

Speech, Writing, and the Confession
of Unfulfilled Desire:
Miguel Delibes' *Cartas de amor de
un sexagenario voluptuoso*

YAW AGAWU-KAKRABA

Grand Valley State University

Las cosas caen por su peso. Baldomero, como cada año por estas fechas, viajaba a Cádiz y se detuvo en Sevilla para entrevistarse con usted. *Preferible hablar que escribir; la palabra no deja huella, se lleva el viento. El informe escrito es más delicado y Baldomero no lo ignora. (Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso, 151; my emphasis)*

In every case, the voice is closest to the signified, whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing. All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense . . . (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11)

Eugenio Sanz Vecilla, Miguel Delibes' protagonist in *Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso* problematizes the question of speech and destiny of his committed himself solely to writing letters, Eugenio hopes on, and destiny of his him closer to the author of an advertisement in *La Correspondencia* a mask to engage in a who has stated explicitly her intentions: 'Señora viuda, de ellos as well as to the juvenil, buena salud. Cincuenta y tres kilos de peso y 1,60 de matter of fact, it deals música y viajes. Discreta cocinera. Con caballeros de ha posedly is designed to características' (9-10).¹ The sixty-five-year-old Eugenio b does, that speech/voice recourse to the written medium he can finally satisfy his ed about her physical erotic union ('no he conocido mujer en sentido bíblico' [8] is not at all certain that later, however, his best friend, Baldomero Cerviño, resorts e's being. For instance, word through which he succeeds in winning the favours of nner truth of his role as thus prevents Eugenio from fulfilling his desires and dream ct, in an indirect way, The question of the spoken as opposed to written langu ence, especially if it is of Jacques Derrida's critique of Saussure manifests itself ev g of the psyche in which *Cartas*.² In contrast to his friend, Baldomero, who uses s cealment. Freud used a medium to express what is supposedly an inner truth of be or the functioning of the to writing inadvertently expresses not only his psychic inter 'Magna Travel Doodle' and anguish that accompany the act of writing. In what he c rests upon a wax slab. anguishing' act of writing, Derrida notes: oy moving a lever back pad, cleared of marks, Freud argued that the

[i]t is because writing is inaugural, in the fresh sense dangerous and anguishing. It does not know w

knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future. However, it is capricious only through cowardice. There is thus no insurance against the risk of writing. Writing is an initial and graceless recourse to the writer . . .³

While no writing is risk-free, as Derrida informs us, it must be emphasized that the epistolary mode is doubly prone to an undecidable destination/future since, in comparison to other kinds of writing, it is designed to generate an indeterminate kind of response from the addressee. Janet Altman suggests that 'letter narrative depends on reciprocity of writer-addressee and is charged with present-consciousness in both the temporal and the spatial sense'.⁴ There is, however, another dimension to the epistolary mode because in the act of writing the writer leaves multiple traces of himself/herself. Those traces could be conscious or unconscious.⁵ As Linda Kauffman notes:

Each epistolary narrator is engaged in the interpretation of a trauma and the trauma of interpretation. Each text is a *traumscript*, a transcript, trauma, script (predestined, already written), a scrap, combining the scraps of dreams, sounds, visual images, conscious and unconscious desires.⁶

Delibes' use of the epistolary mode in *Cartas* is of major significance because not only does Eugenio's act of writing reveal his conscious and unconscious desires, but it also leads to the disclosure of his 'trauma', his fantasies, as well as certain truths that would have remained hidden in the archives of his memory. His act of writing precipitates the unpredictable disclosure of a past that leads to the meaning of an unrealizable future. At the same time, Delibes uses the epistolary mode for a subversive purpose: he parodies and denaturalizes gender.

