

An Analysis of Ana María Matute's "Pecado de omisión" through the Lens of Francoist Spain

Aileen Dever
Quinnipiac University

Painting, sculpture, fiction, and music are all embedded in the vicissitudes of life.
Cary Nelson, "Advocacy and Undecidability" (79)

Ana María Matute (1926—) has written extensively about the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and its consequences. The recipient of many national and international literary awards, Matute was honored most recently with the Cervantes Prize (2010) which was presented to her by King Juan Carlos (see Harris). Yet, despite Matute's literary prominence, relatively little current literary criticism surrounds her works. Consequently, for those interested in the first generation of postwar writers, a veritable treasure trove remains to be uncovered in Matute's prose.¹

In 1961, Francisco Franco y Bahamonde (1892-1975) celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1936 military uprising that led to his thirty-six year dictatorship that came to an end only with his death (Preston 692). That same year saw the publication of *Historias de la Artámila*, a collection of twenty-two stories written by Matute and intended as an organic whole (Díaz 72). Tender lyricism and social criticism imbue these melancholic stories. Referring to Franco as "la momia" (Schwartz 115), Matute has been a consistent critic of the dictator.² As Sandra N. Harper comments, authors like Matute "viewed literature as an instrument that could change society by drawing attention to its injustices, and they used fictional worlds to document social problems" (7).

Written in prose bejeweled with shimmering poetry, the stories in *Historias de la Artámila* contain a microcosm of life in Spain during the dark years of the Franco regime.

¹ Matute exhibited creative tendencies from an early age. She was only five years old when she wrote and illustrated her first story (Díaz 20-21). Because of her father's business as owner of an umbrella factory, she would spend half the year in Madrid and the other half in Barcelona. Margaret E. W. Jones affirms that as a result "of these moves, she had a sense of not belonging: in Madrid, she was the *catalana*; in Barcelona, the *castellana*" (*Literary World* 1; emphasis in original). For Janet Winecoff, among "the most consistently striking aspects of Ana María Matute's work—one which relates her to existential literature—is the vision of the estrangement and alienation of the individual" (62).

² In fact, she was fined 50,000 pesetas for her part in creating and signing the *Montserrat Manifesto* of December 1970 protesting the arrest of clergy, university students, and writers who opposed Nationalist policies and positions regarding law, order, education, and censorship (Schwartz 115).

From among them, “Pecado de omisión” is often reproduced in literary anthologies for undergraduate students of Spanish. Critics generally provide simple plot summaries of this story. For example,

The wealthy village mayor took in an orphaned distant relative, but instead of educating the obviously intelligent boy, sent him to the mountains as a shepherd, where the difficult, primitive life and isolation reduced him to semi-animalism. Much later, when a visit to the village brought him face to face with differences between himself and former friends, the boy kills his “benefactor” with a rock. (Díaz 82)

A deceptively simple story, “Pecado de omisión” deserves a more detailed analysis. By delving beneath the narrative level, we can uncover a subversive critique of Franco and his regime.

Matute was almost ten years old when the Civil War broke out and the umbrella factory her father owned was seized by the workers (Díaz 28; Wythe 21). The outbreak of the conflict caught Matute’s family in the Republican zone of Barcelona where they would remain for the duration of the war (Díaz 28). From that moment onward, Matute’s world changed dramatically; the war would leave a deep wound in her soul and psyche. She says, in translated words, that she saw “the burnings, the violence, those bodies that would appear at dawn in the outlying fields. It was all so terribly new for me, that up to that moment I lived, you might say, in a crystal urn” (Díaz 28).

A Tale of Two Stories

Gerardo Piña-Rosales notes that a work of fiction “puede evocar toda una generación, toda una época” (481). In “Pecado de omisión,” Matute showcases the backwardness, paralysis, and loss of human potential that was Franco’s Spain. As the fateful events unfold, the reader, too, feels a tangible sense of powerlessness.

The title of the story alludes to Emeterio’s deliberate act of dismissing Lope so thoughtlessly as well as to religious undertones throughout. For Eric Pennington, the title “points inescapably to a biblical approach to its narrative” (141). The climax is directly linked to the title as Emeterio’s moral deficiency (his utter lack of compassion in his treatment of Lope and his lack of respect for the boy’s intellectual abilities) leads to his murder. In a more general sense, the title can also be related to the Catholic Church as an indictment for its sin of omission in siding integrally with Franco for many years. More concerned with preserving itself as an institution against the threat from the left than with protecting all of God’s people, the Vatican supported Franco during the war because it considered the Republic a dangerous adversary (Herzberger 47). When the war ended, David K. Herzberger states that “the metaphor of crusade soon gained prominence in Spanish historiography as a way of linking the Nationalist victory to a noble, religious undertaking rooted in Christian conquest in general and the Reconquest in Spain in particular” (47). Franco’s Nationalist movement was succinctly defined as Catholic, anti-Communist, anti-liberal, and free of foreign influences (Preston 567). In Matute’s story, God’s name is invoked by the narrator (“Pecado” 32), and is appealed to repeatedly by the wailing women who make implicit demands for divine justice following Lope’s murderous act (34). However, the Church plays no active role in the lives of the impoverished, orphaned Lope and his companion (the much older, mentally challenged Roque). As a

result of their low status, these two individuals are merely cast away because they simply do not matter. This implies that the God of the *franquistas* was judgemental and totally wanting in compassion.³

