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## Search for an Interlocutor in Carmen Martin Gaité's Short Stories and Novels

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SEARCH FOR AN INTERLOCUTOR IN CARMEN MARTÍN  
GAITE'S SHORT STORIES AND NOVELS

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to The Department of World Languages and Cultures

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## SEARCH FOR AN INTERLOCUTOR IN CARMEN MARTÍN GAITE'S SHORT STORIES AND NOVELS

### ABSTRACT

Analysis of the textual evidence in Martín Gaité's short stories and novels demonstrates that self-actualization is one of life's most important achievements. For this reason, perhaps, she has been acknowledged primarily as a feminist writer, but analysis indicates that it is her search for an interlocutor that is the primary underlying message that underscores all of her fictional works. She creates narratives that require interaction with narrative interlocutors which are designed in the narrative processes of her texts. Therefore, this thesis studies both the narratological strategies used in her works and the function of the prescribed interlocutor(s) in order to highlight a more authentic reading of the short stories and novels she produced. I rely on the critical works of narratologists for the theoretical background of my study.

According to Martín Gaité, searching for and finding an ideal conversation partner is what brings meaning and purpose to life. When authentic conversation partners can't be found, she creates the space for fictional ones because it is the conversation itself that forces the necessary interiorization and corresponding experience of reconciliation to past and present.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 7

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 18

CHAPTER 4: ARGUMENT 22

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION 55

BIBLIOGRAPHY 56

## INTRODUCTION

Writers are in search of a voice. For the Spanish writer Carmen Martín Gaité, the voices that she expresses come to the reader through the use of techniques that allow both the narrator and the reader to discover important things about themselves and the world around them. In many ways the techniques mirror Martín Gaité's life, which was a continual inward search, in which she would look at her experiences in light of her emotions and reactions. These life experiences are both external and internal to the narrative and the narrators express them in a creative way to expose writing as a means of sharing experience. As the characters in her stories reflect on both past experience and their temporal world at the same time, they are set on a journey toward realization and self-actualization. The narrative's unique result is that reading sets the stage for shared "experience" and a shared emotional journey through reading. This is the historical function for the reader of Carmen Martín Gaité's narrative texts.

The present study demonstrates the importance of Martín Gaité's work on the relationship between narrator and reader as it pertains to the topic of voice, the need for expression and the ways in which voice can be expressed to effect acute awareness. Martín Gaité used narrative techniques that became increasingly popular throughout her lifetime, but she was one of the first women writers in Spain to explore the narrative strategies through reader reception. She was a pioneer in using various narratological methods that merit attention. Therefore, the purpose of this study is first to discuss how Carmen Martín Gaité has effected story-telling in a variety of significant ways that set a

path for Spanish writers in the 20th century and, secondly, how these narratological strategies created a space for the development of an acute and higher self-awareness.

For Carmen Martín Gaité, there is a contribution made to the art of narrating in the way she discusses the problem of self-discovery. As she writes, she brings the reader into a world in which the narrator, the characters, and the reader, find themselves on a path toward meaninglessness. This meaninglessness can only be avoided through self-expression, including speaking, listening, writing, and employment of other art forms since "historical reality" does not provide a space for sharing emotional experience in the same way. As the author writes a narrative in which the narrative voice attempts to avoid self-destruction, she turns the reader into her interlocutor, the desired receiver, who is pushed on to a similar journey toward self-understanding. The characters and narrators attempt to find their voice. Sometimes they find it and sometimes, tragically, they do not. Amid this conversation internal to the narration, the reader becomes the desired, albeit mute, interlocutor, and is given a loosely constructed guide designed to avoid meaninglessness.

The importance of these narrative conversations which are internal to the text is that the characters find themselves increasingly "aware" through interlocation, but the search for implied interlocutors brings additional life to the text. An ideal interlocutor refers to the finding of space, set aside, where free narrative "conversation" takes place.

There is a process in which the narratives by Martín Gaité take a reader down a path of self-discovery which is telling and worthy of study. Although her published works can be divided by the time periods of war, dictatorship, and democracy based on

when they were written, they have a unifying theme of the human need for conversation and the pursuit of a space in which personal narrative stories can be shared. Her personal theory regarding the need for each individual to find a method of expression is emphasized throughout her works. Analysis of the ways she accomplishes this task and the effect it has upon the reader form the backbone of this study. Therefore, this study addresses the "search for conversation" and dialog as well as the narrative means to systematically create a personal journey that relies on the relationship of the created "conversation".

In her own words, Martín Gaité talked about the need for conversation and interlocutors. However, Martín Gaité's fictional works have been primarily analyzed in light of feminism, saying that she provides a needed voice for women's issues. It is curious that Martín Gaité's fiction has been analyzed historically in light of feminism because she never claimed that her intention was to create a "feminist" voice. For this reason, the present study focuses on how Carmen Martín Gaité transmits a universal message about shared conversations that she developed over a long writing career. Her message is a message that is common to all people and is not just a model for how the feminine voice can be "heard" in these narratives. The unifying themes of Martín Gaité's fiction are not written for any specific group, nor is her fiction intended to be understood and received by any particular group. Martín Gaité transmits a message about interlocutors intended for and speaking to all people, regardless of their gender, culture or background.

To support my thesis on the role of the interlocutors, I provide a review of the literature available on studies of her works. While a good amount of critical research is

available, studies that focus specifically on narratological techniques as a means to create shared space have not been done. The present investigation looks at her novels and short stories and demonstrates that their unity can be found in the narratological style and techniques that promote a unique “space” in which ideas and suffering can be shared in a safe way. As a contribution to the field, this investigation places her fictional works and narratological techniques within the framework of the other critical literary studies and establishes an understanding of the basic threads of Carmen Martín Gaité criticism. It is important to demonstrate that while other critics were not “wrong,” their focus on the feminine voice instead of the narrative space created for interlocutor(s) led them to different conclusions that inform my study but do not complete the frame of what Martín Gaité was trying to do.

Academic studies of Martín Gaité's fiction usually center around her most studied work, *The Back Room*. Scholars typically analyze this work and occasionally contrast this work with a small handful of her other fictional works. Critic Morales, on the other hand, has taken all of Martín Gaité's ten novels and discussed at length the differences in themes that manifest themselves throughout her novel-writing career. Other scholars like feminists Cruz-Cámara and Garlinger, have analyzed various narratives by Martín Gaité, illustrating her works as a woman's perspective on relationships and life experiences. Their work also informs the study at hand since they see the search for an interlocutor as the search for a needed voice for women's challenges. Navarro-Daniels (In *Women in the Spanish Novel Today*) and Rodríguez explore Martín Gaité's narrative voice as one that is common to women. Others, like Merino, Song and Hartson place her fictional works in a cultural context and highlight her works as an echo of the battles and difficulties faced by



Spanish society as massive cultural shifts took place. While analysis of her works for the purpose of discussion here will consider these critical investigations, my analysis will focus on how Carmen Martín Gaité creates a dialogic voice for all people and emphasizes the basic human need for self-actualization.

When talking of expressing oneself, listening, and being heard, Carmen Martín Gaité points out that the ideal conversational partner will have certain qualities, will ask the correct questions, and will dedicate massive sums of time to a conversation. This ideal interlocutor that all people are looking for provided the means for her to create a fictional place called Bergai, a place where an alternate reality could be created, and ideal interlocutors could be found. Bergai is a small example of a created space set aside for conversation, but the concept of Bergai that Martín Gaité talks about in the interview “Search for Conversation” is a concept that repeats itself more discretely throughout her writing. All of her works revolve around the same idea of looking for a Bergai-like place, and even dissimilar characters share the same search for interlocutors in which their lives will find meaning. According to Martín Gaité, the more one converses with an ideal interlocutor, the more one finds the reason to engage in such relationships leading toward the goal of self-actualization. Due to the sad fact that the long sought-after, ideal conversation can only be "found" in places like Bergai, Martín Gaité talks about this unsatisfying search saying that is worth the effort because the search alone brings meaning to our lives. But according to her words in the interview and her works, the perfect interlocutor is difficult or impossible to find, even though it is through this search, that one finds personal self-actualization and purpose (Films Media Group 2004).

Therefore, for Carmen Martín Gaité, the search for the ideal interlocutor is of paramount importance in one's life and, while attainment of the ideal is impossible, the pursuit of communication and sharing a conflicted past is the route to self-actualization. Narrating a fictional space and creating an implied dialog as well is the way that Martín Gaité consistently blurs the line between conversation partner and reader, forcing the reader on the same path toward self-actualization that the characters are on. Designing the ideal interlocutor represents a difficult and often hopeless search, due to the obstacles of ego, time, fear, etc., but this search serves as Martín Gaité's muse for writing and she imbues her texts with narratives that pursue meaning and a sense of truth. Martín Gaité developed characters that also needed to express themselves (and their perception of truth) through writing and through conversation, and basically every protagonist in her fiction shares this common need of expression. The importance of the contribution of this study is to identify the elements of her story-telling techniques and the important narrative relationships that she knits together between narrator, characters and readers to expose the fundamental role of the search for the interlocutor.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study has been informed by a variety of works. The purpose of this Literature Review is to discuss studies that explore Martín Gaité's fiction as a backdrop to my analysis, and indicate areas in which these studies are incomplete. Some of the works that inform this study focus on the study of Carmen Martín Gaité and they provide insights into motivation for a search for an interlocutor. While the present study focuses on the fictional writings of Martín Gaité (20 short stories and 10 novels), non-fiction works by Martín Gaité have been helpful in analyzing her fictional works and placing her writing in a 20th century Spanish context so I have added a section on the tie between her non-fiction and fictional writings. I also rely on the work of scholars who focus on the topic of narratology since their work informs my analysis of narrative techniques and strategies as well as my analysis of the role of the narrators and readers or listeners in the fictionalized narrative space. The articles on narratology, specifically, inform this study because they provide a lens through which Martín Gaité's fictional works can be viewed and understood. They also provide the methodological and theoretical background for understanding her writing.

