

PUNK JOURNALISM: SEARCHING FOR AUTHENTICITY AND IDENTITY IN ROBERT  
JUAN-CANTAVELLA'S 'EL DORADO'

by

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## ABSTRACT

In his 2008 work *El Dorado*, author Robert Juan-Cantavella explores what it means to be ‘Spanish’ through what he claims to be a new genre called *Punk Journalism*. The protagonist (Juan-Cantavella's alter ego) claims that Punk Journalism is the bastard son of American author Hunter S. Thompson’s *Gonzo Journalism*. Several articles have been written about this work, but few have done so with academic rigor—most notably are Maria Egea’s *De Las Vegas a Marina D’or. O como llegar desde el New Journalism norteamericano de Hunter S. Thompson hasta la nueva narrativa española de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2011) and *Tanteos, calas y pesquisas en el dossier genético digital de ‘El Dorado’ de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2014) by Bénédicte Vauthier. While these works tackle the events surrounding its publication—neither of them take a holistic study focused on the themes of authenticity and identity (pertaining to both the narrative, and the publication itself).

The first part of this study focuses on the authenticity of the novel itself and serves to validate or discredit critic Maria Egea’s claim that Escargot’s literary creation, *Punk Journalism*, deserves to be considered “algo nuevo” (Egea 122). I accomplish this through comparative analysis, juxtaposing *El Dorado* with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) while also addressing Maria Egea’s claims. The second part of this investigation reveals that identity is intrinsically linked to authority and power and that Escargot’s inability to pinpoint the identity of his nation is due more to a symptom of language than Spain itself. This study also finds that although Juan-Cantavella's work is a derivative of *El Dorado*, due to its scope, subjects, and style—Escargot does indeed achieve the creation of ‘something new.’ This newness comes to fruition through Escargot’s use of hyper self-awareness, extreme narrative experiments like switching from first

person to third person omniscient at will, increased political commentary, and a more obvious desire to 'trick' the reader.

## PREFACE

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Austin R. Miller.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PJ: Punk Journalism

NJ: New Journalism

AKA: Also Known As

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## DEDICATION

To God and Family for always being the reason I do everything.

To my wife: Thank you for supporting me throughout this process and taking care of our child while I spent long hours in the library. Without your understanding and happy-go-lucky spirit this would not be possible.

To my daughter: Thanks for all the monkey laughs, spunk and joy you bring to my life—you've given me more motivation to finish this than you'll ever know.



## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to explore the notion of *authentic identity* in Spanish author Juan Cantavella's 2008 work *El Dorado*. Little has been written about this boundary pushing work, and by exploring authenticity from diverse angles—we'll be able to study both the narrative role of authenticity as well as the originality of the novel itself. This latter point is especially interesting as both the novel's narrator *Escargot* and critics (Maria Egea) suggest that he has created 'something new' with his self-named narrative style *Punk Journalism*. *El Dorado* is unique in the fact that it takes an American style of investigative journalism (Gonzo Journalism) and applies it to Spain in order to find out more about nation and self.

Authenticity and identity overlap in many ways and will form the focus of our investigation. In order to declare something 'authentic' we must first identify (or define) the entity and its counterparts. Likewise, in order to identify anything, we must seek to understand what makes something authentic or unique enough to merit a signifier such as a designation of nationality or genre. Thus to build upon one is to build upon the other, and throughout this investigation we will be referring to both concepts—sometimes individually and sometimes together as the singular phrase *authentic identity*.

By analyzing this work, we stand to gain a lot in terms of scholarship like: defining what has been proposed to us as a 'new' way of writing, getting a modern day treatise on what it means to be authentically 'Spanish,' and adding depth to an under explored novel by an author who attempts to cross traditional boundaries at a breakneck pace. In light of these things I argue that for *Escargot*, Spain's identity is intrinsically tied to power—and that exploring the idea of nation requires the exploration of one's own identity. I also argue that *Punk Journalism* does indeed merit to be considered 'something new'—not so much in terms of ground-breaking style,

but in terms of scope and context. Throughout this study we will borrow, reference, and dialogue with such theoretical notions as: Juan Prada's *apropiacionismo*, Roland Barthes' work on historical discourse and language, and Bakhtinian inversion.

At the end of the novel, Escargot calls Punk Journalism a failed experience—due to its inability to fully uncover the essence of El Dorado (Spanish identity). I argue this is less an indictment on Punk Journalism and more a symptom of language. This position is formed in part on the back of Barthes' study on historical narrative and the nature of language, *The Rustle of Language* (1968). While Barthes' comments are applicable to our study of literary authenticity—Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of inversion is most useful as we attempt to unpack Escargot's portrayal of personal/national identity and the nature identity itself. Escargot has a penchant for perverting the authority figure's all-powerful image and bringing it to a base level. In one instance (which we will discuss further), Escargot role-plays as a priest and deconstructs ceremonies and emblems of authority—portraying them as theatrical pieces. As Bakhtin points out, these things possess the ability to subvert power and extend far beyond the purpose of jovial laughter.

As previously mentioned, Escargot's main objective is to find El Dorado AKA Spanish identity. As he searches for what it means to be Spanish—it becomes apparent that he will first have to answer *what nation and identity mean*. This inquiry unravels a waterfall of postmodernist thinking that involves questioning the idea of fixed definitions, the ability of language to capture history, and the existence of individual identity in a commodified society. Furthermore, as he studies the Spanish landscape, his searches keep leading him to investigate the powers at be including the government, the Catholic Church, and big business. These questions of authenticity

and identity also lead him to question his own place in society, the nature of writing—particularly Punk Journalism.

Prior to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), Raoul Duke (pseudonym/alter ego of Thompson) is already in existence, having served as protagonist for both *Hell's Angels* (1966) and several essays to be published in *The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved* (1970). Likewise, by the time Escargot (Juan Cantavella's pseudonym/alter ego) makes his appearance in *El Dorado*, he already has a literary lineage, appearing in *Proust Fiction* (2005), *Dogma*, *Lateral*, *Quimera* y *La fiera literaria* (2002-2008). Maria Egea writes:

Trebor Escargot ha adquirido tal relevancia que resulta difícil diferenciar entre protagonista y autor, algo no extraño en la historia de la literatura o del periodismo. Los textos de Juan-Cantavella han sido protagonizados, y muchas veces firmados, por Escargot, su alter ego o su pseudónimo, según la relevancia que le queramos dar a este disfraz narrativo. En definitiva, una máscara desde la que el autor proyecta, una piel que encarna –como Fígaro para Larra– en la que se siente cómodo, y que adquiere autonomía. (129)

In an interview with the BBC, Thompson comments on the very real conundrum of transcendental characters, stating that when universities asked him to speak—he never knew who they wanted, Hunter or Raoul. Likewise, we (the reader) are inclined to make the same distinction. In

doing so we are better able to understand subversive criticisms that often rely heavily on subversive humor—irony such as this requires us to distinguish between fact and fiction so that we might know where exaggeration, inversion, or satire occur.

As we look at Cantavella's alter ego, we see that there is an added layer of complication to his identity. Egea writes:

Hay una reivindicación de la copia, el plagio que cobra nuevos sentidos, significados diferentes desde el hoy. La distinción entre homenaje y parodia se diluye en estos textos que toman de la literatura, pero también del cine, del cómic, del ensayo teórico, de las series de televisión, del mundo de Internet del periodismo... Todo género es susceptible de ser ficcionalizado, revertido y recreado. La crítica se combina con la novela, se convierte y se integra en ella.  
(123)

Escargot is not just constantly aware of his influences but outright impersonates them as evidenced by the times he morphs into the comic book character and Gonzo disciple—*Spider Scar-got* (273). In doing so, Escargot takes 'influence' to a much more aggressive level, outright stealing and impersonating those that inspire him. This abrasive act of impersonation is a carryover from *Proust Fiction* where the question of *originality in art* plays a central role.

By nature, Punk Journalism necessitates an investigation that comes at it from diverse angles—the work contains various narrational voices, makes bold claims about its originality and is incredibly hybridized, non-traditional, and understudied. Egea's vanguard work takes on the task of defining Punk Journalism in her article *De Las Vegas a Marina D'or. O como llegar desde el*

*New Journalism norteamericano de Hunter S. Thompson hasta la nueva narrativa española de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2011). And while she does well to trace the literary movements and works that precede and surround the publication of *El Dorado*, her claims (and Escargot's) need more vetting. For this reason, I've chosen to further investigate the work, but from a different lens—*comparative study*.

Egea's article quotes Thompson on several occasions, but her focus (as her title states) is on tracing the historical journey and lineage of *El Dorado* and by no means serves as a strict comparison. Furthermore, while most of the articles written focus solely on the potentially 'original' literary devices or format of the novel—none of them take a holistic view on the topic of identity. To the contrary, our investigation not only studies the potential otherness of Punk Journalism, but also analyzes Escargot's portrayals of Spain, individuality, and the topic of identity itself. Thus our study gives as much attention to *what* is written as *how* it is written.

Bénédicte Vauthier also writes a convincing article about *El Dorado* titled *Tanteos, calas y pesquisas en el dossier genético digital de 'El Dorado' de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2014). Vauthier's work focuses on the intertextuality between *El Dorado* and its corresponding website [punkjournalism.net](http://punkjournalism.net), also created by author Robert Juan-Cantavella. Vauthier writes: "...pretendo bosquejar el telón de fondo metodológico (la *critique génétique*) en el que se inscriben estas primeras calas en los 'manuscritos de trabajo' de *El Dorado*, novela —aportaje— de Robert Juan-Cantavella, que se puede adscribir a la estética del *Punk —o Pulp— Journalism*, variante o 'forma bastarda' (p.189) de Periodismo Gonzo. O no" (312). His study helps add contextual value by analyzing the rough drafts, anecdotal photos and notes surrounding the origin of its publication.

When we take a step back and look at the landscape, little formal research has been done on this work. Some such as Jorge Carrión and Juan Francisco Ferré give their thoughts on the novelty that is *El Dorado*—but these writings are less academic and more editorial in nature. Through comparative study, textual analysis, and literary theory—we can help add perspective to this work. At the end of this investigation the reader should walk away with a better understanding of the illusive nature of identity and its interconnectedness to power, the shortcomings of language to define Spanish identity, and why Egea’s statements on the ‘newness’ of Punk Journalism are valid so long as we view them through the lens of appropriation.

## CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING PUNK JOURNALISM

The first part of this investigation will focus on textual identity or more commonly — genre. Throughout our investigation, genre should be understood as the categorization of literature by genus. And while it is not often that the form of a novel takes precedence over its content, *El dorado* arguably edges this line. With its consistent references to genre, intense self-awareness, abundant meta-dialogue, and presumed relationship between real-life author Juan-Cantavella and fictional protagonist Escargot—the temptation to ask whether or not Punk Journalism is worthy of being considered novel, is not just an intellectual curiosity—it is a question forced upon us by the author.

As we study this text, we will try and better understand the nature of Punk Journalism and how it relates to Juan Cantavella and its self-proclaimed relative *Gonzo Journalism*. Doing so will help us contextualize and better understand the componential elements of Punk Journalism—allowing us to get at the heart of a proposed genre that Cantavella considers potentially capable of capturing Spain’s identity.

To achieve such a task, we will be drawing from Hunter S. Thompson’s vanguard work, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) (which Escargot readily juxtaposes with his own work), and Maria Egea’s study of the topic *De Las Vegas a Marina D’or. O como llegar desde el New Journalism norteamericano de Hunter S. Thompson hasta la nueva narrativa española de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2011). serving to either validate or contradict her statement that Punk Journalism deserves to be considered ‘something new.’ A comparative approach gives us a distinct advantage when it comes to defining whether or not *El Dorado* is a truly authentic work. Just as biologist compare potential ‘new findings’ with what is known (i.e. genus and species), comparing

a purportedly new genre with its closest relatives will give us the most insight into what is or isn't novel about Punk Journalism.

Escargot writes at the height of corruption and the rise of the populist movements like the 15M, while *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is written in the middle of the Vietnam War, and the fallout of the hippie movement. Cantavella's work focuses on the excesses of Marina d'Or and the pageantry of the Pope's visit while Thompson's writings focus on the 'aftermath' of the 60's American Dream and its failure to manifest. In this sense the writers exist at different points of similar sociopolitical timeline. By 1972 capitalism in the United States (Las Vegas) is well established, and the populist (hippie) movement is on the decline. To the contrary, in Spain (2006), capitalism is relatively new in comparison with the United States and the populist movement (15M) is gaining traction.

With capitalism well established and the populist movement coming to a close, Thompson has greater context and is able to take a more analytical role—juxtaposing the present with the past. Escargot however, is right in the thick of it—watching things as they unfold in what is a relatively 'up and coming' town. Citing several examples, Egea writes: “Thompson se confesó como un political junkie y Escargot (o Juan-Cantavella) podría secundar esta categoría. Ninguno elude la política, y aún menos las drogas; las referencias ideológicas son concretas: a la Norteamérica de Nixon, a la España de Zapatero y de Mariano Rajoy” (131). In order to properly set the stage for these novels, I will briefly touch on both political parties and the atmosphere referenced in the narrative.

Leading up to the publication of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) are several key political events in the United States. In 1968 civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. is assassi-



nated and following Lyndon B. Johnson and Nixon is elected in 1969 as a member of the Republican Party (right leaning). While the Democratic convention was hectic and bitterly split, the Republicans show a sense of order. Nixon's platform involves promises of talks with Russia and China and he publicly shows support for ending the conflict in Vietnam. Describing the times in *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*, Mark Lytle writes:

Through 1970 Americans battled over the Vietnam War, racial integration, the environment, popular culture, and the rights of women, gays, consumers, Latinos and Native Americans...No longer would the nation face the level of civic disorder it had from the summer of 1967 to the spring of 1970. Skirmishes would break out, demonstrators would march, but the shootings at Kent and Jackson State introduced a more sober tone...Protests now seemed more localized, less sustained. (357)

Lytle points out that protests are more localized and do not carry the same weight as they might have in years previous. The localization of protests is perhaps telling of a more fragmented national narrative. As Thompson points out, after 60's—the movement is no longer under the singular banner of transcendentalism as paralleled by the decline of LSD.

Although published in 2008, *El Dorado* takes place in 2006. Some of the stand-out real-life political events surrounding the narrative include the rise of the 15M movement and the dubious construction of Marina d'Or. On the topic of Marina d'Or's controversial construction, *Idealista* writes: "Isaura Navarro, diputada de izquierda unida, denuncia la más llamativa: 'dos

de los seis concejales del partido popular de cabanes<sup>1</sup> que votaron a favor del proyecto trabajan para el dueño de Marina d'or. Dos hijas de los máximos dirigentes del psoe de cabanes también. La secretaria general del psoe de oropesa está en la nómina de Marina d'or. El resultado: psoe más pp igual a casi 20 millones de metros cuadrados de urbanizaciones.”

