

La Nena and Barcelona's *Gauche Divine*: Ana María Moix's Novelistic Innovations

Holly Stovall
Western Illinois University

*A*s a young feminist poet and novelist in Catalonia, Ana María Moix participated in a radical social and intellectual circle called the *gauche divine*, whose members were known for intellectual and artistic innovation, unconventional sex and gender roles, and a mixture of political liberalism and indifference. The *gauche divine* was active during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period that corresponds to the end of the Franco Dictatorship and to an extremely fruitful period for Moix. An examination of the creation and reception of Moix's early novels in the context of the *gauche divine* proves essential to understanding her work for several reasons: gender, particularly when coupled with age, prejudiced Moix's readership—especially within the *gauche divine*; in her book *24 horas con la gauche divine* (2001), Moix defined the circle, but the *gauche divine* has defined Moix and her readership as well; the circle served as a source of intellectual support and inspiration; an aesthetic of freedom that reflects Barcelona's unique historical context becomes apparent; and Moix was an aesthetic and thematic innovator within the circle and in Peninsular literature in general, particularly with respect to avoidance of the social and political referent in her second novel.

The novels Moix wrote while she was a member of the *gauche divine* are *Julia* (1968) and *Walter ¿por qué te fuiste?* (1973). *Julia*, which Moix published at age 21, is the story of the title character, who, in the context of the extremely conservative social norms of Franco's Spain, is thwarted from coming of age. Moix presents Julia/Julita as both a young adult who tries to commit suicide and a child who is sexually abused. By narrating the six-year-old Julia's sexual assault by an adult friend of the family, Moix is one of the first and few Spanish novelists to address, from a feminist perspective, the theme of childhood rape or sexual assault. No one responded to Julita with sympathy after the attack: in fact, her mother slaps her and, along with the maid, hastily concludes that Julita had fallen. Her family's reaction to her trauma represents the general neglect Julia endured and causes alienation from self and others as she is thwarted from coming of age.

One theme of *Julia* is geographically and historically specific: the need to escape the confining, bourgeois Barcelona that provided only very limited alternatives for young people, especially girls, women, and people who do not identify themselves exclusively as heterosexual. This theme, which reappears in Moix's other works, is arguably political as well as personal because the Franco regime had pushed such rigid notions of man- and womanhood through the Falange that young people felt a glaring lack of personal freedoms.

Julia lays the groundwork for the more complex *Walter*, which overlaps with *Julia* in time, characters and theme, but is more innovative formally. In *Walter*, Moix expands her narrative techniques, employs metafiction and multiple points of view, and includes a surrealistic character, the horse-woman Albina who is the narrator's lover. *Walter*--whose readership has waxed and waned and, unlike *Julia* and much of Moix's other fiction, has yet to see a published

translation--is one of the first Peninsular works of fiction to experiment with gender and sex role reversals and is an extremely dialectical and sophisticated novel that is as relevant today as it was in 1973. *Julia* is Moix's most popular novel, but *Walter* is more profound and technically complicated.

The *gauche divine*, whose appearance coincides with Moix's early work, arose within the rebellious spirit of 1968. Aware of the cultural and historical significance of the *gauche divine*, in 1971 Moix wrote and compiled *24 horas*, but did not publish it until 30 years later. *24 horas* contains nonfiction, photographs, vignettes, interviews and essays and is an important portrait of the cultural revolution of its era (Raventós-Pons 92, Izquierdo). The *gauche divine* resented the conservative social norms and the narrow language and gender role expectations the dictatorship imposed. By prohibiting public use of the Catalan language, Franco repressed Catalonia's identity as a nation. In an act of political rebellion, some *gauche divine* members, including Moix's brother Terenci, but not Moix herself, refused to write creatively in Spanish.

By marking Castilian with a Catalan cadence, Moix managed, simultaneously, to write in and rebel against the dominant language. Underscoring the unique linguistic structure in Barcelona, Juan Marsé emphasizes this point about Moix: "Ella atiende a cómo habla la gente de la calle, en Barcelona, no en Valladolid" (2005). Asked to explain the nature of the language of the streets of Barcelona, Marsé said, "El castellano que se habla en Cataluña tiene su propia manera contaminada por el catalán—no quiero decir que sea incorrecto, pero la construcción de la frase a veces remite a la musicalidad . . . que proviene del catalán . . . lo cual hace que la frase suene distinta" (2005). Thus, while Moix wrote in Spanish, she chose a Spanish laced with Catalan, and this linguistic innovation is one of the ways Moix contributes to the new novel in Spain.

