

THE SPANISH “SOCIAL NOVEL” OF THE FIFTIES IN ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT:

The case of Juan García Hortelano

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Abstract

This article deals with the “social novel” during the Franco era in Spain and in the larger European context of the time, focusing on the work of Juan García Hortelano, one of the most important exponents of the genre. More specifically, I analyze one of his novels – *Nuevas amistades* (1959) – and I emphasize not only the sociopolitical implications of the text specific to the Franco era, but also the larger human questions relevant for any literary work.

Keywords: Juan García Hortelano, Franco, social novel, post-WW II Spain, literature.

Juan García Hortelano (1928-1990) is considered to be one of the major representatives of the “social novel” (*la novela social*) in Spanish letters during the post-WW II Franco era. As Hortelano resisted this critical label, it would be useful to explore why he did so, and to see where one could best place his early work both in the Spanish and in the larger European context of his time.¹ I shall first review very briefly the sociopolitical environment in which García Hortelano grew up, then I shall look at the Spanish and European literary background of his first novels; finally, I shall analyze one of these novels, *Nuevas amistades* (New friendships, 1959), arguing that, while it is apparently concerned with a social critique of the Franco era, it goes well beyond such critique to larger human questions, which any significant literary work addresses.

¹ Hortelano’s later literary productions include *El gran momento de Marv Tribune* (Mary Tribune’s Great Moment, 1972), *Los vaqueros en el pozo* (The cowboys in the well, 1979), and his last novel, *Gramática Parda* (Tawny Grammar), which received The Critics’ Prize in 1982. His *Cuentos completos* (Complete short stories) contains two books: *Gente en Madrid* (People of Madrid, 1967), and *Apólogos y Milesios* (Apologies and Milesians, 1975). His last collection of stories is *Mucho cuento* (Long Story, 1987). He has also edited a series of poems, *Echarse las pecas a la espalda* (1977) and *El grupo poético de los años 50* (1978).

García Hortelano was born in Madrid in 1928, toward the end of the Spanish Civil War. The author himself acknowledges in an interview with Ludovico Nolens that "the event I best remember, and by far the most important in my life, is the Civil War. We are people that can be analyzed in the light of that terrible war" (9). The Second Spanish Republic (1931-39) was marked by intense political involvement of people from various social and ethnic groups. This involvement led to a national division between two opposing blocs. On one side, there were the church, the army, landowners and small farmers; on the other side, there were the workers, the intellectuals, the landless peasants, the Catalans and the Basques. A number of progressive reforms were initiated during the first two years of the Republic, although they often involved social, regional and anticlerical violence. Then, from 1933 to 1936, a conservative government abolished the reforms and suppressed the revolt of the workers. After February 1936, a leftist governmental coalition threatened a radical social revolution, but a conspiracy of conservative officers headed by General Francisco Franco rebelled in July 1936. This rebellion led to the Civil War, which lasted nearly three years. On one side, there were the Nationalists led by Franco, who were supported by Germany and Italy. On the other side, there were the Republicans who were divided into socialists, anarchists, and communists. The Republicans received aid from the Soviet Union and from the International Brigades. Despite this aid, they lost to the Nationalists. The war cost Spain about one million people in civilian deaths, imprisonments, and emigrations.

At the outset, the Franco regime was totalitarian and repressive, and was supported by the army, the Church and the official party--La Falange. However, it survived the Second World War because it remained neutral. After several years of international isolation, in 1953 Franco signed an agreement with the Vatican, and a pact with the United States, by which he granted the Americans the use of military bases in exchange for economic and military aid. In 1955 Spain became a member of the United Nations, and after the severe political and socioeconomic restrictions of the forties and fifties, Franco allowed a substantial liberalization in the early sixties.

During the Franco dictatorship in the forties and fifties, literature took over responsibilities and roles that, in a normal political situation, would have been carried out by the press. It reported on daily realities and social events, but also sought out to act as an instrument of social critique. Indeed, according to Ignacio Soldevila, during the Franco regime literature

became, for the new generation of intellectuals, almost the only form of sociopolitical critique (Soldevila 210). The writers and intellectuals who opposed the Franco regime believed that literature could function as an ideological tool to create political awareness among the public. In the fifties, a generation of young novelists began exploring social problems in their work, such as rural poverty, oppression of the industrial workers, social exclusion and urban deprivation. Also, many of the authors became involved in politics. For example, in 1950 García Hortelano became a member of the Communist Party, later commenting: "Guardo buenos recuerdos y buenas amistades de aquella época, aunque todo era mucho más duro. No se podía llamar a ciertas cosas por su nombre y, entre nosotros, al partido le llamábamos 'El convento'" (Vivas 27).²

Hortelano's involvement in communist activities brought him problems of censorship and landed him in jail. Clearly, the postwar period was very hard for many leftist writers and intellectuals who remained in Spain and opposed the Falangista regime. Hortelano himself notes: "Tras la guerra, el desierto. La segunda experiencia fundamental de estos muchachos de 1939 va a ser la travesía del desierto, una de las operaciones más sórdida, destructiva y venenosa, que una sociedad ha ofrecido a su juventud. . . . Exilio de la inteligencia, opresión del pensamiento y silencio conforman respectivamente, para quienes viven entonces sus años de aprendizaje, ausencia de maestros, represión mental y mengua de instrumentos culturales. Sólo lograrán sobrevivir los que se eduquen a sí mismos." (Vivas 13)³

In debating the relationship between aesthetics and politics in Marxist literary criticism, leftist Spanish writers turned to Jean-Paul Sartre's theories about the social and political role of the novel. In his influential essay, "What is literature?" Sartre argues that the writer is always politically engaged even if he does not admit it. The ultimate purpose of realistic prose is to guide the reader toward a correct perception of social

² have good memories and good friendships from that period, even though everything was much harder. One could not call certain things by their real name, and among us we called the [Communist] Party "The Convent."

³ After the war, the desert. The second fundamental experience of these fellows from 1939 was to cross the desert, one of the most sordid destructive and poisonous operations that a society has offered its youth... Exile of intelligence, oppression of thought and silence respectively, were the lot of those who had then their formative years; lack of mentors, mental repression and decline of cultural instruments. Only those would survive who educated themselves.

reality. Eventually, this knowledge is translated into political action in the real world. Sartre militates against the aesthetics of art for art's sake, which he considers to be merely an instrument of bourgeois ideology. At the same time, he emphasizes the crucial role that the reader plays in the reading process.