In order to analyze these narratives properly, I have investigated the two schools of thought on narratology that have come out of Germany and France. Although the two approaches differ slightly, these approaches greatly overlap and combine to provide techniques used to investigate texts in a cohesive way. The techniques discussed by Nunning, Berns, Shen, Sommer, Herman, Darby and Fludernik have guided me on this path toward understanding what narratology seeks to do and I have applied their findings and arguments to Martín Gaité's fiction. Each article about narratology provides a system

by which one can ask appropriate questions of the text and find hidden nuances in order to understand how an author communicates and their motivation behind what they write. As the techniques discussed by various narratologists are applied to Martín Gaité fiction, her messages will be made clearer and I will be able to show that her critical message is about voice and relationships and is universal and designed for all people.

The basic tenets of narratology involve the techniques that bring a story to life. As an author reveals information, there is word choice, rhythm, and other stylistic considerations that are considered in studies of narratology. The European Narratology Network held a conference in 2011 in which members of the Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology discussed the basic tenets and goals of the study of narratology. Although there is still no concise definition of narratology, the following studies help guide readers toward theoretical and practical applications that aid in the analysis of a writer's use of narrative technique.

In David Darby's "Form and Context: An Essay in the History of Narratology" (2001), Darby asks many questions that narratologists discuss. It is an article that brings clarity to various questions associated with narratology. Darby discusses the difference between narration by an author, an abstracted intelligence and an implied author. Discovering the identity of a narrator is significant because readers must determine how reliable they are. Darby invites readers to find a standard by which a narrator's reliability can be measured, and argues readers should consider the difference between what a text actually says, and how the narrative affects the reader. As questions are asked regarding the reliability of the narrator, Darby debates the need to incorporate linguistics and anthropology into the study of narratology, suggesting that some texts may best be

interpreted based upon themselves, while others may require extra-textual information. This article is significant to Carmen Martín Gaité studies because in many of her works, the reliability and identity of the narrator come into question.

Roy Sommer's "Beyond (Classical) Narratology: New Approaches to Narrative Theory" (2004) provides a different perspective on narratology because he believes that narratology should set standards upon which all texts can be analyzed. His contribution to narratology focuses upon the recipient of the text and the cognitive studies involved in reader reception. While Darby looks more at authors and their intentions, Sommer shifts the focus to the reader and how their life experiences affect the interpretation and understanding of narration. These narratological theories are important to Martín Gaité studies because Martín Gaité pursues these questions in her writings. On the other hand, a large number of feminists have interpreted her works based on feminist ideas, but the present study points to the message in Martín Gaité's fiction that is not strictly "feminist". Sommer's thoughts on the perspective of the reader are helpful because they shed light on analysis by feminist literary critics who discuss Martín Gaité as one who establishes a woman's voice in her writings as opposed to the intention of this investigation, which is to point out a universal message in Martín Gaité's works. To understand various perspectives, it is important to describe the narrative elements that scholars have identified and used in their analyses.

For example, Fludernik divides all writing into genres (persuasive, how-to, argumentation, exposition, description, question, excuse, interview, dialog, poetry), indicating that each has a particular aim, according to her article "Genre, Text Types, Or Discourse Modes?" (2000). However, in most any work these genres overlap and

interact, making an individual work difficult to place in only one category. Fludernik's thoughts on conversation are significant to Martín Gaité studies because of Martín Gaité's conversational writing style and the search for ideal conversational partners (interlocutors) in her works. According to Fludernik, most conversation is "seemingly purposeless, does not have predetermined aims or clear procedural routines, or at best moves from one short-term goal to the other" (282). This differs from Martín Gaité's understanding of conversation that is apparent throughout much of her fiction. She demonstrates that conversational partners provide a journey toward fulfillment and self-actualization.

Shen offers a different perspective on narratology and incorporates stylistics into the study, which includes a focus on the "sound" of the words and syllables as they form sentences including natural pauses. His article, "How Stylisticians Draw on Narratology" (2000), discusses this aspect of narratology and it is significant to Martín Gaité studies because of the conversational aspects of her writing. As a reader analyzes the narration, the conversational flow and sound greatly influence the way it is to be understood. Stylistic choices are necessary because they affect the tone of the text, the interaction of the characters, and therefore, its reception by the reader. Shen also discusses various forms of anachronisms, which are pertinent to Martín Gaité's fiction because many of the narrators in her short stories and novels talk about memories which can be imperfect and have discrepancies, but each has its place in history in spite of its distortion through the retelling of memory in a first-person narrative.

In agreement with Shen, Berns states in "The Concept of Performativity in Narratology" (2009), that dialog should be "heard." Martín Gaité accomplishes this

element of "dialog" through the conversational techniques she employs in her works. Berns also talks about the interactive nature of a text, which coincides with much of what happens in Martín Gaité fiction, as the characters "interact" with the reader. Berns disagrees with Darby, because Darby talks about one universal interpretation of a text, while Berns argues that culturally-shared knowledge and previous biases affect the interpretation by the reader. Also, a reader chooses interpretive methods and is responsible for reconstructing narrated events in Martín Gaité's works. This is a significant aspect of Martín Gaité's fiction in that much of her storytelling is told out of chronological order so the reader has to "re-live" and "order" what the narrator tells to make sense of it. Berns also distinguishes the story from the teller, which differs from the views of many scholars who believe that much of Martín Gaité's fiction comes out of the personal life experiences of the author. Whatever the challenges to issues regarding an author or an implied author, the works of Carmen Martín Gaité cannot be entirely divorced from the historical and cultural period (mid to late 1900s) in which she wrote and published her works.

For example, commonly used scene shifts like "Now we leave X and Y and head to A and B", cannot be found in her narratives for Martín Gaité does not use such scene shifts, and oftentimes, part of the fictional adventure she creates has to do with reconstructing events that are told out of order and take place in unclear settings. The function is to force readers to reconstruct the past and to encourage them to figure out the major historical and personal events. The first-person narrative is key to creating the conversational aspects of her narrative.

Due to the prevalence of first-person narrators in Martín Gaité fiction, narrator reliability is a constant question for the reader who should judge these narrators based on the information they give. Suspicion of narrators, narrator reliability, and narrator intention are all discussed by Vera Nunning. Nunning gives us a cohesive method for appropriately analyzing a narrator, in order to test their reasons for communicating and their methods of communication. In Martín Gaité's narratives readers are privy to intensely personal first person accounts. The norms, values, and historical interpretation a narrator demonstrates through the text gives the reader a sense of who each narrator is and each one's persuasive intention. The article by Vera Nunning ("Unreliable Narration and the Historical Variability of Values and Norms" (2004)) is pertinent to the present investigation because it emphasizes varying cultural interpretations of the same text, and the interaction between reader, author, and narrator. In the case of Martín Gaité's writings, reliability is related to both a personal journey of discovery and to reader reception of the historical-relational interaction between self and socio-cultural context.

Text, context, and textual references are the focuses of Angsar Nunning's "Where Historiographic Metafiction and Narratology Meet" (2004). As different narrators in the same work reference the same fictional events or historical data, a relationship is developed between these narrators. These narrators may have differing versions of the same situation that remain in tension with one another, or their versions may even contradict one another. Reader's awareness of differing "histories" is applicable to Martín Gaité's works because her narrators tell stories that do not completely agree with one another in their retelling of events, nor do they always coincide with traditionally accepted history. Also, literary critics who have analyzed her works agree with Angsar



Nunning's ideas regarding the voice given to forgotten people of history, particularly to women narrators who give a "new" historical perspective, a perspective usually forgotten or ignored in traditional historical accounts by males. This aspect of her narratives is most likely the connection scholars make with feminism as her works provide a female as well as a male voice.

Finally, we return to narratological studies to understand the role of the interlocutor. Herman has interesting insights into first person narratives and, for this reason, his studies are pertinent to my exploration of Martín Gaité studies. In "Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind" (2007), he discusses topics such as the self-presentation of a narrator and the way that his/her personal perspective gives the reader the needed information for the narrative despite the limited perspective of the narrator. Changes in time, setting, tone and tense influence a story's emotional content and narration, and Herman's ideas are applicable to an analysis of Martín Gaité's fiction due to additional points he has made regarding common human emotions, referring to them as emotional standards. It is the manner in which these narrators reveal a personal, emotional connection to their individual perspective of events that readers can form an understanding of a "universal" shared cultural past (one that is both official and secretive or hidden).