As Janet Díaz comments, “Spanish authors, in order to publish, were forced to exercise a self-censorship, or to disguise their messages behind symbols, allegories, and other tricks to mislead the censors” (40). By using symbolism in “Pecado de omisión,” Matute successfully criticizes Franco and his regime while evading the regime censors. Various people, objects, and situations take on symbolic significance throughout the story. Emeterio, for example, represents the dictator Franco. Additionally, the house in which Emeterio lives stands as a symbol of his power and prestige since it looks onto the plaza. Furthermore, the house has two stories as does the narrative itself. Piña-Rosales maintains that “un cuento siempre cuenta dos historias: la historia reconocible —los hechos— y la historia secreta” (479-80). Also, the limited perspective of the women at the conclusion of the story is contrasted with the reader’s greater level of understanding and insight regarding Emeterio’s and Lope’s actions. In this way, the reader is not unlike the discerning Spaniard who is aware of a more complete interpretation of what truly transpired after the Spanish Civil War because of the dictator’s exclusionary policies.

Lope, for his part, transcends his individual circumstances to stand for all vanquished Republicans to whom little sympathy was extended by Franco and his regime. His orphanhood, too, in a wider sense symbolizes the national orphanhood of Spaniards who were not *franquistas* and part of the political inner circle. Certainly, the cornloft where Lope sleeps in Emeterio’s home on the first night of his arrival shows how Lope is shunned from the very beginning (“Pecado” 29). According to Pennington, the barn holds symbolic significance as it is “reminiscent of how Mary and Joseph were refused lodging in Bethlehem” (142) and the crowing roosters at dawn (“Pecado” 29) demonstrate “the conscious hand of the author assigning archetypal significance to Emeterio’s betrayal by reminding us of Peter’s denial of Jesus” (Pennington 142). Furthermore, Lope’s hunger on that first morning takes on a wider meaning as we realize that he is hungry for love and is in need of true Christian charity: “En la cocina, Francisca, la hija, había calentado patatas con pimentón. Lope las engulló de prisa, con la cuchara de aluminio goteando a cada bocado” (“Pecado” 30). In addition, the cane that Lope uses as he sets out for Sagrado defines the relationship between Emeterio and Lope as that of a master and a dog: “Lope salió, zurrón al hombro Antes, recogió el cayado, grueso y brillante por el uso, que aguardaba, como un perro, apoyado en la pared” (30).

The mud hut where Lope lived for years as a shepherd signifies how Emeterio reduced Lope to a subhuman state. Lope was forced to enter the mud hut on all fours like an animal and he could not even stand upright inside it. There, he and Roque would sleep “en el mismo chozo de barro, bajo los robles, aprovechando el abrazo de las raíces” (“Pecado” 31). The words “abrazo de las raíces” take on pathetic overtones as Lope has not truly been embraced by his familial roots. Emeterio has taken the orphan Lope in but his benevolence

³ Regarding Franco’s vengefulness, Paul Preston mentions that at “one lunch in the winter of 1936-37, the case of four captured Republican militiawomen was discussed. Johannes Bernhardt who was present was taken aback by the casual way Franco, in the same tone that he would use to discuss the weather, passed judgement, “There is nothing to be done. Shoot them’ ” (227).

is merely a false front as he does not help the boy in any substantial way. Throughout the brief story the swift passage of years is noted in relation to Lope who, because of his youthfulness, would normally represent the potential of a new, emerging Spain. Hemmed in by circumstances, however, as poignantly represented by that confining mud hut “con la techumbre de barro encima de los ojos” (32), Lope can accomplish nothing meaningful like so many living under Franco.

Ironically, eyes in this story emphasize blindness rather than (in)sight. First, there is Lope’s innocent and youthful lack of vision and perspective, when he initially arrives at Emeterio’s home (“Pecado” 30). The sleep in Lope’s eyes inspires feelings of tenderness for the boy’s childlike innocence. Despite the harshness of his childhood following the deaths of his parents, the reader is reminded of his lack of experience which leads to his unquestioning acceptance of Emeterio’s dictates. Second, Emeterio’s stubborn lack of (in)sight and regard for intelligence become apparent when he discounts the schoolteacher’s words about Lope’s intellectual potential with an abrupt gesture that blocks his eyes: “Emeterio le cortó, con la mano frente a los ojos . . .” (31). Emeterio, not unlike Franco, cares only for his own version of the truth without any sort of critical self-reflection. Franco even “denied his regime was a dictatorship at the same time as he railed against democracy” (Preston 693). Third, the indifference to Lope’s tragic plight is mirrored in nature by the summits of Sagrado: “Las cumbres de Sagrado eran hermosas, de un azul profundo, terrible, ciego” (“Pecado” 31). The sun also beams like a sightless eyeball: “El sol, alto y redondo, como una pupila, impertérrita, reinaba allí” (31). Finally, at the end of the story, Emeterio is nonplussed by Lope’s intentions when, gripped by intense anger, he approaches the older man who evinces a complete lack of understanding in terms of Lope’s mental and emotional state: “Lope fue directo a Emeterio y vio sus ojos interrogantes y grises” (33).