In Spain, Sartre's aesthetic theory was chiefly popularized by the Marxist critic José María Castellet. Like Sartre, Castellet expounds the idea that the novelist must be ideologically committed and must actively participate in the process of political and social change. Castellet states that "por su condición de revelador de la verdad y de miembro dinámico del proceso histórico, [el autor] es un revolucionario nato que propone al público lector . . . el perfeccionamiento de su libertad personal, muchas veces contra dogmas y sistemas" (*La hora del lector* 13-16).⁴ Thus, following Sartre, Castellet conceives writing not only as a means of revealing social reality, but also as political and revolutionary action. Of course, he advocates the viewpoint of the leftist opponents of Franco's regime. He understands the writer as a "revealer of truth" in the sense of being a critic of Franco's right-wing dictatorship and, more generally, a critic of bourgeois ideology and a promoter of Marxist ideology.

Castellet's articles further suggest that the personality of the author and his presence in the literary work should remain in the background. What matters is the exact reproduction of "reality" (as perceived by Marxist ideology). This is achieved, according to Castellet, through the techniques of "authorless" story-telling, such as first-person narrative, interior monologue, and objective narration (*La hora del lector*, 12). In the wake of Sartre, Castellet also discusses what he calls "the time of the reader." In this respect, Castellet says that "el arte literario ya no es un simple acto creador del escritor, sino ante todo una doble operación que se realizará según el siguiente esquema: el escritor crea para el lector una obra que éste acepta como una propia tarea a realizar. Concretamente, en el caso de la novela, él revelará un mundo que el lector se comprometerá a poblar activamente" ("El tiempo del lector" 42).⁵

⁴ For being a revealer of truth and a dynamic participant in the historical process, [the author] is a born revolutionary who proposes to the reading public ... the enhancement of personal freedom, often against dogmas and systems. (*The Hour of the Reader*)

⁵ Literary art is not just a writer's creative act, but above all a double operation to be performed according to the following scheme: the writer creates for the reader a work which he accepts as his own task. Specifically, in the case of the novel, he will reveal a world that the reader will commit to actively populate. (*The Time of the Reader*)

Under the repressive censorship of the Franco regime, novelists could treat Spanish reality only indirectly, using the strategy of writing not "newspaper editorials," as it were, but direct news reports instead. In turn, the reader would have to read between the lines and come up with his own questions and conclusions about the situation presented. In this way, Castellet believed, the novel could operate directly on the consciousness of readers so that they would act in the real world to eliminate social injustices. This is generally the idea behind the Spanish "social novel" of the fifties and sixties.

Many Spanish critics support the idea that pre-war social realism, including the realism of the Class of 1927, is the precursor of the postwar social novel. For example, Eugenio García de Nora believes that prewar realism represents an important precedent for the sociocritical realism of the fifties and sixties. Nora considers Ramon Sender's prewar work as a precursor of and a model for the social novel:

Sender sería ya el más considerable (también, acaso, el más "impuro" y excedente) de los "novelistas sociales" de preguerra. Situado con sus nuevas creaciones en una perspectiva más amplia, integrado y en contraste con los narradores españoles--del interior y del exilio-- de estos últimos treinta años, Sender nos parece, sin vacilación, como uno de los nombres fundamentales (y en muchos aspectos, como el precursor y el maestro efectivo de los más jóvenes) en la literatura narrativa actual. (Nora 478)⁶

In turn, for Gil Casado the social novel written by the generation '54 can be seen as a derivation from and a continuation of the one created by the new romanticism of the generation '27. (Casado 138) He offers the example of López Pacheco who was inspired by Cesar M. Arconada's novel *La turbina* (The turbine, 1930). Despite pointing out some important differences between the realist aesthetic of 1927 and that of 1954, Casado ultimately joins Nora and the majority of Spanish critics in accepting the general thesis that the postwar novel is characterized by a continuation of the previous realist tradition.

⁶ Sender would be the most significant (also, perhaps, the most "impure" and excessive) of prewar "social novelists." Situated with his new creations in a broader perspective, integrated and in contrast to the Spanish narrators - home and in exile - of the last thirty years, Sender undoubtedly seems to be one of the key names (and in many respects, the precursor and effective teacher of the youngest writers) of today's narrative literature.

By contrast, Barry Jordan believes that the social novel is neither the result of gradual development nor the culmination of the Spanish realist tradition. On the contrary, it is a historical phenomenon full of contradictions and discontinuities. He argues that "we cannot talk in any strict terms of a series of distinct phases or stages in the development of the *social novel*; it is perhaps better understood as a literary movement, a plural, contradictory, shifting phenomenon that exists as a varied series of attempts to develop a formula for politically committed literature" (Jordan xi). According to Jordan, the social novel went on to become a dominant trend in the late fifties, because it was supported by private advertising industries; these industries wanted to publish any type of literature that was fashionable among a small group belonging to middle-class readers, who would buy it and make it profitable.

Jordan also disagrees with the critics who have a formal or aesthetic approach to the social novel. For him, this kind of novel remains an attempt to create a politically engaged literature. And, as in the case of Castellet, "politically engaged" is to be understood as a commitment to leftist ideas. As to "objectivist realism," Jordan's definition of it corresponds, to a certain extent, to what Hortelano notes about it in his interview with Arnosi Sanchez: "Lo del realismo objetivista fue una etiqueta muy circunstancial determinada por factores no literarios sino políticos, de gente que estaba unida por la común resistencia a la dictadura [franquista]" (Sánchez, Arnosi 11).⁷ But, unlike Jordan who uses the term "objectivist realism" approvingly, Hortelano adopts a critical stance towards it. He considers it a "very circumstantial label" determined by political factors.