In the intensification of his epistolary narratives, *Cartas* represents fragments of the protagonist's anticipation of a future that the reader witnesses a defamiliarization of the notion that demonstrate, therefore, a fixed and unified whole. In other words, although Eugenio the delay in the arrival of a specific reader, he assumes multiple selves in which one sixty-five-year-old back dialogues. This kind of dialogic tension expresses not only deferment of the pleasure with his addressee but also a subtle dialogism between the closer to the object of desire, in which an older self wants to consummate the desires toward unification. Since as incapable of relishing. What is more, his role as brother absence, the letter signifies his sister Rafaela raises curiosity about the enigma and perhaps kissed. The other insights that the protagonist presents include the Eugenio, a picture that, initial missives are going to be received, the excitement of a hence becomes an icon of a full realization of the truth about his addressee, and the 'puedo asegurarle que de t of his unfulfilled desire.⁷ Delibes' *Cartas* thus engages in Parece mentira que un dialogue with other epistolary narratives like Rousseau's *La hecho y derecho tamaño Heloïse*, who uses her memoirs to confess in order to contemplates the portrait of to arrive at some form of psychological state of being, entire figure (60). s some of his most intimate thoughts. In Eugenio's case,

Indeed, Eugenio's initiation of the correspondence is designed to establish contact with his addressee, who forces him to reflect and, somewhat close part of his hidden past that he would have liked to *Sentimental*. Rocío's

and to open up communication that can facilitate the possible end to his virginity at age sixty-five. The gift of his contact, from a purely egotistic point of view, is sensuality. But before he reveals to his addressee the real motive behind his decision to initiate the correspondence, he presents himself by evoking his childhood memories as well as his physical deficiencies: 'Yo soy un enfermo saludable o, si lo prefiere, un enfermo que nunca se muere ni acaba de sanar del todo' (17). Although it might seem odd for one to reveal in one's second letter these physical traits to a woman who, from the advertisement, presents herself as the attractive lady that most men would aspire to know, Eugenio's intention to self-advertise lucidly his shortcomings is designed strategically to present consciously a self that is compassionate and without any complexes. Unconsciously, however, as we find out over time, Eugenio's presentation of certain aspects of himself intends to conceal a darker side of his past that will become evident only through the addressee's and her son's incessant questioning of Eugenio's activities in the Franco years as journalist.⁸

From a theoretical and philosophical point of view, the protagonist's identity as sender of the missives as well as the receiver's are problematic since both seek recourse to the whole question of being and presence. Indeed, in Eugenio, Delibes invokes the traditional assumption that speech implies immediacy and presence by subjecting his protagonist to an endless display of mediated language (writing) that supposedly obscures meaning and presence. But as we discover later, Delibes attempts to problematize and deconstruct the opposition between speech and writing by linking it to the uncovering of a metaphysics of presence as a whole.

Both Eugenio and Rocío confront the metaphysics of presence via the medium of writing. From Eugenio's letters we surmise Rocío's uncertainty about the ultimate destiny and reception of her true self since she does not leave any traces about her real self (her weight, height, and age). By the same token, Eugenio also does not write or divulge who he is or what is hiding in the archives of his *memories* because of the uncertainty of the reception, the destination in epistolary novels. writing. In both cases, Rocío and Eugenio use writing as *Letters of a Portuguese* game of deception that later becomes apparent to both of *feelings in letters to the* reader.⁹ But the issue goes beyond one of deception; as a *ouvelle Heloise*, Mme indirectly with the question of presence that speech sup *e Sancerre*, and Milord engender. While one can argue, as Saussurian linguistics *rse and The Post Card:* implies immediacy (in speech Rocío could not have had Derrida respectively appearance) and, for that matter, is a metaphor of truth, its *uage by using amorous* it acts as a transparent medium for an inner truth about *of love, identity and* although Baldomero uses speech to seduce Rocío, the *inters consciously 'femi-* agent of Franco's censorship is hidden, repressed. In fact *an has argued, 'mock[s]'* writing can also be associated with truth and self-pres *us between gender and* conceived in Freudian terms as a metaphor for the working *algebraically reinscribe the* the verbal text is constituted by revelation as much as con *they show what can be* writing gadget, 'The Mystic Writing-Pad', as a metaphor for *gender and identity'.¹⁴* psyche.¹⁰ The apparatus (a variation of which is called the *efforts to parody and* in the United States) contains a celluloid covering-layer that *by the Woman: Woman* With a pointed stylus, traces can be made on it and erased *ful (she waits), man is* and forth between the extreme ends of the surface. The *traces, or writing, can be used again for new messages. gives shape to absence,*



elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so, she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, calvacades). (13–14)¹⁵