And in 2008, *Spanish Property Insight* writes:

It's also a mystery how Marina d'Or ever got the go-ahead from the Coastal department of the environmental ministry to build what looks like a wall of cement so close to the beach, when the law explicitly prohibits that. Marina d'Or is implicated in ongoing investigations into urban planning corruption scandals, both in Oropesa and other parts of Spain like Cabanes. The owner of Marina d'Or – Jesus Ger – is being investigated for perverting the course of justice and influence peddling.

Like Thompson's narrative, Escargot tends to focus on the controversial, the ugly, and the grotesque aspects that surround him such as buffet goers who do not know when to stop, the commodification of culture, oppressive authority figures, and the corrosive effects of money. This particular focus on the negative creates a suffocating and hostile environment where there is a lack of answers and absolute knowledge. Privy only to the protagonist's thoughts, we are obligated to empathize with him while simultaneously being suspicious of the characters that surround him. This extra level of empathy created through first person narration takes us one step

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<sup>1</sup> A municipality located in Valencia

further from journalism, as we can no longer be completely impartial to the details that are reported.

Through his narrative, Juan-Cantavella brings the question of Spanish identity into modern times, creating one of the most genre-bending rock 'n' roll takes on the difficulties of defining the Spanish nation. After receiving a mysterious assignment from his editor to locate 'El Dorado' (the heart of Spanish identity), the journalist begins his search in the tourist district, Marina d'Or. His editor writes, "Me han pedido algo divertido y fresco y tiene que ser en la playa. Conviértete en uno de ellos...yo he pensado en Marina d'Or, un complejo vacacional muy cachondo...no digas que vas de nuestra parte" (29). Despite the fact that the editor presents the objective of finding El Dorado in Marina d'Or as an easy task, Escargot immediately detects the irony and expresses his confusion at the assignment. The artificiality of the place maddens Escargot to the point of fleeing with his friend Brona. No longer convinced that El Dorado exists in such a place, the journalist moves his search to Valencia where the Pope is set to make a visit<sup>2</sup>. Like Marina d'Or, Valencia does little to avail him of his problematic search. The novel ends with him in a bar dejectedly drinking a Mai Tai. As will be explained in detail later, the act of him closing his laptop and drinking a Mai Tai is a symbolic declaration of defeat in the intellectual battle that is defining Spain, self, and even human existence.

Serving as one of the few critical pieces written on *El Dorado*, Egea's claims deserve critical analysis as little has been written in response to not only her paper, but Cantavella's work itself. Egea notes that Cantavella most fittingly belongs to the 'Generación Nocilla' or 'Afterpop' movement. Other authors who would fall in this category include: Agustín Fernández Mayo,

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<sup>2</sup> It is now widely known that this event was marred in corruption and organized by Gürtel. More about this can be found here: [http://www.eldiario.es/temas/visita\\_del\\_papa\\_a\\_valencia/](http://www.eldiario.es/temas/visita_del_papa_a_valencia/)

Jorge Carrión, Manuel Villa, and Eloy Fernández Porta. Eloy Fernández Porta suggests that it is Afterpop which would require literary criticism to redefine itself—a testament to the movements elusive nature. Throughout this chapter, our objective will be to test Egea’s theory by analyzing her statements in conjunction with the novel and the historical record. We will not only revisit some of her ideas, but consider new areas of study such as sociopolitical influences and the journalism-novel dichotomy<sup>3</sup> in order to ensure we provide a more thorough answer to the question—*what is Punk Journalism*.

Thompson’s transcendental work *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a raucous first person journalistic novel featuring protagonist Raoul Duke (a pseudonym for Thompson). The work began as an editorial assignment given to Thompson by *Sports Illustrated Magazine* to investigate the Mint 400. However, as Thompson interjects himself into the narrative, he quickly becomes the focal point of the work and the car race fades into anecdotal obscurity. The narrative begins with Raoul and his lawyer buddy Dr. Gonzo (in actuality an infamous lawyer/activist named Oscar Zeta Acosta) in the desert as they contemplate which drugs will best suit them for their journey to Vegas. As they travel, Thompson bounces back and forth from carnal and visceral distractions, to the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of the human and (more particularly) American condition.

At the time of its publication, America is in a period of transition with the golden era of hippiedom ending, the Vietnam war still raging on, and the ever controversial Richard Nixon in the Oval Office. Meanwhile the golden era of New Journalism is also coming to a close. As such, Thompson emerges at the tail end of an era, acting as the bastard child of the movement that found its influence with the Beats, and its founder in Thomas Wolfe. Although Thompson

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Wolfe describes New Journalism as a journalism dressed as a novel.

follows in the steps of his literary forefathers by writing journalistic novels that do not shy away from social issues, politics, the use of first person investigation and subjective analysis—he quickly establishes himself as the creator of a new genre which he deems *Gonzo Journalism*.

Having followed nearly a generation after the golden era of NJ—Thompson’s works take the blueprint of their lineage while adding new twists. By mixing fact with fiction, his works are notably ‘less journalistic’ than those of Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, et al. But by the time the genre falls into Cantavella’s hands, we are two maybe three (if we count the Beat generation as the originators) from its origins. And as each new iteration adds its own twists, the new copies become less and less factual and journalistic and instead become increasingly laced with homage, parody, literary devices, and novelistic contraptions. Such is the luxury of those who come after—the ability to parody something once established. By 1972 Thompson is writing at the tail end of the New Journalism movement, the genre is well enough established that if he had chosen to do so, Thompson could have easily dialoged with his literary predecessors. But unlike Juan-Cantavella, the Gonzo journalist chooses not to do so.

By the time of Cantavella’s *El Dorado*, the NJ movement is long gone<sup>4</sup>, but as he does so often with his subjects of investigation—he digs at its historical roots making numerous mentions of Thompson and Spider Scargot. Unlike Thompson, Cantavella is constantly in a state of self-evaluation as he engages the reader in a meta-literary discussion about how Punk Journalism differs from Gonzoism and why his work should be considered an ‘aportaje’ and not a ‘re-reportaje.’ His exploration centers around questions of identity including ‘originality in art’—a question that serves as an extenuation of his previous work *Proust Fiction* (2005).

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<sup>4</sup> Although permutations will always exist, most sources reference the New Journalism Movement as belonging to the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Some critics such as W. Ross Winterowd and Louis Menand think of his work as “...little more than popular fluff and the ravings of a drug-soaked ego-maniac, telling the reader nothing of importance beyond the writer’s own experience (Colvill 1). Colvill refutes this view by pointing out that “...Thompson’s writing requires a kind of analysis that studies the text from a non-linear, multi-dimensional perspective” (1). It is for this reason we are considering multiple angles using such varied lenses as: journalism, novel, society, history, meta-commentary, and critical dialogue. Rather than take on identity directly, we are adhering to the basic tenant of New Historicism which is to work our way from anecdotal evidence towards the heart of the matter. Contrary to the majority of the authors involved in the New Journalism movement, Cantavella joins the movement with the background of an author not a journalist. For several years he was Editor in Chief at the magazine *Lateral*, in 2003 he received his doctorate in Humanities (emphasis on literature) at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona and before the publication of *El Dorado*, he had already written several novels like *Proust Fiction* (2005) and *Otro* (2001). Cantavella’s style also shows a writer with the DNA of an author. In *El Dorado* The narration jumps from first to third person, this change is generally not acceptable in conventional journalism (the majority of traditional journalism being written omnisciently). And while many journalists have written in first person, few have taken the liberty to change the narrator media-res just because they begin to feel cowardly.

Much has been written about Thompson’s innovative style of journalism, but little to nothing has been written about Escargot’s (Juan-Cantavella) own attempts at genre-bending (Punk Journalism) which he produces through a technique he calls “aportaje” (aportage) (188), a play on words with ‘reportaje’ (reportage), something he explains is a mixture of lies and truths

where the main story can be found in the anecdotal rather than the principle narrative. The closest and most comprehensive critical commentary available on Punk Journalism is María Egea's article *De Las Vegas a Marina D'or. O como llegar desde el New Journalism norteamericano de Hunter S. Thompson hasta la nueva narrativa española de Robert Juan-Cantavella* (2011). Egea writes: Novela, periodismo, gonzo, ficción, cuento, punk, ensayo, reportaje, 'aportaje', fragmentación discursiva, diálogos, monólogos interiores, descripciones, comunicados, telegramas, emails, notas de prensa, noticias radiofónicas, canciones, eslóganes, todo cabe para recrear géneros, para releer tradiciones periodísticas y literarias, y llegar a construir algo nuevo. (109) Egea claims that Escargot is able to dialogue with past genres and mediums, but more strikingly—she claims he is able to create 'something new.' But what exactly is this 'something' and how does it differ from its predecessors (if at all)?

Although genre is worthy of discussion, our focus has and continues to be the sub-surface analysis. This story within a story is best uncovered by paying attention to the seemingly small details of the narrative instead of playing into the magician's hand—Escargot's purposeful attempt at distraction. In lieu of determining a specific genre, we will borrow from Egea's much safer terminology and determine if Escargot is able to achieve 'something new.' Egea's analysis is safer in the fact that it opts to use the term 'something' instead of 'genre.' The term *something* creates a buffer, defending against the need for Punk Journalism to be determined as a genre, sub-genre, or an entirely different entity.

We will carry out our task by dialoging with Egea's proposals and analyzing Escargot/Thompson's writing in conjunction. Be it individual or national, defining identity is tricky business. Objects and concepts are constantly changing and being shaped by those who interact with them. In Jason Mosser's article titled *What's Gonzo about Gonzo Journalism?*, he writes:

Thompson later confessed that he regarded *Vegas* as a failed experiment in Gonzo journalism because he had to revise his prose to create the effect of raw spontaneity, and yet, as multiple interviews testify, he defined Gonzo differently at different times. In a way, Thompson seemed stuck with a label that he didn't create and that he could never completely define. (87)

Although María Angulo Egea proposes that Escargot does in fact create something new, her article does less to define or defend this statement, and more to trace its lineage. Her commentary focuses on the synonymous and self-created term (by Escargot) for Punk Journalism, *aportaje*, and its etymology, as well as the historical characters and literary movements that lead to Punk Journalism. In turn, our primary focus is to compare and contrast *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* with *El Dorado* to see if Egea's suspicions are correct. To add value and further Egea's research, we will try to focus on areas of study (in regards to the comparative analysis of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *El Dorado*) that have either been ignored, given little commentary, or deserve further consideration.

We will break our investigation down into two sections—*Journalistic Style* and *Context* in which we will cover points of literary interest and move into the socio-historical aspects that affect the novels and their authors. In attempting to define Punk Journalism through comparative analysis, we are furthering our understanding of identity and authenticity's role in *El dorado*. Determining the validity of 'newness' requires us to use something as a reference so we might determine proximity and likeness. Being that Escargot claims his work to be the bastard son of



*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, comparative analysis between the two works serves as a logical methodology for investigative purposes. To begin our comparison, we will focus on journalistic style, this includes literary techniques and devices as well as investigative practices.

## **Journalistic Style**

### *Investigatory Practices*

A central tenant of New Journalism is the immersive process of the author. He or she becomes a natural part of the narrative and lives as those he wishes to investigate in order to truly understand them. As Escargot points out, this is a double edged sword—for the immersive process can be entrenching and the process of reification can consume the outsider to the point where he no longer remembers the reason for investigating, no longer swimming against the current—but becoming one of many (mass culture). This process differs from traditional journalism where a level of ‘professionalism’ and distance must be maintained as to not create an author’s bias. Thus immersion, and the methods of investigation deserve to be scrutinized as they play a large role in Escargot’s writings and how we should view them.

Egea notes that with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson “...was going to shed new light on the New Journalism proposals, improving the immersion process using drugs until he gets implied personally in his reports and taking all his narrative influences from the 50’s beat movement” (110). She goes on to explain that Escargot does much the same on the other side of the Atlantic as he walks the streets of Marina d’Or. In Part III of *El Dorado*, Escargot takes Thompson’s immersion tactics to a new level—going so far as to have his partner in crime (Brona) role-play the part of Bishop. There is no audience, no one to deceive, no one to impress except for a single and anonymous demographic—the reader. Therefore, the immediate and prac-

tical implications of disguise such as the need to hide and evade physical danger (or incarceration in Thompson's case) do not apply. This act is not to physically deceive those around him or to gain unfettered access to an exclusive event<sup>5</sup>, rather it is a tongue and cheek exercise meant to prove a point to Brona and the reader(s), but what point might Escargot be trying to make to the reader with this role playing exercise? Speaking to Brona, Escargot writes that “en realidad no eres un obispo, ya lo sé...tú lo sabes y yo también lo sé, OK, los dos lo sabemos, pero el lector de mi aportaje no tiene por qué saberlo...” (290). This intentional and vicious lie as Escargot characterizes it, is one of the things that Escargot claims differentiates him from the Gonzo tradition. But as the Punk Journalist points out, his lies are truths in disguise.

As Escargot interviews Bishop Bronco Vareta AKA Rouco Varela AKA Brona—his questions are sharp, pointed, and inarguably critical of the Catholic Church's attempts at covering up its 2001 molestation scandal as well as its doctrine of family structure. This might well be interpreted as a quick and expedient way for Cantavella to make a few pointed criticisms at the Catholic Church. This act of taking on the Bishop's identity is one example among many where Escargot plays with the fluidity of information authority—questioning such figures as authors, reporters, clergy, and politicians. This reoccurring game forms a central theme in the novel and leads us to believe there might be a broader over-arching criticism at play—*the invalidity of authority figures*. By focusing on the process of power rather than power itself, Escargot avoids projecting himself as an anarchist or full blown nihilist.

The way he inverts authority creates a Bakhtinian setting where irony and humor serve to bring those who place themselves on an altar down to a base level. In turn, through mimicry—

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<sup>5</sup> In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Raol and Dr. Gonzo disguise themselves as private investigators to gain access to a drug conference.

the outcast Punk Journalist is able to transform himself into a voice of authority—as clergy and journalist. As Bakhtin comments, *‘official’ authority is subverted most of all by laughter, a current of slippery ambivalence*. Through laughter, “...the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint...Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter” (Bakhtin 66). This ‘ambivalence’ is created by inversion’s ability to make the observer question authority. Authority is that which drapes itself in robes, hides behind high walls in castles, surrounds itself through archaic tradition and enshrouds itself in mystery by keeping its distance from that which is common and base. But when Escargot perverts these authority figures and makes them laughably accessible, he forces the observer to question the intangibility of their position.