While lacking commitment to a political cause, the *gauche divine* emphasized freedom, whether it was to be linguistic, political, personal, or aesthetic. The poet Jaime Gil de Biedma describes the group in Moix's *24 horas*, "Creo que *gauche divine* va unido a creer, por ejemplo, en la libertad de expresión, en la libertad sexual . . ." (97). In his memoirs, Eugenio Trías also emphasizes the yearning for more personal freedoms: "Toda la gente que yo entonces frecuentaba (incluyendo los de la *gauche divine*) . . . poseían idéntica obsesión por librarse de esa coraza de carcundia moral y sexual que había determinado sus vidas durante los interminables años de aquel régimen casposo," (340). *Gauche divine* women, for example, were journalists, editors and business women, work that required independence and leadership and had been seen as unsuitable for women. Sexual roles, notes Trías, changed also, and many, such as Moix, her brother Terenci, and Esther Tusquets, engaged in alternatives to heterosexuality (339). In *Julia* Moix alludes to homosexuality and reversed gender roles, while in *Walter* she addresses these themes unambiguously.

Moix and her work, like the *gauche divine*, were characterized as free. With its free verse and mixture of Spanish and English, formally Moix's poetry reflects the yearning for freedom that many young writers felt in 1968. Moix breaks form with her poetry and writes in prose style, without verse, prompting Vázquez Montalbán to call the presentation of her poems "una estupenda lección de libertad," (1969, 8). Others said she took a similar approach to her personal life and, importantly, to her fiction. In an interview with this author Juan Marsé

emphasized freedom in describing Moix: “Ana llevaba una vida muy, muy libre, muy liberada” (2005). Speaking of Moix’s fiction in the context of post-war writers of social realism, Marsé continued along the same lines: “Ana no se apuntó por esa tendencia. Ana iba por libre” (2005). Moix was pointing the way towards a new novel, one “free” of obligation to send a message of social critique.

The simultaneously permissive and controlling nature of the closing years of the dictatorship created ideal conditions for the rise of the *gauche divine* and Moix’s work. Moix and other writers who entertained controversial themes such as feminism and sexuality could publish their works, but often with heavy censorship (Buckley 1996, IX-XVIII). When Moix published *Walter* in 1973, a time when writers had already begun to enjoy new freedoms, the government made over 45 cuts to the text and required her to revise it three times (Levine 1983, 293). She had to remove almost all of section three and much of the love scenes between Albina and Ismael (Nichols, “Escribir” 110). These and other sections were reincorporated into later editions, with the 2002 edition becoming the definitive one.

While Franco’s limited permissiveness was one factor that allowed for more freedom of expression within the *gauche divine*, the common opposition to Franco within the creative Catalan bourgeois was another factor. Interestingly, unlike most of the *gauche divine*, Marsé came from a working class background, but he was considered part of the *gauche divine* due to his creative production and anti-Franco position. As Marsé describes the *gauche divine*, “no tenía una ideología determinada salvo antirégimen, antifranquistas, gentes de izquierda. Lo único que nos reunía a absolutamente todos era probablemente esta posición sociopolítica frente al régimen franquista” (Marsé 2005). Despite the circle’s anti-Franco sentiments, they were generally not ideologically committed.

While the Franco dictatorship served as a force against which the *gauche divine* might rebel, it had traditionally deflated authors’ morale. According to Francisco Ayala, postwar authors who did not go into exile, especially those in the generation before Moix, suffered such restrictions to their freedom of expression that they wrote in a state of alienation, as if they were also in exile (Ayala, 192). Many of these writers avoided complete isolation by remaining closely tied to a small, almost private group of colleagues, as is the case with the *gauche divine*, but they were frequently out of touch with daily life and experienced a figural exile, the effect of which was to alienate readers from authors and to isolate and rob authors of an intimate understanding of their social context. This lack of knowledge of the daily life of Spaniards contributed to what the *gauche divine* and others understood as the postwar dearth of creativity. However, Moix (and, as Masoliver Ródenas notes, Marsé as well) has been able to capture the language of the streets, which leads to the conclusion that her participation in the elitist *gauche divine* did not remove her from the discourse of the broader culture (2002).

Many in the *gauche divine* have argued that a cultural renovation was necessary because the Franco regime had induced a lack of creativity and intellectual rigor among the older post-war writers (Campbell 1972, 39). Ayala said that minds of even the most lucid Spaniards had become skewed by the stifling propaganda of the regime (197). Authors were either exiled or silenced by censorship. Unlike the *gauche divine*, earlier post-war writers were so absorbed with what they believed was their responsibility to critique society that they often focused on political

and social messages at the expense of artistic innovation. The message relied on concrete allusions to the country. Despite their anti-Franco ideology, many in the *gauche divine* rejected the practice of more established writers, the social realists of the 1950s and early 1960s, who wrote “against” Franco and promoted social change.