In my view, the definition of the social novel proposed by Jordan is rather narrow and prejudiced. Although I agree with him that this kind of novel should not be viewed simply as "a progressive recovery of realism in the postwar Spanish Novel" (Jordan x), I don't think it should be considered as a mere political tool of the left, nor as a completely different phenomenon from traditional realism. Instead, my position comes closer to that of Gil Casado, for whom a novel is social when it "señala la injusticia, la desigualdad o el anquilosamiento que existen en la sociedad, y, con

⁷ Objectivist realism was a very circumstantial label determined by political, non-literary factors, of people who were united by common resistance to [Franco's] dictatorship.

propósito de crítica, muestra como se manifiestan en la realidad, en un sector o en la totalidad de la vida nacional" (Casado 19).⁸

Nevertheless, I believe Jordan is right when he points to the most important foreign influences on the social novel, influences which to some extent give it its specific character and differentiate it from other Spanish realistic forms. Examples of these influences include Italian neo-realist cinema, the North-American novel, and the French *nouveau roman*. Italian neorealist films, such as Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* or Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*, had a big impact on Spanish realist literature of the fifties. These films revealed to the young writers that the most mundane issues of life could become a valid literary subject matter. Also, the social novel borrowed the cinematic technique of suppressing the narrator's or the speaker's messages, allowing the characters to establish direct contact with the audience through their own words, behavior or gestures. In this respect, Jordan notes: "Italian neo-realism was mainly appropriated for its documentary-style mode of presentation, it posed the challenge to the social novelists of capturing in the novel the sort of visual impact and emotional identifications of a filmed narration." (Jordan 114)

In turn, the American novel, as practiced by Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Truman Capote, caught the Spanish social novelists' attention with issues such as poverty and oppression of the lower classes, but also with their techniques of "non-authorial narration." (Jordan 126) Spanish critics who promoted the social novel used the North-American novel to demonstrate that committed literature is inseparable from neorealist aesthetics. As Jordan notes, "a committed literature demands, by definition, a narrative technique which is neutral, objectivistic, and 'non-narrated'. Initially, the American novel would provide guidance precisely on those modes of non-authorial narration required by the theory [of committed literature]." (Jordan 127)

Of course, it is precisely this narrative technique that the Spanish critics of the fifties, including Garcia Hortelano, call "objectivist realism." As Margaret E. Jones observes, objectivism "is the natural consequence of the stance adopted by neorealism, which makes the author a witness rather

⁸ Signals injustice, inequality and the stagnation existing in society and, for purposes of criticism, it shows how they manifest themselves in reality, in a sector or the whole of national life.

than a creator, an informer rather than a judge." (Jones 32) In other words, the objectivist novel ostensibly presents unfiltered reality, while the reader has to pick out what she considers to be the most important elements and then reach her own conclusions.

A similar non-authorial narrative technique can be found in the *nouveau roman*, which was another source of inspiration for the Spanish "objectivist novelists." In the mid-1950s several French novels belonging to this literary trend were translated into Spanish, such as Robbe Grillet's *The Voyeur* (1956). French writers associated with the *nouveau roman* were experimenting narrative strategies of authorial self-effacement that matched what their Spanish colleagues were trying to accomplish. García Hortelano himself acknowledges that there is a direct influence of the *nouveau roman* on his works of the fifties: "Fui representante del realismo objetivista en mis dos primeras novelas, que tienen una influencia excesiva del *nouveau roman*. Yo creo que muy poca gente lo practicó en España, si se exceptúa *El Jarama*. Yo tenía mucha fascinación por el *nouveau roman* y todavía la sigo teniendo, por eso me alegré cuando le concedieron el premio a Claude Simon" (Sánchez , Arnosi , 11)⁹

Some critics, however, contend that the Spanish and the French novelists were not involved in the same project, and that an apparent similarity in narrative technique did not imply a common moral or ideological purpose. Thus, Jordan observes that Juan Goytisolo, for example, admired the technical rigour, experimentalism, and innovatory style of Robbe-Grillet, but saw in the *nouveau roman* a resurrection, after seventy years, of Oscar Wilde's theory of art for art's sake. Other Spanish writers would "echo Goytisolo's view and, in the final analysis, reject the French trend on ideological and political grounds for its unavowed aestheticism and commitment to a rarefied notion of literature rather than to an examination of an historically verifiable reality, the aim and responsibility shouldered by Spain's own *novela social*." (Jordan 128)

In the foregoing citation, Jordan follows Sartre and other Marxist critics in making an untenable distinction between the form and content of a literary work. Unlike Jordan, García Hortelano does not commit this error, even

⁹ I was a representative of objectivist realism in my first two novels, which display an excessive influence of the *nouveau roman*. I think very few people practiced it in Spain, except for [the author of] *El Jarama*. I was very fascinated by the 'nouveau roman' at the time, and still am, so I was glad when Claude Simon was awarded the [Nobel] prize.

when he criticizes literary forms without content: "No admito la *novela artística* como entidad independiente; creo en la belleza únicamente en función de la expresividad. Me preocupa la adquisición de una técnica (o varias) y un lenguaje, aunque vislumbre que esta forja de herramientas puede llevar a un estéril tecnicismo y a un estilismo retórico" (Sánchez, Arnosi 11).¹⁰ Although here Hortelano seems to criticize, as Goytisolo does, the theory of art for art's sake, the novelist carefully uses the word *expresividad* (expressiveness) to underline the unity of form and content in the artwork.

The separation of artistic form and content presents a difficult task to the proponents of the sociocritical novel who demand that a committed literature be combined with objectivist realism. How can you be politically engaged and at the same time employ an objectivist technique in the presentation of your literary material? In objectivist realism, it is assumed that the reader has the responsibility to reach his own conclusion on the subject matter presented. If the reader does not share the ideology of the writer, however, it is unlikely that he will identify himself with the author's political position. In theory, there may be a difference between objectivist realism of the social novel and the narrative technique of self-effacement of the *nouveau roman*, but there is no perceivable difference in the practice of reading.

Moreover, by Jordan's own admission, the situation of the radical writer in the fifties was contradictory and paradoxical. On the one hand, the writer wrote for radical social change, on the other hand, a bourgeois audience read his work. Writers of bourgeois origin doubted their ability to represent the reality of the lower classes, which they did not know very well; they were also afraid of falling into a false solidarity with the working class. These types of problems did not help practitioners of the social novel to devise an effective writing formula. The best novelists of this era, including Sánchez Ferlosio and García Hortelano, consciously ignored such problems in their works. They preferred to focus on the presentation of bourgeois life with its typical dilemmas, without offering a radical ideological or political solution to them.