The name *Sagrado* itself implies through its name biblical associations as the shepherd, Lope, ascends the mountain that also represents the sacred quality of the established societal hierarchy in Spain. At the time, not even merit could surmount this hierarchy. Towards the end of the story, Emeterio tells Lope to return to Sagrado, in other words, to his place in the social scheme of things: “Anda, muchacho, vuelve a Sagrado, que ya es hora...” (“Pecado” 33). Lope’s response is to pick up a square, reddish rock that is as inflexible and insensitive as Emeterio. The rock exemplifies Lope’s personal stagnation and its color represents his seething rage. The reference to the torn-down wall can be interpreted as an assault on the status quo of the accepted inequities that Lope is about to attack: “En la plaza había una piedra cuadrada, rojiza. Una de esas piedras grandes como melones que los muchachos transportan desde alguna pared derruida. Lentamente, Lope la cogió entre sus manos” (33). It is noteworthy that whenever Lope approaches Emeterio he does so by descending physically to a lower level as occurs on the first morning of Lope’s arrival: “Lope bajó descalzo, con los ojos pegados de legañas” (30). His final descent from Sagrado ends in his murder of Emeterio which parallels Lope’s moral downfall. Lope’s actions are slow and deliberate yet Matute’s entire story stresses that situational rather than dispositional factors led to his killing of Emeterio. When he picks up the rock, Lope loses his mind completely. When he uses it to kill Emeterio, he not only loses his intellectual potential but he gives into utter brutality stemming from his outrage at the injustice done to him by the older man. The rock hits Emeterio’s head and blood splatters

on his chest where a heart should be. In the end, Lope becomes simultaneously shepherd and judge in his murder of Emeterio (33-34).

Structure

In "Pecado de omisión," Matute employs the limited omniscient point of view, writing in third person. Beginning with the second paragraph, the events in the story are narrated as they occur. The action moves inexorably forward not unlike Franco's governing style lacking considered self-evaluation (Preston 628). Never does Emeterio second guess his decision to send Lope to Sagrado. The author allows readers to glimpse Lope's thoughts and feelings, however, when he meets up with Manuel at the fountain: "¿Quién podía entender lo que decía? ¡Qué acento tan extraño tienen los hombres, qué raras palabras salen por los oscuros agujeros de sus bocas!" ("Pecado" 32). Matute also permits access to Lope's reflections and emotions when he accepts the cigarette Manuel proffers: "Qué rara mano la de aquel otro: una mano fina, con dedos como gusanos grandes, ágiles, blancos, flexibles. Qué mano aquélla, de color de cera, con las uñas brillantes, pulidas. Qué mano extraña: ni las mujeres la tenían igual" (33). By allowing a glance into Lope's introspections as he compares himself with Manuel, Matute heightens the sense of pathos and the extent of the injustice done to this feeling, reasoning human being. Through the use of point of view, Matute shows how she is solely concerned with the thoughts and feelings of Lope whom she presents as the true victim. Interestingly, as Díaz observes, although Matute belongs by family and class "to the Nationalist (or Franco) faction, her implicit sympathies are with the vanquished, with the poor and suffering of all creeds, and with all whose rights and liberties are curtailed" (147).

Ronald J. Quirk points out that many of the characters in *Historias de la Artámila* are people "often isolated, misunderstood, and unable to communicate verbally" (113). The lack of communication is a recurring theme in "Pecado de omisión." Ironically, much of the dialogic structure underscores that only one opinion is actually heard (Emeterio's) and that other opinions (such as Lope's and the schoolteacher's) are silenced. Lope is not expected to question but merely to obey. This was also the case with those serving under the dictator, Franco, who was intolerant of dissent of any kind (Preston 452). Franco's experiences in the army and then as the Caudillo were rooted on a strict hierarchy. Similarly, Emeterio speaks to Lope on the basis of commands and until the final, climactic scene, Lope responds obediently with silence or acquiescence:

—Te vas de pastor a Sagrado.

Lope buscó las botas y se las calzó. En la cocina, Francisca, la hija, había calentado patatas con pimentón. Lope las engulló de prisa, con la cuchara de aluminio goteando a cada bocado.

—Tú ya conoces el oficio. Creo que anduviste una primavera por las lomas de Santa Aurea, con las cabras del Aurelio Bernal.