The *gauche divine* served as Moix’s primary social milieu and provided the setting in which she discussed literature and culture. The individuals in the circle frequented the same bars and even the same boutique. Some of them were old friends, and many of the poets of the *gauche divine*, including Moix as the only woman, were anthologized in José María Castellet’s 1970 anthology of new poets (*Nueve novísimos poetas españoles*). In 24 Horas Moix lists 89 people in her “índice de personas,” including editors Carlos Barral, Beatriz de Moura, Rosa Regás, Esther Tusquets and Oscar Tusquets, filmmaker Ventura Pons, the photographer Colita, architects Oriol Bohigas and Ricardo Bofill, and writers such as Marsé, Gil de Biedma, and Mario Vargas Llosa.

Those who were a part of the circle didn’t choose to organize themselves into a group with a name; rather, journalists and cultural critics, with the original, French “*gauche divine*” in mind, maliciously began to use the name to refer to this particular group of creative Catalan bourgeois. The French *gauche divine* had consisted of bohemian entertainers Yves Montand, Juliette Greco, Simone Signoret, and others and was probably more authentically *gauche* or left than the Catalan group. The reaction of the members of the Catalan circle to this nickname was mixed-- some decided to embrace the name, while others rejected it. Poet and editor Carlos Barral, for example, said “Nadie sabe qué es, ni siquiera existen claros indicios acerca de la invención de esta afortunada expression periodística” (Moix 2001, 65). When asked to define “*gauche divine*,” Gil de Biedma emphasized that the press tagged the group with this name, and film director Jacinto Esteva said “No tengo ni idea” (Moix 2001, 96, 72). Despite early controversy, eventually members of the *gauche divine* took this name that originated in a satirical tone and re-appropriated it for their own purposes. In interviews with this writer, Juan Marsé, Rosa Regás, Esther Tusquets, Moix, and literary critic Ramón Buckley did not question the name—they have long accepted it and the fact that the *gauche divine* was real. Moreover, Moix, not without irony, used “*gauche divine*” to title her book about the circle.

Most importantly, those in the group were friends who inspired each other creatively. Some members of the *gauche divine* emphasized that to be considered part of the group, one had to drink at Boccaccio, a well known bar. When asked to describe the *gauche divine*, Marsé said “simplemente nos juntábamos después del trabajo . . . en Boccaccio” (2005). Tusquests concurred that having a few drinks in Boccaccio was what made one part of the *guache divine*: when asked if poet and intellectual Gabriel Ferrater, whom everyone knew and who has an aesthetic influence on writers of the *gauche divine*, was part of the group, Esther Tusquets reasoned he was not because he did not “tomar copas en Boccaccio” (2005). Marsé published a short story about the *gauche divine* called “Noches de Boccaccio.” The playfully social aspect of the *gauche divine* is one of its hallmarks.

Moix emphasized the professional diversity and spontaneity of the *gauche divine*: it was a group of “amigos de diversas profesiones—que esto yo creo que era importante—que ahora existe menos . . . entonces la discusión era temas de política, pero desorganizada . . . y

espontánea . . . muchas áreas de la cultura entonces importante” (2005). Freedom then, characterizes their conversation, which is unstructured and contrasted greatly with a university lecture or, for example, a round table seminar. It was as much the form of the discussion as the content that inspired Moix.

Moix says that the *gauche divine* embodied a cultural renovation. She benefitted from the exchange of new information that circulated through the group: “Había un intercambio de lectura (y) de información cultural” (2005). Moix emphasized that having access to new information differentiated *gauche divine* writers from their post-war predecessors (2005). According to Moix, towards the end of the 1960s, suddenly friends of the *gauche divine* would travel and bring back books and magazines to share, which contributed to a “renovación cultural” (2005). This cultural renovation inspired Moix’s writings. There was, she says, “más posibilidad que en los años anteriores” (2005). In addition, says Moix, visiting Latin American writers such as Vargas Llosa “aportaron un clima de novedad e inquietud de renovación” (2005). The *gauche divine* attracted innovative writers such as Vargas Llosa and Ferrater. The group served as an inspiration for what could be created, which would lead Moix, with *Walter*, to innovate formally within the novel in ways that others had tried without fully succeeding, an argument I shall make in a later section of this paper.

The *gauche divine* had its critics. Many Spaniards, especially Catalans, admired the *gauche divine* and, as seen by the professional success of the circle’s members, supported the artistic and intellectual works produced by the group; however, according to Vázquez Montalbán, some Madrid critics had developed a “severe antagonism” against the group, accusing the *gauche divine* of being silly hippies who lacked seriousness. They said that the *gauche divine*’s members distorted the Spanish reality, don’t even know what country they live in, and, as Vázquez Montalbán quotes the press, “no pisan tierra firme” (Vázquez Montalbán, 21). It could be said that the *gauche divine* had no cause but itself. This position was a radical one to take in an era of political protest.