Escargot writes, “Vas a ser un obispo, de hecho ya eres un obispo, así que empieza a pensar como tal y junta las piernas...” (290). He freely assigns his companion the role of Bishop as if it were simply a name, not a calling. It seems to Escargot that the current state of authority necessitates no real credentials, this is also evidenced by his manipulation of credit cards/signatures, clerical titles (AKA Bishop), real-estate titles, press credentials, and even the title of author. During his interview with the ‘bishop,’ his questions serve to demystify the sense of infallibility amongst authority in what appears to be an attempt to show the Church not as a mythological power but as a system built of fallible individuals. In this case, the authority figures under the scope are the clergy who use their power much like lawyers to interpret the scriptures. This latter detail adds another layer to Escargot’s criticisms which is the imperfectness of language (which we will discuss in more detail later). The Punk Journalist records his conversation with the Bishop (Brona), and writes:

No hace mucho, La Voz de Galicia sacaba a la luz pública en sus páginas de Sociedad que en un cajón de la oficina de cierto empleado de la Santa Sede alguien encontró ochenta y siete gramos de cocaína. Según información del rotativo, se trata de alguien que trabajaba en el Palacio de Gobierno del Vaticano y que confesó consumir cocaína, aunque negó las acusaciones de tráfico.

-Lo recuerdo, señor Trébol.

-¿Y?

-No sé, dígame usted. ¿y?

-¿Qué le parece?

-No me parece nada más de lo que tiene que parecerme, amigo gasterópodo, al César lo que es del César...¿Cuál era su pregunta?

-Ninguna don Bronco (292-293)

Escargot's questions are politically charged and often preceded by skewed premises that lead to predetermined answers. In some cases, what he says are not questions at all, just statements—showing that Escargot's priority is to share his own feelings. The long dialogue, his non-inquisitive statements, and his questions that are more of the 'gotcha' variety instead of 'beginners mind' queries, are indicative of someone who's not as interested in listening as he is telling—telling what he thinks of religious authority. This however is only an affirmation of what we suspected from the beginning of his 'experiment'—after all an interview with one's self could only

reveal internal monologue. Although interviews form part of the investigatory process for journalists, this highly opinionated and feeling-based writing style shows a process that is mostly literary.

Discussing his own writing style, Escargot writes:

Un aportaje no es sólo una mentira, también es una verdad. No falsifica aunque sí samplea. No miente. No es eso exactamente. Escribe sobre una cosa diferente a la que dice contar eso es todo. O mejor, hace las dos cosas. Dicho de otro modo, el escritor siempre aporta a los hechos sucedidos otros que no existieron tanto. Los aseá. Les da un nuevo uso. Nada más que eso. (188)

According to the journalist, his aim is to repurpose culture, ideology, literature, and society. To do so he uses lies and tricks for the purported purpose of exposing of truth. Through his abrasive writing style, he reveals his plans and intentions to the reader beforehand:

Me refiero a que si en estos momentos apareciese delante de mí una nave espacial gigantesca con la forma del platillo volante más extraño que pueda imaginarse y cargada hasta los topes de marcianos es probable que entonces sí te creyese cualquier mentira con tal de pasar un buen rato y averiguar a santo de qué se disponen a aterrizar precisamente en este enclave privilegiado de la costa de Azahar. Aun si fuese mentira. Qué importa. ¿O no? En realidad no me

estarías creyendo, claro, pero eso es algo que queda entre nosotros y que al final no es tan importante. (23)

Using the UFO as a personification of his ludicrous writing style, Escargot proposes that deciphering the difference between fact and fiction is anecdotal. This point is furthered by his satirization of traditionally established institutions and ideals such as authority, family, and national identity in his attempt to show that social norms are on the same level of ridiculousness as fictitious tales of extraterrestrials. The need for Escargot to explicitly point to this fact shows a mistrust, as if he's fearful that the satirical nature of the work might be lost on his readers. As we will cover in detail later, Thompson does not share this same need to 'kiss and tell,' avoiding the temptation to create a meta-dialogue within the narrative in order to further clarify his purposes.

Where many of Escargot's immersion tactics (the act of getting close to the subject of investigation by trying to blend in) seem to be uncannily steeped in thematic elements and imagery, the great majority of Thompson's immersion tactics appear to be more for temporal needs such as evading arrest. Such is the case of his attendance at the National District Attorney's Drug Conference as well as his desire to get a hold of some priests' robes:

I'd like to get hold of some priests' robes," I said. "They might come in handy in Las Vegas. But there were no costume stores open, and we weren't up to burglarizing a church. "Why bother?" said my attorney. "And you have to remember that a lot of cops are good vicious Catholics. Can you imagine what those bastards would do to us if we got busted all drugged-up and drunk in stolen vestments? Jesus, they'd castrate us! (14)

His references to immersion are not steeped in meta-discussions or metaphorical considerations. Thompson's comments also carry no obvious allegorical references or overt symbolism, instead they highlight an immediate fear of physical punishment or 'castration'—a fear he expresses in several scenarios like: when he finds out his lawyer has drugged a young runaway girl and brought her back to the motel, when he and his lawyer sneak into a drug conference disguised as investigators, and the uncomfortable situation when Dr. Gonzo (Zeta Acosta) pulls a gun on a waitress and slips her a note that says "Back Door Beauty?" (151). Unlike Escargot, his narrative examples of immersion are mostly relegated to short quips that focus on the visceral. This makes it harder for us draw meaning beyond the immediate, forcing us to have patience till the end of the novel where anecdotes start to come together and form a more cohesive narrative.

The whimsical nature of Thompson's immersion style points to a more indulgent and gratuitous style of humor that focuses mostly on the ridiculous and immediate—subversive drug humor, jabs at cops, and depravity. Oppositely, the long-form nature of Escargot's writings surrounded by political and governmental dialogue denote a more overt and exhaustive satire. That's not to say that Thompson's writings do not touch on critical aspects of American Society, only that his critical voice becomes more apparent when analyzed from a holistic view of his work—each of its little and almost insignificant anecdotes combining to form larger themes and critiques of American society.

Likewise, Escargot does not shy away from temporal needs with immersion tactics like his need for camera equipment. But even these banal scenes like purchasing camera equipment (a seemingly ordinary act for any journalist) are shrouded with uncanny details that point to social commentary. As he uses a stolen credit card and forges the signature, we are given seven

paragraphs worth of 'background' radio narration detailing the events of the monarchical bombing, and more specifically the nature of the monarch's ascendance to the throne. His satirical commentary of the pageantry that surrounds monarchy coupled with the ease and timing at which he steals another's identity, show an inversion of identity, authority, and the written word. Escargot is meticulous in this regard, making sure to surround scenes with background details that denote a surface commentary is at play.

Perhaps, the closest Thompson approaches to overt allegory is with his conversation at a food stand that sells five tacos for a dollar. After getting in an argument with his attorney about the validity of such cheap tacos, Thompson speaks with the 'small-town' girl working at the stand whose rudimentary speech reveals to us she is less educated. Thompson asks if they have authentic tacos, the girl seems confused and after a while tells him that they are just hamburgers in taco shells AKA 'taco burgers.' The dialogue of what constitutes a 'true taco' plays into the much broader question of identity and what it means to be American. Thompson proceeds to ask the attendant for help on his assignment. He chronicles the scene that ensues:

Waitress: Hey Lou, you know where the American Dream is?

Att'y (to Duke): She's asking the cook if he knows where the American Dream is.

Waitress: Five tacos, one taco burger. Do you know where the American Dream is?

Lou: What's that? What is it?

Att'y: Well, we don't know, we were sent out here from San Francisco to look for the American Dream, by a magazine, to cover it.



Lou: Oh, you mean a place. (164)

The conversation that takes place about authentic culture, commodification, and capitalism brings into focus the American story. We are not spoon fed any answers in regards to authenticity (for example, the question of *when does a taco stop being a taco*), but we do learn that these lower class workers are not even aware of the American Dream's existence. It is as if the American Dream which is never quite defined by Thompson, does not form part of the working class narrative. In *Fear and loathing in American literature: Freedom, the American dream, and Hunter S. Thompson* (2009), Elric Colvill analyzes the taco stand incident and writes "The trauma of experience leaves Raoul with more questions than answers, and the same applies to everyone who seeks an ideal—if the American Dream was so easy to locate, everyone could take advantage of it" (41).

The cashier's ineptness shown in the conversation preceding Thompson's questions about the 'American Dream' make it unlikely that he is expecting to find a direct answer to his question, leaving us to believe that the Gonzo journalist cares more about *how* the attendant answers not *what* she answers. This answer beneath the surface, is something Escargot preaches throughout his novel, admonishing the reader to be weary of the magician's hand and to always search for hidden truths in actions. In this rare case, his literary forefather presents us with a cryptic conversation that reveals Thompson's belief that the American Dream is only for the elite.

Escargot's immersive investigatory practices break the traditional journalistic approach of third party observer and enter the realm of influencer. Escargot has an assignment to search for El dorado, but like Thompson, *he* becomes the story. Both authors use similar investigatory

practices, but Escargot's use of immersion lends itself to a more overt sense of allegory—challenging the role of authority at every twist and turn. And while Escargot and Thompson use disguises to immerse themselves, both use non-traditional investigatory practices go far beyond aesthetics—extending into the realm of consciousness with mind altering drugs.

### *Investigating Under the Influence*

Another investigatory practice that cannot be ignored is the obsessive use of recreational drugs. Egea writes: “Las drogas que, tanto en el personaje de Thompson como en el de Juan-Cantavella, parecen ser la única vía de escape posible a los límites impuestos a la conciencia y a la vida diaria por el sistema dominante” (112). The need for escape from authority is clear as both Escargot and Thompson constantly refer to it as they fearfully flee from its reaches. Ironically, their drug use contributes to the state of paranoia they so desperately hope to escape, both exhibiting a constant fear of being arrested for possession.

Escargot and Thompson's heavy drug use might also be a metaphorical escape from the 'dominant system.' Egea writes:

El código gonzo permite contar además una experiencia de clase. Es una forma de expresión que presupone que el único modo de escapar a las constricciones sociales y a la hipocresía dominante es hacer cosas que sólo puede hacer un marginal, un drogadicto entrometido, un canalla —y convertir al lector en cómplice comprensivo de ese canalleo. (118)

Escargot has a tendency to take quotidian or routine events and politicize them or inject them with critical meaning. But to discover any ‘truth beneath the surface’ sometimes we have to analyze the work in its totality and see if any themes develop over time. Viewed as such, we see that one of the most consistent themes throughout *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is the failure of the 60’s counter cultural revolution. Thompson writes:

Strange memories on this nervous night in Las Vegas. Five years later?  
Six? It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era—the kind of peak that never comes again. San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run... but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant...(66)

His drug use in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is depraved, violent, and degrading. It no longer reflects the idealistic and innocent narrative of the 60’s that preached peace, love, and ‘transcendentalism.’

Throughout the novel Escargot refers to ecstasy as “manzanas” (apples) (29) and creates a particularly descriptive scene of drug use in a paradisiacal garden. As he walks through the gardens of Marina d’Or popping apples (MDMA), Jorobado (the bellboy) makes a reference to the Garden of Eden and asks Escargot “Habéis comido del árbol prohibido?” (61). By using a biblical reference, Escargot evokes deep historical and traditional themes as we have seen him do time and time again in his references to traditional monarchy, the concept of the family, and

Spanish identity. This ‘interpretation’ of a story that has been interpreted by clergy for centuries, is a way for him to dialogue with authority and show that Punk Journalism possesses the capability of (the aforementioned) Bakhtinian inversion. By interlacing Biblical references with sinful vices, Escargot once again creates interpretative ambivalence. Escargot’s references show a penchant for making use of seemingly anecdotal details to create uncanny coincidences and situations too improbable to dismiss as anything but allegorical—perhaps once again attempting to subvert the power that religious interpretation has had on traditional societies including Spain.

Dialoguing with the past is a tactic Thompson uses, but on a much smaller scale. Thompson’s historical references are mainly relegated to the previous generation (the Sixties) whereas Escargot’s drug references touch on deeply rooted historical accounts such as the origin of man, Roman Catholic mythology, and monarchical tradition. This seemingly small but important detail reveals a stark difference between the two novels that we have hinted at throughout the second half of this investigation. While Escargot tackles big themes like identity and power through grandiose allegories and longstanding historical traditions—Thompson’s narrative takes on big themes like consumerism and post Sixties’ identity with seemingly small and insignificant events that in the end constitute a cohesive narrative.

Although there are definite metaphorical and ideological considerations for their drug use, they also play a large stylistic role in Escargot’s writing style. There are moments, paragraphs and even entire pages where his writing style speeds up with the inclusion of short, choppy sentences. “Pierdo otra vida. Game over. 10...9...8...insert coin, 7...6...5...ya no echas otro euro...2...ya no intentas escapar de Alcatraz...¡START!” (147). These sentences are often incoherent and without further explanation. The reader feels as if he too is under the influence of some dizzying and language altering drug. This rapid-fire and aggressive writing style serves to

create a sense of urgency as Escargot faces an identity crisis that affects both his perception of self and the nation.

Escargot's frenetic writing style that includes (as we have covered in the first part of this investigation) converting the narrative into a video game where the reader himself must flee for safety, is one of the stark contrasts that separates the authors and their works. Indeed, Thompson has a penchant for using short sentences, but they are never used in a rapid-fire manner without proper context. Every word used, forms part of a coherent and more traditional narrative. And while the drugs influence the content of his writings, they rarely affect his writing style, at least not to the level of Escargot's narrative. Thus Egea's argument for 'something new' is strengthened by this stylistic divide.

Escargot's use of drugs appears to be much more than a stylistic choice, but a way of subverting authority and resisting reification. Thompson's drug use on the other hand is most often a matter of recreation—only producing real symbolic meaning when used as a historical marker denoting that the shift from hallucinogens to cocaine was representative of youth culture's abandonment of its optimistic transcendentalism (common among hippies). While Escargot and Thompson's narrative forms clearly push the boundaries of investigative practices, they also push narrative boundaries, leading us to ask if indeed the final result is a novel, a piece journalism or both. This question is crucial as it helps us better understand the nature of *El dorado*, its implications as a narrative form and how we should interpret its contents.

### *Journalism vs. Novel*

While both Thompson and Escargot borrow from the two writing styles, we must ask—to what degree? Escargot claims his writing style is notably more deceitful than that of New Journalism (NJ), a class of writers composed mainly of novelists who are career journalists. In an interview

with *New York* magazine titled *The Birth of 'The New Journalism': Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe* (1972), Wolfe explains that the pioneers of NJ did not think about writing novels, that it was not a collective movement but a group of journalists who were repressing their novelistic desires. Wolfe Writes:

This discovery, modest at first, humble, in fact, deferential, you might say, was that it just might be possible to write journalism that would... read like a novel. Like a novel, if you get the picture. This was the sincerest form of homage to The Novel and to those greats, the novelists, of course. Not even the journalists who pioneered in this direction doubted for a moment that the novelist was the reigning literary artist, now and forever. All they were asking for was the privilege of dressing up like him . . . until the day when they themselves would work up their nerve and go into the shack and try it for real . . . (34)

The New Journalist goes on to explain that they never thought they would be able to surpass the novel in any aspect—however, in some regards they achieved it. In the 70's, *Sports Illustrated* gave Thompson the assignment to cover the Mint 400 en Las Vegas. He covered the event as assigned, but also took the liberty of mixing fictional events and injecting himself into the narrative—becoming the central figure of the story.