Unlike the traditional epistolary novel in which the female invariably laments the absence of the loved one, Delibes presents us with a male subject who must wait with anxiety for Rocío's letter to arrive. Because Eugenio is retired, he has time to construct and spin his epistles in which he manifests his sensuality. The act of writing his letters thus becomes a vocation. It is, perhaps, also an exercise in which he indirectly gains some level of sensual pleasure because for the first time he is able to engage consistently with the other sex, even if not physically. For him, this level of exchange can be highly satisfying, especially given his age. In short, Delibes subverts the traditional hierarchical notion that privileges the male subject as the force that precipitates the female revelation of emotional, psychological and sentimental *angst*. As Neuschäfer notes, 'en *Cartas* se ha realizado un cambio en lo que se refiere a la jerarquía de los sexos. No sólo porque la mujer, aquí, es más fuerte y más desconfiada que el hombre, sino también porque éste—a lo largo de la historia—va perdiendo gran parte de su prestigio y de su supuesta autoridad'.¹⁶

Within the context of this subversive intent lies the paradox of writing, which is conspicuously transparent in Eugenio's efforts to perpetuate, on the one hand, a stronger sense of self-presence, as Derrida conceptualizes writing, and on the other, the confessional which characterizes the act of writing. Eugenio's deep interest in his self articulates a discourse that deals with himself and with Rocío as the other. By expressing the dearth or insufficiency of being and the exigency for a complement, the protagonist hopes to transfer to the other the feeling of ontological insecurity. Eugenio's lack of being functions both on a physical and metaphysical/ psychological level. In his second letter, he informs his reader(s) that the state of his health is neither good nor bad. In addition to his physical debilities, subsequent letters, like the fifth one, evoke his emotional frailties: 'A pesar de mi apariencia flemática y controlada, soy hombre de temperamento nervioso; no duermo o duermo mal' (30). His nervous temperament, closely linked to his sense of insecurity, is partially responsible for the introduction of Baldomero to Rocío. His presentation of Baldomero suggests that he is not confident of winning Rocío's favours on his own terms: 'Baldomero es una persona equilibrada. Brillante y bienhumorado, de todo saca partido. Y, luego, su físico, su noble testa patricia, de sedoso cabello blanco, que él sabe llevar airoosamente sobre los hombros, con una altivez arrogante e inofensiva' (64).

This portrait of Baldomero stands in sharp contrast with Eugenio's presentation of himself: 'mido, como usted, un metro sesenta, siquiera mi peso, 85 kilos, no esté proporcionado a mi estatura, denote una inequívoca propensión a la obesidad. Un viejo amigo, Onésimo Navas, habla de la curva de la felicidad, refiriéndose a mi vientre voluminoso' (15). If his intention is to present himself honestly, he may have unwittingly aroused the desire of his addressee to know more about Baldomero, for he does not endear himself to her by accentuating his inferior state in relation to his friend's. His attempts to put himself on a par with Baldomero only reveal his inadequacies and lack of self-identity:

Mi intimidad con Baldomero Cerviño no me releva de mi condición subordinada. Yo soy a Baldomero lo que Sancho a don Quijote o lo que

to the truth of old age and a physical appearance that bears no resemblance to the picture she sends to Eugenio: 'Pero con la mano en el corazón, ¿qué tiene que ver ese cuerpo armonioso, elástico, vital, de la foto, con la mujer madura, de antebrazos flácidos, ojos enramados y cintura enteriza que se sentó frente de mí en la mesa del Milano?' (147-48). Hers is a construction of a self that is a fantasy. If, however, one is to accuse Rocío of constructing an image, a self that is unreal, so can one charge Eugenio that that his sole purpose in undertaking the epistolary adventure is to fall in love with an image that is impossible. The appeal of the portrait of the woman in *La Correspondencia Sentimental* is connected with Eugenio's erotic attraction to his deceased sister, Rafaela:

Voy a sincerarme con usted: Creo que lo que en última instancia me decidió a tomar la pluma y escribirle después de leer su nota, fue una curiosa coincidencia: mi difunta hermana Rafaela pesaba un kilo menos que usted, medía lo mismo que usted, uno sesenta, y por lo que usted dice, tenía su mismo aire juvenil. Al leer su mensaje, me la imaginé talmente como ella era, grácil, insinuante, la tez oscura, las extremidades largas y flexibles, la mirada caliente . . . ¿Me equivoco? (49)

Rocío might have conjectured that what Eugenio wants is, as Neuschäfer puts it, an *Ersatz*, 'una sustituta para sus difuntas hermanas, para la "cocinera" y para la "querida", sobre todo para Rafaela, de la que Rocío, en la mente de Eugenio, no parece ser más que una proyección'.¹² As a result, Eugenio's blatant confession forces Rocío to accuse him of a latent incestuous sentiment toward his sister, an accusation that the protagonist denies vehemently: '¡Oh, no, por favor! . . . ni por broma debe usted considerarme un satírico incestuoso' (52). Words cannot express the protagonist's dismay at this kind of accusation. But at the same time, having committed himself to writing, he must use that medium to exonerate himself.

Delibes' presentation of Eugenio in *Cartas* reminds us of what can be characterized as the traditional representation of the feminine. Examples of this kind of epistolary novels abound: *The Nun*, in which a lonely nun in a convent reveals her feelings for a cavalier who has abandoned her; Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*; Riccoboni's *Lettres d'Adelaïde de Dammartin, comtesse de M. de M. de M.*; and d'Ossery's *Lettres de Juliette Catesby*. In *A Lover's Discourse: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida attempt to emphasize the performative propensities of language and literary discourse to frame their meditation on the question of gender and literature.¹³ They present themselves as fictional characters 'characterized'. Their recourse to feminine stereotypes, as Kauffmann notes, 'show[s]' the effect of undermining the presumed next to the self-identity. She notes that both Barthes and Derrida 'nostalgically' refer to feminine stereotypes they mean to mock, but at other points they gain by destabilizing the assumed relationships between them. Indeed, Delibes' strategy in *Cartas* approximates Barthes' attempt to denaturalize gender consciously. For Barthes,

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by a man who is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful, Man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who g

elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so, she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, calvacades). (13–14)¹⁵

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... con Baldomero Cerviño no me releva de mi condición de hombre. Yo soy a Baldomero lo que Sancho a don Quijote o lo que

Ciutti a don Juan Tenorio. Los hombres apuestos, inteligentes o intrépidos precisan para brillar, para agotar sus posibilidades de proyección social, de un segundón, de un contrapunto. Yo soy este contrapunto, señora. (64)

Unlike the early epistolary confessions in which correspondence between friends and lovers is carried out in absolute secrecy for fear of potential disclosure of contents to unwanted recipients, Eugenio's introduction of Baldomero to Rocío transgresses the code of epistolary secrecy. As he naively underlines Baldomero's qualities (symbolically Baldomero becomes the intermediary, if not a confidant), the contents of his letters become indirectly available to Baldomero, who will exploit Eugenio's weaknesses to his advantage and gain access to Rocío. Like the early confessional letters and secret correspondence that are tinged with fatality, as is the case of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Cartas* will also be framed by a tragicomic if not a fatal end.¹⁷