The fact that *Madrileños* were critical of the *gauche divine* reflects conflicts of nationhood: Catalonians (like other regional groups in Spain) often preferred to identify themselves as a nation separate from the central powers, but as Franco demanded use of only one language for all of Spain, they were publicly prohibited from doing so. Intellectuals of Barcelona, especially those of the *gauche divine*, were seen as separatist and too progressive. The ideological differences between intellectuals of Madrid and Barcelona reinforce the argument that Moix’s unique geographical context influenced her work and its reception. Readers and critics from Madrid and other central areas of the country were often hostile towards writers who represented the cultural renovation in Barcelona. The fact that *Walter* was seen as the product of a bourgeois rebel may have negatively impacted the novel’s reception in the country as a whole: readers may have believed it was irrelevant.

Vázquez Montalbán’s accusation that the *gauche divine* didn’t know what country they lived in has some validity, as members of the circle consciously tried to create their own “country” in the sense of forming a safe haven in which to produce their work without feeling obligated to react against the dictatorship as did other authors and intellectuals. Even as they created an oasis for themselves, however, they were not always out of tune with feelings of

unrest in the public. For example, they were the leaders of a political protest in December of 1970 that drew in the public from which they were supposedly alienated (Vázquez Montalbán 1971, 21-22).

Despite moments of protest, the *gauche divine* did not usually take a political stand. Nevertheless, their lifestyle choices, especially in terms of sex and gender roles, challenged the values of the Franco regime. Vázquez Montalbán asserts that there is only one true characteristic of the *gauche divine*--that its women members don't cook (1971, 23). This statement singles out women and is sexist; it implies that women *should* cook, but do not, and that whether or not men cook is irrelevant. Given Vázquez Montalbán's frequent satirical tone, one assumes that this accusation is at least partly an exaggeration; nevertheless, the *gauche divine*'s women were feminists and professionals who would not have been as attracted to cooking or as obligated to do so as women who did not have careers or did not feel the need to challenge the rigid gender norms of the dictatorship.

While Vázquez Montalbán describes the *gauche divine* satirically and with a stress on the critics' opinions, Moix defines the *gauche divine* in a way that is feminist and affirming of women. She questions gender roles, but she does not demean traditional women. Indeed, Moix begins *24 horas* not with a story about one of the well-known male editors or architects of the *gauche divine*, or one of the nontraditional women of the group, but with a portrait of Montse Esther and Isabel Bohigas who ran the boutique that members of the circle frequented. Esther and Bohigas are nicknamed the "Violeteras" and their role within the *gauche divine* is "madrazas" (13). Esther is a business woman. The highly educated and literary Bohigas, says Moix, serves as the shoulder to cry on (15). In her description of Esther and Bohigas, Moix does not miss any details about gender roles: she gingerly notes, for example, that Bohigas has received the kind of high quality university education that Catalan bourgeois parents procure for their daughters not so that they may be independent, but so they will become dignified, patient, and understanding wives (15).

Moix is savvy to the fact that readers of *24 horas* expect to learn about men, since in the eyes of many, men were the central figures of the *gauche divine*, but Moix refuses to present an androcentric perspective of the group. She says, "Se preguntará el lector a qué viene hablar tanto de dos señoritas que nunca salen en los periódicos, y a qué espero para ir a por Carlos Barral, Castellet o los arquitectos" (15). Moix, however, insists that *she* will be the one to define the *gauche divine*, and that her view of the group first requires a story about the *Violeteras*: "Ya que el asunto que aquí nos trae es la *gauche divine*, ellas, Isabel Bohigas y Montse Esther, constituyen uno de sus pilares esenciales" (15). If you want to know anything about the *gauche divine*, says Moix, get Bohigas or Esther drunk. Moix does not mitigate the significance of women who have made much more traditional choices than she has; rather, as the one to define the *gauche divine*, Moix affirms their centrality to the group.

Moix defined the *gauche divine* in *24 horas*, but the *gauche divine*, importantly, defined her as well: she was mascot, lesbian, feminist, and most importantly, "la nena." Presently, she (and arguably, Marsé and Tusquets) is the member of the *gauche divine* with the most enduring literary significance, but during the time that this cultural circle met, she was not seen as the

leader or innovator, and readers within and outside of the *gauche divine* failed to appreciate the full value of her work.