Escargot writes “...su lector a estas alturas ya debe de haberse dado cuenta de que si ha escrito la segunda parte de su aportaje en tercera persona es por cobarde...”(238). Cantavella breaks the 4th wall and dialogues with the reader through the use of metafictional references, this detour is reticent of a *entremés teatral* where the actors make light of and parody the characters

of the work itself. Parody is hardly a staple tactic of journalism as it violates the third rule of *The Elements of Journalism* which states: “Its essence is a discipline of verification.” Parody by definition is an act of discrediting through ridicule and laughter.

When considering to what degree these works approach journalism or novel writing, we must also consider their use of narration. The narrative format for traditional journalism is third person omniscient. The writer makes the subject of investigation the focus, and tries to speak as objectively as possible. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson breaks from this journalistic tradition by inserting himself into the narrative, mixing fact and fiction, and using extremely abrasive and countercultural language/references. Likewise, Escargot takes Thompson’s interpretation of journalistic narration and adds several twists of his own.

One of these twists (which we have already briefly touched on) is the fluidity with which the journalist switches roles (as is the case with his impersonation of Bishop Bronco Vereta). But even so, this tongue and cheek experiment maintains the first person narration and the reader never questions who is telling the story. This all changes however when Escargot decides to write as the comic book character/Gonzo Journalist Spider Scargot as well as the ‘mysterious’ third person omniscient narrator who takes over in the latter part of the novel. This narrative shift has direct links to the what many consider the first Spanish novel—*Don Quixote* (1605). In the novel we see the role of narrator switch from Cervantes himself, a ‘a second author,’ and Cid Hamet Benengeli (a Moore). But unlike Thompson, Cervantes as primary narrator does not usually switch narrational perspectives, mostly remaining in third person omniscient.

The implementation of this literary device holds roots in what many consider to be the birth of literature. Thus Cantavella takes an American tradition (New Journalism) and adds a home grown twist. Egea writes:

...el plagio que cobra nuevos sentidos, significados diferentes desde el hoy. La distinción entre homenaje y parodia se diluye en estos textos que toman de la literatura, pero también del cine, del cómic, del ensayo teórico, de las series de televisión, del mundo de Internet, del periodismo...(123)

Again we see that Escargot is willing to take the Gonzo Journalism blueprint to a new level, breaking what the *Reuters Handbook of Journalism* calls the "cardinal rule"—*plagiarism*. Of course, many authors borrow, use, steal, adapt, and implement literary devices—but this act is a means to an end. Escargot actively draws attention to the act of theft, as it not only serves as a means to an end but a statement in itself on the validity and nature of journalism. Escargot is equally suspicious of authors and their powers of interpretation as we've seen him be with clergymen and politicians.

While both parties break from tradition, Escargot has the circumstantial benefit of having a larger canon to draw from. His narrative shifts are more abrasive and extreme and fall clearly within the realm of the literary. And while Thompson's CV denotes a tried and true professional journalist, Cantavella's writing reveals a man who has worked in the literary industry at every turn—serving as author, editor, and literary critic. If we accept Tom Wolfe's description of NJ, that it is *journalism dressed as a novel*—we must accept that Punk Journalism is primarily a novel dressed as journalism. And despite Escargot's more extreme take on Gonzoism that pushes it to the edge of what might be considered 'journalism'—what keeps him most closely associated to journalism is his insistence that his lies are truths disguised and (as we have noted in the first



part of this section) and his unwavering challenge to authority. The idea that Escargot subscribes to ‘truth’ (even if disguised as lies), shows an ironic touch of absolutism and a journalistic spirit to reveal fact. Both of these concepts are mentioned as essential ideals of journalistic ethics in Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel’s *Elements of Journalism*.

Expounding on the relationship between Punk Journalism and New Journalism, Escargot writes:

En ese aspecto concreto, y en la utilización lúdica de drogas como herramienta de trabajo, el Punk Journalism es a su vez una forma bastarda del Gonzo Journalism. Aunque hay una diferencia...en el caso del Punk Journalism no sólo se importan las elegantes trampas de la narración realista sino también otras menos respetables que tienen que ver con la pura fabulación, la parodia maliciosa, a mentira sincera, a especulación camicace, el despropósito gratuito, la irresponsabilidad meditada, etc...o lo que viene a ser lo mismo, el Punk Journalism también trafica con mentiras porque sabe que lo que está diciendo es verdad. (189)

In his own words Escargot corroborates something we have observed time and time again—that perhaps Punk Journalisms’ greatest claim is not the addition of new literary elements but the amplification of a pre-existing genre. The symbolism is more frequent and overt, the stylistic mimicry of drug use through words is more rampant, the political and ideological commentary more aggressive, and the fictionalization of events less of an exaggeration—but a flat out lie. Like the *bastard* it claims itself to be, it carries traces of its heritage but is in no way an exact copy.

Juan Martín Prada's words appropriation seem befitting here, as *El Dorado* forces us to reflect over the process and meaning of literature (particularly the novel vs. journalism dichotomy). While Escargot creates a novel that stands on its own in terms of structure, criticism, and content—it never leaves its predecessors shadow—always reflecting on the nature of art and how it differs from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Prada writes: "...un desplazamiento del análisis del discurso histórico y estético en términos de expresividad o forma, a uno centrado en los modos de su circulación, valoración, atribución o apropiación" (66). Prada portrays apropiación posmoderna as a vehicle for displacement—in this case, what is being displaced is both literary and real. On one hand he destabilizes our understanding of genre, and on the other, he destabilizes how we define nation, self, identity, and language.

In a separate episode of meta-analysis, Escargot reveals yet another point of difference between him and his literary ancestor Thompson. Escargot writes:

El Old Journalism tenía un objetivo, la fotografía, ser tan veraz y lúcido como una buena fotografía, escribir una instantánea de la realidad donde el estilo literario quedase impreso en el texto a través del encuadre. Y en cierto sentido el Punk Journalism hace lo mismo, también toma una foto. Pero resulta que cuarenta años más tarde aquella fotografía y ésta son cosas muy diferentes, y ahí está la diferencia entre el Old Journalism y el Punk Journalism. Cuando la televisión era en blanco y negro y lo de ir a la Luna no le parecía a nadie una chorrada, una fotografía significaba una imagen fija e inamovible, era una fuente de autoridad y en ella se veía un reflejo de la realidad. En cambio hoy en día una fotografía es un archivo

digital que con el photoshop puede convertirse en cualquier otra  
cosa. (189-190)

Escargot points out that little to nothing has changed about the photographic process, instead it is all of the things surrounding it—people, cultures, ideologies, technology and society. Modern people have more tools, more ways to fact-check, verify, document, question, manipulate and answer the things they confront. Both the written word and photography have been on this trajectory for some time—in the ancient days writing was a skill relegated to lawyers and clergymen and used as a form of establishing authority through laws, contracts, and accounting records. Later it would be publishing houses who served as gatekeepers and authorities on what could or couldn't form part of the mainstream narrative. But now nearly any person with access to the internet can create a blog, photo, or video post on social media that has the potential to reach thousands. And while this decentralization of power he speaks of has its benefits, it also removes the editorial process—allowing for non-verified sources, Photoshop experts, and anonymous writers to make bold claims and statements that diminish the credibility and therefore authority of journalism.

Understanding to what degree Escargot and Thompson hybridize literature and journalism allows us to better understand to what degree Escargot separates himself from his literary forefather. And if Thompson is to be considered a pioneer of the journalism-novel hybrid, then Escargot's PJ should be considered a more extreme extension of such. This aligns with his Photoshop theory in which emblems of authority such as reporters should no longer garner the trust

they had in previous generations. According to the Punk Journalist, this newly fragmented environment gives new meaning to the way we interpret works i.e. Gonzo Journalism and Punk Journalism.

Unlike the classic Greek template for storytelling where there is a clear hero origin with a challenge to overcome in the end, these two stories seemingly start in the middle of an event. Both protagonists serve as our eyes and ears that interpret the landscape, but the protagonists are never heroes or integral factors in overcoming a challenge, or even changing their environments. In the end there is no resolution where an evil monster is vanquished, there is merely a throwing up of the hands and a ‘must carry on’ attitude. This final act of pessimism is seen as a great contrast from the public perception which interprets the settings of both novels as playgrounds of optimism where ‘dreams come true’ and the ever optimistic slogan of ‘What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas’ lives on forever.

To best understand *El Dorado*’s ‘literary identity’ or essence as a work of literature—we drew from its closest relative and self-proclaimed (by Escargot) bastard father—*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Having analyzed the works in conjunction, we can convincingly affirm Egea’s admonition that Escargot does indeed manage to create ‘something new’ through Punk Journalism (as evidenced through his 2006 publication *El Dorado*). From the analysis we were able to determine that similar to how *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* takes a previous body of work and pushes the needle further to the left, Juan-Cantavella takes Thompson’s body of work and amplifies its most standout aspects. His appropriation of Thompson’s work pushes the needle towards the literary, making *El Dorado* appear more as a novel sprinkled with journalism than journalism disguised as a novel. Each of Cantavella’s chapters carry a trace element of Gonzo

Journalism, but we also see an increased sense of self awareness, more extreme narrative experiments like switching from first person to third person omniscient at will, increased political commentary, and a more direct desire to ‘trick’ the reader. It is these considerations that help us characterize Punk Journalism and (more specifically) *El Dorado* as an amplification of Gonzo Journalism—something not entirely the same nor entirely different.

In an analysis of modern day *Spanish Nationalism titled From National-Catholic Nostalgia to Constitutional Patriotism*, Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas points out that there are several factors that complicate the question of Spanish identity when viewed in light of nationalism such as the ambiguity of the 1978 Constitution, the post-Franco rediscovery process, nostalgia, a “guilty conscience” and regionalism. He writes:

Even among most Spanish public opinion shapers, and for a large part of the Spanish academic community, Spanish nationalism is virtually absent, a phenomenon that dissolved with the end of Francoism and the birth of the democratic monarchy. Yet this is just one side of the issue. Most Spaniards, including many intellectuals and influential public figures, have no difficulty claiming Spain is a multicultural and historical nation. To its defenders, this affirmation seems to fall entirely outside the category of nationalism. This illustrates the ambiguity surrounding Spanish nationalism when one attempts to identify it as an object of study. (121)

Despite Nuñez Seixas' suggestion that many intellectuals view post-Franco Spain as void of "nationalism," he makes it clear that there exists a sense of unified semblance among its constituents. It is this semblance of something that escapes Escargot's grasp and drives the narrative forward, leaving the reader with more questions than answers. And as Escargot readily suggests, Spain requires a search beneath the surface—a filling in of the gaps through a process he dubs "Punk Journalism." Such an analysis requires a thorough investigation of anecdotal evidence. Stephen Greenblatt (widely considered the father of New Historicism) refers to these anecdotes as "counter histories" and writes: "...the anecdote could be conceived as a tool with which to rub literary texts against the grain of received notions about their determinants, revealing the fingerprints of the accidental, suppressed, defeated, uncanny, abjected, or exotic—in short, the nonsurviving—even if only fleetingly" (52). Thus these seeming inconsistencies will help provide the most accurate portrayal of history and reveal what critiques lie beneath the surface narrative.

In the next section the anecdote of inquiry is the term *El Dorado*. Not only is this the title of the book, but it is the focus of Escargot's cryptic investigation. Said investigation causes Escargot to be paranoid against authority, and makes him feel the need to disguise himself and his objectives. Other critics who have studied this work have neglected to try and define the term, but I predict that by interpreting the in-text use of the term *El Dorado*, many more doors of understanding will open—allowing us to better and more accurately interpret the narrative. Furthermore, it is my prediction that the term *El Dorado* will be synonymous with *Spanish identity*. To accomplish this task, we will use textual analysis—focusing heavily on the narrative and its references, determining the relationship between *El Dorado* and authentic identity (if it does indeed exist) and its implications.

## CHAPTER TWO: 'THE PROBLEM OF SPAIN' ACCORDING TO ESCARGOT: THE COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POWER, IDENTITY, AND LANGUAGE

The 2006 work *El dorado* is the third novel by author Robert Juan-Cantavella and the second to feature the character Trebor Escargot. Escargot is the fictional journalist and writer of the novel, and although we can never assume that the protagonist's opinions align with those of the author—*El dorado* and the anecdotes that surround its publication are uncannily tempting in this regard. Due to the fact that Escargot claims to be the author (even though the cover clearly bears Juan-Cantavella's name), we can safely deduce from the beginning of the novel that the journalist is untrustworthy.<sup>6</sup> Thus Escargot pays homage to his Spanish forefathers and the birth of the modern novel by following in Cervantes's large footsteps, establishing a sui-fictional authorship where what is said cannot be completely connected nor separated from the 'real' writer of the novel.

Further complicating the question of Spanish identity is the question of identity itself. Critics such as Judith Butler and Benedict Anderson have argued that identity is neither static nor easy to define. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) Benedict Anderson writes, "The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (50). Anderson's central thesis is that community like identity, is in reality a social construct. And if we accept the notion of fluid identity, the task of capturing a

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<sup>6</sup> The website [www.punkjournalism.net](http://www.punkjournalism.net) furthers our suspicions of the author/narrator relationship. The landing page contains numerous archives that have pictures of what appear to be Juan-Cantavella, articles published in the journal *Lateral* of which Juan Cantavella was the acting editor, and even interviews with other real life authors that are published in magazines and journals.

moving object becomes much more difficult due to the fact that both the investigator and the investigated are constantly redefining themselves.

According to Jose Álvarez-Junco and other prominent critics<sup>7</sup> of Spanish identity, Spain has an exceptionally mercurial identity—this due to the fact that the author of its narrative cannot readily be found. Summarizing Álvarez-Junco’s argument in his review of *Spanish Identity in the Age of Nations*, Dr. Phillip Williams writes:

The essential thesis is that 19th-century Spain was not characterized by a sort of fervent nationalism of the sort that could be said have pre-shadowed the Franco dictatorship; rather the precise opposite was the case: Spain was marked by the relative failure of the nationalist programme. The absence of a fervent nationalism among the masses can in part be attributed to the commitment of much conservative opinion to the Catholic Church, which as an institution existed almost as a rival to the state, especially in the field of education.