—Sí, señor.

—No irás solo. Por allí anda Roque el Mediano. Iréis juntos.

—Sí, señor. ("Pecado" 30)

Lope's inability to speak freely implicitly underscores the repressive, self-imposed censorship which Spaniards suffered under Franco. Indeed, most of Matute's works were written in a country enshrouded by Franco's repressive censorship that even considered

the anticlericalism of Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) and Pío Baroja (1872-1956) as politically dangerous (Abellán 94).⁴ In the 1950s, Matute's writing "empieza a tener éxito y se va haciendo poco a poco un hueco en la narrativa española y en el círculo de los escritores más jóvenes, que la consideran su maestra en el antifranquismo y continuadora de Cela y Laforet en el arte de torear la censura" (Redondo Goicoechea 19).

Matute's tone in her story is glaringly matter-of-fact as she recounts the circumstances and sad events in Lope's life. By writing objectively, Matute lends sincerity and credence to what she relates and, thereby, "se abstiene de la crítica social directa dejando que resulte obvia por medio del análisis objetivo" (Gil Casado 154). The effect of this unsentimental narration makes the tragedy starker and also elicits deep-felt emotion from the readers who commiserate with Lope. Alicia Redondo Goicoechea affirms that Matute "pretende en sus cuentos y novelas contar historias hermosas, pero también que contribuyan a mejorar el mundo haciéndolo más justo. Para su primera finalidad utiliza su sabiduría y todas las técnicas literarias a su alcance, pero para la segunda creo que usa como arma fundamental la emoción" (37). This steadfast identification with Lope over Emeterio, who perishes at the young man's hands, is not only a testament to Matute's brilliant storytelling but also exposes her implicit hope for reform through readers who will be incited to take action against such injustice. There were many intelligent "Lopes" in Francoist Spain who never had a chance to overcome their past and present circumstances because of how corrupt the system was in terms of who got ahead and who did not. Through Lope's fate, Matute eloquently makes manifest for future generations why the decision to educate talented youth should not rest in the hands of a biased decision-maker.

Matute does not situate her story within a specific context. Therefore, the rural community in "Pecado de omisión" floats in its own reality, completely cut off as was Spain from its historical past and from other countries during the Franco regime.⁵ As Redondo Goicoechea observes regarding the narratives in *Historias de la Artámila*:

Las coordenadas temporales en las que transcurren estas historias tienen que ver más, de nuevo, con el universo simbólico de las edades de la vida, que hemos visto en sus novelas, que con el tiempo cronológico que establece causalidades encadenadas. Las concreciones cronológicas no son, en ningún caso, históricas, es decir, no se citan años, ni datos de tiempo extratextual, ya que las historias se centran en torno a la llegada de estaciones, en las que ni

⁴ Censorship in Spain was not abolished until 1977 (López de Martínez 139). In an interview she gave in the 1980s, Matute admitted that she does not read newspapers as she has "una incapacidad física para leerlos. Me viene de la época de Franco; como eran periódicos al dictado, les cogí un odio terrible" ("Ana María Matute" 44). Díaz also reproduces Matute's frustration regarding censorship: "After the experience of war we were able to understand the great lesson of words not uttered, of bitten-off cries, and the great dull silence of the increasingly oppressive gag over thousands of mouths, ears, eyes, and finally, over thoughts," wrote Matute years later. Repeating the words of another novelist of her generation, she called these things the "horrors of peace" (35).

⁵ During summer vacations, Matute would stay at her maternal grandparents' home in Mansilla de la Sierra (La Rioja) (Redondo Goicoechea 65). While spending a year recuperating from a serious illness with her grandparents, Matute's eight-year-old eyes were opened to "children pulling on the plow after having sold their horse to buy seed, and women plowing with their children tied to their backs" (Jones, *Literary World* 2). The characters that appear in *Historias de la Artámila* are drawn from these peasants, townspeople, and children she encountered as a young girl. In fact, all of the stories in this collection share the common setting of Mansilla de la Sierra which the author fictionally names "Artámila" (Redondo Goicoechea 40).

siquiera se suelen nombrar los meses, o se remiten a acontecimientos muy concretos pero imprecisos temporalmente. (39)

Through the interactions between Emeterio and Lope, Matute criticizes Spanish society and “las desigualdades e injusticias que existen en ella” (Gil Casado 66). Lope becomes the embodiment of accepted injustices because of willful neglect and indifference (recalling, again, the title of the story). Indeed, Lope’s entire life—like the lives of Republicans in general under Franco—could well be defined by absence. The absence of assistance, care, the Catholic Church, compassion, dignity, education, equality, hope, and opportunities. As critics have indicated, Matute often shows a proclivity for contrast and antithesis (Pérez, “The Fictional World” 104-05). In “Pecado de omission,” the pairing of opposites abounds, indirectly reinforcing the antagonistic, bipartite structure of Spanish society at the time: Emeterio/Lope; Francisca/Lope; Emeterio/don Lorenzo; Lope/Roque; Lope/Manuel; winners/losers; wealthy/poor; young/old; uneducated/educated.