With regard to studies that have been done on Carmen Martín Gaité's works, most involve an analysis of her novels *The Back Room* and *Variable Cloud*. Many have found a feminist message in these works, articulating that the lost, forgotten voice of women who survived the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship is communicated through these two novels. Most Martín Gaité critics agree with Cruz-Camara's statement, that the

ideal woman under Franco was a Catholic woman at home who conforms to a standard imposed upon her by oppressive male leaders. In “Chicas Raras” (2003), Cruz-Camara discusses Martín Gaité as a needed female voice, lost in Franco's dictatorship who, through fictional first-person narratives, establishes a buried reality, a buried voice, a reality no less fraught with suffering. Cruz-Camara's analysis informs this study because it investigates the cultural background of Martín Gaité, and the historical situation into which she wrote. This material by Cruz-Camara and other Martín Gaité critics is valuable, but this thesis focuses on the literary works, how the narratives function, and why this functionality promotes a more universal reading of the texts.

In Joe Rodríguez' article “The Search for Meaning in Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*” (2006), as the title implies, he states that this is a novel that is designed to find meaning in a difficult situation. As he discusses the confusion and stress left by an oppressive dictatorship, he identifies narratological themes pertinent to this study. The key theme related to the role of the interlocutors says that truth is not the primary focus when overcoming trauma, but instead, finding meaning among traumatic memories and sharing them as a means to expose the damages as well as the means to grow beyond silent suffering. His interpretation coincides with Kaminer's study on trauma.

Kaminer's article titled “Healing Processes in Trauma Narratives” (2006) has been used for this study because of the way in which it talks about the creation of trauma narratives. Although Kaminer's study focuses on the psychology of trauma, she discusses the human need to tell the story of traumatic experiences. Kaminer's ideas are pertinent to the study of Martín Gaité's works because they support the ideas of people like Joe Rodríguez who tie the need for to tell about a trauma to works like *The Back Room*.

Kaminer's article offers scientific information regarding trauma, and her findings inform my study because much of Martín Gaité's writing talks about not only the trauma of war, but also the trauma of emotional distance and lack of human connection.

The lack of human connection seen in Martín Gaité is also supported in an article by Garlinger, who discusses the lack of depth in human relationships and the need to find closeness in relationships (1999). Although I feel he takes this theme to an extreme in saying that there are lesbian relationships happening in the works of Martín Gaité, his study is important because his work helps support the analysis of the un-fulfilling relationships that women in the narratives have at home, and the importance of the search for people with whom to connect. Finding and making that connection is the crux of the investigation, but the possibility of sexual attraction is a theme which I believe has insufficient evidence in the case of Carmen Martín Gaité's fictional stories because the connection that characters seek is emotional, not physical or sexual.

Additionally, Hartson has made a contribution to Martín Gaité studies by investigating *The Back Room*, and her article, "The False-Bottomed Suitcase: Historical Memory And Textual Masochism In Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*" (1999) informs my study as it pertains to the difference between collective memory and personal memory. Hartson helps us understand the role of the narrator in humanizing traumatic experience. The common official historical interpretation pertaining to the Spanish Civil War is that it was a terrible traumatizing event, yet the narrator of *The Back Room* recalls positive memories of that time in history. Hartson has raised good points regarding perspective, narration, and overcoming trauma. His article contributes to this study because he has described the difference between a shared experience and a personal one.

A narrator can personalize their own historical account that is richer than a summary historical account. Likewise the personal first person account provides a greater variety of emotions and the emotional account creates the "space" for the reader to "experience" and "share" with the narrator.

One of the most helpful sources regarding Martín Gaité has been Morales' *La trayectoria narrativa de Carmen Martín Gaité*. This book is a long-term study of her life and novels (but not short stories). It provides background regarding the history and development of themes seen in Martín Gaité's fiction. Morales' analysis investigates the influence of the personal life of Martín Gaité on her fictional literary themes, and has an additional focus on the various narrators and their unique ways of expressing themselves. He discusses at length the ways in which narrators change without much explanation, meaning the first person "I" changes from one character to another. The narration also goes back and forth from internal monologue, to omniscient narrator, to the perspective of another character. Morales informed this study by providing insight into the originality of diegesis seen in Martín Gaité's fictional works. He also makes a timeline upon which her development as an artist can be understood. The pluralistic character of the narrative creates the space for reader interpretation.

Another work that informs this study was written by Martín Gaité herself. *Love Customs in 18th Century Spain* (1991) (*Usos amorosos en el siglo XVIII de España*) demonstrates important aspects of Martín Gaité's worldview. To produce *Usos amorosos*, Martín Gaité analyzed ancient documents which shed light upon the ways in which men and women interacted in the 18th century. Her beginning studies led her to an even deeper investigation (a two year study turned into 8!) due to her fascination with the

superficiality of people who lived in 18th century Spain. Her investigation looked deeply into human relationships and the absence of depth or shared experience. The society of her ancestors that gave birth to the society in which she lived was, according to her, negative, due to the sad realities of superficial human relationships. This same superficiality appears in her fiction but she humanizes and personalizes these relationships that lack a connection to the "other". Martín Gaité seemed to have noticed the effects of this history upon the Spain she lived and worked in, providing her with themes that manifest themselves in her fiction. *Usos amorosos* provides valuable insight into the world view of Martín Gaité, particularly in the areas of human interaction and relationships.

Possibly the most important work that pertains to this study is a video titled "Search for Conversation" (Films Media Group, 2003). In this video, Martín Gaité provides her own ideas regarding her works in her own words. She does not talk about herself as a feminist, nor does she talk about her literary originality as a female artist. Instead, she talks about the basic human need to find a shared space in which uninterrupted conversation can take place. It is because of this interview that this study focuses upon interlocutors and attempts to explain to readers of Martín Gaité's fiction that understanding her strictly as a feminist is too narrow. Her works are powerful explorations of the human need for shared conversation about the most frightening as well as the most comforting aspects of shared experience.

## METHODOLOGY

In preparation of this thesis I read twenty short stories from *Cuentos completos*, and ten novels, but my investigation began with the interview of Martín Gaité. To understand what she was suggesting about an interlocutor I read a variety of sources that mentioned her work specifically, and studied narratological theories that shed light upon pertinent techniques used by Martín Gaité. The following sources were studied while reading the fiction of Martín Gaité, and each provided new insight into these works.

First, the interview "Search for Conversation" shows Martín Gaité speaking, and she explains in it her life and literature. This is the primary lens through which I read her works to produce this investigation. The topics she discussed involving interlocutors, shared experience, and openness in narrative, form the basis for the questions I formulated for my literary analysis. I felt this was a good foundation to begin my analysis because I wanted this investigation to be based upon the expressed words of the author, even though an author's expressed intention must still be substantiated through the analysis of empirical textual evidence.

Morales' book *La trayectoria narrativa de Carmen Martín Gaité* was the second source that shed an important light upon my study. The book was useful because it provides a timeline regarding the life and literary production of Martín Gaité. This book separates time periods of her life with respect to political movements and literary themes. As Morales points out these literary themes, it is also possible to see an internal consistency that unites these fictional works. This book also helps point out the changing

perspectives of narrator(s) that constitute an important aspect of the way in which Martín Gaité's narrators impart meaning and contextualize narrated thought.

In seeing that narratology would form an important means for understanding Martín Gaité fiction, I relied on the experts in the field to understand narratological methods and their applications. The authors of these articles (ie Nunning, Shen, Darby, Berns) provide ideas that form a roadmap for narrative analysis, and I applied their techniques to Martín Gaité fiction. Their discussions about narrators, psychology, sociology, and reader reception theories narrowed down and focused my research questions. The application of their findings to a close reading of Carmen Martín Gaité's texts allowed me to pay special attention to the narratological techniques used and provided a structure for describing the narrative model for analysis of the narrative evidence.

One of the main purposes of this study has to do with finding meaning and purpose in life through narrative interlocutors, and the ways in which Martín Gaité structures the narratives of her short stories and novels to create a sense of shared space for conversation. Many of the works studied for this investigation explore this theme, but some do so in more depth than others. Therefore, some specific works are not discussed at length ("Sybil vane", "Tarde de tedio") while others (*The Back Room*, *Ritmo lento*) are.

Martín Gaité demonstrates that a major motivation for writing narratives is to promote communication techniques to "unearth" what has been forgotten. Feminist critics have been crucial to helping us understand this element of her narratives. After reading the articles that interpret the fiction of Martín Gaité in light of women's issues, the

questions that these critics used to approach the text come into focus. These critics were looking for a female voice that would interpret the difficulties of Spanish life during hard times. Generally, feminist critics were also looking for a woman who would speak on behalf of other women, and allow people to experience the perspectives of women. These scholars are helpful because we agree that Martín Gaité's writing continually demonstrates a voice that is looking for a way to take buried feelings and hidden emotions and put them on paper.

Therefore, this study integrates ideas ranging from the themes discussed by narratologists, Martín Gaité critics, Morales' long-term study of her life and fiction, and also includes Martín Gaité's cultural study, *Love Customs in 18th Century Spain*. These works are read and discussed in light of the video "Search for Conversation." Analysis provides evidence of what Martín Gaité communicated through her novels and short stories. The following argument provides ample background regarding the theme of interlocutors and Martín Gaité fiction, and I demonstrate how the narrative creates a safe, shared space in which the narrator continually searches for an interlocutor, or a conversation partner throughout her writing. The "partner" who may be absent or present in different situations is the key to making sense of an emotional journey.