Apart from calling the attempt to define a nation as “pretentious,” Álvarez-Junco says that pre-Franco, Spain struggled to find a prevailing national narrative due to the power struggle between the Catholic Church and the state. As we will see throughout this second half of our investigation, Escargot frames the post-Franco era similarly but with the addition of a third entity—industry. The journalist investigates these three faces of authority (church, government, and industry)

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<sup>7</sup> In *Spain is (still) Different: Tourism and Discourse in Spanish Identity* (2008), Eugenia Afinoquénova and Jaume Martí-Olivella suggests that “Expressions of Spain’s difference, peculiarity, exceptionality, and at times, its ‘abnormality’ have been circulating since the late eighteenth century in Spanish discussions of national identity...” (xi).



and ends up suggesting some of these entities suffer from a power vacuum disguised by pagantry and tradition—leaving him wondering where Spain’s true power lies. Realizing that the new era of power in Spain is international and occult in nature (foreign investors, gentrification, tourism, and globalization to name a few) leaves Escargot defeated.

Perhaps some might believe the process of discovering a nation’s identity to be a fallacious pretext and in some ways they would be right. But the fact remains that the world refers to a certain Mediterranean inspired cuisine, Christian heritage, and peninsular peoples (among many other things) with the singular term *Spain*. And even though a textbook definition of *nation* might boil down to invisible lines drawn on a map—the inspiration for national hymns, poems, epitaphs, and patriotic devotions is rarely if ever conceived in the name of longitude and latitude. Like Spain’s national anthem, far more often, odes to nation contain tales of brave deeds done in the name of an ideology, moral code, or ethical and religious belief. In this sense (and as Escargot suggests), we must attempt to dig deeper than surface definitions. Every country cannot definitively be boiled down to a simple definition, each nation has its own unique challenges and contradictions that complicate its nature and as Escargot aggressively demonstrates—Spain is a particularly difficult case.

Echoing Escargot’s sentiment in *El Patriotismo Étnico* (2001), José Álvarez Junco writes:

Para llegar desde la nación así entendida al nacionalismo habría que cubrir muchas etapas. En primer lugar, sería preciso atribuir a esos pueblos o naciones rasgos psicológicos comunes...cosa que ocurrió, aproximadamente, a lo largo del siglo XVI; muchos de estos rasgos psicológicos envolvían ya valoraciones éticas,

con lo que las naciones pasaron a ser colectividades morales ideales. Habría que convertir, a continuación, a esos pueblos en “voz de Dios”, como hizo el protestantismo, y presentarlos como enfrentados con el monarca, hasta entonces encarnación terrenal de la autoridad divina, en competencia únicamente con el papado; y esto ocurrió durante la revolución inglesa del XVII. (59)

Álvarez Junco’s definition of nation goes far beyond the physical and enters the realm of the psychological. As we ponder *who* and *what* might be of the greatest influence in nation-building—we are tempted to think about powerful policy makers such as government, clergymen, and big business. Perhaps it is due to these groups’ sway over minds, resources, and social conduct—that Escargot reduces his search for El Dorado to big business, the monarchy, and the Pope. *Who* Escargot decides to leave out of his search, tells us just as much (if not more) about Escargot’s attitude towards Spanish identity. Speaking on the concept of historical discourse, Roland Barthes states in *The Rustle of Language* (1968), “So true is it, once more, that within a system any absence of an element is itself a signification” (139). Therefore, to leave out the middle class, the quotidian—is to implicitly state that the commoner is not autonomous, his voice inert against authority.

Escargot’s choice to leave out two of the most autonomous regions (Catalonia and The Basque Country) of Spain in his attempts to define the country is also rather curious in this respect. Autonomous regions such as these are widely regarded as vocal in nature. Why then, would he choose to leave them out of the conversation? There are several plausible explanations for this *choice* (if one can call it such), none that are provable—but worthy of consideration nonetheless. One possibility is that Escargot like many (in the hopes of solidifying his argument),

might have purposefully chosen to leave details out. This wouldn't be the first time (in an attempt to make a closed case) that an investigator would have chosen to leave out details that might prove problematic to their argument.

Also possibility is that these groups do not form what is "Spain" but the anti-Spain, the desire to break from the nation. Perhaps it is due to these desires not to be considered part of the nation, that Escargot chooses not to include them as part of the equation. If this is the case, I believe him to be flawed in concept—as at the end of the day, "dissenting" elements still form part up part of the make-up that is Spain. Especially elements (regions) as scrutinized as Catalonia and The Basque Country—regions so intrinsically tied to the conversation of Spanish identity they've become exhaustively inseparable to the topic. As Barthes states<sup>8</sup>—neglecting to dialogue with these things has its own meaning.

In relation to Escargot's portrayal of Spain—power and identity are indelibly linked (as evidenced by his choice of suspects—industry, church, and state). It is this very relationship between identity and power that complicates the journalist's search and leads him to question his own identity. Throughout this chapter my research will focus on several aspects surrounding Spain's and (by default) Escargot's identity. The perpetual nature of identity, Spain's complex web of power (or lack thereof), and Escargot's conflicting self-perception make for a tension filled narrative.

I will analyze Cantavella's attempt to pinpoint "El Dorado" by first establishing its synonymy with Spanish identity. Afterwards I'll attempt to answer *how Escargot defines Spain* and

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<sup>8</sup> Referencing the aforementioned quote in which he states in *The Rustle of Language* (1968), "so true is it, once more, that within a system any absence of an element is itself a signification" (139).

*why the process is so problematic.* These questions will be addressed by analyzing textual evidences that show Escargot's journalistic search does in fact revolve around the question of identity. After establishing this fact, I will attempt to find common threads in his analysis that might lead to a synthesis of his ideas. Finally, I will use textual and theoretical analysis to study how his own personal identity is linked to the question of national identity, and why the question itself might be flawed.

Through textual evidence the reader will come to know that, Escargot's search for "El dorado" is in fact a search for Spanish identity. Furthermore, he/she will witness how the idea of perspective comes to supersede Escargot's notion of static identities—for it is through perception that identity is formed. It is precisely this realization about the fluidity of identity that destabilizes Escargot's conception of "nation," one I argue that trickles down to his perception of self. With his national and personal identity ever interlinked, Escargot experiences a series of hallucinogenic episodes that he chronicles in an abrasive writing style serving to exacerbate the fragmented nature of reality. To him, the idea of a Catholic nation or monarchical kingdom no longer exists in what is an ever-commercialized landscape.

Thus Escargot breaks from traditional categorizations of Spain (particularly pertaining to the Colonial and Franco eras). Although his perspective on identity evolves throughout the novel, his hunch that power and identity are indelibly linked does not. His constant investigation into industry, church, and monarchy—make it clear that he believes that identity and power must be considered in conjunction. Even though he never quite finds a singular author of Spanish identity, his writings progressively reflect his belief that power influences perspective—and perspective influences identity.

Escargot's assignment to find El Dorado is as much a physical journey as it is intellectual. This is evidenced by the constant battle between maintaining his outsider identity, and being reified by society—a battle which nearly drives him mad as he flees Marina d'Or. “¿Qué es esto? ¿Dónde estoy?...¿Cuántos puntos debe de valer cada una? PANTALLA/01/ Otra fresa. Doscientos puntos” (143). With no solid foundation to stand upon, everything becomes relative, and in the third act he symbolically loses his voice to a different third person narrator—a sign that he can no longer be sure of the things he says. Escargot writes:

...lo que pasa es que como siempre hay dos bandos, dos opiniones, dos verdades, muy a su pesar les toca jugar en equipo. Es el periodismo convertido en un loop sin acuerdo posible, un ejercicio de estilo en el que la grosería, la descalificación, la extrema ignorancia extrafutbolística, la puñalada trapera, el grito pelao y la desmesurada confianza en uno mismo pueden llegar a combinarse hasta el infinito sin alcanzar nunca un punto de confluencia. (164)

The battle of maintaining his one “true self” forces him to be hyper aware of his surroundings and own identity, leading him to call the tourism industry a *panopticon of control*. Escargot views his own identity to be interconnected with the Spanish landscape, he writes: “...a ver si en un rato puedo pensar detenidamente en quién soy y en qué estoy haciendo aquí” (41). But before we can analyze the effects of his journey, we must first decipher *what* it is that he searches for. The vague assignment to find El Dorado is as open to interpretation to us, as it is to the journalist. And although it is never explicitly stated *what* El Dorado represents, we will analyze several

textual examples that lead us to believe that the journalist is indeed searching for Spain's authentic nature or *identity*.

### **The Link Between El Dorado and Identity**

The realization that El Dorado and identity are one in the same isn't necessarily obvious to us at first. What is obvious however, is that Escargot immediately picks up on the fact that the seemingly random insertion of *El Dorado* in his editor's email is to be taken as a cryptic code. The editor's instructions to blend in with the people through disguise, and to tell no one of his assignment are not typical instructions for a slice of life piece such as covering the mundane happenings of a tourist district. The abnormality with which the editor throws a line in at the bottom of his email to *find El dorado* without any preface of the objective, draws attention and peaks the reader's (Escargot) curiosity. Furthermore, the sheer amount of fear with which Escargot investigates, and his paranoia of power denotes an immediate understanding of his mission to be more than a casual investigator. "Y en esta fase preparatoria de la investigación es muy importante que ocultes tus cartas, que nadie pueda descubrir qué es lo que buscas en realidad...No hay leyes universales que puedan explicarte la forma de obtener esta clase de información. Éste es un problema metafísico, espiritual, por eso llevo siempre encima la foto de mi asesor en temática religiosa, para que me guíe, es éste, se llama Brona" (42). Escargot treats this "class of information" with reverence, placing it on the altar of spirituality—a place not reserved for a tourist piece, but for defining the very soul or identity of country and self.

I submit that Escargot understands that they (identity and El Dorado) are one in the same from the beginning but that he simply can't admit this because as he says, he must "hide his cards," from both tourists and the reader (42). However, the obvious disappointment he encoun-

ters with each new pillar of power is not for lack of discovery—indeed Escargot finds each object of power, but none of them fulfill his desire to find the shaper of national identity. If he's truly hiding his cards as he states, it follows that he can't reveal the word *identity* to us (at least not in the early stages). However, the journalist does reveal that he's searching for power early on, showing that it is not the explicit object of search, that he understands from the beginning that identity is his true aim, a Trojan horse—an objective within an objective. This is evidenced at the end of the first part of the novel when he becomes overwhelmed by the international commercial influence of Marina d'Or, forcing him to state—“Debía haber buscado a Marina Doria, no a Marina d'Or, y ahora Marina Doria no existe. Casi no quedan reyes. ¿Cómo he podido dudar? Estaba equivocado” (143). The realization that he is not where he had hoped to be, shows a sense of destination, an orientation to where he should be looking, and *what* he should be looking for.

But for a postmodernist such as Escargot, identity doesn't exist, only identity markers. Despite this belief, he conflictingly holds onto hope, the ability to center his world—thus the term postmodern *crisis*. But his search never fulfills him, Escargot never finds what he's looking for. Identity is a moving object, and to some—not an object at all, simply a social construct. Even to the absolutist, the identity of an object can vary in meaning depending on experience, beliefs and ideologies held by individuals—the old glass half-empty or half-full analogy comes to play here. While the middle class sees Spain as a playground of whimsical bourgeois activity, the powers at be see it as a chess board, and those on the fringe such as Escargot see it as an exploited landscape. Thus *Spain* means many different things to people, and to find a singular and objective answer to such a question is a flawed idea. The investigation unravels into a question of identity itself more than a focus on the country. Escargot's search for identity is a search for a

chimera—a search, that like the mythical El Dorado, never fully quenches the investigator’s desire for certainty.

With the incessant use of the word *plastic* (over thirty uses), an intense focus on the pastiche sculptures/commercialized landscape, and a continuous referencing of his ‘exploited’ patch—all signs point to a journalist suspicious of commercial intentions. And for Escargot, the embodiment of statist ambition is nowhere more apparent in 2006 than the tourist district, Marina d’Or. Commenting on the mechanisms of ‘progress,’ the Punk Journalist writes, “Las dos o trescientas grúas que salpican el paisaje aquí y allá signo inequívoco del progreso de estas tierras tocadas por la mano del Constructor...” (22). In the prelude to his treatise on Marina d’Or’s consumer culture, the journalist continues this sentiment by stating: “Un lugar peligroso no siempre tiene la pinta de lugar peligroso” (33). Escargot’s own disposition throughout his stay in the tourist district mimics this statement as he progresses from bemused (if not cynical) drifter, to bewildered and utterly confused victim who desperately attempts to flee the labyrinth of commercialism that engulfs him in the final paragraphs of Section I.

Throughout his narrative, two themes of Spanish progress emerge—that of power and that of ‘awakening’—or according to Marx, those who have become conscious of their exploitation and role as a laborer in the state’s economic machine. As Georg Lukacs explains in his article *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*: “...the commodity becomes crucial for the subjugation of men’s consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the ‘second nature’ so created” (1). The more Escargot investigates, the more he becomes aware of the tourists’ subjugation to commodity culture, and the more his ‘second nature’ reveals itself. Throughout his time in Marina d’Or he focuses on its



economic progress and the commodity driven middle class—the pinnacle of this being the Auster family who haunts his every move. Escargot isn't alone in his use of Marina d'Or as a microcosmic metaphor for Spain. Íñigo Domínguez, correspondent for *El Correo* writes, “Marina d'Or es la metáfora perfecta de España. Aquello era lo más de lo más, la culminación de nuestros deseos de bienestar, lujo y riqueza” (Prieto). For Escargot and others, Marina d'Or is the Spanish equivalent of Disneyland, a destination for middle-class families, a paella of bourgeois desire.

This same desire for wealth is shared by explorers of the early Spanish kings who set their hearts on tales of riches. One cannot readily dismiss the uncanny nature of Escargot's object of desire and its shared name with the infamous object of Spanish desire—*El Dorado*. After all, one's identity is formed in large part by desire.<sup>9</sup> While in Marina d'Or Escargot writes, “...la dirección del establecimiento trata de transmitir la dicotomía modernidad-tradición que inspira al grupo Marina d'Or en su camino hacia el futuro” (37). By accepting the interconnectivity between identity and desire we also accept that Escargot's conceptualization of modern Spanish identity, is built (in large part) on the middle class's desire for wealth.

Some might be skeptical of the comparison between Spain's arcane past and its modern landscape, but the interlacing of the past and present is a seminal theme in *El dorado*.