Eugenio's discovery of the truth between Rocío and Baldomero prompts him to return to the 'usted' form with which he initiated the correspondence between him and his addressee. The use of 'usted' symbolically closes the line of communication, it seals off contact, intimacy and desire. It signifies Rocío's betrayal. The letter as a mode of communication still serves as mediation, but it is no longer the kind of mediation that emphasizes the power of absence to draw people together. The letter, as Altman recalls, has the capacity of being 'an intermediary step between indifference and intimacy', and she adds: 'the letter lends itself to narrative actions that move the correspondents in either direction'.¹⁸ In Eugenio's case, the letter serves not only to ensure an antithetic dimension between indifference and intimacy, but also to function as closure in which Eugenio inscribes both Rocío and her lover, Baldomero, within his final text: 'Ahora ya me salen las cuentas, todo está perfilado y en su sitio: la hepatitis, el tono de sus últimas, su comportamiento en Madrid . . . Las piezas del "puzzle" casan' (150). Eugenio's message to Rocío recalls Barthes' note to his addressee:

Here I cannot give you what I thought I was writing for you—that is what I must acknowledge: the amorous dedication is impossible (I shall not be satisfied with worldly or mundane signature, pretending to dedicate to you a work which escapes us both). The operation in which the other is to be engaged is not a signature. It is, more profoundly, an inscription: the other is inscribed, he inscribes himself within the text, he leaves there his (multiple) traces.¹⁹

Certainly, Eugenio's 'amorous dedication' to Rocío, which sustains most of the text, has become impossible because the final outcome of the communicative act has not resulted in the reciprocity of honesty, desire and the erotic adventure he had expected. It is in his last letter to Rocío, after having suffered total humiliation and deception, that Eugenio finds it appropriate to inscribe Baldomero within his text and expose him for what he really is:

No lo crea usted. A las prendas físicas de Baldomero hay que añadir una diabólica facultad, adquirida, sin duda, a lo largo de los años que ejerció como censor: la de adueñarse de la mente ajena socavando previamente los resortes defensivos de su víctima. Porque Baldomero, señora, digámoslo de una vez, fue censor de oficio, profesional, de plantilla y esta tenebrosa

actividad crea hábito . . . Durante lustros fue éste un país de posesos y uno de los poseyentes más cualificados fue Baldomero. (151)²⁰

What is more, Eugenio leaves his traces by emphasizing the difference between the delicacy of writing and the spoken word. For Eugenio *logos*, the spoken word, leaves no traces: gone with the wind, the signifier and signified produced in speech last only as long as that communicative event is in progress. However, voice, the spoken word, has served his rival Baldomero well (151)²¹ and Eugenio believes it to be more potent. As metaphor of truth and excellence, self-present, vital speech stands in contrast to the insignificant torpid flow of writing. Speech facilitates the ability to experience a close bond between sound and sense, an instant fulfilment of meaning which manifests itself without recourse to complete, translucent comprehension. By committing himself to the letter, the written word, Eugenio metaphorically exposes himself, his nakedness and his weaknesses.

Although Eugenio laments the anguish of writing, the act of writing in itself is meaningful within the context of the usurpation of his position by Baldomero. Since writing, as Derrida puts it, has the power to dismantle that obsession with self-presence engendered by speech, Eugenio is able to use his epistles first to elevate his friend to a pedestal, then to undermine and expose him through the same medium. Baldomero's truth and authenticity, verbalized through speech, undergo an endless displacement of meaning via the medium of writing. At the same time, Eugenio ignores the dialogic nature of epistolarity because dialogism implicitly denotes the speaking voice transformed into the written word as the writer cannot speak to the addressee.