This study has limitations, but identification of these limitations can lead to other investigations. First, due to the narrow focus on conversation and relationships that lead to self-actualization, others may find additional themes within Martín Gaité fiction that merit discussion but these themes still fit within the created space for dialogic narration. Also, the field of narratology is still being defined. Although there are common threads that unite narratological studies, communication techniques and the art of narratology are



still being considered and tested by scholars. This study should also help fit what feminist critics have offered regarding Martín Gaité's work, and explain how the articulations about feminism or woman's voice becomes historically significant when analyzed as part of the created fictional "safe" space for exchanging historical versions – the official and hidden, the personal and the national. This will broaden the readers' view of Martín Gaité's purpose in relation to what others have written about her work.

Other critics who have looked more specifically at her diegesis should find the possible purposes behind her narrators that change (from one "I" to another, to omniscient, etc.) not only interesting but pertinent as Martín Gaité's narratives shift perspective to provide a more historical and complete version of any his(or her)story or our story that is narrated. Another limitation is that my study relies on narratology and the author's expressed intention as a starting point. My project here is to define how Carmen Martín Gaité creates the space but I have not done systematic and extensive textual analysis but only offer this initial study as a model. In essence, I discuss the design of the communicative reading experience and its implication for providing a more complete historical perspective on the lived (but fictionalized) cultural history.

## ARGUMENT

As a means to begin discussing the importance of creating a narrative "conversation," I rely on a 2003 series of interviews, in which Martín Gaité's narrative strategies are the subject. In this videotaped interview, titled "In Search of Conversation" (Films Media Group, 2012), Martín Gaité tells the viewer in her own words about two central focal points that define her writing; her literary voice and her need to find an interlocutor. In the video, other writers and authors and even her sister contribute their perspectives on these topics. Most of these interviews were conducted after her death. As the various interviews unfold, the viewer is taken on a journey into Martín Gaité's literary world, where one sees that conversation, listening, and truly being heard are basic needs according to her, similar to food and water. She says that self-expression served as her refuge from bombs during the war, and continued to be her solace throughout her life.

"Search for Conversation" explained that Carmen Martín Gaité died in an apartment full of papers, with countless notes and notebooks that had been written throughout the years. Her life, as discussed in "Search for Conversation," shows an obvious tie with one of her characters, Diego, from *Fragmentos de interior*. Similar to Martín Gaité's personal life, in this novel, Diego says he has many beginnings to many novels, but doesn't know which to finish (p. 59). Likewise, Martín Gaité wrote obsessively, constantly searching for the perfect phrase or way in which to express an idea, but many of these writings were never finished and published, according to the interview with her sister in "Search for Conversation". Her sister also says that she took her "office" to the public busses where she would listen to everything said in an attempt

to uncover every form of self-expression through conversation, focusing on slang, ironies and hidden messages.

In "Search for Conversation," Martín Gaité explains her need to write and express herself. Instead of speaking about writing, she talks of escaping, and finding refuge (2012). She doesn't say that she began to write, but instead that she began "to take refuge" during the war when she was very young. This desire to escape the real world with the intention of finding truth and honesty in open conversation is illustrated by many works including "Ya ni me acuerdo."

"...estábamos los dos algo cansados. Sin embargo, aún no hemos llegado a la etapa en que esto se puede decir sin que el otro se ofenda, sino que es necesario fingir que se ha olvidado todo proyecto y preocupación..." (*Cuentos completos*, p 39) Translation - ...we were both kind of tired. However, we haven't yet arrived at the stage in which you can say so without offending the other, because it's necessary to pretend that every worry and responsibility has been forgotten...

In this quote, the narrator finds his ideal interlocutor in the reader. He is trapped in an isolated loneliness, able to express his true feelings to no one but the reader. The theme of frustrated communication repeats itself throughout Martín Gaité's fictional works, and the complicated search for interlocution affects her characters. Internal dilemmas like the narrator's in "Ya ni me acuerdo" are found in small situations like this one, and also on a larger scale throughout Martín Gaité's fictional stories.

Although this investigation focuses on the narratology of Martín Gaité, it is important to acknowledge that the time period in which she lived influenced her writings.

Her life stretched across a time-period that included war, dictatorship, transition and democracy in Spain. Her personal life saw typical ups and downs common to all people that shape individuals and make their lives unique, yet she had vivid memories of hiding during bombings when she was very young and of great sufferings as an adult. She witnessed huge culture shifts that took place as her country transitioned from dictatorship to democracy. The need to adapt to enormous shifts is reflected in her writing. Something that unites the works of Martín Gaité is that readers can see a change in the characters, their perspectives, and their circumstances. Throughout the forty years of her writing the common themes of finding a voice, searching for identity, searching for freedom, and the desire for conversation bring her works together. Some of these motifs can be found in the works of other contemporary Spanish writers with whom she interacted.

During her young adulthood, Martín Gaité was part of a literary circle of people in her age group. In this literary circle, there were a number of writers who became famous in Spain and internationally (Jesús Fernández Santos, Agustín García Calvo, Alfonso Sastre, Ignacio Aldecoa, Carlos Piera, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio - her husband, and others). These writers had been given the identity of "Niños de la Guerra" or children of the war. They all had personal stories to tell, an identity to find, and a past to overcome. As for her, she began writing as a way to escape the war, and this need to escape shapes her entire writing career.

The combination of the search for interlocutors and the story-telling techniques that bring this search to life is framed by Spanish culture. Therefore, it is important to examine the non-fictional cultural study done by Martín Gaité, *Usos amorosos*. Since the human need for conversation wars against hard-to-define cultural factors, *Usos amorosos*

casts an important light upon these cultural factors that many characters face in Martín Gaité fiction, where one often sees a personal journey that a character embarks upon juxtaposed with the superficiality of most human relationships. The created characters are imbued with historical background which Martín Gaité researched, and undoubtedly saw and experienced in her own life. In *Usos amorosos*, Martín Gaité presents to the reader a historical account of Spain's gradual rise in wealth that corresponded with a new desire for fashions and foreign goods. Her study of 18<sup>th</sup> century culture seems to greatly inform the nature of her created characters. In 18th century Spain, marriage was often an institution with the purposes of name and wealth, so women sought out "cortejos", or men with which to converse, who served them with great pageantry and respect, while gossiping and wearing the best fashions. The great pressure to see and be seen in Madrid wearing the newest clothing from France also created pressure to be able to converse about such things. The honor of name and swordsmanship of the previous century was replaced by the "honor" of slowly walking through wealthy neighborhoods and being able to speak about petty topics.

Carmen Martín Gaité's historical research discussed in *Usos amorosos* informed and influenced Martín Gaité's later writings in terms of how the narratives approach relationships, marriage, and culture. *Usos amorosos* provides valuable insight into the worldview of Martín Gaité and how she connected her historical research to her creative writing. A major theme in *Usos amorosos* is appearance. *Usos amorosos* describes 18th century Spaniards who focused on physical appearance and also the appearance of sexual purity. Another major theme in *Usos amorosos* has to do with the development of relationships that do not involve responsibilities. She discusses a culture in which there

was an obsession with image and appearances, which meant the possibility of lying or ignoring certain behaviors in order to maintain image. The more contemporary writers, like Martín Gaité, explored how appearances deceived. As one of the "niños de la guerra," she understood the remnants of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by identifying herself as an offspring of this superficial culture, and her characters fight against its customs and ways of thinking.

Martín Gaité explored the restrictions that were in place before her time. Even as culture shifted elsewhere, religious activities and government enforced appearances. Authorities attempted to establish rules regarding the days in which women could leave the house, for example, which probably impacted works such as *Entre visillos*, in which women are "trapped" behind the curtains of their homes. Only on special days, usually associated with religious holidays, were women given an opportunity to go to Mass, or the rare opportunity to walk around with complete freedom. This "journey of freedom" theme appears in many of her works, such as "Lo que queda enterrado", where a woman who feels suffocated leaves her house for the day with no real direction or purpose. *Usos amorosos (Love Customs)* describes a distinctly negative outlook upon typical relationships, and as Martín Gaité develops this work, she consistently returns to the analysis of superficiality and the narrative voice laments the lack of depth and freedom experienced by Spaniards, especially women, who had gone before her in the 18th century with a similar lack of freedom that she saw among women in 20th century Spain.

Superficiality leads to a suffocating loneliness, resulting in narrators like the one from "The Spa," who vividly expresses her need to take out what she has kept buried.

"Levanté la cabeza y me parecía que salía a la superficie después de contener la

respiración mucho rato debajo del agua." (Translation: I raised my head and it seemed like I came up from underneath the surface after holding my breath for a long time under the water.) Here the character needs to breathe and find a space to reveal her hidden emotions and fears. In this fictional space the narrator can fully express herself and all of her insecurities as she tells the reader about a dream. The narrative voice could be Martín Gaité or a narrator telling the story in order to emphasize the consistent theme of exposing buried emotions. By creating an empty space for needed air, the narrative encourages her readers to do the same because this "space" is both familiar and safe. Morales discusses Alemany Bay's understanding of this space as a type of reflection that may be a way of controlling the uncomfortable past by people who already know the painful results because they want to relive the past on their terms in a narrative space that can be "shared" (Morales, 235).