As seen by his description of La Feria Muestrario Internacional de Valencia, his portrayal of the Pope as an anachronism perpetuating dogma from the 8th century (221), his treatise on Philippe Merlo (76) and dozens of other such examples, Escargot often opts to narrate contemporary

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<sup>9</sup> Katrina Srigley demonstrates convincingly in her article about depression era women altering their identities through desire, *Clothing Stories: Consumption, Identity, and Desire in Depression-Era Toronto* (2007)—one's identity is formed in large part by desire. It is a protagonist's desire for 'good' that gives him a reputation as a hero, it is a politician's legislative desires that give him a political identity, and it is an individual's desire for romance that defines his sexual identity.

events by contextualizing them with the past. Perhaps most notable in this regard is the section titled *La Hecatombe de los Reyes*, a several page treatise covering the current monarchies of the world by explaining their lineage—Escargot writes: “Va una lista de testas tocadas sorprendente y larga. No sé por qué pero cuando pienso en estas cosas siempre me viene a la cabeza el de Suecia, Carlos XVI Gustavo, soberano de la Real Casa de Bernadotte y en el trono desde 1973” (101). Later, writing about the bombing of the monarchs by Queen Marina Doria, he writes:

...me pongo el ordenador sobre las piernas y abro el navegador, tecleo marina doria y en un par de clicks averiguo que era la esposa de Víctor Manuel de Saboya. Todo empieza a cuadrar. El tristemente fallecido Víctor Manuel de Saboya, príncipe de Nápoles, era hijo del último rey de Italia Humberto II y de María José de Bélgica, que a su vez descendía del rey de los belgas Alberto I. Según parece, encandilada por este ilustre currículum, Marina Doria siempre había fantaseado con la idea de llegar a ser reina junto con Víctor, su marido, y con la idea de llegar a ser reina junto con Víctor, su marido, y desfacer así el entuerto de aquel año funesto de 1946 en que un vulgar referéndum finiquitó el tema monárquico en el país. Todo apunta a que había tomado una firme decisión, si ella no iba a ser reina nadie lo sería. (120)

Escargot posits that it is widely assumed that historical disputes are to blame for Marina Doria’s modern day act of terrorism. His comments embody his propensity for mixing the past and present when he states, “Aquí el paisaje humano no cambia” (253). If there is an argument to be said

against the association of the El Dorado of old and the El Dorado of present (Escargot's interpretation), it cannot fairly be done by arguing that Escargot doesn't have a habit of associating Spain's history with its contemporary setting. With one foot in the present and another in the past, Escargot establishes a literary palimpsest. By establishing the connection between the El Dorado of old and Escargot's El Dorado—we can strengthen our argument that Escargot believes it to represent Spanish identity and desire.

Perhaps the first clue we are given about Escargot's skepticism towards hunting down El Dorado, is his reaction to the editor's assignment. "No tengo ni idea de cómo quiere que encuentre El Dorado en un sitio como éste, entre esta marabunta de indígenas del chiringuito, pero el caso es que voy a intentarlo" (31). The indigenous group he refers to, is a tribe of gluttonous middle-class consumers who according to his portrayal, do not think for themselves. "En cualquier caso, y por decirlo así, el anciano de los calcetines no es una anomalía. Menudo tipo..." (35). He divides the inhabitants of Marina d'Or into two groups—old flaccid tourists and middle class nuclear families. "Se trata de las dos tribus urbanas que se disputan el control del espacio" (71). But what is it he finds so impossible about the relationship between El Dorado and Marina d'Or? A possibility he finds so detestable, he ends up deciding he must "exterminate the brutes" (AKA the masses)?

The way he views mass culture (dividing the tourists into tribes as if they were a collective incapable of forming their own thoughts and actions) offers us a plausible explanation. Escargot describes the first of them as pitifully elder and flaccid—beholden to commercial gluttony, or in this case— free buffets. The grotesqueness with which he describes them, (portraying them as farmed pigs only there to eat and take up room with their pathetic existence which is in

the state of ‘decomposition’) is abrasive and degrading but meant to draw attention to what he sees as the exploitative nature of the tourist industry. He describes the second tribe as follows:

La otra tribu suele funcionar en grupos de cuatro: una madre de menos de cuarenta, un padre de edad similar, un hijo con plena autonomía motriz y otro metido en un cochecito. A él le hubiese gustado más la República Dominicana, llegar allí, ponerse la pulserita y liarse a tomar daiquiris sin pagar un duro. Ella siempre ha querido ir a Luxemburgo, visitar el gran palacio ducal y hacer un picnic a orillas del Alzette. Pero no ha podido ser, y Marina d’Or tampoco está nada mal, qué caray. Eso es con lo que me encuentro cuando le acabo de dar la vuelta al macizo rocoso por la izquierda del puentecito: con una nutrida reunión de esta segunda especie que, para más inri, en estos momentos parece estar celebrando un extraño rito.” (71)

The second tribe is a reference to the middle class family, a father who aspires for more but is cheap and lazy, failed family ambitions (The Luxemborg), and a tribe who is ritualistic in nature (beholden to commodity). Escargot shows us that he interprets the masses to possess a sheep-like mentality. It would seem that their inability to break the cycle of reification and what he views to be the commodification of culture is what most draws his attention to this social class. It follows that without express control over their desires—a nation cannot be said to possess a unique identity, for their identity will always be dependent on the ruling class’s agenda. Escargot observes the phenomenon of consumer culture while at the hotel diner: “Marina d’Or prevé un sistema panóptico de control de calidad de los alimentos que ofrece en sus comedores”

(123). After describing the automatization of the tourists through menial and predictive processes—he abruptly comes to the conclusion “Tal vez éste no sea el lugar, tal vez debiera moverme...” (123). The automaton-like actions of the people are what plant a seed of doubt in Escargot’s head. This forces him to question the viability of Marina d’Or as the location of El Dorado. To not be in control, is to not have an authentic voice, and if one does not have a voice—he cannot truly possess a unique identity, only one that is manufactured.

### **The Link Between Power and Identity**

The tribe of Marina d’Or that lives in a land of “chiringuitos” (27) is described as existing in an artificial landscape with cheaply recreated cultural icons like the Hombre-Paella. And by crossing off the list where El Dorado cannot be found, Escargot helps us narrow down its location. It follows that such a location would have to be the antithesis of what Escargot perceives Marina d’Or to be—voiceless. And if Marina d’Or is portrayed as an artificial setting full of easily swayed tourists looking to be reified by commercial enterprise, we might very well hypothesize that his idea of El Dorado’s location is one of empowered and autonomous peoples where individuals shape the narrative rather than fall victim. It is precisely this hunch that leads Escargot to focus his investigation on Spanish figures of authority—for authority is both autonomous and authentic in the sense that it attempts to control rather than be controlled. For Escargot this power is not organic, but a calculated attempt to manipulate and exploit. Such sentiment is evident when we consider (as we have noted previously) his *exploited* patch that he references often as well as his cynical comments about hotel buffets (the excesses of capitalism) forming part of the “panopticon” of Marina d’Or (123).

Escargot writes, “El Dorado está en Marina Doria, eso ya lo sabemos, el problema es otro...es que Marina Doria quien no está aquí...porque encontrar el camino a Marina Doria significa encontrar El Dorado, por eso enseguida pienso en el monarca Benedicto XV de la Ciudad-Estado del Vaticano, uno de los pocos reyes que sigue con vida” (126). We can tell by the fluid and non-linear nature of Escargot’s comments that his linking of identity and authority is at the subconscious level. As he states, he knows not why he associates El Dorado with the anarchist bombing of the monarchical families by Marina Doria—but soon after thinking about the Princess, his thoughts drift to Benedict XV (a man he considers to be a king). By changing the focus of his search to a perceived ‘king’—Escargot confirms that his belief in Spanish identity now lies in the hands of autonomous power. The Pope however, is only one of three subjects he investigates—all of whom possess perhaps the greatest amount of influence and authority in Spain, each belonging to one of three categories: private interest (economic power), the Monarchy (legal power), and the Church (religious power)<sup>10</sup>.

While in Marina d’Or, Escargot is determined to interview the public relations of Marina d’Or (a symbol of economic power). Upon finally meeting the PR, Escargot is surprised to see that he is walking around nonchalantly with a lion by the leash. The lion has historically served as a symbol of Spanish power and national identity<sup>11</sup>. It has been imprinted in the Spanish consciousness through iconic literary scenes in works like *Mío Cid* and *Don Quixote*, been associated with soccer clubs (Athletic Club de Bilbao AKA “the lions of San Mamés”), saints (San

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<sup>10</sup> As opposed to government and business, the Pope’s power is more symbolic and testimonial in nature. His approval, his influence, all have power—but only through government or business, such as the Concordat. In terms of actual raw power, organizations like the Kiko and Opus Dei would be considered more aggressive.

<sup>11</sup> Recently there have been a variety of cases in which several dubiously rich Spaniards have been characterized by photos with dead animals including lions as part of their property.

Mamés) and Kings. During the Middle Ages the Roman imagery of the lion was adopted by several Christian kingdoms such as el Reino de León, or the end of the 16th century when Portugal was annexed Spain was depicted as a lion and Portugal a Dragon. Furthermore, many of the monarchs following Felipe II (including the Bourbons) painted crests with lions on their thrones. Philosopher Juan Caramuel writes that “El león es príncipe de las selvas, monarca de los fuertes, y emperador de todos los animales. No conoce el miedo, y por esta razón es símbolo perfecto de España, que con corazón bueno ampara con valor a todos sus súbditos” (Cervera). But unlike Caramuel’s description of an unconquerable lion, in this case we have the representative of commercial interest controlling the beast. “Vamos a tomar algo y no te preocupes—dice haciendo un gesto con la mano—ahora mismo dispongo que se lleven a Marino, don’t worry. Es un león muy dócil, you know, aunque comprendo que te inquiete” (79). If we accept that the lion is a symbol of traditional Spanish authority, this exchange makes it evident that Escargot views private interest as having neutered the powers of old, rendering the monarchy powerless.

It is interesting that the scene with the PR and the lion should take place before Escargot’s investigation of the monarchy. I posit that Escargot already suspects the monarchy to be impotent, that if there is a hierarchal order among the three power structures of Spain—he believes that private interest overshadows the monarchy. Perhaps for this reason, Escargot spends the least amount of investigative effort on the monarchy. In comparison with business and church, the monarchy seems to be a mere footnote. Also worth noting, is the fact that he actively seeks to investigate private interest and the Pope, whereas the consideration of the monarchy appears to him in the form of newsflashes. Rather than search for the answer to this question, the revelation of its impotency comes to him effortlessly. Sometimes this information comes in the form of radio and other times via the TV, but never does Escargot seek out the King of Spain.

After the second attempted terrorist attack—it looks as if few survive. Escargot writes: “Como ya resulta obvio, la reunión no ha llegado a buen puerto y este segundo atentado, que por el momento, y como sucediera el lunes, no ha sido reivindicado por nadie, ha dado al traste con sus planes...y quién sabe si también con la posibilidad de un pronto restablecimiento de los derechos dinásticos en todo el mundo” (215).

When the news finally sinks in, Escargot satirically asks “¿Qué vamos a hacer ahora sin reyes?” (216). And after a brief moment of contemplation, he puts the car in drive and heads to Valencia in search of the Pope. The news of the monarchy’s possible demise might have surprised the protagonist, but his laughably short-lived concern towards the existence of the monarchy (and lack of mention throughout the rest of the novel) shows us an Escargot (perhaps Cantavella) who never really feels as if the monarch sat at the true throne of power in Spain in contemporary times. After all, Franco is he who allowed the monarchy to retain its existence, and groomed Carlos for his eventual takeover. Despite the fact that Carlos played a crucial role in Spain’s transition to democracy, the dictator’s role in Carlos’s position of prominence exists as part of his legacy. No matter Carlos’s disposition, he cannot completely be separated from his heritage—something of the regime’s ‘approval’ still lingers in the monarch’s very existence—a symbol of traditional rule. Even without Franco’s role in the monarchy’s existence, its long history of elitist oppression and autonomous actions rather than democratic process—render it utterly impossible to serve as a symbol of communal power and identity. Some critics have compared the transition period to a venereal disease, and Teresa Vilarós categorizes it as a “agujero negro” (black hole) (Vilaseca 10). Perhaps a bit elitist in perspective—but nonetheless, a representation of some of the intellectual characterizations of the monarch’s rebirth and the people’s inexplicable need for such an institution that seemingly serves little function other than symbolic.



While observing the VEMF06 in Valencia, where the Pope will be speaking, Escargot satirizes this real-life event. His descriptions contain no mention of substance, only style. He puts the King and Pope on equal terms, stating that they are one in the same, only that the Pope is more charismatic and powerful. As previously mentioned, Escargot calls the Pope “...uno de los últimos monarcas del mundo” and also refers to him as the “el rey del Vaticano” (Vatican King) (312). But the power Escargot describes them having is not raw like the wind or sun, but illusory and dependent upon pageantry and tradition. Satirically describing the tranquilizing effects of the Pope he writes:

...no me refiero tan sólo a toda la parafernalia estilística ni a los cirios ni a esas vestimentas blancas tan bellamente bordadas o sus graciosas mitras, el palio, el besamanos, la fraseología histórica, el linaje divino, la decadencia asumida, la mitología de la empresa más potente del planeta, los discursos a pleno sol...  
Aunque a veces dudo. (219)

Escargot then goes on to compare the Pope to the lead singer of U2, a direct reference to his theatrical nature and ability to ‘perform.’ By claiming the pope’s power is an echo of a lost era, a performatory act void of authority—is to simultaneously dismiss him as the author of Spain’s identity.

But Escargot’s dismissal of the Pope is two-fold, for he finds his power to be unauthorized: “Ustedes ponen la Sagrada Familia como ejemplo de familia católica, ¿no es así? —Obviamente, la duda ofende, ¿conoce usted las Santas Escrituras?” (293). The pair debate whether or

not the scriptures prescribe a nuclear family—according to Escargot the Bible has been misinterpreted. For him, the religious interpretation of the Immaculate Conception serves as a false foundation for Christianity—rendering its teachings invalid. In this sense, Escargot believes Spanish culture to be based in part on a logical fallacy. Once again, the answer for Escargot lies in the lack of authority, in this case, textual<sup>12</sup> or perhaps more accurately—*interpretative* authority. The interpretive authority he refers to in this instance is Pope Pius IX. This accusation brings forward the question of perspective once more, showing that interpretation combined with authority equals identity shaping powers. At the time of the Immaculate Conception’s defining (1854) and the general consensus that precedes it, the Church was one of the leading architects of the Spanish landscape. But in modern times, the more pertinent claim in terms of interpretive control would be the interpretative power of the law. Thus Escargot’s criticism of language’s deficiencies and the power of interpretation might appear to be most strongly aimed at the exploitation of the law that surrounds the construction of Marina d’Or. Collusion such as this forms part of the global narrative in which corruption leads to the financial collapse of both the global economy and Marina d’Or (the symbolic utopia of Spanish economic ambition).