Many left-leaning, educated citizens in Francoist Spain often found themselves in untenable positions. As Preston asserts: “The huge investment in State terror made between 1939 and 1945 was paying off in the political apathy of the bulk of the population. Franco’s opponents had learned their lesson and torture, prisons and occasional executions served as a reminder for those who forgot” (627). Myriad Spaniards under Franco were forced to obey and silently follow government mandates. In Matute’s story, the schoolteacher don Lorenzo is clearly intimidated by the more forceful and powerful Emeterio. In the exchange below, don Lorenzo brings Lope’s intellectual promise to Emeterio’s attention as they smoke and drink in the tavern, even scratching his ear in an unconscious gesture as if imploring Emeterio to listen to him:

—Lo malo —dijo don Lorenzo, rascándose la oreja con su uña larga y amarillenta— es que el chico vale. Si tuviera medios podría sacarse partido de él. Es listo. Muy listo. En la escuela...

Emeterio le cortó, con la mano frente a los ojos:

—¡Bueno, bueno! Yo no digo que no. Pero hay que ganarse el currusco. La vida está peor cada día que pasa.

Pidió otra de anís. El maestro dijo que sí, con la cabeza. (“Pecado” 30-31)

As with Franco, Emeterio is a ruthless pragmatist. Lope must earn his living without special consideration of any kind. Although the mayor responds to the schoolteacher impatiently as if his hands were tied regarding Lope’s destiny, all of the action in the story revolves around and results from him. He holds all the clout. The intellectual of the story, don Lorenzo perceives the injustice done to Lope, voices his concern, and then sinks into apathy. He literally bows his head before Emeterio’s obstinacy, insensitivity, and greater status. Thus, the schoolteacher represents that entire sector of the Spanish populace under Franco who, for one reason or another, reacted to injustice with complacency. Matute brings attention here to “el fracaso moral, la pasividad, la conformidad” (Gil Casado 153) that became a survival strategy for countless Spaniards. Only a person with the moral courage and vision of philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) could have spoken as boldly and honestly as he so famously did before all assembled, including Franco’s wife and General Varela, the absent Franco’s representatives, on October 12, 1936 during the Day of the Race celebrations in Salamanca:

¿Qué dijo don Miguel en aquel foro de exaltación patriótico, fundidas en una misma vibración las armas, las letras y la religión... la Iglesia, la sociedad civil y militar ... en instantes de alta tensión emocional? Sencillamente que aquella guerra tan en los ojos de todos no podía significar ya a los tres meses lo que se había esperado del alzamiento y él mismo había proclamado: ser la defensa de la civilización occidental y cristiana. Para cumplir su destino le ha faltado compasión y le ha sobrado odio y venganza. De ahí que esa guerra “nuestra” —dice Unamuno—, a diferencia de la que conoció de niño en Bilbao, “es sólo una guerra incivil... Vencer no es convencer, y hay que convencer, sobre todo, y no puede convencer el odio que no deja lugar para la compasión”. Hace a continuación un quiebro en su breve discurso y, volviendo a su viejo antimilitarismo, contrapone sutilmente milicia e inteligencia, dando a entender que lo propio de aquélla es dejarse arrastrar por el odio a ésta, pasión que todo lo confunde y arrastra en torbellino de oscuridad, mientras que la inteligencia es “crítica y diferenciadora, inquisitiva...”, y por eso mismo es luz y puede abrir un espacio a la necesaria compasión. (Heredia Soriano 57-58)

Present in Salamanca that day, too, was José Millán Astray whom Franco had appointed as Head of Press and Propaganda (Preston 190). According to Antonio Heredia Soriano, during the celebration “chocaron dos amores y dos formas de entender patria y religión: la del intelectual liberal antidogmático, que ama sobre todo la inteligencia crítica y rinde culto a la compasión (Unamuno) y la del guerrero que ama sobre todo la inteligencia obediente y rinde culto a la disciplina (Millán Astray)” (59). Because of the fear that reigned in Salamanca at that time, the so-called *rector perpetuo* “was shunned by his acquaintances and removed at the behest of his colleagues from his position in the University” (Preston 192). Shortly thereafter, Unamuno died on December 31, 1936, no doubt sickened and saddened by the tragic events in Spain.