Moix was the youngest of the *gauche divine* and they often called her, with respect and affection “la nena” (Masoliver Ródenas, 1974). When this writer asked Esther Tusquets, Marsé, Regás, and literary critic Ramón Buckley who they thought Moix was during the period of the *gauche divine*, the first point each one made and then reiterated was not that she was a great writer, but that she was extremely young (2005). Tusquets said Moix was “muy, pero muy muy muy joven” and much younger than everyone else of the *gauche divine*. Marsé said she was “muy jovencita” and “siempre tuvo . . . un aire juvenil e infantil.” Marsé, Regas and Tusquets emphasized Moix’s role as “nena” and little sister. Marsé said, “Era la hermana pequeña del grupo” and Regás: “La llamábamos ‘la nena’ y era como la hermana pequeña de todos . . . y nos sentíamos muy protectores .” Tusquets explained that “en Catalonia en las casas le decímos ‘la nena’ a la más pequeña.” Within the *gauche divine* the most notable characteristic about Moix was not her intellectual capabilities, but her age.

Despite the *gauche divine*’s rejection of patriarchal gender roles, the circle held Moix to the very traditional role of *la nena* which made it difficult for those in the *gauche divine* (her potentially most supportive readership), to evaluate her early novels as the product of a sophisticated, adult mind. As feminists have long acknowledged, “nena” is applied to women in ways that “nene” is not applied to men: as women are called “girls” they are treated as little girls and seen to have the authority of little girls at ages (in Moix’s case, the early twenties) in which men are regarded as more knowledgeable, authoritative and mature. *La nena*, while used endearingly within the *gauche divine*, is actually a belittling term for an intellectual and creative scholar, regardless of her age.

Thus, the *gauche divine*, relating to Moix as “la nena,” recognized Moix’s talent, but not the fully realized aspect of her work; instead, they characterized Moix in terms of potential. When asked if members of the *gauche divine* emulated Moix, Marsé said she was “tan jovencita para la época que más que nada era como una promesa” (2005). This statement binds the quality of Moix’s novels to her age, so that her work could not be considered more than potential. When asked if Moix influenced anyone, Tusquets replied that “a los veinte años no influye a nadie” (2005). Juan Antoinio Masoliver Ródenas, who was not part of the *gauche divine*, also characterized her work in terms of potential (1974).

With some exceptions, readers of *Walter* were not open to the idea that it might be an influential work. Rosa Regás and Gabriel Ferrater were exceptions in that they emphasized the quality of Moix’s novels. Regás said that some were calling Moix “una gran escritora,” and when asked if *Walter* had influenced her as a novelist, Regás did not deny this possibility as did Tusquets (Regás, 2005). After reading *Julia*, Ferrater recommended that Esther Tusquets publish it even though he had previously said no one younger than 40 was capable of writing a good novel (Moix, 2005).

Even as some, like Regás, recognized the importance of Moix’s works, they coddled her. Regás said that Moix “Nos despertaba instintos de admiración pero también de protección. Queríamos que fuera feliz” (2005). Here, Regás articulates how the *gauche divine* in general felt

about Moix. The group limited Moix as much as it supported her, for it is difficult to undertake an objective reading of work by an author who is believed to be simultaneously a great writer, a little girl, only promise and in need of protection.

Julia may have been easier to accept than *Walter* because the former did not contradict attitudes about Moix, and *Julia* could be rationalized as “young adult” literature, which made it appear to coincide with Moix’s age. The title character of *Julia* is a “nena” who is always in need of protection. Asked about his early impressions of *Julia* and *Walter*, Marsé commented that he believed there was “una ingenuidad . . . una pasada juvenil” in these novels (2005). Because of her age, Moix is considered naïve, and her work is as well. Masoliver Ródenas’s viewed Moix’s work similarly, saying it “causó cierta sensación en el mundo de la literatura juvenil de los años setenta, en la que abría horizontes insospechados” (2002). It is as if only young adult literature could be expected and accepted from Moix. *Gauche divine* members, then, read *Julia* with age and gender prejudices. They tended to do the same with *Walter*, even though this second novel cannot be categorized as ingenious or young adult literature.

Generally, critics have not recognized *Walter* as Moix’s best work. Tusquets said that “*Julia* fue muy bien recibida, mejor que *Walter*” and that “sus mejores libros” are *Julia* and *Vals Negro* (2005). It should be noted, however, that some critics outside of the *gauche divine* praised *Walter*: Masoliver Ródenas called it an “auténtica comedia humana socio-psicológica” and said it was one of the most important novels to be published in the last few years (1974). As a juror of the 1972 edition of the Barral prize, Julio Cortázar said that *Walter*, which was only a finalist for the award, was one of the best manuscripts submitted that year (cited in Martínez Cachero, 283 and 323).

It is important to understand *Walter*’s lack of readership within the context of the *gauche divine* and the new novel. Despite acclaim from Cortázar and Masoliver Ródenas, *Julia* is read more widely than *Walter*. A search in the MLA Bibliography reveals only five articles in which *Walter* is the “subject term” or the “preliminary subject work,” but 17 articles for *Julia*. I ask why readers have not recognized *Walter* as more accomplished than *Julia*, and the answer to this question is complicated, but part of it pertains to the fact that the sophisticated and boldly experimental nature of *Walter* did not correspond with the vulnerable and youthful image *gauche divine* members and others held of Moix. Indeed, *Walter*’s protagonist is weary and jaded, not youthful in the least. There was a refusal or inability to read *Walter* objectively.