To claim that the fundamentals of Christianity are false, is to claim that much of Spain’s identity is founded on false principles. This claim is furthered by Escargot’s three unsavory mentions of Santiago, the patron saint of Spain. His first two mentions of Santiago are in reference to his temporary travel authority or “la documentación de Santiago” (96)—he keeps these papers in his bag with his ‘exploited’ patch. Such a symbolic gesture is a direct criticism and symptom of

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<sup>12</sup> Although textual in nature, it is also a matter of religious interpretation. As the ambiguity of the scriptures lead to the many to rule on absolute meaning through councils such as the famous (or infamous) Council of Trent.

the panoptic nature of authority, publicly bringing to light the fact that authority is he who permits and denies the actions of its constituents. Escargot's third use of Santiago is equally critical. He uses a faulty credit card (economic symbol) under the name of Santiago and gets away with it, showing both the commodification of Spain and the ability to manipulate the written word. We have shown earlier Escargot's critiques of the powers of interpretation when it comes to religious law (i.e. the prescribed doctrine of the family), but now we see it being aimed at legal interpretation. A pointed criticism considering the corruption charges surrounding the construction of Marina d' Or and the faulty contracts that were signed. Of course, these two examples can be taken as individual critiques of specific arms of authority—or in conjunction (and perhaps more accurately) a broad attack on the modern power structure and authority's ability to hide<sup>13</sup> behind the easily manipulated written law.

Escargot views the pageantry and spectacle of power as a magical diversion from reality, referring to the unknown authority of Marina d'Or as "el mago" (126). He writes: "...tienes dos minutos para meterte en el papel. Ahora eres un obispo" (290). The simple defining feature of power for him is not the individual, but the appearance of power. For this reason, he wears an 'exploited' patch on his bag wherever he goes, a symbol of protest against being used as a utilitarian object of authority. To consider himself exploited is to consider himself an easily stolen and traded commodity much like the equipment he steals from the store by signing his name. Throughout this seemingly insignificant but detailed scene—the radio narrator's voice plays in the background talking about the ascension of kingdoms and thrones and the transfer of

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<sup>13</sup> In Foucault's panopticon, this constitutes the place where authority can hide, see, but not be seen.

power. For him, to adhere to a monarchical tradition is a ridiculous notion—the monarchy holds no authentic power, only symbolic.

According to the journalist, the Spanish monarchy only has power because the people treat it as such. Baudrillard refers to this as the fourth step in his essay, *The Precession of Simulacra* (1981). In essence, Baudrillard claims that objects can become void of their true identity, rendering the people incapable of distinguishing the original referent from the now empty sign. In this sense, authority depends on appearances and the *interpretation* of appearances. Thus symbols, the written, and pageantry—all add up to authority's attempt to solidify its appearance as necessary and indisputable. This concerted effort built of laws, nationalistic symbols, and ideals—plays a major role in the shaping of a nation's identity. This identity itself is not flawed but becomes problematic when the public sees things as what they were (or intended to be) rather than how they presently are—a la *Simulacra*. Factors such as corruption, hardship, and ideological shifts all contribute to this national (identity) cognitive dissonance.

But are Escargot's linking of power and identity valid? Must they be considered in conjunction? In her article *The Relationship Between Power and Identity* (2012), Morina Ard writes:

Thus, power never seems to be living in a parallel world with identity. It is meaningful only through it. At the same time, power continuously reconstructs identity according to its interests. It picks and chooses identity traits it likes or it cannot ignore and imposes as well as defends them from others it identifies as alien or dangerous. Acknowledging that identity is not static, and that tools, interpreta-

tions and interests are involved in its constant definition and re-definition, the outcomes are situational and contextual and do not necessarily follow a linear or chronological order.

By drawing physical or metaphorical boundaries such as borders, laws, commandments, customs, and culture—authority is constantly shaping and reshaping the identity of its constituents. Just as the author manipulates his characters to tell a story, authority uses its influence over others to write its own narrative. In this sense, Escargot’s suspicions of Spanish authority are conceptually sustained. But as Marina Ard points out, “identity is not static” and therein lies the challenge—pinning down a moving target. If we accept Marina Ard’s position, we accept that there is a hierarchy when it comes to the identity-power complex, that identity is both a tool and a consequence of the will of power. For Escargot the challenge is not what forges Spanish identity but *who*.

### **Identity Crisis**

The moment the investigator (Escargot) thinks he has pinned down the target, it is already shifting—the best he can hope for is approximation. But to catch the perpetually moving target of Spanish identity (or identity in general), the investigator must always be on the move. For this reason, Escargot is always experimenting, changing perspectives, and altering reality—a probable cause of his paranoia. “El periodismo es una cuestión de perspectiva. Y un cambio, cualquier cambio, sólo es cambio si le das la vuelta del todo a la tortilla” (337). The word ‘tortilla’ does not act as a randomly selected word, but a carefully selected food that is symbolic of Spain in its

totality<sup>14</sup>. This also provides probable cause as to why defining identity is so problematic for the protagonist. When Escargot concedes “El Dorado nunca está donde estás tú” (314), he is in fact positing that identity is a mercurial concept—one that can never fully be captured, even through Punk Journalism. Escargot shares his frustrations with Punk Journalism (and perhaps language in general) calling it *impossible* (337).

On the impossibility of journalism and reality, Roland Barthes writes:

As we see, by its very structure and without there being any need to appeal to the substance of content, historical discourse is essentially an ideological elaboration or, to be more specific, an IMAGINARY elaboration, if it is true that the image-repertoire is the language by which the speaker (or “writer”) of a discourse (a purely linguistic entity) “fills” the subject of the speech-act (a psychological or ideological entity). Hence, we understand why the notion of historical “fact” has so often given rise to a certain mistrust. Nietzsche has written: “There are no facts AS SUCH. We must always begin by introducing a meaning in order for there to be a fact.” (138)

The conflict between historical discourse and reality is symptomatic of language due to its fluid nature. The signifier can be understood but the signified (that which is most susceptible to manipulation) hangs in the balance. According to Ernesto Laclau, the hegemony is most amenable to the practice of signifier manipulation, “Hegemonic struggle requires the identification of what

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<sup>14</sup> The ‘tortilla,’ commonly referred to as a *Spanish Omelet* is a typical Spanish dish.

Laclau calls ‘floating signifiers,’ those signifiers that are open to continual contestation and articulation to radically different political projects” (Worsham 1). Laclau’s words help us better understand the confusion Escargot faces when attempting to understand floating signifiers like “identity”, “nation”, and “power.” His theory also helps validate Escargot’s suspicions in authority’s ability to shape identity. For if authority can alter the very means by which we understand concepts of language, be it through judicial, religious or economical interpretation—it can also alter the way its citizens both think and act.

Thus we see that as Escargot’s journey progresses, he begins to question the existence of Spain (nation) itself. We are left wondering *what* causes this paradigm shift. It is hard to pinpoint the precise moment this cataclysmic change occurs, but we (like Escargot) can approximate the reasoning behind this ideological shift. In a conversation with Brona<sup>15</sup>, Escargot describes who he believes to be one of the only “real” journalists in the business—Joel Estrada. Discussing his encounter with the journalist, Escargot writes: “La única vez que durante todos mis años de trabajo y exploración me he encontrado con algo parecido a lo que yo entiendo por un periodista, un tipo que de verdad va al fondo de la historia sin importarle que tenga que llevársela por delante, fue en el rodaje de una película famosa, en pleno desierto, y no se trataba de un periodista sino de un asesino” (301). The story itself is an allegory for what ends up being Escargot’s concluding ideology—*reality is fragmented*.

Just as Escargot refers to Joel Estrada as the only true journalist in the business, he also refers to him as an impostor. And if a journalist is to be the harbinger of truth, we must accept that Joel Estrada is the symbolic ideation of Escargot’s idea of truth—double sided.

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<sup>15</sup> Brona is Escargot’s companion/friend for the majority of his journey to find El Dorado. It is not always clear as to the reality of his nature, whether allegorical or tangible flesh and blood.

Joel era un impostor. Joel no era un periodista. Joel se había hecho pasar por periodista para acceder a Mister Smithee. En cuanto lo consiguió, Joel sacó unos cuantos cuchillos y un bisturí que debía de llevar escondidos en su bolsa de mano y montó una autentica carnicería. Le arrancó la nariz entera, nadie sabe todavía por qué. Antes de irse Joel me dejó una nota en la que ponía <<Pregunta:¿ A qué huele el éxito, Mister Smithee? Respuesta: A sangre y arena.>> (307)

Discursive truth for Escargot is no simple matter, gone for him are the days of absolutes. Instead, the Punk Journalist conceives reality to be stained with the defining characteristic of postmodern ideology—irony. Escargot himself embodies this irony, rejecting the idea of understanding identity in its totality while never quite giving up on his strong opinions of what an “authentic” journalist or Spain consist of.

The Punk Journalist is torn in this regard, feeling the need to defend the colonizing of identity while at the same time unsure of its true nature or existence. Thus he holds on to specific parts of its traditionally accepted definition without ever obtaining a vision of the whole “tortilla,” agreeing to parts while rejecting the whole. And although he never fully settles on a culprit, it appears that language and authority are that which he suspects most. Joel, the dedicated revealer of truth and bringer of the word, is also (according to Escargot) an anti-journalist, that thing which manipulates and murders. Continuing with this analogy, we must surmise that Escargot believes that truth, language, identity and perhaps all societal concepts are moldable by the “beholder.” And no one shapes things more than the authors of society than those who govern. This realization forces us to turn once more to the inescapable relationship between identity and authority.



Escargot begins like most investigators, searching (for identity) in obvious places. However, his search for personal and national identity becomes convoluted the more his search progresses. And though his investigation doesn't reveal to him *who* Spain is, it does cause him to ask an even bigger question—*What is the nature of identity?* He writes, "...la Evolución es Mentira, el Big Bang es Mentira, la verdad es Constante, todas estas páginas son mentira, todas estas páginas son verdad..." (339). In short he asks, *how can one identify anything when what something is, is what we perceive it to be.* Escargot concludes that identity is relative, and that the sociopolitical forces that the status quo believe to drive the narrative are just facades built on false authority. He posits that their tools are those of the magician, smoke and mirrors—pure unabashed pageantry created to distract. Moreover, Escargot's Marxist revolutionary leanings encourage him to fight the machine—but he concludes that the only way to take on power is with raw power, fighting fire with fire.

After Brona gets arrested for burning down a club called the *Indiana*, the streets turn ugly. Looking down at the chaos of the city that arises post-arson, Escargot observes the phenomenon of organized power (the police) trying to corral raw power (anarchists). He writes, "Imagino que si los punkies se organizaran un poco dejarían de ser anarquistas, pero lo cierto es que la batalla sería un poco más entretenida. Aunque claro, eso desvirtuaría esta bonita tradición de optimismo y violencia, y hay tradiciones que hasta los punkies saben que deben respetarse. Por eso todo los años sucede lo mismo" (346). To win power over the authorities, people like him would have to become organized. And to do so, would simultaneously kill the spirit of autonomy. Thus a paradox emerges—if he is to organize in such a way as to take on authority, he will become like the very thing he wishes to abolish.

## **Towards the Notion of Self, or Lack Thereof**

I propose that it is this very web of paradoxes (pertaining to national identity) which extends to and complicates Escargot's own personal identity—an identity made even more mercurial when we consider the author/protagonist complex<sup>16</sup>. Escargot mentions that he wants to go undercover with the “brutes” but that if he does, he might also lose his one “true identity”—he does so anyway. Indeed, Escargot believes in a fragmented reality, but we've also seen how he subconsciously holds onto the desire for finite definitions of country and self. We've seen that he critiques the masses for their consumer behavior, but that at the same time he stays apprised of trends and commonly makes references to pop culture icons like “Zelda” and “Tomb Raider.” Escargot claims that the best journalist (Joel Estrada) is not afraid to inflict violence while simultaneously claiming that it is this very thing (violence) which disqualifies him from being a true journalist. His split feelings on Spain's identity are mirrored by his feelings about his own nature—a promising sign as we inch closer to the conclusion that Escargot's investigation is not just about Spanish identity, but the concept of identity at large.

As we contextualize Escargot's portrayal of the Spanish landscape, we are forced to ask how it stacks up with reality. One of the prevailing themes throughout the novel is Escargot's self-juxtaposition with society. He pictures himself as an outcast of society and in essence a revolutionary. This viewpoint becomes problematic however, when we consider Mayo Fuster Morell's article *The Free Culture and 15M Movements in Spain: Composition, Social Networks and Synergies* (2012). In this piece, Morell provides a fascinating look at how the Free Culture

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<sup>16</sup> It is insinuated that the author and protagonist overlap in the Gonzo/New Journalism tradition.

Movement (FCM) might have influenced the 15M movement<sup>17</sup>. She uses empirical data to justify her arguments and provides compelling evidence for their interconnectivity. In its own words, 15M exists to “Call [ . . . ] to organize a large protest throughout Spain before the coming municipal elections [ . . . ] to denounce the deplorable situation in which citizens suffer from severe abuse caused by political and economic powers” (Morell 387). Escargot’s self-conceptualization as an outcast, and that of Spanish mass culture as right-leaning bourgeoisie might not be as accurate as he would have us think.

In the article *Majority of Spaniards support 15-M movement* (El País 2011), it is stated:

In early June, when the protest movement was only in its infant stages and the public did not know how long it would last, 66 percent supported it. Now, almost a month later, support for the movement remains at 64 percent. About 71 percent of Spaniards - among them 83 percent of Socialist voters and 54 percent of Popular Party supporters - believe that the platform is a peaceful movement that seeks to rebuild democracy. Only 17 percent consider it a radical, antisystem movement that aims to replace the current system with another.

Although we can’t be certain if this level of support was the same in 2006 as it was in 2011, it is fair to say (according to the setting of the novel), Escargot appears to be part of a strong and

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<sup>17</sup> This is significant due to the fact that the FCM was alive and well during the 2006 setting for *El dorado*. And even though the 15M doesn’t establish itself until 2011, if we accept that it spawned from FCM, there is a compelling reason to believe Escargot might very well be part of a larger way of thinking. 15M is a group that (like Escargot) refers to themselves as indigents (a similar punk-rock societal reject to Escargot’s self-identification as ‘exploited’), it believes in a unilateral structure (anti-ruler), and has a fear of capitalism.

growing contingent of the populous<sup>18</sup>. And from a historical perspective, (considering there is only a 5 year gap between 2006 and 2011) one could fairly state that in many ways he indeed is a man of his times.<sup>19</sup> In this sense (barring his extreme investigatory tactics i.e. drug consumption), Escargot does not appear the total outcast he portrays himself to be, yet he appears to form part of the seed of society which would later become the status quo (if not what had already become quite mainstream at the time of the novel's writing). This would suggest that his sense of self appears to be out of sync with the historical reality. This is especially important considering that the novel was published in 2008, noting that Cantavella and Escargot share an identity complex—the 15M movement would be much more advanced by the time of the physical (not meta) novel's publication.