A Name Says It All

In this political context, Matute used names in addition to symbolism to avoid censorship while expressing her views of Francoist Spain. For example, in “Pecado de omisión,” the mayor full name is Emeterio Ruiz Heredia. *Emeterio* resembles the word *cementerio* and brings to mind Franco’s colossal crypt at the *Valle de los Caídos* completed in 1954 where the defeated were exploited like slaves (Preston 631; Romero Salvadó 127). *Emeterio* is reminiscent, too, of the Latin *emittere* ‘to send out’ while *Ruiz* recalls *radicem* from which *raíz* is derived and *Heredia* evokes *ferire*, that is, *herido* (Gómez de Silva 186-87, 260-61, 447). Emeterio’s repudiation of Lope (*emittere*) is the root cause (*radicem*) both of Lope’s grim future and, ultimately, of the mayor’s own fatal injury (*ferire*). Similarly, Franco’s persistent rejection of half of the population who fought against him in the Spanish Civil War would become a mortal wound to his own historical legacy. Through Matute’s rendering of Emeterio, she “describes the false Christian whose mask of piety belies the fact that he represents the very antithesis of Christian ideals” (Jones, “Religious Motifs” 416). Emeterio decides that, despite his intelligence, Lope is to become a shepherd on the slopes of Sagrado because of his contempt for the boy’s father, his inability to feel compassion, and his indifference toward intellectuality: “El ‘esgraciao’ del Pericote no le dejó ni una tapia en que apoyarse y reventar” (“Pecado” 31).

Matute does not provide a physical description of Emeterio yet the reader gains a sense of his commanding presence through his interactions with people and also his concentration on the commonplace in his fondness for food and drink. Emeterio is

evidently someone ruled more by his stomach than by higher considerations. In the tavern with don Lorenzo, after he downs his *anís*, Emeterio unceremoniously wipes “los labios con el dorso de la mano” (“Pecado” 31). In the final moments of the story, Emeterio is sitting on the porch, watching his grandchildren play while he has “la bota de vino al alcance de la mano” (33). Then as Lope ominously approaches with the fatal rock, Emeterio has “la mano derecha metida entre la faja y el estómago” (33-34).

From the very beginning, Emeterio’s wealth, stature, and association with the material are made clear: “Emeterio era el alcalde y tenía casa de dos pisos asomada a la plaza del pueblo, redonda y rojiza bajo el sol de agosto. Emeterio tenía doscientas cabezas de ganado paciando por las laderas de Sagrado, y una hija moza, bordeando los veinte, morena, robusta, riente y algo necia” (“Pecado” 29). The reader learns that, like Franco who also had one daughter,⁶ Emeterio holds the pre-eminent political position. Emeterio’s prominence and power, showcased by his profession and possessions, find a somber contrast in Lope’s indigence: “A los trece años se le murió la madre, que era lo último que le quedaba” (29). Lope’s humble birth is reminiscent of “Jesus born in a manger to a carpenter’s family” (Pennington 141). Like the one-sided Caudillo, Emeterio dubs Lope a loser as the son of that distant and disdained cousin (“Pecado” 28). Consequently, Lope embodies in his person the divisiveness and discrimination to which Franco rigidly adhered throughout his years in power. This divisiveness and discrimination resulted in a catastrophic loss of human potential.

Although not identified by name and only briefly mentioned through her relationship to her husband, Emeterio’s wife draws attention to the strict social hierarchy of the time. Women in this story have a very peripheral role which corresponds with life for women in the Franco era.⁷ The maintenance of the traditional family structure was essential to the Francoist vision: “One of the images held high in the Franco era was the sanctity of the traditional patriarchal family. Father and mother were sacred, and obedience and submission were the highest forms of respect. Thus in conservative literature multitudinous versions of the holy family appear as none too subtle role models for the nation” (Pennington 145-46).

Francisca, Emeterio’s daughter, is included in the list (noticeably at the end) of his possessions (“Pecado” 29). We learn that she becomes a wife and mother fulfilling, thus, the traditional role for women in Francoist Spain. In fact, she is “algo necia” (29), which also reinforces the prevailing view of women. School textbooks regularly indoctrinated such

⁶ Franco’s daughter, María del Carmen, was born on September 14, 1926, the same year as Ana María Matute (Preston 52).

⁷ In 1963, Matute separated from her novelist husband, Ramón Eugenio de Goicoechea (Díaz 130). An especially painful result of the separation for Matute was the loss of her eight-year old son who was “entregado a la custodia de su suegra, y al que tardó casi tres años en recuperar” (Redondo Goicoechea 32). With regard to the separation process, Janet Pérez highlights the following: “During more than three years while the legal separation procedure dragged on, she was forced to live in limbo, residing with a sister, because as a married woman she could not have her own apartment without her husband’s consent, nor could she have her own bank account. When awarded an international literary prize, she could not go to claim it: she was not permitted to leave the country without her husband’s authorization. Nor was she allowed to travel with her son without the husband and father’s documented permission. Her semi-incarceration attests more succinctly than any theoretical legal or sociological exposition to the situation in which Spanish women, writers included, found themselves under Franco” (*Contemporary Women* 8).

ideas as “women have never discovered anything. They lack the creative talent, which God has reserved for men” (Tremlett 57).