¹⁰ I do not accept the *artistic novel* as an independent identity, I believe in beauty only in terms of expressiveness. I am interested in the acquisition of a technique (or various ones) and a language, although I suspect that this forging tool can lead to sterile technicalities and rhetorical mannerisms.

The Marxist attempt to exploit the social novel in order to create political awareness was not very successful either. Writers such as García Hortelano and Juan Goytisolo recognized their lack of impact on the social and political situation in Spain. For example, Goytisolo recalls not only with nostalgia but also with skepticism the political program of the literature of the fifties and sixties:

“En el momento en que aparecen las primeras novelas y poemas de la generación del medio siglo, el fin de la guerra fría, el deshielo ideológico del campo socialista alimentan la esperanza de una transformación radical y a corto plazo de la anacrónica sociedad española: este objetivo (irrealizable lo sabemos hoy) parecía exigir de nosotros la movilización, a su servicio, de todas nuestras energías. . . el quehacer literario se integraba en una lucha más general y ajena a la literatura, en la que ésta actuaba de avanzadilla, y como tal, sujeta a una serie de consideraciones de orden estratégico y táctico. Escribir un poema o una novela tenía entonces (así lo creíamos) el valor de un acto: por un venturoso azar histórico acción y escritura se confundían en un mismo cauce, literatura y vida se identificaban” (Goytisolo 51-52, my emphasis).¹¹

From the foregoing citation it becomes obvious that Juan Goytisolo, no less than García Hortelano, realizes that literature cannot be attached to political considerations of a strategic and tactical nature without losing its specificity, its *expressiveness*. Starting from this insight, my main thesis in this article is that the novels written by Hortelano have little to do with objectivist realism, if the term refers to "a very circumstantial label" determined by political, rather than aesthetic, factors. It is for this reason that Hortelano later resists the label of "social novel" for his early literary productions as well. On the contrary, the narrative techniques of his literary works cannot be separated from their content; indeed they are integral to it, so that Hortelano and Goytisolo, being genuine artists, also refuse to attach to literature the label of art for art's sake. The concept of

¹¹ At the time of the appearance of the first novels and poems of the mid-century generation, the end of the Cold War, the ideological unfreezing of the socialist camp nurtured the hope of a radical transformation in short term of the anachronistic Spanish society: this objective (unrealizable, we know it today) seemed to require our mobilization, to serve it, with all our energies. . . literary work formed part of a larger struggle outside literature, where it acted in advance, and as such, it became subject to a number of strategic and tactical considerations. Writing a poem or a novel was at the time, (so we thought) the value of an act: by a lucky, historical chance, action and writing mingled in the same channel, literature and life identified with each other.

form and content belongs to the traditional mimetic theory of literature, equally shared by Marxist literary critics, according to which literature imitates or represents reality, whether social or natural; in this framework, “content” refers to social reality or nature, whereas “form” gives it an aesthetic shape. Oscar Wilde, among other artists, shows the fallacy of such a view when he playfully states that it is nature that imitates art. This simply means that what we call “reality” or “nature” is not amorphous, but it is already “pre-formed” as it were, or given shape by our individual and collective perceptions.

Literature and art in general draw attention to the fact that any specific reality is individually and/or socially constructed, therefore making it possible to change our perceptions and thus bring a new reality into being. In turn, a novel, “social” or otherwise, by staging a certain state of affairs, allows the reader to become aware of the existential choices available to him or her both as an individual and as a member of his/her community. This does not mean, however, that literature is “tendentious,” offering a particular ideological solution, as Marxist critics such as Sartre and Castellet would like it to be—on the contrary, it allows full freedom of choice to the reader who might find that political left-wing solutions to particular social or individual problems are as inadequate as their right-wing counterparts. In this second part of my study I shall illustrate this thesis by analyzing one of Hortelano’s early novels, *Nuevas amistades* (*New Friendships*), in some detail. I shall suggest that its narrative technique is based on an ironic contrast between the way the literary material is presented and the author's point of view. The author's ironic perspective involves both objectivity and subjectivity, engaging the readers much more than a purely objectivist technique might. At the same time, it enables them to reach their own conclusions and, possibly, devise their own solutions regarding the fictional world that the novel draws them into.

The reception of *New Friendships* by critics and readers alike was so positive that the book was awarded the Biblioteca Breve Prize, and it went through five editions in two years. According to Troncoso Duran, the novel was well received because the author chose as protagonist the same social group that constituted his main audience (Troncoso Duran 17). The novel is about a group of young people from the upper bourgeoisie of Madrid. Gregorio is an eighteen-year old boy who comes from Gijón to Madrid to study law, and stays with his twenty-year old friend Leopoldo until their parents arrive. The title of the novel, *New Friendships*, refers to the

relationship Gregorio establishes with Leopoldo's friends and his acceptance into the group.

Among Leopoldo's friends there is thirty-year old Isabel, who tries to escape reality through alcohol; Jacinto and Neca, who have a conventional marriage of rich people; and Jovita and Meyes, two girls who compete for Gregory's attention. There is also Pedro, who works in a ministry and has been engaged to Julia for several years. Supposedly she is pregnant, but Pedro thinks it is not the right time for marriage. As abortions are illegal in Franco's Spain, he enlists Leopoldo's help to find a discreet and reliable doctor to solve the problem. In turn, Leopoldo asks Gregorio to talk to Juan, an estranged friend of the group who studies law and now lives in the slums. Through Juan, they hire a midwife, Emilia, who confirms Julia's pregnancy and presumably performs the abortion.

So far, the action has taken place in Madrid. As Julia's life could be in danger, and the group is afraid of complications, the friends decide to move her to a house in the mountains, away from her family. Julia's health apparently worsens. Gregorio, who has now become the leader of the group, gives up seeking help, preferring to inject her with morphine. But Leopoldo insists that the situation is so serious that she needs to see a doctor. He and Pedro turn to Darío, a common friend, who discovers that it was all a hoax. Julia has never been pregnant, and the woman who performed the "abortion" had simply made some superficial wounds in order to collect the money promised to her. Darío reprimands Gregorio for his behavior and threatens to call the police. In turn, Gregorio hits him. Eventually they make up, and the group return to their normal routine to plan parties and pleasure trips, as if nothing had happened.