While within and without of the *gauche divine* *Walter* was generally well-received, if not widely read, some people disliked it. The young journalist José Ribas, for example, said that he and his friends “pretendíamos tirar bombas fétidas en la presentación del libro de Ana María Moix, *Walter* . . .” Ribas harshly criticized *Walter* despite the fact that he and his other 20-year-old friends were “unos cocos obsesionados por la nueva literatura y una cultura antiautoritaria” (Ribas). Ribas’s criticism, from a journalist and someone outside the *gauche divine*, reflects an interesting view of *Walter*: it was not “new” and anti-authoritarian, or if it was, it was simply not good. It may have been too experimental for the tastes of many, or the lack of emphasis on anti-Franco references may have made *Walter* seem extraneous.

In addition to “la nena” and bourgeois rebel, other clichés about Moix include “mascot” for the *gauche divine*, feminist and lesbian. Moix is seen as mascot because she was known for expressing, in her personal life and her poetry and prose, the freedom that the *gauche divine* valued. Her fiction expresses freedom not because she felt she should embody values of the *gauche divine*: she followed her instincts and wrote what she liked, not what she thought others expected (Moix “Poética,” 222). *Walter*, perhaps more than any other fiction to arise from the *gauche divine* of the late 1960s and early 1970s, represented the ideal aesthetic of the circle because it broke away from more established post-war authors by shunning (if not completely avoiding) the traditional referent and political message.

Moix is a feminist, but her work is not first and foremost “feminist.” Despite the fact that Moix would write for the feminist journal *Vindicación Feminista*, some aspects of her fiction do not easily lend themselves to feminist interpretation. The title character of *Julia*, for example, does not narrate her own story, and the protagonist of *Walter* is a man. It should be noted that Moix narrated Julia’s story in third person not with the purpose of avoiding a feminist categorization, but because she was beginning to write the new novel in Spain, and therefore wanted to break away from the first-person narrative tradition of women’s coming of age stories from post-war Spain. Other factors, such as Julia’s divided self, would have made it difficult for her to narrate her own story. Similarly, the fact that Ismael is a man does not preclude *Walter* from being feminist, but it does allow more space for the reader’s interpretation, making a feminist reading more complicated and less definitive. Thus, once again, aesthetic goals (innovation in the novel and narration) would not be sacrificed to ideology.

Consistent with the values of the *gauche divine*, Moix focused on aesthetics and avoided any writing that could be labeled as political—whether it was liberal, feminist, or lesbian politics. Moix herself has understood aspects of her work as more psychological and aesthetic in places where others have categorized it as related to identity politics. For example, Perriam et al. discuss Moix’s novels under the heading of “Lesbian Narratives.” In addition, whereas many critics have interpreted the plot of the short story “Las Virtudes Peligrosas” to be about two women in love, Moix sees only one (Nichols, 114), a position that avoids a lesbian theme. Of course, there are valid political readings of her work, but they are a question of interpretation and do not override aesthetic priorities. Moix’s work is too complex to be categorized as “lesbian” or “feminist” even if she herself is both of these and in her work she has addressed or at least alluded to feminist and lesbian themes.

Having deconstructed the clichés about Moix, it is possible to consider *Walter* as a formally innovative work. By contrast to protagonists created by authors of the 1950s and 1960s, Moix makes only minor reference to politics and geography. *Walter* is consistent with *gauche divine* aesthetics that rejected the idea that the novelist or poet should produce a social message; indeed, *Walter* contains very little of the traditional referents to the civil war and Franco. When Moix alludes to social and political factors in *Walter*, she does so not necessarily to critique or call for social change in society, but simply because these referents are part of her characters’ experiences.

Rather than emphasizing political referents, Ferrater, an advocate of Moix who helped shape the literary aesthetic of the *gauche divine*, believed that the writer “intenta traducir sus

experiencias” (1994, 326). Thus, the author writes about politics only if it is central to her experience—she is not obligated to take a political stand. However, it was somewhat impossible for a novelist to avoid political criticism, for even omission of the political referent can be understood as a reaction against the dictatorship, as if to say the writer was deliberately trying to avoid acknowledging Franco’s power. Indeed, a hallmark of the *gauche divine* was that it tried to escape Franco’s dictatorship without leaving the country. It must be clear, however, that within the *gauche divine* omission of the political referent was not intended to indicate pro-Franco sentiment.