Lope's name is related to the Latin *lupus*, or *lobo*. As Lope eventually proves to Emeterio, he is a lone wolf among sheep like the conforming schoolteacher don Lorenzo. Lope also lacks a surname reinforcing his orphanhood and transcendence of individual status to represent the suffering of the many. Additionally, Lope's companion's name Roque suggests the word *roca* and Mediano suggests *medianus* ‘middle of’ (Gómez de Silva 321, 341). Lope and Roque have both been dispatched to more primitive surroundings in their isolation from the village.

The name of Lope's friend, Manuel Enríquez, also deserves mention. The name *Manuel* suggests the adjective *manual* meaning “of the hands” and the attention drawn to Manuel's and Lope's hands during their brief encounter becomes symbolically significant. Manuel's delicate hand impresses Lope in contrast to his big, rough one: “Qué rara mano la de aquel otro: una mano fina, con dedos como gusanos grandes, ágiles, blancos, flexibles” (“Pecado” 33). The mention of worms takes the reader mentally to Lope's reality of dirt and disillusionment and his relegation to the world of muscle over mind despite his greater intelligence. Lope's hand is almost paw-like associating him again with the subhuman: “Al fin, cogió el cigarillo, blanco y frágil, extraño, en sus dedos amazacotados: inútil, absurdo, en sus dedos” (33). Cigarettes symbolize the attainment of some level of social status. Manuel offers Lope a fragile cigarette from a silver-colored case, underscoring the young student's refinement. Yet in his deep-seated anger and bitterness, Lope crushes the cigarette Manuel gives him. Thus he rejects the so-called civilized society and the status it represents because Franco's Spain has been tenuously built on false hierarchies and histories (33).⁸ Moreover, Manuel's surname, Enríquez, fittingly recalls *enriquecer* or *rico* from the Germanic *riksja* ‘ruler’ (Gómez de Silva 463). Unlike Lope, Manuel has a key connection in his well-positioned father who plainly cares about his son, his education, and the quality of his life. Lope observes how this former school companion is dressed in a suit and tie, the outer trappings of affluence and respectability. The fact that Manuel is studying law further emphasizes the pitiable lack of justice in Lope's situation because he was academically superior to Manuel when they were in school together. In Franco's Spain it was not unusual for mediocrity to win over merit, beginning with the Caudillo himself. Regarding the dictator's brother-in-law Ramón Serrano Suñer and Don Juan de Borbón y Battenberg, son of Alfonso XIII and father of King Juan Carlos I, Preston says that Franco “easily defeated challenges by those—from Serrano Suñer to Don Juan—who were his superiors in intelligence and integrity” (783). Manuel seems genuinely glad (though astonished) to see Lope and shares his cigarettes without ulterior motives. Nevertheless, Lope's humiliation is complete.

Lope as a Symbol

When Lope's widowed mother died, he was just thirteen years old and left completely adrift. The dative of interest underscores not only the unexpectedness of what occurred but

⁸ Indeed, Francisco J. Romero Salvadó writes that children “were not taught until the 1970s that Spain had been devastated by a cruel Civil War. Instead, they learnt that a national and patriotic movement had saved the country from the clutches of a Communist-inspired conspiracy” (128).

also that Lope is wholly a victim of circumstance: “A los trece años se le murió la madre, que era lo último que le quedaba” (“Pecado” 29). The number thirteen is traditionally associated with disorder (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 988) and, in young people, it is often the age of dawning self-consciousness (Shulz and Kerig 13). Only for Lope, this awakening consciousness results in a gradual awareness of his tragic plight. His lonely cries of frustration are compared to shooting stars, glimmers of light, and beauty across early morning skies. Only Lope’s isolation has turned his words to piteous wails. Matute creates foreshadowing to the final scene of the story as she compares the heartrending screams of Lope’s to falling rocks:

En la neblina del amanecer, cuando aún no se oía el zumbar de las moscas ni crujido alguno, Lope solía despertar con la techumbre de barro encima de los ojos. Se quedaba quieto un rato, sintiendo en el costado el cuerpo de Roque el Mediano, como un bulto alentante. Luego, arrastrándose, salía para el cerradero. En el cielo, cruzados como estrellas fugitivas, los gritos se perdían, inútiles y grandes. Sabía Dios hacia qué parte caerían. Como las piedras. Como los años. Un año, dos, cinco. (“Pecado” 31-32)

Lope’s character and potential are revealed through physical descriptions of him, his superior performance in school, and his initial willingness to please Emeterio. The early focus on the large size of Lope’s head (which is later superseded by the description of his huge hands) visually underscores his intelligence: “Estaba poco crecido para sus trece años y tenía la cabeza grande, rapada” (30). Lope’s eyes are also described as “negros y redondos, brillantes” (30). The word *brillante* also accentuates Lope’s exceptional mental capacity.