The prescribed obligation of the reader or interlocutor to learn from Martín Gaité's characters is pertinent. The reader is not supposed to simply be entertained by what is narrated and only escape into the world the narrator creates. This believable, created world contains elements that the narrator expects the reader to grasp and wrestle with, like the importance of self-expression and self-actualization through writing and dialoging with a prescribed or yearned-for receiver of narrated information. The function of this one-sided, implied dialog with an interlocutor is the revealing of a space in which the skeletons that each person has hidden in their own personal closets can be exposed, met, and confronted, albeit in fiction. As writer also becomes the reader, and as the characters face their personal demons from the past, narrator, reader and characters are all taken down a road toward self-discovery that leads to value and self-worth.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between much of Martín Gaité's fiction and the *Thousand and One Nights*, in which a physical death was avoided by consistent talking. For Martín Gaité, talking prevents an inner death of the soul and the life that is sought has to do with finding purpose and meaning. While critics have pointed out elements of autobiography in Martín Gaité's narratives, and she would agree with Basanta, who wrote about autobiography and autobiographic novels, and says people need to explain themselves, Martín Gaité takes it a step further referring to interlocution as a

"necesidad enmascarada por un cúmulo de circunstancias adversas y de interpretaciones falaces, pocas veces confesada y menos satisfecha, pero que nunca, aun cuando se reniegue agresivamente de ella, deja de condicionar, como último móvil, nuestros actos y nuestras omisiones" (*Búsqueda*, p 7). Translation – need masked by a million adverse circumstances and false interpretations, rarely confessed and hardly ever satisfied, but it never, even when one aggressively denies it, stops determining our acts and omissions, as if it were our ultimate motive.

This quote points out the ways in which humans cover this need by their present business, their misunderstanding of themselves and their world, and their lack of openness and satisfaction. Revealing past experience through conversation is critical to her narrative because it exposes actions and omissions that need to be revealed and understood as a therapeutic means to overcome personal but shared suffering (Morales, 149).

Carmen Martín Gaité transforms basic plots for a purpose: She creates a framework for shared therapy. This is her unique narrative style. In a book titled *Seven*



*Basic Plots*, Christopher Booker summarizes the basics of stories that have been told throughout history. He discovered interesting commonalities among stories from different cultures and time periods, and he categorized these seven basic plots as Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches, The Quest, Voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. (Booker, vii). These categories are important to the discussion here because Martín Gaité attempts to universalize or share individual suffering as a means to find companionship in the narrative process and a means to create therapeutic sharing.

While many of her stories fall into these basic categories of plots suggested by Booker, in Martín Gaité's fiction the happy or tragic ending centers around a personal journey to self-awareness and excising the monster. Many of the characters in her works are either on a quest toward self-actualization and self-understanding or they are overcoming a personal monster. It is pertinent to note that many of the narratives have a tragic ending since the characters never reach their goal of understanding their pain and becoming self-aware. Their search is truncated because of the enemies of self-actualization, which are hard to define, and in many narratives there are multiple enemies that overlap and affect different characters. For example, in *Entre visillos*, the enemy is a boring routine life, in *Ritmo lento*, individualism, and in *Cuarto de atrás* the dictatorship, while in *Nubosidad variable*, various evils of society become the enemy. Martín Gaité's characters are continually battling such enemies, but the narrative functions to provide a shared experience of the struggle, thereby seeking out mutual understanding and appreciation of personal hopelessness (Morales, 363).

This theme of hopelessness, coupled with the prevalence of superficiality creates a suffocating situation for characters who long for escape. Escape is seen in characters

such as David, in *Ritmo lento*, a novel which Borrall says belongs in the literary canon because it was the first psychological novel, imitated by other authors (Morales, 62). As David converses, he begins to discover and come to terms with what is inside his head, but is only able to label it as "noise". He exemplifies the importance of escaping or finding refuge. "Tomo la pintura como refugio. ... Del ruido, por ejemplo. Del ruido que se te queda en la cabeza." David begins to show the reader a step by step process to self-actualization. For him it is painting, but many of Martín Gaité's fictional characters attempt to escape from life's difficulties into their various art forms in order to avoid reality and, through conversation, to find a space for sharing what they have suffered. However, this escape always becomes a temporary diversion from coming to terms with oneself and one's personal reality and pain. In David's words, "Tomo la pintura como refugio", he admits that his painting is a method of escape, but it is through the conversation surrounding this escape that he is put on a road toward explaining, understanding, and dealing with the past, which is the first step toward a self-actualized life. Reflection on what has been exposed through artistic expression and discussed with another through conversation leads to self-actualization and freedom from the noise within while his conversation points out the process and function of a listener or interlocutor as a means to share what is finally understood.

David's dialog with his friend points out the process of self-actualization and the function that an interlocutor or listener contributes to this process. An interlocutor not only serves to help one explain their personal past, but to additionally help someone confront the past or to make sense of the noise within. Conversation provides a way to bring out that which is buried inside, recognize it and to take action. The need to take

action or change may not be realized until a conversation with another takes this buried information out of a person and reflects the image of the past back to the narrator so she or he can "see" it in a context beyond their own perception. The function of a conversation is to expose the trajectory of a painful situation, so that the individual can figure out ways that they have been hurt and how they will move past their pain in a moment when these individual sufferings can become shared as both universal and historical. In fact, the key component of therapy is telling and sharing the story-interlocution with the other.

To understand the creative paradigm that Martín Gaité offers, it is useful to review how trauma narratives function. According to Kaminer, "producing a trauma narrative as part of the therapy process may facilitate recovery." (Kaminer, 481). This facilitation of recovery is a key aspect of Martín Gaité's writing. Interestingly, the "traumas" discussed in her works generally have more to do with internal battles and unfulfilling relationships than larger events like war for these are "manageable" personal scars of how trauma affects an individual. In overcoming any trauma, the problem never seems to be the trauma itself, but one's ability to deal with it and overcome it through having the appropriate outlets in one's life. Although war is a shared, traumatic experience, it must be confronted in a personal way, and the enormity of such human tragedy can only be "handled" on the individual or personal level, and "solved" through exposure in shared conversation.

In *Ritmo lento (Slow Rhythm)*, for example, David grows up in a seemingly perfect upper-middle class family, but he is distraught over the lack of relationship he has with his father. He never is able to recognize the cause of his sadness nor can he express

what is missing from his life, but the reader can see his problem. His father regularly visits a psychiatrist, and one day brings the psychiatrist to meet his son David, introducing the psychiatrist as a friend. David and the psychiatrist instantly hit it off, and David finds in him the father figure he had been wanting. Years later, near the end of the book, when it's discovered (by David and the reader) that this friend was actually being paid to spend time with David, the tragedy of emotional distance culminates, because the one healthy relationship that David thought he had was based on an inauthentic desire to be with David (on the part of the psychiatrist). David is disillusioned by the deception of this superficial relationship that he thought had depth and sincerity. David finally found his ideal interlocutor in someone who ended up being a mirage. This tragedy parallels the tragedy of his father's suicide, because both father and son have no authentic relationships. David finds the body, stabs it repeatedly, then embraces and kisses him, showing his bitterness toward him and his desire to experience true connection with someone.

In *Nubosidad variable (Variable Cloud)*, marriage and its unfulfilling superficiality are discussed by two women who have failed marriages. They are old friends that had lost touch over the years, but as they get reacquainted they talk about the same themes discussed in *Love Customs*. Their marriages fell apart along with their lives in general, due to a lack of communication. Throughout the work, these women seem to fall deeper and deeper into the despair of loneliness, but find each other as an outlet for their sorrow. The lack of people to talk to honestly seems to be the common enemy they share, and since this enemy is hard to nail down specifically, one needs to continue reading the work to the end in order to understand this enemy. Unlike David, the women

speak with compassion for one another, leading to relief, shared experience and self-actualization, as opposed to simply talking without authentic reception like David's case, which is a tragedy.

In both *Ritmo lento* and *Nubosidad variable*, the reader experiences the theme of disillusionment, emotional distance, and the basic human need for self-discovery through intimate, personal relationships. They are tragic works, but the characters have positive experiences associated with the ideal interlocutors in their lives. For David, the psychiatrist gives him time, patience and good questions that guide him on a path away from meaninglessness. The two women in *Nubosidad variable* can express themselves recklessly through their letters, because they too, have found an ideal interlocutor who "listens" (reads) without interruptions or judgment. Even though these people catch glimpses of quality conversations, their tragic lives are defined by isolation and its accompanying meaninglessness.

*El cuarto de atrás (The Back Room)* has an opposite outcome in that the narrator's loneliness is cured by a visitor that does not allow her to dwell on superficialities, but draws profound information out of her. This work may be Martín Gaité's most studied work because it presents the reader with the truly ideal interlocutor that is never found in her other writings. The goal of self-actualization that other characters fail to realize is found by C. in this novel. She spends most of the night with a man who draws information out of her until she finally faces her traumatic past and tells her story in spoken and written form. Meanwhile, "Las ataduras," *Caperucita en Manhattan*, *Irse de casa*, and "La tata" are all full of unfulfilling family relationships. In these four works, people distance themselves from their families and discover things about the loneliness

they have suffered from fragmentation, dislocation, and/or a lack of close relationships in the family. In "Variaciones sobre un tema" and other short stories, there is also a consistent theme of loneliness and identity loss, all stemming from the same root problem - the lack of personal relationships and ideal interlocutors.