The dictatorship shaped the way authors understood the literary referent, which was political and geographical. Moix may have avoided physical descriptions of the city of Barcelona in order to differentiate herself more clearly from many of the well-known writers of the 1960s who, at least thematically, had not fully differentiated themselves from the social realists. She eliminates most references to geographical, political, and economic details, while novelists writing only a few years before her, with a much more politically committed approach, emphasized them. It should be noted that many of her contemporaries were also moving away from the social novel.

The idea of creating an anti-referential novel was becoming increasingly appealing to authors writing after the publication of *Tiempo de Silencio*, but Moix is the first to fully accomplish this goal. She is able to eliminate referents without writing a purely apolitical or asocial novel. Goytisolo’s *Señas de identidad* is clearly a political critique, while *Walter’s* potential political and social critiques are indirect, require the reader’s interpretation and are secondary to form. In Moix’s work, to use Hayden White’s terminology, form is content in itself.

While the purpose of many post-war novels was political criticism, Moix, having virtually removed the traditional referent in *Walter*, incorporates a new and more personal “referent” that pertains to sexuality and gender roles. Ismael, for example, is mocked and criticized for not being masculine enough. In fact, he often plays a feminine role: as Albina repeatedly rescues him, he is like the damsels who are rescued by her “knight in shining armor.” She is, in fact, the horse minus the knight. He has no interest in raising offspring and supporting them with a “respectable” job as does Carlos. Moreover, he forgoes or fails the “tests” of manhood that have defined the transition from boy to man in Spain (Gilmore). Ismael has failure to succeed, owing to the fact that he is not stereotypically masculine, may constitute a subtle criticism of the rigid gender roles in Spain.

Arguably, many of these personal referents are universal and therefore not “referents” at all in the context of 20th-century Peninsular literary history; however, at times Moix subtly points to the political system with the idea that a repressive government can cause repression of sexuality and self-expression. *Walter’s* María Antonia and Ricardo, for example, directly respond to their specific cultural setting, the former with her political leadership and sexuality and the latter with his diary.

Though as acutely aware of her social place and space as other post-war Spanish writers were, with *Walter*, Moix most fully accomplishes the goal of removing the traditional political

referent from her work. She “translates” (to use Ferrater’s terminology) her own experience, and because she is younger than Luis Martín-Santos and others who were trying to bring about innovation in the novel by moving away from use of the referent that earlier post-war novelists had depended on, and possibly because, as a feminist, she writes from a perspective that emphasizes that the personal is political, she alludes to politics through the lens of the personal, which, as understood in the dialogue of key 1960s post-war writers, was not a “referent.”

While *la nena* was Moix’s most prominent role within the *gauche divine*, she had many other sides, one of which is the silenced voice, revealed by Ismael, the protagonist of *Walter*. Because he is a writer like Moix (and for other reasons, including his twinship with the Julita character of *Walter*), Ismael is partially based on Moix and may be representative of how the *gauche divine* defined her. Andrew Bush cites Ismael’s phrase “¿Acaso puede una frase arrastrarme a algo? Antes sí . . .” (15) to argue that the narrator of *Walter* is critiquing the narrator of *Julia*. Ismael’s voice is based on Moix’s, which is saying she will now write a different kind of novel, perhaps one of more formal prestige that would earn her better recognition from her peers in the *gauche divine*. Ismael is a silenced writer struggling not to tell a story. Likewise Moix was figuratively silenced within the *gauche divine*: they denied that she, as the youngest member, could exhibit anything more than potential or be an aesthetic influence on other members of the group.

Walter poses the question of what kind of novel is relevant in the waning years of the dictatorship. Social realism is clearly not the answer, but in some ways Moix seems to say that the relevant novel does not exist, because the writer is doomed to repeat herself and to become trapped in a story she does not want to write, as is Ismael. Moreover, she humbles and even humiliates the writer: Ismael, the narrator and a failed poet, is a mute circus clown who, in his act, is abused and killed. The narrator emphasizes this pathetic aspect of Ismael by mockingly referring to him as the “Great Yeibo.”

The subtle, but pessimistic, conclusion that the relevant novel does not exist may be one of the factors that keeps Moix’s readership small and her novels excluded from literary histories or included in only limited ways. The humbling of Ismael could be seen as a commentary on the role of the writer while Franco was still alive; because of censorship and the undefined readership, the author was silenced and invisible. It would be foolish to think that a writer living in Spain could actually accomplish something meaningful that would be read by many. The writer, from Ismael’s perspective—and possibly Moix’s—is an abused clown.

Walter’s circulation outside of the *gauche divine* is unclear. Ayala argues that readership was undefined in the Franco era, and while this observation remains largely accurate in Moix’s case, she could rely on the small *gauche divine* to read her novels, though they would do so with a gendered lens. Some, such as Perriam et al. and Gonzalo Sobejano, have thought of Moix mainly as a poet. In their literary history, Perriam and his co-authors focus on Moix as a poet and refer to *Julia* and *Walter* in the thematic context of the “lesbian narratives” (199). These authors, like other literary historians, do not evaluate *Walter* in terms of form.