The fact that Hortelano presents the thoughts, feelings and actions of a small group has led some critics to believe that his thematic scope is also limited. For example, Ramon Buckley states that the novel describes a specific social group: "Y no se trata del propósito más importante del escritor, sino el único. Todo lo demás, tanto características de los personajes, como historia o anécdota, está estrictamente subordinado a este fin: la presentación de unos individuos como representantes típicos de un determinado grupo social" (Buckley 57).¹² Unlike Buckley, I believe that

¹² And this is not the writer's most important purpose, but the only one. Everything else, both character traits and story or anecdote, is strictly subordinated to this end: the presentation of some individuals as typical representatives of a particular social group.

although Hortelano chooses a restricted group, his theme is not only the behavior, feelings and moral values of that group, but those of Spanish society as a whole. In this respect I concur with Gil Casado's statement that "el acierto consiste en lograr que esas actitudes ofrezcan implicaciones de carácter nacional. En *Nuevas amistades* el vacío de la juventud coincide con el vacío de la vida nacional, la abulia general se encuentra duplicada en el tedio de los personajes" (173)¹³.

One may add that the moral values and social behavior presented in the novel are not limited to Spanish society, but can be found in various forms in all western societies as well. The novelistic themes of *New Friendships* include the emptiness of a life based on material values, the conflict between different social groups and, more generally, the difference between reality and social and moral appearance. But the most striking aspect of the novel is not so much the thematic matter as the way in which the author presents it through his narrative techniques.

New Friendships is considered to be one of the best examples of objectivist technique in the Spanish social novel. Critics have pointed out that this technique has been used before, for example in Ferlosio's *El Jarama*, but never quite so extensively nor quite so effectively. Gil Casado expresses this critical consensus when he remarks that "*Nuevas amistades* revela un novelista de sorprendente madurez (sobre todo en la técnica y en los procedimientos narrativos) que cree en un escueto y absoluto objetivismo como medio para analizar una capa de la sociedad española" (Casado173).¹⁴

There is little doubt that *New Friendships* reflects the author's great maturity in style and technique. But one should qualify Casado's statement about the "stark and absolute objectivism" of the novel. Troncoso Duran, for instance, shows that the author makes his presence felt in various ways in the narrative (Troncoso Duran 53). In the case of *New Friendships* we may speak of a limited objectivist technique arising from the fact that Hortelano never sacrifices content for the sake of form, or form for the sake of content.

¹³ the challenge is to ensure that these attitudes have national implications. In *New Friendships* the vacuity of the young people matches the vacuity of the national life, and the overall apathy is duplicated in the characters' boredom.

¹⁴ *New friendships* reveals a novelist of surprising maturity (especially in narrative technique and strategies) who believes in a stark and absolute objectivism as a means of analyzing a layer of Spanish society.

As the author himself confesses, "Si por algo no me podría encasillar en el realismo social es por el desprecio programático que en aquellos años existía por las formas literarias. Al parecer se había olvidado algo que me parece fundamental: la forma determinada el contenido, y el contenido determina la forma. Se había decidido que la literatura, como arma de combate . . . no tenía porque preocuparse de las formas literarias, sino que, en todo caso, debía utilizarse la agresividad de sus propios contenidos. A mí me parece esto una contradicción grave porque, por definición, toda la literatura tiene que ser literaria." (Cited in Sylvester 40)

The preceding statement reveals that García Hortelano is fully aware that in literature form and content are inseparable. That is why in *New Friendships* the author does not make direct political, ideological, or moral comments, but only indirect statements that say less than they mean. In this regard, it is revealing that the epigraph of the novel contains a quote from Albert Camus: "Ce jour-la, je compris qu'il avait deux vérités dont l'une ne devait jamais être dite."¹⁵ This epigraph makes it clear that Hortelano wants his reader to discern between two narrative levels: an immediate level and an implied one. Therefore the presentation of the novelistic material in *New Friendships* is better described as ironic rather than objective.

Even though irony usually denotes subjectivity, this does not mean that an ironic narrative such as Hortelano's may not involve a factual presentation of the narrated content. For some writers the objective presentation of the novelistic content in itself implies irony. For example, Thomas Mann notes:

[The novel's] greatness is mild, restful, serene, 'wise-objective.' It keeps its distance from things, has by its very nature distance from them; it hovers over them and smiles down upon them, regardless of how much', at the same time, it involves the hearer or reader in them by a process of web like entanglement. The art of epic is "Apollinian" art as the aesthetic term would have it; because Apollo, distant marksman, is the god of distance, of objectivity, the god of irony. Objectivity is irony and the spirit of epic art is the spirit of irony." (Cited in James, 88-89)

Until the Romantic period, irony was mostly seen as a rhetorical figure. It was defined as a statement that implies the opposite of what it said, as a finely disguised joke. As a result, irony was usually looked upon as a

¹⁵ That day I realized that there are two truths, of which one should never be told.

component of satire. However, in the Romantic period, for example in Friedrich Schlegel's idealist philosophy, irony became a metaphysical concept, expressing an ambiguous relationship between subject and object, or between reality and appearance.¹⁶ In the twentieth century the literary term has been so much used that it is in danger of losing most of its usefulness. To contemporary critics literature is in itself a verbal ironic structure. For example, Northrop Frye notes: "The critics who tell us that the basis of poetic expression is irony, or a pattern of words that turns away from obvious (i.e. descriptive) meaning, are much closer to the facts of literary level. The literary structure is ironic because what it says is always different in kind or degree from what it means" (Frye 80). For Douglas Muecke, irony is also the art of saying something without really saying it. It is an art that "gets its effects from below the surface, and this gives it a quality that resembles the depth and resonance of great art triumphantly saying much more than it seems to be saying." (Muecke 6) Douglas Muecke, Charles Glicksberg, Wayne Booth, Gary Handwerk, among others, have created a large number of ironic categories, describing the same phenomenon under different names. For example, these critics speak of verbal irony, irony of situation, romantic irony, metaphysical irony, irony of destiny, overt and covert irony, and tragic or dramatic irony. According to Muecke, moreover, the ironist and the object of irony are related as observer and observed (Muecke 218). This is in keeping with the basic duality of irony. The opposing points of view that are presented through irony reveal the tension between the ironist's position as observer and his awareness of the difference between his view and that of the observed. It is precisely the ironic observer's attitude that Hortelano adopts in presenting his characters in *New Friendships*. My analysis will adopt and employ these categories whenever appropriate. It is useful, for instance, to distinguish between irony and satire and then determine whether *New Friendships* is ironic or satirical.

The Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary defines satire as "una composición escrita cuyo objeto es censurar acremente o poner en ridículo a personas o cosas." (1434)¹⁷ The satirist diminishes the object under attack, deriding it to the point of conveying anger, contempt and ridicule, and often ending in sarcasm. In this sense, the satirist's attack is based on ethical norms, consciously discriminating between desirable and undesirable human

¹⁶ For an extensive discussion of the Romantic concept of irony, see Lilian Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984) p. 30ff.

¹⁷ A written composition whose purpose is to harshly censure or ridicule people or things.

behavior. One can say that the satirist is moralistic because he judges the world without hiding his likes and dislikes.

On the other hand, irony is governed by relativities. Like the satirist, the ironist sees beyond the surface of human behavior. But unlike the satirist, she is not placed in an authoritarian position to judge. Hence, irony is much more ambiguous than satire. From this discussion one can also infer that *New Friendships* is more of an ironical than a satirical work, also because Hortelano presents his social commentary in an implicit, rather than an explicit manner. To illustrate the difference between an ironic and a satirical commentary, one may compare a passage from, say, Jorge Icaza's novel *Huasipungo* with a passage from *New Friendships*.

In Icaza's narrative, the plantation owner, Don Alfonso brings the Indian Cunshi into his home in order to care for his grandson. He takes advantage of his power and forces Cunshi to have sex with him. Dissatisfied with the girl's unenthusiastic performance, he comments: "They are beasts. They do not make a man feel good as they should. They are passive like cows It is an inferior race (Icaza 59). For the reader it is immediately clear that the beast of inferior race is Don Alfonso, the quintessential master, who uses and abuses his power over his servants. He is a grotesque caricature. He belongs to the upper class, appears to be human, but is revealed to be a monster. In the Icaza fragment, the comment is explicit, delivered in a grotesque and coarse manner. The reader immediately sees that it means the opposite of what it says. The fragment is fraught with verbal irony. Unlike situational irony, verbal irony "implies an ironist, someone consciously and intentionally employing a technique" (Muecke 42). But in the case of *Huasipungo*, this verbal irony is so intense and direct that it becomes satire.

In *New Friendships*, on the other hand, the irony is very subtle. Let us look at the scene where Pedro and Leopoldo decide to contact Juan to help them solve Julia's problem. He used to belong to their group, but seems to have chosen to move to the slums and fraternize with the poor people. Referring to this fact, Leopoldo comments:

- Y no era sólo resentimiento social, lo que le hizo [a Juan] salir a patadas de nuestro grupo. Mal que bien, con su mierda de poco dinero podía seguir nuestra vida. Nosotros somos tolerantes, ¿no?, y él ha tenido siempre una decidida tendencia a la gorronería. Es que no vale. ¡Qué no vale! Un fracasado. Hay muchos así. Tipos que se dedican a la cultura, pero que

rabian por vivir como nosotros, por ir de un sitio a otro, por conocer mujeres y manejar billetes. Juan es uno de ellos. (88)¹⁸

This passage, like the one in *Huasipungo*, reveals the conflict among different social groups. In this case, Leopoldo and Pedro belong to the upper bourgeoisie, whereas Juan belongs to the intelligentsia. Although he is not rich, he is well educated and therefore has a special social status, between the mostly uncultured rich and the largely uneducated poor. Juan seems to have been attracted by their group, but to have rejected their empty values. He has apparently decided to radically change his life and take up the cause of the underprivileged. For Leopoldo, however, Juan is a social failure who has left the group out of envy of his friends' rich lifestyle. The passage is ironic, and somewhat satirical, but it is handled in a subtle way. It is also an example of situational irony. In this type of irony there is no ironic narrator, but a state of affairs or outcome of events revealed as ironic. The reader must infer the truth from the dialogue itself. She must figure out that the ones who actually lead an empty existence are Leopoldo and Pedro. The priorities in their lives are parties, money and keeping up appearances. Basically, they envy Juan's strength and non-conformism. They do not ask for help from their peers, but from Juan, even though they consider him to be their social inferior. Furthermore, they turn to him out of cowardliness and sheer convenience: Juan now belongs to the "underworld" where, at least in their eyes, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and illegal abortions are a routine matter. This way they can save appearances with their families and social circle concerning Julia's "embarrassing" situation. The reader is told none of this, but has to infer it from Leopoldo, whose viewpoint at this point seems to be untrustworthy.

While in the passage from *Huasipungo* the social criticism is clear and direct, in the one from *New Friendships* it is much less obvious: the reader must figure out what is going on and reach her own conclusions. At first, she may conclude that Juan is a positive figure because he decides to change his vacuous lifestyle. But she will eventually discover that he is no better than his erstwhile friends. When Gregorio asks him for help, Juan replies:

¹⁸ It was not just social resentment that had him [Juan] kicked out of our group. Despite his lousy little money, he could have continued living our life-style. We are tolerant, aren't we? And he was always scrounging money off us. He's no good! No good at all! A failure. There are so many of them. Guys devoted to culture, but dying to live like us, moving around, chasing women and spending money. Juan is one of them.

"Cuéntame chismes de esos. ¿Siguen odiándome y suponiendo que les envidia y les odio? ¿Continúa Leopoldo durmiéndose doce horas al día, sacándole el dinero a su madre y mintiendo cada vez que habla? Y Jacinto, ¿qué le ha pasado últimamente al buen cornudo en potencia de Jacinto?" (97)¹⁹

The reader realizes that Juan is not so different from his friends, because he immediately agrees to find a doctor who can perform the abortion and demands a handsome sum for his help. Juan lowers himself to Leopoldo's level when he badmouths the group. In part, this does reflect the resentment and envy he feels for his former friends. Later on, the reader also discovers that Juan is naive to think that the lower social groups have a higher ethic than their upper counterparts. The reader knows that this is not so, because the midwife Emilia takes advantage of the situation, lying about the pregnancy and the abortion in order to collect the money. To some extent, the novel reveals all three social groups (rich, poor, and intellectual) to have false, materialistic values.