Martín Gaité's first published work, titled "The Spa" ("El balneario"), was one for which she won the *Café Gijón de Relato Corto* prize, and critics at the time of publication (1954) were impressed by this work because of its unique style in narration. Although the plot could be summarized in a paragraph, this story goes from one detail to the next, and allows the reader to experience the mind-set of the narrator. The reader sees and feels everything the narrator is experiencing, because the purpose of the work is to expose the emotions and the experiences of the narrator. This work foreshadows much of what was to come in the writing career of Martín Gaité because the main protagonist needs to take out everything that is buried within her and share these hidden thoughts with a listener/reader.

Throughout "El balneario," the first person narrator gives an extremely detailed description of everything that she senses, suspects, and feels. Every thought is given special attention as the narrator tells the reader about the situation because she wants the reader to experience exactly what she is experiencing, and she wants that experience to be validated. For example, a woman passing through the aisle of the bus is given special attention in the narrative, because the narrator is describing everything as it is happening. "La señora, sin dejar de mirarme, se dispuso a pasar, y en el momento de tener su cuerpo casi abrazado contra el mío, porque el pasillo era muy estrecho, me dirigió una sonrisa. Olía muy bien, a colonia fina" (p. 96). This is a stream-of-consciousness technique that is

common in Martín Gaité fiction, and in "The Spa." The point that she makes is that one's feelings, fears, and emotions form the backbone of one's life experiences. Facts and situations are secondary to the more important feelings and reactions that a person has. An omniscient narrator could have told the story, giving the same details, but when a first person narrator describes his or her every thought, the reader is taken into a realistic world, dictated by someone who is not telling the reader about the situation, but about themselves and who allows the reader to share in the experience. When the narrator has a small exchange with the bus conductor, she thinks, "Sin duda había interpretado mi gesto como una amenaza, como algo hostil o despectivo. Sentí un gran desaliento" (p. 96). The plot (or series of events) is not the focus of the work, nor does chronology dictate the experience, but the personal reactions to these events and the emotions of the narrator are what both guide the narration and provide a shared experience. Readers become "insiders," not outsiders.

Many of Martín Gaité's works have been analyzed by feminists and her writings are often interpreted in light of the women's movement. The feminist movement often centers upon a recognition of female accomplishments and abilities, but in "The Spa," this same type of recognition takes a twist. Here, the "heart and soul" of a woman is expressed with all of its fallacies and insecurities. Martín Gaité uses this narrator to demonstrate to the reader the importance of taking out all that is within and expressing it, giving affirmation to the internal struggles common among all people. In "The Spa," the narrator exposes (defoliates the fallacies of her experiences to reveal bare, raw emotions about self), and the reader sees someone who is insecure about her body, her relationship with her husband, and she is constantly bothered by fears that seem to have little

foundation. The narrator finds her voice by expressing everything that is running through her mind, and she does so in order to share her experience, be heard, be understood, and through her interior monologue, understand herself.

The universality of this interior monologue - dialogue with the absent/present interlocutor - is the point that draws attention to a relationship between the narrative voice(s) of Carmen Martín Gaité. The narrator serves as a conduit through which a writer like Martín Gaité can express a personal or parallel situation of her own insecurities as a Spanish 20th century woman. Some have related "The Spa" to her relationship with her then boyfriend, an exposé of a relationship that becomes the muse for a fictional work. But more importantly, in these narratives, Martín Gaité can "deal with" hidden fears in the openness of conversation through a narrator that has similar internal struggles (Morales, 26). The important element is safety: Neither narrator nor the author has to deal with judgment or an outside voice within the fictional space. The reader is "within" and sympathetic to her cause. As the narrator discusses her hidden feelings, the reader is given the opportunity for analysis and reflection, bringing affirmation to their own parallel hidden fears and creating a space for compassion, not judgment. Because the work is full of these neuroses explicitly expressed through a first person narrator, the reader looks into the mind of a narrator who may not be entirely reliable but is entirely compatible with the purpose of sharing painful experience.

Although it is the sharing of experience that forms the crux of Martín Gaité narratological technique, her work cannot be discussed without confronting the issue of the reliable narrator. As a narrator expresses certain events, their motives will begin to shine through leaving the reader aware of why they have written in the first place.



However, the reader is also left with questions regarding the memories (actual or imagined?) of the narrator and the possibility of leaving out important details. Nunning invites readers to wonder why a first person narrator wrote what they did in the first place. Using "The Vicar of Wakefield," she found that members of her own generation found the vicar to be naive, self-righteous and arrogant. Meanwhile, people from a past generation said he was lovable and good. Nunning invites readers to look at first-person narrators skeptically, and reminds us that narrators may have intentions beyond a truthful retelling of events, but instead, they may be trying to brag, looking for sympathy, or wanting to change opinions. Varying cultural contexts manipulate these different interpretations (Nunning, V). Studies such as this one are significant to the study of Martín Gaité because of the varying motives that many first person narrators have that appear throughout her works. The question of the reliability and intention of the narrator is a significant aspect of how the reader will receive the presentation of the narration and interpret what they "experience" as interlocutors.

The irony and benefit of this narrator in "The Spa," then, is that this woman has a seemingly photographic memory, making her appear extremely trustworthy. Her detailed descriptions of every head turn and sound she hears provides the eyes and ears of the experience to replicate the expected emotions. However, at the end, the narrator looks in the mirror and sees someone that is not herself, and now the character is jealous of her. That is when readers find out that the entire detailed narrative has been a dream in which she is dreaming about being someone else. This brings to the forefront the emotional turmoil of desiring and inventing the "other" only to recognize self as different and less than the imaginary created self.

The reliability of the narrator who deceives herself is less important than the critical realization that fictional reality is more convincing and "real" than the painfully dull and mundane existence of the physical self. When delusion is perceived as "richer" than reality, the narrator shares the pain of disillusionment. This is when the reader is reminded of the fact that a story can be told through the eyes of someone else, and in realizing this, the facts portrayed come into question, since a dream is a created reality in the mind of the dreamer. The reader is left wondering what circumstances led the narrator to have this dream, and who she actually is (Nunning, V). This is what Berns describes as separating the story from the teller (Berns, 96). Throughout Martín Gaité's works, the reader must continually make this separation between the narrator and the presented narrated experience as well as the motives that the narrative voice reveals.

Darby writes about the standards by which we are to judge a narrator's reliability, and reminds the reader to ask themselves about them, including the culture or linguistic environment in which they are writing. The identity of the narrator and their intentions is significant in the study of conversation and interlocutors because a first person narrator will only reveal about themselves what they want to reveal, forcing the reader to draw conclusions and fill in blanks. Even though Martín Gaité's fiction is full of details, information is left out by the narrators, because they may be trying to cover up information, protect themselves or someone else, or they do not remember things accurately, even when the "space" for narrating seems "safe". Also, first person narrators are not omniscient, and therefore are incapable of providing the reader with every aspect of the history and feelings of other characters. It is for this reason that they need to

express themselves, and they show the emptiness in their lives that leads them to need to interact with a listener (Darby, 830-833).

In a short story such as "Lo que queda enterrado," the title implies that the first person narrator has something buried deep within her, and as the story unfolds, the reader escapes into her mind, and explores what it is that remains buried because she is carrying around an immense emotional weight. Her fruitless conversations with her husband leave her more upset and alienated and her troubled mind and limited perspective force the reader to question her reliability. However, since the point of the narrative is not to communicate a series of factual events, but instead, to share an experience of emotion and heartache, the narrator's reliability is based upon her accurate descriptions of herself, and not upon the situation she is in. Her retelling of events may not be completely correct, but the reader forgives her inaccuracies because what is important is her sharing of her pain and emotional distress and its potentially transformative effect (Darby, 830-833).

Often times, Martín Gaité seems to want to give the reader a taste of the limited perspective of the first person narrator alongside an omniscient perspective and a letter written by one of the characters. This switching back and forth between narrators can be confusing, because the reader sometimes wonders who is speaking. The reader also wants to know who has the facts and how reliable any of the narrators are. This switching of narrators gives the reader varied perspectives, from first person, to omniscient, to letter. The insertion of a letter into the text can present a snapshot of one's emotions and ideas at a specific time. Letter-writing fills Martín Gaité's works and more facts may be filled in by letters, but there are specific purposes to letters that do not have to do with providing

an outside reader (the implied reader of the work outside the text) with facts. These letters, at times, have no context, and cause the reader to wonder what happened. Questions regarding truth, imagination, and believability force the reader to tie up loose ends using the various perspectives presented in the text. These varying perspectives also raise the repeated theme of the reason why the writing was done in the first place. Writing is action and can be therapeutic as the act of writing requires reflection and communication with another, even if the other is absent or fictional.

In *Variable Cloud*, the written letters by the two women give them the chance to tell their story, but the reader is left wondering if their versions of the truth are believable. The Spanish verb *desahogarse* is the best description of what they are doing. They seem to be literally "un-drowning" themselves or "un-choking" themselves. The tension in their lives between their own insecurities, their insufficient emotional support structure, their unsatisfying spousal relationships, and their lack of direction and purpose causes them to need this outlet of letter writing. These, however, are limited conversations. Inner anxieties show forth and so do opinions, but there is tension created within the work due to the differing perspectives. The narratological artistry seen here is that their internal struggles are reflected by the external tension between their differing stories. Both narrators seem logical and reliable, but since their stories differ, the reader becomes aware of the differing (even contradicting) effects that the same happenings caused. Both women are overcoming their pasts, and even though the events overlap, their personal dilemmas challenge any official or common history of events.