When Escargot decides to go silent in Part III, he no longer narrates in first person due to fear. It is at this point that the reader really begins to understand the effect that national identity has on Escargot's personal identity. There's a trickling down effect, the journalist realizes that if there is no authentic "nation," his concept of self might also be in question. Escargot writes the following, "...el periodismo es una cuestión de perspectiva y de huevos y ahora la única opción es huir hacia delante...y ahora el tiempo se ha convertido en un desierto imposible" (336). It is precisely when Escargot chooses to flee rather than show that he has "huevos" and can violently confront "reality" like Joel Estrada, that things start to go south for the protagonist. Escargot becomes more disillusioned with reality and begins to have more psychotic episodes, he turns more

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<sup>18</sup> According to the article *Más de seis millones de españoles han participado en el Movimiento 15* by RTVE (2011), 6 to 8.5 million Spaniards participated in the movement and 76% of the population thought their demands were reasonable.

<sup>19</sup> Due to a lack of empirical evidence, we can't be certain that the same majority of Spaniards from the *Metroscopia Poll* (cited above) share Escargot's complete dissolution in the nation-state. I posit however, that Escargot does in fact tap into a more post-modern psyche that seems to be occurring in Spain.

pessimistic, his friend Brona gets thrown in jail, and the journalist ends his search with the close of his laptop and an acceptance that he's not willing to do what it takes to overthrow the powers at be. As his ideology markedly turns more post-modern, the world around him becomes fragmented. In *Modernism, Postmodernism, And The Question of Identity* (2001), author Mihaela Dumitrescu writes: "The postmodern notion of identity is one that decenters the individual, causing a shift from sheer subjectivity to an almost total loss of subjectivity...The decentered subject is perceived as multifaceted and contradictory, hence identity is no longer viewed as singular and stable, but rather as plural and mutable" (12). In typical postmodern fashion, we've seen Escargot to be contradictory, his notion of identity destabilized, and his identity as well as his country's—atomized.

In the end, Escargot is an agonizing journalist that fights to find a perspective from which he can stably view society. Without an ideological foundation, there is no stability and no security blanket. Towards the end of his stay in Valencia, the heat continues to rise, symbolizing Escargot's realization that Spain for him has become a living hell. Said inferno is a reflection of his existential crisis, and just like his journalism—the story already has a written ending. He wants to challenge the societal norms of Spain, but fears that he can't do it from the outside—that he would have to fully commit to being one of them. Compounding Escargot's woeful belief that he has failed to find El Dorado, is the sudden realization that perhaps investigative journalism (Punk Journalism to be specific) does not possess the power to penetrate the surface narrative and uncover the mysteries he had hoped. Escargot writes: "El tema es que al final, en mi caso concreto, las cosas se acabaron poniendo más bien feas. Lo de Valencia salió mal. No encontramos El Dorado. A mí por poco me echan el guante y a Brona lo volvieron a encerrar..." (347). Although

his search does not reveal the mystery he searched for, it does bring new self-discoveries to light such as identity and power's complex relationship.

By accepting Morina Ard's notion that power and identity share a correlative relationship, we must also accept that Spain is a particularly complicated case due to its diverse and complex power structure—as witnessed by Escargot's difficulty in pinning the source of power down between private interest, the Church, and the State. According to Escargot, there is no one obvious source of narrative driving power. This is a symptom of the modern day panopticon governance structure. As Foucault points out, “The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (Foucault 4). In this sense, Escargot is left exposed to authority's reach while the target he seeks remains in the shadows—an obvious fact when we consider his constant paranoia.

Even though Escargot is unable to pin down the precise location of El Dorado, it is clear he sees it as inseparable from the role of authority. High-dollar investors, monarchs, and the pope might all differ in moral, spiritual or ideological codes—but they all possess influence and power. The PR lives by the law of investment, the Monarchy by judicial law, and the Pope by spiritual guidance. At his suggestion *to follow the trail of power*, we come to a very interesting crossroads. After coming up empty, the fact that Escargot insists that he has “failed,” suggests that he might subconsciously hold onto the idea that there is a finite national identity to be found. This flies in the face of his claims that identity itself is a flawed concept. In her book *Postmodernism, Realism, and the Problem of Identity* (2000), Shari Stone writes “Postmodernism speaks to our sense of the contingency of seemingly ‘universal’ truths, our exposure to a plurality of

perspectives on ethics and history, and our experience of not quite fitting into any single identity” (126). As Stone mentions, the post-modernist fails to see finite identities and instead sees a fragmented reality. Once again, Escargot’s inconsistencies force us to call into question his notion of self-identity.

On the phenomenon of perception, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, comments “All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth” (Barthes 138). To go against the prevailing narrative of interpretation as a *function of power* in search of truth is a conceptual act of rebellion against authority. But towards the end of the novel we see that this countercultural power has taken its toll. The process of rebellion has turned him from a hopeful explorer of El Dorado to a fatalistic and tormented journalist. At the end of his journey he concedes to the illusory nature of identity declaring, “EL DORADO NUNCA ESTÁ DONDE ESTÁS TÚ” (314).

The powers at be within a country’s borders inevitably have some level of control over the citizenship and therefore their identity. But through small words and actions Escargot shows that the average citizen can protest against the hegemony as 15m famously did with their communal approach to social media in order to incite social action<sup>20</sup>. His rule-breaking writing style, his perspective-altering practices, and his wearing of the “exploited” patch are all examples of subversive behaviors that serve to destabilize power. And though he cannot determine the faceless names of power, the true nature of Spain, or even who he is—through his words and actions he’s able to establish who he is *not*. Ironically even this small level of self-centering requires the presence of the nation—for without the nation Escargot has no point of reference, no entity with

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<sup>20</sup> The previously mentioned grassroots movement would share information on social media inciting political action against a corporate hegemony.

which to compare. As Mihaela Dumitrescu states in *Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Question of Identity* (2001): “We tend to define human identity in much the same way that we try to approximate—unsuccessfully, though—the divine essence, namely in negative terms “apophatically,” in relation to what it is not. And, ironically, it is this demonized Other that enables us to circumscribe, even consolidate, our own identities” (11). Thus is the nature of postmodern identity, a system of referents with no central ground. Without hot there is no cold, and without wet there is no dry. For as much as Escargot distances himself from the idea of nation, he relies on it as a template with which to compare and contrast identities. He uses the same process as he attempts to understand his own identity—constantly aware of what the middle class “brute” consists of, and always careful to try not to become one of them. And although he never reaches the point of full blown nihilism, his relativism leads him to an endless sense of questioning.

Escargot’s belief that the end is already written and can’t be undone is personified in the interview Brona finds on his computer. To his companion’s surprise, all of the questions have answers written down before they’ve been asked—falsified responses written by Escargot himself. In one part, Brona and Escargot go as far as having Brona pretend to be a bishop while Escargot interviews him. “Vas a ser un obispo, de hecho ya eres un obispo, así que empieza a pensar como tal...” (29). This type of game is nothing short of a statement that fiction and reality are one in the same and that power no matter its form is predictable. The fluidity with which he views a bishop’s identity goes to show his detachment from absolute reality. By reading history as narrative, Escargot proves himself to be a true New Historicist. And like Nietzsche, he no longer believes in truth, only perspective—although (as I have previously shown) Escargot shows subconscious tendencies towards absolutes that show themselves from time to time. For



the journalist, there is but one reality he consciously ascribes to—power. But this power for Escargot is without authority (or truth), and therefore invalid. To the journalist, the Monarchy is a pageant of historical tradition, the Church is based on false conceptions, and the Economy based on exploitation. With all three pillars of nation undermined, he is left wondering who pulls the strings.

Just as Escargot turns away from first person narration in Part III due to fear—in the end he locks part of his inner-self away and appears ready to conform to the status quo in order to make life easier. This act fulfills his prophetic fears, that if he was to “act like one of them,” the day would come where he could no longer swim against the current. The novel ends with the journalist closing his laptop and drinking a Mai Tai, a postcolonial drink that has become a staple of tiki bars and famously served with a little umbrella—the epitome of commercial tourism. In essence the journalist shuts the door on intellectualism in favor of temporal and visceral pleasures, essentially embracing the inevitability of reification. Discussing Brona, he writes: “El último hombre libre de nuevo entre rejas (347).” Opposite the journalist, Brona chooses ideological freedom in the face of physical incarceration—he refuses to take the easy way out. By calling Brona both free and incarcerated, he is describing what he perceives to be the frustrations of Spanish intellectualism—to be free of mind (a break from reification) but corporally impotent against power. And just as Brona gets locked away in prison, Escargot locks this more spirited side of himself away as he moves forward.

By suggesting a degradation of Spain is to simultaneously declare a belief in an original and pure form or at least a more perfect form. Nothing can degenerate lest it have previously existed in a more perfect state. In the end it would seem that his troubling search for national identity is a complicated matter—one comprised of dual politics, dual existential belief systems, dual

autonomies, and perhaps most importantly—dual perspectives on the concept of nation itself. Escargot feels as if Punk Journalism has failed him, and his final action is nonchalantly sipping a Mai Tai as if nothing ever happened. After writing several fatalistic lines about life in Spain, Escargot concludes “Sí señor, ése es el mundo en el que vives, ni más ni menos” (347). It seems as if he’s finally willing to accept that there is nothing he can do against power.

For Escargot, Spain is just a myth. And when we read his portrayal of the VEMF2006, there is a sense of national pride amongst the attendees, a unified collective. For the attendees of VEMF06 Spain is a tangible reality, an absolute. But Escargot’s own picture of Spain is both absolute, and mercurial. Unlike most people, he’s able to see the glass as half empty *and* half full. This dual perspective makes him a conflicted and sometimes disturbed character. His inner voice tells him that Spain exists but that he’s just not part of it. His intellect however, tells him there is no Spain—it is just a concept of power used to govern. These two diametrically opposed points of view beg us to ask which of these perspectives is the “truth.” After all, the grand claim of Punk Journalism is its ability to uncover the lie and reveal that which lays dormant beneath the surface. But perhaps in doing so, we (like Escargot) are asking the wrong question; and like the ancient explorers of El Dorado we were doomed from the start of this investigation. Perhaps like Escargot suggests—it always was and will be a matter of perspective.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, literary identity only covers part of our investigative efforts. In the first part of this undertaking we set out to see what role identity played within the narrative. We saw an inseparable relationship between the events in the novel and those of modern day Spain as well as the author of the novel *Robert Juan-Cantavella*. It is this latter connection which makes the task of understanding the nature of *El Dorado* all the more relevant. In a novel of lies, tricks, and deceit we have to use as many peripheral clues and resources to make connections such as checking Escargot's references, the things he parodies, his setting, and his literary idols.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel advocate in *Elements of Journalism* (2001) for the need to question power. As we saw in the latter part of our investigation, the Church, State, and Economic institutions that control Spain are all put under the microscope. Like Thompson, Escargot fears that the forthcoming commercialized and tourist-driven Spain (as embodied by Marina d'Or) is not for the lower classes' benefit. In his own exploration of power and identity, Escargot paints a picture of a dizzying landscape full of artificiality and traps designed to suck Spain of its "authentic" culture, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. For a moment he seems to consider a few ways to combat these faceless puppeteers of power, namely becoming organized and powerful like them. But in doing so he realizes the cost would be his own identity. To become like them would be to risk reification, something he was barely able to escape throughout his investigation. At the end of the novel Escargot's focus turns towards the visceral as he closes his laptop and takes a drink of his Mai Tai.

After examining both the role of identity in *El Dorado* and the nature of the novel itself—we have fulfilled our promise to take a holistic view of the topic, examining identity from disparate angles. Such a methodology is necessary, as *El Dorado* is as connected to the storylines that

surround its publication as the publication itself. Such is the nature of journalism, to reveal factual truths to the masses. But unlike a traditional journalist, Escargot's truths are not revealed through an objective and scientific reporting methodology—they are given to us in the form of abrasive and chaotic fiction. The idea of receiving truths through lies may seem contradictory, but to Escargot—a greater irony is the idea that anyone whether journalist, clergymen, or magistrate should profess to have objective and universal knowledge at their disposal.

Instead, Escargot shows how the common and unchecked acceptance of these things can lead to the commodification of a people. In the end he searches for a solution, a way to fight back. But a solution would imply an absolute and universal truth to the reader—a near scriptural solution to liberate the masses. Caught between desire and belief, we see a protagonist who suffers from paranoia, delusions, identity shifts and drug addiction. Escargot desperately searches for a foundation—solid ground from which to judge, absolute concepts, and a system of truths with which to compare and contrast. The Punk Journalist finds no such thing, his furious and jumbled writing style serving as evidence of such. Likewise, as we the reader search to understand the nature of Punk Journalism and *El Dorado's* place as a work, an homage, and a bastardized version of New Journalism—we are forced to do so by searching the canon, looking for solid ground with which we can compare and contrast. Even so, we are never quite able to answer what Punk Journalism is, as much as we are able to answer what it is most like.

Putting together the elements of our study (both Chapter I and Chapter II) on identity together, we see that our powers of observation are limited to a system of signs and referents. We are forced to compare Punk Journalism to Gonzo Journalism, Gonzo Journalism to the Beats, Marina d'Or to Vegas, Journalism to non-fiction, and literature to fiction. Both the investigators

and the subjects of inquiry (Spain, the hegemony, Escargot, Punk Journalism, El Dorado) undergo changes at the same time which make precision an implausibility when it comes to fully understanding their identities. Language fails us in this regard, and it is why Thompson cannot define the American Dream (just who it is for), it is why Escargot cannot define Spanish identity (just what it is not), and it is why we cannot define Punk Journalism (just what it is similar to).

Through comparative analysis we see that PJ is not entirely “something new,” rather it is an extension of Thompson’s work that pushes the needle closer to the literary than the journalistic—*a novel dressed as journalism*. It was our intention from the beginning to analyze identity from diverse angles—both the nature of the novel and its contents. And after tirelessly analyzing its pages in conjunction with history, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Egea and other critics’ works—we come away with the following: identity is perpetually in motion, and so long as society is relegated to language, “the real” can always be manipulated by authority whether that be religious, economical, or textual.

Many of those who have written about *El Dorado* (especially the aforementioned) seem to be aware of its apparent novelty and the potential importance of the work. But the articles that have been written with academic rigor are far and few between. That’s not to discount what appear to be valid and well thought out opinions—but there still remain abundant opportunities for future students of *El Dorado* to dialogue with literary theory, genre studies, and historical facts. It is extremely tempting to focus solely on the aesthetic and stylistic nature of this novel, after all, this is what seems most novel about the work<sup>21</sup>. But as more scholars tackle its pages, it becomes prudent for them to also focus on the contents of *El Dorado*’s pages, not solely on *how* it

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<sup>21</sup> Both Egea’s and Vauthier tend to lean in this direction.

is written. In order to fill in gaps of research, the textual (not aesthetical) nature of the book is that which necessitates the most attention.

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