But if Eugenio succeeds in utilizing his letters to expose Baldomero, he also leaves multiple traces of himself in his text. One of the sore points between Eugenio and Rocío has to do with Federico's intervention in the communicative process. Eugenio's exasperation over Federico's insinuation that he might have gained access as journalist in *El Correo* through the back door provokes a vehement rebuttal. While his Freudian evaluation of Federico is correct ('Federico está celoso de mí. Tu hijo, único varón en la familia al fallecer tu marido, te quiere en exclusiva, para él solo' [127]), it must be reiterated that like Rocío, Federico functions as a medium that accelerates the protagonist's flight from the present to the past. In conjunction with his mother, Federico forces Eugenio to look back, to reassess his role in an autocratic regime that blocked self-expression and self-realization. Thus, as Eugenio desperately tries to salvage his reputation and dignity, he only reveals a past that would have remained imprisoned in his memory: 'Yo, te repito, no organicé el Alzamiento Nacional ni creé el Tribunal de Represión de la Masonería y el Comunismo, pero ello no fue obstáculo para que acatara las normas entonces vigentes como hubiera acatado otras' (87). His declaration that he is aseptic and apolitical is rather unconvincing since the people he associates with are those who are the direct beneficiaries of the outcome of the Civil War—the winners: 'Admisible en el caso de Bernabé del Moral, un advenedizo, enemigo declarado de *El Correo*, director por méritos de guerra, pero ¿por qué en el mío, un ser refractario a toda ideología, un simple trabajador?' (67; my emphasis). As Eugenio continues to reveal the failure of his dream to assume the directorship of *El Correo*, he unwittingly divulges his attachment by association with a regime that he claims Baldomero served well. In spite of his

assertion that he is no ideologue but rather a passive observer of the status quo, it is fair to say that his silent acceptance of the prevailing conditions makes him a collaborator as much as a perpetrator of the violence that characterized the period.²² Indeed, the very act of writing not only reveals but also conceals his past. As Eugenio masks his tracks by censoring the trails of his forbidden past with the Franco regime, he simultaneously leaves that past legible by way of incorporating into his text his infamous friend who has first-hand knowledge of that past. Consequently, Eugenio's role as a government official in favour of the status quo becomes apparent, thanks to Baldomero, whom he attempts to excoriate. Baldomero's insights into Eugenio's professional life have undoubtedly provided the necessary ammunition with which Rocío and her son force the sixty-five-year-old to divulge not only his erotic feelings but also his past.

Eugenio's trauma of recuperating the past through writing designed to deal with the present, a present that can possibly yield a realizable future of erotic experience, remains unresolved. In spite of that condition, as well as his status as a spurned lover, he does not spend his time lamenting his fate but self-ironically mocks his unfulfilled erotic and emotional desires. He appears as someone capable of understanding and forgiving:²³

Más claro todavía: usted no es la señorita de la fotografía . . . Durante meses, embaucado por su fotografía, viví en la inopia, imaginando el milagro, pero cuando la otra tarde en Madrid observé atentamente su rostro y percibí, por debajo de afeites y cosméticos, las tenues, disimuladas, arrugas, las oscuras bolsas bajo los ojos azules, la traidora sotabarba, en una palabra, las patentes huellas de la edad, comprendí que tal milagro no existía, . . . ¿Voy a tacharla de embustera por eso? ¿Voy a censurarle que sustituyera su verdadero retrato por el de una encandiladora señorita de bañador? Al contrario, comprobar su ingenua argucia me conmovió, despertó en mí una inmensa ternura. No vi en su juego una falacia, sino al revés, un deseo de ser más para darme más, un anhelo de ser perfecta para ofrecerme la perfección.

(147–48)

Eugenio in this instance rationalizes Rocío's deception, interpreting the addressee's make-up as a means to offer him her best ('de ser perfecta para ofrecerme la perfección'). At the same time, behind that apparent dispassionate and objective analysis of Rocío's behaviour lies a soul that grieves over the unfulfilled desire for eros, for passion. The grief is not for the loss attributed to the death of a loved one, but rather one in which the protagonist must decide that the image of the object of his desire must die. Eugenio must, in conformity with Barthes' notion of the lover exiled from the image-repertoire, undergo two contrary miseries. The first is 'to suffer from the fact that the other is present (continuing, in spite of himself, to wound [him]) and to suffer from the fact that the other is dead (dead at least as [Eugenio] loved [her])'.²⁴

Eugenio's text becomes a combination of scraps of dreams, conscious and unconscious desires that have remained unfulfilled on an emotional, psychological and erotic level. But as readers who are involved in the creative and reading process, not only have we, like Eugenio, been fooled and deceived by the addressee but our desires are also left unfulfilled. The defamiliarization that has framed