The reliability of the narrator comes repeatedly into question due to many factors including the mood-shifts of the characters as they write letters. In *Variable Cloud*, from

one paragraph to the next, the letter-writer might first provide opinions, and then lengthy conversation including many direct quotes. These letters cannot be considered typical in their style. Also, the reader cannot trust everything said by women with so many neuroses, but this is a key aspect of Martín Gaité's means of narrating a specific situation. By putting the neuroses of her characters down on paper, recognizing the tension caused by different perspectives and the emotional turmoil of individual characters she affirms the individual experience as universal. Again, these characters are on a path away from their perception of meaninglessness through self-expression. They are not telling their stories in an attempt to set the record straight, but instead as a means of catharsis or *desahogarse*. They unburden themselves in hope of finding meaning, if not sympathy or compassion.

Zecchi says that in *Entre visillos*, three narrators play hide and seek with one another and never find each other (Zecchi, 97). This adds to the confusion of the characters and gives the reader a look into a fictionalized narrative that represents elements of a realistic and stressful world, which the narrators hope they can deal with through conversation and writing experience. Following this theme of "un-drowning," on page 320 of *Irse de casa*, the past is talked about as a "malignant tumor" which needs to be purged. The physical removal of a tumor is like the self-expression and unburdening that come in the form of writing, art or speaking. As narrators express themselves and their pasts they remove these tumors. The one who unburdens him/herself through self-expression can look through their personal reflections, compare them to the collective memory, and move on, even if their facts are unclear (Morales, 138). The function of the entirety of the text is to expose several personal realities, personal battles that reveal a

culture at war with itself. There is no one truth, but versions of personal truths and lies or created, fabricated experience.

This style of neo-realism in writing, according to Castillo-Puche, does not just portray the real world, but completes it by including fears, doubts, dreams, obsessions, and hallucinations (Castillo-Puche, 51). Morales explains that the narratives expose the inauthenticity of the characters, and Carmen Martín Gaité wants to demonstrate authenticity by exposing what is not authentic (in history) but real (in emotion-laden fictional but personal experience).

*Retailas* contains characters that are believable and authentic in that the adult, Eulalia, rambles like an adult, with deep thinking alongside a normal adult experience. Meanwhile she is placed next to Germán, a kid who has more kid-like thinking, which is uncommon in a lot of children's literature (Morales 223, 305, 337). Authentic-sounding language demonstrates the mutually-shared experience between the two characters but emphasizes their methods of confronting their situation. They connect with each other because they live side by side but deal with life in their own specific neo-realistic ways. Another example of a believable narrator is found in *The Back Room*; the details included in her account are exceptional but lead to deception in the end. In addition to the exact descriptions made regarding her every experience, she also uses memorized poems to express herself. In showing the reader her ability to memorize these poems, she shows us her ability to recount events with precision. These poems serve the narrator as a way to find stability in the static constant these unchanging poems can offer. They also give the narrator a way to express herself when she cannot find the appropriate words herself. In this case, her longed-for interlocutor is a space set aside toward whom she can direct her

thoughts, but not with the help of a conversation partner, but with an artistic creation: a poem.

Even though Martín Gaité is known for her lengthy descriptions with many details, there is always a certain degree of self-censorship of any work, or what Nunning (2004) calls selectivity. We see that the narrators hide information from other characters, which opens up the possibility of accusing the narrator of hiding information from the reader. Frequently, Martín Gaité's narrators strictly follow her original purpose of taking out and exposing all that is buried. The candidness with which the narrator speaks to the reader shows us his/her authenticity and desire to be totally open and honest with someone, because s/he cannot be open with the current conversation partner in the text. The interlocutor or reader becomes the repository for stories and narrations that can be considered authentic in the space in which it is received even if it is not necessarily reliable in the space where it is written. The "reading" completes the authenticity.

The emphasis on authenticity is narrated via personal experience, a technique that coincides with existentialist thinking: that one's personal reaction to events is more important than the events themselves. Martín Gaité's works frequently oscillate between omniscient and first person narration to highlight the introspection of the characters. This shows itself in *Lo raro es vivir* in the way the characters battle between individuality/isolation and conformity/losing oneself. The conflict is internal: protagonists who do not want to draw attention to themselves do not want to think and act like others. This creates an internal isolation that can only be resolved by self-expression. The protagonists suffer due to their conflicting desires and are therefore frustrated, lost, and confused, however, they are also seemingly normal people. This normal-ness of the

characters makes them accessible and therefore appropriate for "conversation". For example, when the first-person narrator is arguing with her husband in "Lo que queda enterrado", the reader must fill in details about the husband, because readers are unable to read his thoughts (Fludernik) and (Nunning, A). The narrator is desperate for someone to talk to but she has no one to "listen" to her, so she finds her conversation partner in the reader. The reader feels part of her life because of her openness. The narrator's exposure to the fictionalized listener-reader enhances the "sharing" of the experience while also demonstrating a lack of people in her proximity who can "listen". The narrator seeks refuge from her isolation in the way she expresses herself openly and it is the interpretation of what the narrator says/writes in the communicative context that makes it an authentic experience and makes the narrator believable because it is her experience, her version of a reality that does not make sense.

In *The Back Room*, for example, the apparent disorganization of the text may be designed to represent the disorganization of the mind, memories, and the experiences of life under Franco. The text moves fluidly from a discussion of the present, to memories, with the occasional change of narrator. According to Rubert de Ventos, the world had seemed cohesive, but now it was chaotic, and this switching between narrators represents the chaotic world. I disagree with this interpretation because I don't feel that it is the world in transition that is chaotic, but the confused mind that needs to expose itself with the chaos it contains. Although Rubert de Ventos is right in saying that the culture shifted away from homogeneity after Franco (Rubert de Ventos, 30-40), these narrative techniques of Carmen Martín Gaité point toward an attempt to organize memories in the



stream of consciousness narrative, and are not necessarily designed to reflect political transition.

Although readers are looking for a reliable, believable, narrator, there are ways in which anachronisms and created or distorted memories create a believable "haziness" regarding the narration of past events. Due to the imperfections of the human brain, recollections of the past should at times be disjointed in order to create a believable summary of what happened. In Martín Gaité's narratives, anachronisms and fictionalized memories often are manifested in descriptions of women who fight with their husbands. Feminist writers, such as Mercedes Carbayo Abengozar, who interpreted Martín Gaité's novels, have said that these arguments are an important way to expose the bold, new, Spanish woman in post-Franco feminism. However, these arguments don't expose a strong protagonist that wins arguments, but an insecure woman that is lost in her confused emotions, and who frequently loses arguments, leaving no space for finding one's self. The protagonist usually loses due to the fact that her desire to win the argument trumps her ability to be open and honest. Although she appears to be searching for an interlocutor in her husband, she must resort to the reader, who is allowed to see the entire picture of her emotions, and the reader sees her internal angst. The reader has compassion for her situation, but also becomes frustrated with her as she dances around the truth of her pain. As the fictional world is described, it doesn't make perfect sense, but in its lack of perfection, the reader finds someone who is believable, in pain, and worthy of being heard (Biggane, 247, 248).

The retelling of arguments also emphasizes the importance of listening. In "Lo que queda enterrado", the argument is only seen from the perspective of the first person

woman narrator. The reader is left wondering what the man was thinking, wishing that the woman would have listened, explained her pain, and simply opened up instead of trying to win the argument. She gives us access to her thoughts, regretting her word choice that led to her loss of the argument but her true pain is never expressed to him, and the reader sees most, but not all of it. This is where the motivation of the narrator is seen. She could not find space in this relationship for real conversation so she converses later with the reader, who makes a more sympathetic listener and who cannot counter her argument. The explanation surrounding what is going on inside the narrator's mind may also be found in *Nubosidad variable*, where the women fight through their letters throughout the work but, in the end when they meet, there is no resentment between them. They simply wanted to express their pain and hopelessness to someone who was listening, but they didn't want to actually fight about their pasts or encounter counter arguments. This is the purpose of their letter-writing, and the motive for sharing provides a small, but important piece to the solution to their emotional energy associated with their problems. The letters are helpful in giving the characters a chance to let out what is happening inside but they do not provide the solutions they anticipated.

The pain and hopelessness that many characters face in Carmen Martín Gaité's works stem from their shared lack of freedom. This theme of freedom is often expressed by the rhythm, pace, structure, and pace of the work. As characters express their state of anguish and pain, the text often "slows down" as well, allowing the reader to experience this oppression with the character and to get caught up in the experience. This narratological technique of slowing down the pace of discourse impels the reader to ask how and why a text is transmitted in this way. The internalization of the discourse is not

to be confused with the narratological story or plot that focuses on what is said. To illustrate: when analyzing the discourse of "El balneario," the pace of the story reflects the pace of the events it describes (i.e. it takes about 2 hours to read and covers a time period of about 2 hours). Also, as the narrator describes her experience, the changes in setting or scene take place through her observations, further allowing the reader to travel with the narrator through the story. This parallel journey, of narrator and reader, is significant because it emphasizes the importance of sharing an experience with a listener. The narrator finds an ideal interlocutor in the reader, as her personal life events are told in her own words in the way these events are experienced and "lived". An awareness of hopelessness or the tedium of being caught up in personal suffering with no means of escape can be experienced, not discussed as an historical event. This is the key to Carmen Martín Gaité's narrative genius.

