only to shed light on the present, by means of narrative and logical causality, but also to understand the past itself and how it gained meaning” (Narrating 163).

In my interpretation, La mitad del alma, the narrator’s search for her identity, a search for the truth, is a metaphor for the search for the identity of Spain, for the truth of the history of Spain, an attempt to rescue historical truth and revise incomplete versions of history, to shed light on the present by understanding the past. However, we have seen that the search is inconclusive, and the past cannot be recuperated or fully understood. In the 1977 novel Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez, a fictionalized autobiography, Jorge Semprún reflected on the relationship between literature and reality in an attempt to recuperate the lost past. In a disclaimer that he is not writing a novel but rather strictly historical testimony, Semprún writes, “Si estuviera escribiendo una novela” (qtd. in Ferrán 199) and “si estuvieras en una novela” (qtd. in Ferrán 201), as if to imply that he has no choice about what to write. At the conclusion of the novel, we see how Riera uses the same manipulation of the imperfect subjunctive mood, which implies a statement which is contrary to fact, in order to excuse the lack of a definitive conclusion to the search for the truth about Cecilia Balaguer. We read the words of the narrator, “Si Cecilia Balaguer fuera sólo la protagonista de una novela y no mi
madre” (207) and “Si Cecilia Balaguer fuera un personaje de novela” (208), “Si Cecilia fuera sólo un personaje de mi invención” (208), “Si esto fuera una novela” (212), “Si la entidad de Cecilia sólo estuviera hecha de palabras, podría dar por válidas las que acabo de utilizar” (212), and “Si esto fuera una novela, a estas alturas sabría muy bien cómo acabarla y lo habría hecho escogiendo el final más coherente” (212). These speculations imply that Cecilia was not only a character in a novel and that this is not a novel. However, it is important to remember that these are the written words of the narrator, who is a character in a novel herself. It is again essential that we, the reader, not fall into the trap of confusing the author Riera with the narrator. Nevertheless, as Semprún has done, Riera is reflecting upon the nature of reality and literature, of truth and fiction, and specifically on the hidden truth about the Civil War in Spain.

Riera wrote *La mitad del alma* at a time when the truth about those who died in concentration camps and the truth about those who were killed in mass executions and buried anonymously during the Franco Regime were still hidden but just beginning to be uncovered. In like manner, the narrator’s attempt at discovering the complete truth about Cecilia Balaguer is not yet successful. The protagonist’s narration as well as the author Carme Riera’s novel remain open and unfinished. We have seen how the narrator’s “mitad del alma” of her past remains undiscovered, empty, and incomplete. In order to discover the truth about Cecilia, the narrator begs for the help of the reader
to complete her story. The narrator needs the help of the reader “para poder completar la historia de Cecilia Balaguer y la mía propia [...] estas páginas sólo adquirirán sentido si cuentan con su colaboración” (218). Emphasizing the importance of the reader, Carme Riera explains, “He querido render un homenaje a mis lectores y lectoras y les pido ayuda para que resuelvan la historia” (“La memoria es el alma”).

However, it’s not only an homage to the reader that the author seeks. Riera insists upon calling the reader’s attention to the necessity of uncovering the truth, “para que sea el lector quien tenga la última palabra” (“Carme Riera reivindica”). In this context, the truth that needs to be uncovered is not only the incomplete story of Cecilia but that of that period of the history of Spain that remains unknown. We can thus relate *La mitad del alma* to an attempt by Spaniards to finally uncover the truth about a dark period of its history.

More than three years after the writing of *La mitad del alma*, Giles Tremett states in *The Guardian* on November 3 of 2007, “Only this week, however, did Spain finally pass a “historical memory” law, honouring Franco’s victims” (“After Franco”). It is only on October 17, 2008 that the Associated Press announced that Judge Baltasar Gazón of the National Court ordered the urgent exhumation of mass graves believed to contain the bodies of tens of thousands of victims of the Civil War and the early postwar years. The Associated Press calls Judge Gazón’s criminal probe as “the culmination of a
decade-old movement for Spain to come to grips with its past atrocities” (Woolls).

Riera has contributed to this search for truth not only with the novel *La mitad del alma* but also by calling upon and urging her fellow writers to uncover the hidden truth about Spain’s past. She writes, “Creo que hay parte de nuestro pasado que no puede ser olvidado por los escritores y parte de la historia necesita ser rescatada, como la Guerra Civil” (“Mis novelas”). In the novel, the narrator connects the story of her search for her mother with the stated purpose of Riera, to keep searching into the past to seek the truth about this time period of Spain’s history. The narrator quotes an article by Gabriel Marcel who writes, “España es una herida abierta que sólo podrá cerrarse cuando recupere la libertad” (209). It is the search itself that is the important thing, for abandoning the search would imply a closure that would lead to continued forgetfulness about the past, just as the “pacto del olvido” had previously done. The past cannot and should not be forgotten, for without the past we live with only half a soul. As I quoted earlier these words of the narrator, “La memoria es el alma de las personas y quizá por eso yo ando buscando la mitad de mi alma” (158).
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated that the protagonists Clara in *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, Angela in *Cuestión de amor propio*, and the narrator of *La mitad del alma*, have had difficulties in maintaining meaningful relationships as daughters and friends because of the harmful effects of the devaluation of women in the patriarchal society of Francoist Spain. The proof of this assertion is evident by examining when in the novels these characters have avoided the negative influences of Francoism.