Walter tends to be excluded from the literary histories of the period to which it belongs. Bradley Epps, Sobejano, and David Herzberger have characterized and summarized the

evolution of the novel in Spain during the period that starts with *Tiempo de Silencio* and (though usually not recognized) *Ritmo Lento* and ends with novels of the mid to late 1970s. These three critics omit Moix from their studies.

Sobejano analyzes the way novels by several leading authors of the 1960s and 1970s contain theory of the novel (1983 and 1986); however, he does not mention Moix despite the fact the introductory section to *Walter* is highly concerned with theory of the novel. Sobejano omits Moix from his discussion of the contemporary novel that is “un texto creativo autónomo” or avoids the referent (1986, 352). He specifically names at least 16 authors who have aspired in some way towards a more creatively autonomous text, but Moix, who—due to her ability to write without heavily relying on the referent—is arguably the first to fully achieve this goal, is not mentioned. In his 1986 article, Sobejano focuses on the novels of the “renovación formal” from 1962 to 1973 (353). These novels, he says, contain the roots of the “metanovela en España” (353). *Walter* is excluded but could be said to mark the end of the formal renovation or, because of its allusions to *Julia* and *Rebecca* and the futile nature of writing a novel, the beginning of the metanovel.

While Sobejano does not treat Moix as a novelist, he does refer to the *novísimos*, the poetic group to which Moix notoriously belonged. The new novel, says Sobejano, was like the poetry of the *novísimos*, in the sense of being “culturalista” (1986, 355). Thus, Sobejano indirectly acknowledges Moix’s poetry, but not *Walter*, for formal innovations.

Epps indirectly explains part of the reason why he omits Moix from his description of the novel of the 1960s and 1970s: she is a woman. Men, he says, dominated the dialogue about the novel. The few Spanish women, he says,

who did manage to figure in critical overviews and editorial promotions--Carmen Laforet, Ana María Matute, Carmen Martín Gaite--were generally relegated to particular positions that figure only fitfully, if at all, in the male-dominated cultural debates of the day. For the questioning of the text in Spain is carried out most resoundingly by such men as Juan Goytisolo, Torrente Ballester, and Benet. (201)

Joan Lippman Brown has also commented that had it not been written by a woman, *Ritmo Lento* would have been consistently recognized as equally important as *Tiempo de Silencio* (1987, 102). If the well-established Martín Gaite has not been recognized for her role in questioning the text, one would expect Moix, who was considered extremely young when she published *Walter*, to receive even less attention for the same reason.

While some have thought of Moix mainly as a poet, others have viewed her at best as a writer who was not integrated into the corpus of writers who dominated the discourse about the novel. She has never enjoyed the broad readership of Laforet, Rodoreda, Matute, Martín Gaite or the more contemporary Tusquets. Batlló argues that readers were not ready for *Julia* because it expresses extreme weakness and vulnerability (83), but Marsé and Tusquets disagreed with this argument (2005). The difficulty in defining Moix’s readership, or the fact that her readership fluctuates, should not indicate that her novels lack literary value.

Walter should be evaluated in the context of the most respected writers who were attempting to innovate within the novel. The frequently-read Martín-Santos, undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the time and the one who initiated the transition towards privileging language over the referent, does not do so to the extent that Moix does in *Walter*. Juan Benet's *Volverás a Región* approximated the anti-referential novel (at least with regard to the contemporary referent) more than Martín-Santos and his followers, but again, not as closely as does *Walter*.

Moix actually accomplished the independent work of art, but the reason she has limited readership might be exactly because *Walter* shuns the referents that readers often depend on for a sense of orientation and grounding. This factor would explain why so few read *Walter*, her ultimate creation. It would also explain why a non-Spaniard, Julio Cortázar, appreciated *Walter* immediately: as a Hispanic-American he did not have the same need to read works that referred to the political context in Spain. *Walter* may only recently be arriving at the point in which it is perfectly relevant for today's reader and no longer too far ahead of its time. The rejection of referents that date the novel is one factor that makes it relevant today. Ironically, a novel from 1973 may be more relevant now than when it was originally published.

Moix is recognized as a fine writer, but not read or generally taught in high school or college classrooms. One could consider her early novels a cult product because interest in it surges and fades. The lack of readership and the sporadic interest in her work, however, should not indicate an artistic judgment. Her skill at portraying the inner conflicts that have arisen from adolescence is exceptional, but more remarkable is her ability to portray angst and grief in a formally innovative and complex novel. As a member of the *gauche divine*, Moix "seized the moment" and with *Walter* wrote a novel that captures the cultural and aesthetic innovations of an intense and exciting era.

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