When Lope comes down to the village for his first medical exam in years, he is found to be entirely healthy: “—¡Vaya roble! —dijo el médico, que era nuevo. Lope enrojeció y no supo qué contestar” (“Pecado” 32). Between the lines, we read “strong, silent, and passive” with regard to the oak comparison. The fact that Lope blushes at the doctor’s words indicates his self-consciousness which is another indicator of his painful self-awareness. The reader is cognizant, too, that the pronouncement of Lope’s good health does not coincide with reality. Psychologically, Lope is suffering greatly. At the end of his encounter with his school companion, Lope mentally refers to Manuel in the diminutive form, not in a derisive way, but rather as a poignant reminder of their schooldays together that are as far away as Manuel’s astonished voice calling after him to no avail (33). Lope rushes off and then lurches toward Emeterio who is sitting leisurely watching his grandchildren (33). As the years passed, Franco, too, became increasingly removed from the *real* world (Preston 346). He spent more and more time on pursuits such as hunting and fishing and “took greater pleasure in his grandchildren” (Preston 639).

As Lope is taken to prison for his murder of Emeterio, that age-old Spanish theme of appearance vs. reality comes to the fore as the reader realizes that there is no true justice here. The pious women appear as a collective conscience accusing Lope and displaying only a superficial understanding of events as mentioned before. Franco actively cultivated this kind of ignorance through his propaganda and censorship. The Franco years were about maintaining power and (re)-creating reality, past and present, imposing a truth upon the people, and keeping them shuttered away from the rest of the world to preserve that truth. Lope’s handcuffs are now visible but they were put in place long before by his poverty, his

orphanhood, and his father's identity. Through Lope's sad life, Matute brilliantly encapsulates the painful loss of the past, of any meaningful present, and of the future.

As the story draws to an end, the group of women now trade places with Lope to become the wolves ready to lunge at him. The number of pauses in the women's lines turns their words into long, faltering laments: "Cuando se lo llevaron esposado, Lope lloraba. Y cuando las mujeres, aullando como lobas, le querían pegar e iban tras él, con los mantos alzados sobre las cabezas, en señal de duelo, de indignación 'Dios mío, él, que le había recogido. Dios mío, él, que le hizo hombre. Dios mío, se habría muerto de hambre si él no le recoge...'" ("Pecado" 34). Crying, Lope guiltily accepts all the blame for his actions in a spluttering trinity: "Sí, sí, sí..." (34). Therefore, through these women and, ironically, through Lope's acquiescence, Matute demonstrates the one-sided nature in the retelling of events. Indeed, after the Nationalist victory, history was essentially re-written and assigned to those "who shared the spirit of the crusade. Sycophants and apologists orchestrated official propaganda which had little to do with reality" (Romero Salvadó 128). For Pennington, the "conclusion of the story is strong enough to cause reflection on the reader's part as to the parallels between Matute's fiction and Franco's reality" (146). Franco wanted to impose one whitewashed truth upon all while Matute's story points to other underlying truths.

Just as the women in this final scene perceive Emeterio in a paternal role, Franco, too, was pleased to project himself as a sympathetic father figure who saved Spain from a nefarious, godless, Communist-led plot.⁹ There were many Spaniards who saw him from this perspective too:

The series of masks behind which he hid—gallant desert hero in Africa, twentieth century El Cid during the Civil War, would-be imperial leader in the early 1940s—were deeply gratifying to him and gave him a conviction which made him impervious to discouragement. After the international triumphs of 1953, the mask which served him for the rest of his days was that of the benevolent and beloved patriarch of the Spaniards. Like its predecessors, it was a persona in which he believed totally and which derived its strength in part from the undeniable fact that it met a need among his admirers and supporters. After all, Franco did not rule by repression alone: he enjoyed a considerable popular support. (Preston 784)¹⁰

Franco once justified his dictatorial regime by condescendingly stating that "democracy invariably ended up unleashing violence among Spaniards" (Preston 519-20). However, the peaceful nature of *la transición* to democracy following Franco's death discredited that assertion and became one of the proudest moments in Spanish history as well as a glowing exemplar for the world. Certainly, in the haunting climax of Matute's "Pecado de omisión,"

⁹ During the Cold War, Franco's anti-Communism stood him in good stead with the United States. Economic aid from the U.S. in the 1950s and the normalization of diplomatic relations averted the collapse of the Spanish economy and thus, most likely, of Franco's regime. Spain was admitted to the United Nations in 1955 (Harper 2-5).

¹⁰ In his lifetime, Franco was compared not only to El Cid but also the Archangel Gabriel, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Charles V, Philip II, Napoleon, and others (Preston xvii-xviii). The surrealist painter Salvador Dalí declared that, after lunch with Franco, he had reached the conclusion that he was a saint (Preston xvii-xviii). How astonished Franco would surely be to read most present-day assessments of his years in power!

the author shines a crystalline light on Lope who, overtaken by righteous rage, assails the injustice, insensitivity, and entrenched oppression that Emeterio (Franco) represents.

By analyzing this story through the lens of Francoist Spain, we have acquired a deeper understanding of the dictator's vengefulness and his lack of compassion and esteem for intellectuality. The human consequences of the Civil War for those on the losing side are made clear in this story. This, I believe, was Matute's covert intention.

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