Delibes' text undermines our expectations acquired from reading the traditional epistolary narrative. Aside from frustrating our desire by demolishing the underlying traditional suppositions of representation in which hierarchies are established through binary oppositions, Delibes also thwarts our expectations by subverting the traditional notion that the woman has a mythic place in which, full of anxiety, she patiently waits for the lover's letter and presence. At the same time, the author succeeds in illustrating how the act of writing forces one to disclose not only one's present but also one's past. While Eugenio uses his writing as an escape from past political misconduct, it inadvertently opens old wounds and memories that would become obvious to him and his readers. However, by choosing a sexagenarian protagonist who declares without reservation his sensuality and sexuality, Delibes asserts that eroticism can indeed find place in the mind, heart and soul of the old. But perhaps what is of most importance is the fact that, for Delibes, the so-called truth, self-presence and transparent proximity engendered by speech does not necessarily supersede writing.

NOTES

1 All references are to Miguel Delibes, *Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso* (Barcelona: Destino, 1983). Henceforth the title will be abbreviated as *Cartas*.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976). Derrida locates at the core of Western philosophic tradition Saussure's prioritization of spoken as opposed to written language. Against the Saussurean methodology of privileging speech in which voice becomes the metaphor of truth and excellence, Derrida argues that writing is indeed the precondition of language and must thus be conceived as prior to speech. Within every system of communication, Derrida posits that writing functions as 'free play' or elements of undecidability that escape the self-consciousness of speech and its beguiled sense of the power of concept over language. Derrida does not intend to assert that writing in its standard, restricted form is in some way more fundamental than speech. For him, it is the opposition speech/writing that must be critiqued in order to forestall the 'blind prejudice' to which writing has been subjected.

3 *Ibid.*, 11.

4 Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1982), 187.

5 Altman has indicated the dual potentiality of the letter. She suggests that either it is transparent and thus a 'portrait of soul, confession, vehicle of narrative' or opaque, in which case it functions as a 'mask, weapon, event within narrative' (186).

6 Linda S. Kauffman, *Special Delivery. Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), xxii.

7 See Linda Kauffman's assertion that Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a meticulous multiplication of the self 'divided between past and present, between younger and older selves, between roles, functions, insights, moods, and experiences' (135).

8 See Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer, 'Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso. Novela epístola y ejercicio (auto) irónico', in Miguel Delibes. *El escritor, la obra y el lector*, ed. Cristóbal Cuevas García (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1992), 61-77). Although Neuschäfer is one of the few critics to point out that Rocío is responsible for prompting the protagonist's revelation of his past (73), he fails to acknowledge that Eugenio's disclosure of what ostensibly are his physical weaknesses has a strategic psychological importance to it. On that basis, Neuschäfer suggests that the reader cannot but excuse the frivolous Rocío for spurning Eugenio: 'En vista de un comportamiento tan poco "masculino" ¿qué cosa más natural que el enfriamiento por parte de ella, la preocupación y la necesidad de informarse detalladamente sobre un hombre que, si bien es sincero y por ende algo simpático, no corresponde, en absoluto, al ideal con el que puede soñar una viuda deseosa de rehacer su vida!' (69-70). The irony, of course, is that Rocío herself is not the kind of ideal woman with whom many men in Eugenio's position would have wanted to spend the rest of their lives.

9 Although one can argue that Eugenio was frank enough to state that 'Soy hipócrita y mendaz, ¿puede calificárseme con este rigor por el hecho de medir un metro cincuenta y ocho en lugar de uno sesenta o por la pueril estratagema de encaramarme a un ladrillo para retratarme y aparentar unos centímetros más de estatura?' (147), it must be mentioned that his statement is full of irony since we do know that his supposed forthrightness is rather selective. María Grazia Scelfo Micci thinks that Eugenio's lie is 'una mentira que no tiene importancia y que podríamos llamar secundaria'. See María Grazia Scelfo Micci, 'Entre mito y realidad en *Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso* de Miguel Delibes', *Annali* (Naples), XXVIII, 1 (1986), 337-60 (347). However, it must be emphasized that what Eugenio considered his lie, as well as his repression of his past with the Franco regime, gains profound importance after being subjected to rigorous questioning by both Rocío and her son, Federico.