The difference between *Huasipungo* and *New Friendships* is in fact a difference between two types of narrative voice. In Icaza's novel, the narrative voice is constantly present, standing between the text and its reader. By contrast, in Hortelano's novel, the narrative voice is minimal and fragmented. Troncoso Duran argues that "toda la novela aparece narrada en tercera persona y en pretérito indefinido con lo cual se acerca . . . a lo que se llama 'narración histórica.'" (Duran Troncoso 20)²⁰ The author chooses various characters through which he moves the narrative along. For example, in the first chapter, the point of view belongs to Joaquín, a minor character who is not a member of the protagonist group. In the other chapters, the narrator chooses the perspective of a member of the group, switching between Leopoldo, Gregorio and Isabel. The dialogue prevails, and descriptions are minimal, as they are presented from the characters' standpoint. One may add that this kind of technique is essentially dramatic. Furthermore, although the narrative voice is fragmented at the explicit

¹⁹ "Tell me some gossip about them. Do they still hate me and assume I envy and hate them? Does Leopoldo continue to sleep twelve hours a day, taking money from his mother and lying every time he talks to her? And what about Jacinto? What's going on with our good old cuckold, impotent Jacinto?"

²⁰ The whole novel appears to be narrated in the third person and the past tense which fits ... what is called 'historical narrative.'

level of the fictionalized events, the continuity and unity of the narrative are established at an implicit level, which is precisely the ironic one.

Additionally, Hortelano employs what I would call "structural irony." This kind of irony can best be defined in relation to situational and dramatic irony. Situational irony "does not imply an ironist but merely a 'state of affairs' or 'outcome of events' which are seen and felt to be ironic." (Muecke 42) Muecke partially adopts this definition from the *English Oxford Dictionary* which, referring to irony as a rhetorical figure, says: "A contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things." In turn, dramatic irony is a special type of situational irony in which "los espectadores y posiblemente algunos de los actores también son conscientes de algo que ignora otro personaje y para quien esos conocimientos tendrán hondo significado." (Roster 14)²¹

Structural irony is also a special kind of situational irony, but it differs somewhat from dramatic irony insofar as the reader and some of the characters remain unaware of the real state of affairs until the end of the story. In *New Friendships*, Hortelano organizes the presentation of events in such a way that the result is always ironic. In the beginning, he allows the reader to gain knowledge only of appearances; she finds out the truth later on, or at the end of the novel. As we have seen, he uses this technique in the presentation of Juan's character. At first, the reader thinks Juan is a positive figure because Leopoldo, whom the reader begins not to trust, has a negative view of him. But at the end, the reader discovers that Juan is no better than Leopoldo and that the negative opinion the two former friends hold of each other is fairly justified.

Hortelano also employs structural irony in the very first chapter of *New Friendships* through Joaquín, a minor character in the narrative. Joaquín belongs to the lower class and his point of view allows the reader to distance himself from that of the main upper-class characters. But Joaquín's perspective will also make the reader realize there is not much difference between the moral values of the lower classes and those of the upper classes. For example, Joaquín and Ventura, the owner of the bar, speak contemptuously of Isabel, the alcoholic woman:

²¹ The audience and possibly some of the actors are also aware of something that another character ignores and for whom such knowledge would have profound significance.

- No está casada. Por lo menos no lleva anillo.
- ¿Te has fijado? Pues, el padre o un hermano. La gente es muy rara.
- Está buena, ¿verdad?
- ¿No dices que te repugnan las borrachas?
- Hombre, sí, pero. . . (*Nuevas amistades* 13)²²

Here, one can again see the author's ironic manipulation. First, Joaquín says he does not like inebriated girls, but later on he tries to pick up Isabel. This is a good example of how Hortelano's ironic perspective goes beyond social criticism based on class conflict, since he questions the mentality of Spanish society in general. Although Joaquín belongs to the lower class, he shares the same macho attitude of the upper class male.

An example of structural irony that develops throughout the work is the presentation of Julia's false pregnancy. Here, the reader encounters two ironic situations: the situation before Darío's revelation, and the one after the truth is discovered. At first, the reader and the characters believe that Julia is pregnant. This allows the author to reveal the true moral character of Pedro and Leopoldo. Pedro thinks that it is not the right time to get married because it would create a family scandal: "Imposible. Una boda repentina en los dos o tres próximos meses echarla muchas cosas a rodar. Sobre todo, cuestiones de dinero." (81)²³ Pedro is more concerned about money, appearances and his family's opinion than about Julia. Leopoldo, on the other hand, appears outraged and chides his friend:

- Pero -¿Cómo se te ha ocurrido acostarte con Julia?
- ¡Yo que sé! grito Pedro
- Parece inconcebible. . . . Julia, una muchacha como Julia. Eres un animal descompuesto y
- Lo sé, Leopoldo.
- No tienes disculpa. En una ciudad de dos millones de habitantes. (56)²⁴

²² - She is not married. At least she wears no ring.

- Have you noticed? Well, the father or a brother. People are very strange.

- She's hot, right?

- Didn't you say you loathed drunken girls?

-Well, yes, man, but....

²³ - Impossible. A sudden wedding in the two or three coming months throws many things up in the air. Above all, financial matters.

²⁴ "Pedro, how could you sleep with Julia?

"How would I know!!!" Pedro yelled.

"It seems inconceivable.... Julia, a girl like Julia. You're a sick animal and....

"I know, Leopoldo.

"You have no excuse. In a city of two million inhabitants.

The scene reveals the hypocrisy of these young people and their double standards. Leopoldo condemns Pedro's behavior, because he should not have had sexual intercourse with his respectable fiancée, with whom he goes to church every Sunday. Then the reader learns that Leopoldo has had sexual intercourse with Encarna and that she has also had an abortion. Confronted with this, Leopoldo protests:

- Lo [el aborto] de Encarna fue distinto.
- ¿Por qué?
- ¡¡Oh!! Porque Julia no es una chica como Encarna. La pobre Encarna era casi una criada.
- No sabía eso. (84)²⁵

The reader realizes that for Leopoldo, Pedro and their social circle it is acceptable to have sexual intercourse with girls from the lower classes. The irony of the author, although implied, is caustic. These friends are entangled in a social web of appearances and lies. Leopoldo and Pedro decide to ask Juan to help them because they are incapable to confront the abortion problem in a responsible manner. After Julia's surgery is allegedly performed, moreover, and the friends think that her life could be in danger, Jacinto tells Gregorio that it has been a good idea to move Julia to the countryside, because if something happened to her, it would be easier to get rid of her corpse. He imagines a scenario from a detective novel, in which they could put the corpse in her car and set it on fire to destroy the evidence of her having died as a result of an abortion. (*Nuevas amistades*, 200) Gregorio has no objection to the idea. Jacinto and Gregorio show not only their cynicism, but also their cowardliness. Unable to accept responsibility, they are willing to be accomplices in a crime in order to avoid blame for Julia's death.