Although lack of freedom is lamented in many of Martín Gaité works, some characters find freedom as they struggle to break out of their circumstances. This break from oppression into freedom often coincides with a break in the chronology. When chronology is confused, the themes and ensuing emotions take precedence over the events. This writing technique is seen in many works, but in *Entre visillos* it is most obvious. Galaos says that *Entre visillos* breaks the reality of time (Galaos, 636), and these breakages with time coincide with frequent changes of perspective. Therefore, the narrative accomplishes the goal, placing emphasis on the theme of women trapped at home and the reader experiences this theme because it takes precedence over the actual events and their historical explanation. This interior freedom from a traumatic past is only found in writing the personal emotional reality and its difficulties do not change. The

impetus for writing is self-expression and exposure. The need to express can be supported by what Kaminer, who studied PTSD victims, writes; that self-expression leads to faster therapeutic recovery. Herein lies the motivation for the main character named C. writing about the war in *The Back Room*. Like a person with PTSD, these memories are disjointed, but they create a structure and a pace that is artistic and believable. The exposure does not change the essence of character, but does change the way in which readers make sense out of the trauma as the emotions of trauma are co-experienced through the reading (Kaminer, 481).

This same disjointedness is discussed as stylistic rhythm by Shen who also points out the way in which a text represents the world. Throughout Martín Gaité's narratives, details seem unimportant at the time but later these same details receive special attention and the reader discovers that there was a specific purpose for these details all along. These details allow the narrator to express fully what is on his or her mind, while providing the reader with a look into the narrator's mindset, discovering how the narrator assimilates all of their experiences together, even as they focus on seemingly unimportant details. For example, in *The Back Room*, a cockroach causes C. to freeze in fear and prevents C. from walking down her hallway. This represents her feelings of being trapped, and later, it is referred to again regarding the general theme of freedom or being trapped, and her unwarranted fears. The detail of the cockroach has a larger purpose because the narrator must construct her world-view based on everything that she narrates as it happens to her, which includes the combination of all experiences.

Many of the characters are searching for freedom from societal pressures and Martín Gaité herself said that when a person is surrounded by conformists, they fear

freedom, and breaking the pattern (Morales 254). Freedom and its various connections between the individual and society is a repeated theme throughout her works, and near the end of her writing career, her works for children, like *Caperucita en Manhattan*, share this theme (Morales, 288) (Shen, 381).

This personal search for freedom from societal repression and stagnation is nothing new for 20th century Spanish literature or for earlier writers but the character of the search for freedom is different here. In the picaresque genre, the fictional autobiographical narrator reflected on the past to justify his or her actions, but here, the protagonist is looking to have an experience of self-actualization. In the analysis of modern feminist novels done by Ciplijauskaitė, the argument is made regarding the accepting of past and present personal reality. One must not only explore and understand a personal past or present. Instead, accepting this person from the past and accepting the present, is the highest human goal, and this goal appears in various forms of narrative (Ciplijauskaitė). Martín Gaité's narrative fits this description and the writing points toward these goals. Her characters need to realize who they truly are and not who they wish themselves to be. They talk through their past in order to expose the personal experience and accept it with all its ups and downs. The personal quest of finding this personal identity and accepting "self" and "personal experience" does not give anyone the meaning of life, but it gives them a guide or a map for interpretation. The reader receives and interprets this map. This reader reception, or what Sommer calls the recipient of the text, receives the text based on their own culture and the cognition involved in reading. As the reader is exposed to this experience of self-actualization, the narrative itself guides the reader to avoid the pitfalls of the characters in the text.

Analysis of the textual evidence demonstrates that according to her general understanding of the world, Carmen Martín Gaité feels that self-actualization is one of life's most important achievements. She creates narratives that require interaction with interlocutors which is designed in the narrative processes of her texts. When authentic conversation partners can't be found, she creates the space for fictional ones because it is the conversation itself that forces the necessary interiorization and corresponding experience of reconciliation to the past and present.

The field of narratology encompasses questions regarding a narrator's intent and their reliability, the flow of each individual work, and the relationships created by the text. In Martín Gaité's fictional works, outcomes all pivot around conversations that create an emotional experience and require interpretation of the experience. For example: David, in *Ritmo lento*, is a character that talks about his process of self-reflection, a path that many other characters are on, but most characters do not talk as openly as he does about the search for meaning. According to David, self-reflection is dangerous because it may take the interpreter to uncomfortable emotions and memories, but appealing because it provides the means to look at self from the outside; it is a way to order the meaninglessness of pure emotion. David only finds a good interlocutor in his psychiatrist. His family relationships offer no communication, which leads to death and destruction. Like David, many characters find their ideal interlocutor in their psychiatrist, but it is never the psychiatrist that is idealized as a path to resolution, but the role that they play in the person's life and the profound conversation that results is a consequence of exposing and re-narrating experience to create meaning.

The tragedies of the superficial families in *Retaílas*, *Fragmentos de interior*, and *Ritmo lento* are results of individualistic characters that are emotionally distant. As their socioeconomic status improves, their relationships disintegrate, leaving an ironic situation of people who are stuck between a fast-paced life of success, and an emotionally slow boredom stemming from a void in their lives. The title "*Slow Rhythm*" (*Ritmo lento*) may refer to this emotional distance that creates a slow, repetitive meaninglessness in life. Interestingly, the technique attempting to narrate meaninglessness for the purpose of exposing the absence of communication or a sense of purposeful communication is a 20th century phenomenon. Typically, a narrator will position themselves in such a way as to get the reader on their side (Herman, 314, 315), but there is no "good" nor "bad" guy in these works and the reader is simply encouraged to make sense of senselessness. This emphasizes the way in which the enemy is something broader, and more universal like a lack of communication, and relational silence amid life's noisiness.

In *Nubosidad variable*, the letters emphasize the loneliness experienced by the protagonists. This void or absence is cured in the end, when they find one another in a serendipitous way. The two women run into each other and they both realize that they satisfied a mutual need, one of conversation, exposure, sharing, and openness. Their desire for writing had less to do with communication, and more to do with being heard and curing their mutual loneliness.

Although many of Martín Gaité's works talk about actual places and time periods, she frequently appeals to the naturalist understanding of emotion discourse, meaning that emotions are cross-cultural and can be understood by anyone. She would have disagreed with constructionists who say emotions are culturally specific (Herman, 314). This is

what makes her writing universal: her message is for all people. The emotions are universal even though specific circumstances and their journeys are individual. The readers can take something from the text that they have learned and they don't need to embrace Spanish culture in order to do so since these emotions are shared and universalized through personal, albeit read, experience.

The ideal interlocutor is finally "found" in *The Back Room*, Martín Gaité's most studied work. The interlocutor is a mysterious visitor akin to a prescribed reader, who arrives late and alone at night and fits the description of the perfect interlocutor. He is the perfect interlocutor because he takes an interest. There are no interruptions, and he has the opportunity to leave, but he chooses to stay. He also has a way of gently pushing C., forcing her to dig deep inside and find the right words to bring her historical skeletons forth. As she finally wraps her mind around her past, he validates her as a person. There is added interest to their conversation because, typically in literature, there are female muses that tap into the creativity of men, while here the roles are reversed. This interlocutor is the epitome of the interlocutor that so many Martín Gaité characters search for, and never find. This work can, therefore, be understood as a happy story with a longed-for interlocutor who arrives. Even so, this interlocutor is so mysterious, the reader never knows if the visitor in C.'s life is part of a dream, or if he is imagined. This emphasizes Martín Gaité's repeated theme of searching for a narrative space, real or imagined, set aside for conversation and personal growth.

Martín Gaité's constant pursuit of relationship, interaction, and conversation is at the center of her works. The interlocutor, the listener, and the reader, follow the lives of characters who sometimes but rarely find a person with whom to converse deeply. The



narrative itself exposes the function of reading and interpreting by compelling the reader to participate in the narrative. The reader forms a fictional relationship with what is read. The need for interlocution manifests itself in the narrative. As Herman puts it, we need narrative to understand others, and in so doing, we understand ourselves (Herman, 327). Carmen Martín Gaité exposes the fictional fallacies of the reading experience to forge a commitment with readers to be the interlocutor who can draft meaningful communication from the narration.

## CONCLUSION

In Martín Gaité's fictional works, the need to connect with one's-self and others is the main motivation for writing and reading, with the final goal of promoting self-actualization from the character's perspective and a reading commitment from the interlocutor (inside and outside the text). The narrative is designed to help readers recognize the importance of avoiding meaninglessness by finding or creating a safe space for sharing self and for commitment to understand suffering, oppression, repression, sadness, etc. While there are historical connections to the character and times in Spanish history, the key to the success and universality of her works relies on the narrative designed to commit the reader to serving as the interlocutor who can make sense of the pluralistic voices and their disjuncture.

Through innovative narrative techniques and by creating a search for an interlocutor, Martín Gaité provides a means for understanding how internal pressures conflict with those that are external. She demonstrates self-recognition or self-awareness may not exist without the shared space an interlocutor provides because a life not shared is meaningless. The created fictional space is representative of a 20th century Spanish society that demonstrates the illusion and superficiality that denies a safe space for exchanging depth of spirit or true relationships. The text affirms the complexity of human emotions as characters seek refuge from the past, and from the oppressive, worldly noise of the present through sharing the creative space of the "conversation" or "implied dialog" with the desired but often absent interlocutor.

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