10 Sigmund Freud, 'A Note upon the Mystic Writing-Pad', in *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), XIX, 227-32.

11 The reader's involvement in creation and in the reading process is shaped by the paradox of epistolary fiction as Altman informs us: 'as a reflection of self, or the self's relationship, the letter connotes privacy and intimacy; yet as a document addressed to another, the letter reflects the need for an audience, an audience that may suddenly expand when that document is confiscated, shared, or published' (186-87).

12 Neuschäfer, *op. cit.*, 70.

13 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987).

14 Kauffman, *op. cit.*, xv.

15 Barthes, *op. cit.*, 13-14.

16 Neuschäfer, *op. cit.*, 74.

17 Once Baldomero enters the picture, we notice an imbalance in the relationship between Eugenio and Rocío. As Eugenio's erotic desires increase, so does Rocío's reticence magnify. Baldomero's intervention thus could be considered as the *coup de grâce*. When Eugenio asks that both of them unite telepathically on the midnight of September 25 in order to contemplate a satellite with the accompaniment of a musical programme on Mozart by Radio Nacional de España, Rocío either consciously or unconsciously forgets their nocturnal telepathic date. Rocío's actions come in the wake of feigning sickness after Eugenio has proposed that they meet in Madrid. Blinded by the insight into his own erotic feelings, Eugenio is unable to reflect critically in order to see the lie behind Rocío's flimsy excuse for failing to keep their romantic extraterrestrial date: 'el hecho de que fuera el televisor, trasto que habitualmente menosprecias, el causante de tu olvido, aumenta mi decepción' (134). The most tragicomic aspect of the novel reveals itself when without warning Rocío surprises Eugenio with a date in a Madrid restaurant on October 15. Needless to say, their meeting is a total disaster. The truth of Rocío's deception becomes apparent. Her silence during the whole encounter, as well as her general lack of enthusiasm, awakens Eugenio to the reality that something is wrong. The enigma of Rocío's feigned illness, the coldness in her letters and her strange behaviour on their first and final encounter become clear to the sexagenarian protagonist only after Baldomero writes to Eugenio to inform him that he is in love with Rocío and that they are going to get married soon.

18 Altman, *op. cit.*, 186.

19 Barthes, *op. cit.*, 79.

20 Ever so subtle in his critique of the Franco government, Delibes attacks the Nationalist government's censorship of speech. Here, Baldomero Cerviño is presented as the censor *par excellence*. He encapsulates the essence of censorship, having developed the talent to extract hidden information from his subjects. For a more detailed discussion of Delibes' critique of the Nationalist government, see my book *Demythification in the Fiction of Miguel Delibes* (New York: Peter Lang, 1966) and my study 'Miguel Delibes and the Politics of Two Women: *Cinco horas con Mario* and *Señora de rojo sobre fondo gris*', *Hispanófila*, CXVII (1966), 63-77.

21 See the first epigraph to this study.

22 Neuschäfer has stated convincingly Eugenio's collaboration with the Franco regime: 'Eugenio tiene que dar cuenta, *malgré lui*, de lo que realmente era su carrera; así va saliendo poco a poco que él, al principio, ni siquiera tenía el carnet de periodista, que se lo procuraron por enchufe; que no le gustaba nada el espíritu liberal del periódico, ni su *engagement* por la República; que se



sintió aliviado con el advenimiento del régimen franquista, que se convirtió en la mano derecha del nuevo director, un héroe de la guerra civil' (72).

23 Scelfo Micci has equated Eugenio to God in his capacity to tell the truth. Such assertion is, however, problematic because Eugenio himself admits falsifying his physical appearance. In addition, as I have already shown, but for Rocío's penetrating questions, he would not have revealed his true identity as sympathizer of the status quo. To some extent, Eugenio's willingness to forgive may have been the result of the communication with Rocío and her son, an act that has forced the protagonist to revisit his past in order to come to terms with his role in that past in the present.

24 Barthes, *op. cit.*, 107.

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