In my interpretation, it is only when these three protagonists have left Spain and gone to foreign locations that they have been able to escape from the repression of the Spanish Regime: Clara in Italy, Angela in Denmark, and the narrator and her mother in France. In *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini*, in Spain, Clara almost married Carlos, thus almost accepting her expected position as the uncomplaining, self-abnegating wife under the patriarchy. It is only through her romantic relationship with Alberto in Florence, Italy that she is able to escape her fate. When the romantic relationship with Alberto ends and Clara returns to Barcelona, Clara falls into the same trap as a helpmate to Enrique, a powerful representative of the Spanish patriarchy. Her female friends, her Three Graces, are unwilling or unable to provide the help that she is seeking. Again, only when Clara returns
to Florence, Italy to investigate the case of Domenico Guarini’s vandalism of Botticelli’s *Primavera* does she use the mirrors of the character Guarini and the painting *Primavera* to stimulate her childhood memories so that she is finally able to free herself from the bonds of her traditionalist culture, find her authentic self, and look ahead to her future as a strong, self-sufficient person. As a student in Denmark, Angela had the opportunity for a possibly fulfilling, satisfying romantic relationship with Ingrid, a relationship which terminated when Angela returned to Spain where she has lived an unfulfilled life. Angela’s future does not include positive change, even if she does exact the revenge she seeks by humiliating Miguel, unless she follows the advice of Ingrid and resolves the question of her own sexual identity. She will not be able to do that without searching back into her own past as Clara did, examining her own identity, and discovering and accepting who she is.

In *La mitad del alma*, the unknown man who hands the narrator the papers that stimulate her search for her lost mother comes from France. It is in France that Cecilia takes up the fight against the forces of fascism as a resistance worker. It is also in France that Cecilia falls deeply in love, a love which contrasts sharply with her marriage of convenience in Spain. Although *La mitad del alma* begins in Barcelona, it also takes place in France – in Portbou, in Avignon, and in Paris. Carme Riera characterizes France as “un referente para mi generación pero también para el exilio republicano” (“Ahora tenemos”). Unfortunately, it is also in France where Cecilia dies, likely as a
punishment for her transgressive acts. Also unfortunately, as the narrator of *La mitad del alma* searches in France for the truth, she is frustrated in this search for her lost mother, for Spain has not yet uncovered the complete truth about the Civil War and its aftermath. The narrator will not discover the truth about her mother unless the complete truth about the Civil War and the Franco Regime are uncovered.

I have demonstrated that Clara has suffered from an unfulfilling relationship with her mother, who has been victimized by an oppressive male-dominated society and have shown how Clara uses the painting *Primavera* to delve into her subconscious in search of her authentic self so that she can live a free and autonomous life. I have shown how Angela has also been victimized by her culture and how she reacts by her attempt to use the power of rhetoric to manipulate a friend and thus abuse the mutuality inherent in an ideal friendship. I have also demonstrated how the narrator of *La mitad del alma* delves back into the past in a failed attempt to discover the truth about her mother and about her own identity. Therefore, in all three novels, Riera highlights the power of the repressive, patriarchal culture to negatively affect her protagonists’ lives by not only causing psychological problems associated with depression but also by preventing them from developing and maintaining the meaningful, fulfilling interpersonal relationships which they seek. As a solution to the problem, we are reminded of Marcia Westkott’s assessment of the task to be accomplished in the future:
The story of women in patriarchy – of mothers and daughters – is waiting to be told [...] The critical task remains to attend to the contradictions between submission and refusal and between patriarchal domination and female autonomy. It is a task that requires understanding more fully the ways that the world of the father informs the relations between mothers and daughters, and thus affects the lives of all women. (“Mothers” 20)

According to what I have demonstrated in this work, this is what Carme Riera has done. In these three novels, Riera has examined the contractions inherent in the position of woman as she seeks to develop our understanding of the relationships between mothers, daughters, and friends in the world of the father and how that world has affected their relationships. I have shown that Riera highlights the power of the past to affect the present and described how she looks forward to a resolution in the future in which women are free to experience mutually satisfying relationships and therefore live enriching, fulfilling, and authentic lives. Riera emphasizes the importance of writing to this mission, so that the female voice is no longer silenced but rather has the authority to produce change and therefore provide a necessary transformation of society.
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