Structural irony is also present in the dynamics of the relationship between Leopoldo and Gregorio. In the case of these two main characters, Hortelano gradually increases the ironic distance between them and the reader until it becomes insuperable, at the end of the novel. At the beginning of the

²⁵ -Encarna's [abortion] was different.

-How so?

-Oh!!! Because Julia is not like Encarna. Poor Encarna was almost a maid.

-I didn't know that.

narrative, Leopoldo is the leader of the group and appears to the reader as a sympathetic and reliable person. He seemingly looks out for all of them, including alcoholic Isabel, whom he collects from Ventura's bar in the opening scenes of the novel. His friends consider him the most intelligent and strong among them. They all call Leopoldo when they need help. When Isabel goes out, she always carries an identification card with his name and phone number to have him contacted if she drinks too much and passes out. Pedro also comes to him when he has the problem with Julia's pregnancy. Obviously Leopoldo feels important because all of his friends depend on him for help. Even when his friend Gregorio comes to Madrid, Leopoldo tells Jacinto that "Me espera una temporada de niñera, hasta que el muchacho aprenda a desenvolverse." (27)²⁶

But, ironically, the one taking the role of a nanny in the end is Gregorio, because Leopoldo proves utterly unable to act in a crisis. When Leopoldo charges Gregorio to search for Juan, Gregorio takes over the leadership of the group. The other group members passively accept the change. At this point the ironic distance between Leopoldo and the reader has reached its peak, and the ironic focus begins to shift toward Gregorio, who until this moment has appeared as a rather sympathetic and reliable character. But the author gradually increases the ironic distance between him and the reader as well, until Gregorio becomes as unsympathetic and unreliable as the rest of the group when he refuses to call a doctor to examine Julia after the alleged abortion, preferring to treat her himself with morphine and thus supposedly putting her life in danger. He is not at all concerned with Julia's health but with maintaining his leadership status.

With the revelation that Julia was never pregnant, the ironic distance between Gregorio and the reader increases exponentially. When Darío confirms that everything has been a deceit and calls Gregorio "a murderer, a stubborn idiot and a pig" (258), the later refuses once again to accept the responsibility for his actions. He knocks Darío out cold, and almost all the members of the group support their leader's violent behavior. The revelation of the truth has no impact on the behavior of the group or their leader. To Gregorio's mind, the guilty one is Darío: "Mientras golpeaba a Darío, había deseado que Pedro, Juan o la propia Julia se encontrasen bajo sus puños. Todos ellos, puesto que todos habían colaborado en la minuciosa y fatigante maraña de aquel inútil combate de las noches y los días últimos. *No obstante. Darío era el culpable.* Reprimió un temblor de las

²⁶ I expect a nanny season, until the boy learns how to handle things.

piernas. *No entre ellos, ni siquiera Emilia. sino Darío había cometido aquella defraudación, al revelarles lo que debió callar.*" (261, my emphasis)²⁷

Here the reader is aware that Gregorio, when faced with the truth, avoids acting on it and prefers to find a scapegoat to justify his feckless behavior. What Darío was not supposed to reveal was the terrible reality of the emptiness and idleness of their lives. The reader may also speculate that Hortelano alludes to the larger context of Franco's Spain, where those who were telling the truth about the dictatorship were beaten, thrown in jail, or otherwise silenced. Nevertheless, Darío himself is not necessarily a positive hero, as in the end the affair is hushed up, and they all become friends again, carrying on as if nothing had happened.

There is also a juncture in the narrative at which it seems that Leopoldo will again assume leadership and become more sympathetic to the reader, namely when he decides to bring in Darío to examine Julia, chiding Gregorio: "Estás jugando al héroe. Sabes pinchar en un brazo, convencer al cerdo de Juan y conducir un automóvil, y lo estás explotando bien. Pero se ha acabado. O intentarás que te ayudemos a cavar una fosa." (241)²⁸ After Gregorio hits Darío, however, Leopoldo praises him, instead of decrying his violent behavior. He seems to have the same reaction to Darío's revelation that Gregorio does.

In turn, Gregorio claims that Darío's accusations are irrelevant, given the complexity and fluidity of reality. But to the reader, this argument is nothing but Gregorio's excuse to return to his trifling and senseless existence: "Aunque la ausencia de signos no presuponía la inexistencia de hechos, tampoco un signo, un recuerdo, la precisa recriminación de Darío, había de determinar toda una vida. Una vida era algo más confuso, más inestable, que cualquier hecho aislado o cualquier propósito. Volvería a buscar a Lupe, a jugar al "póker," a acumular desconcierto, a besar a

²⁷ While he was hitting Darío, he wanted Pedro, Juan or even Julia to receive his punches, too. All of them, since they worked together in the intricate and exhausting web of that useless battle of the last nights and days. Notwithstanding, Darío was the guilty one. He repressed a trembling of his legs. No one among them, not even Emilia, but Darío had committed the fraud, to disclose what he should have shut up about.

²⁸ You're playing the hero. You know how to administer shots, how to persuade stupid Juan and how to drive a car, and you're exploiting it well. But it's over. Or do you intend to ask us to help you dig a grave?

Meyes, a charlar con Neca, a acechar a Carmen en el recodo del pasillo.” (262)²⁹

Thus the structural irony of the narrative comes full circle, and the reader is given to understand that there is no hope of changing the deplorable social and moral attitudes of these people. Based on this discussion of *New Friendships*, I believe it has become clear that García Hortelano manipulates the objectivist technique to achieve ironic effects, especially structural irony. The author does not intervene directly in the narrative, which he presents from the viewpoint of various characters. These viewpoints are completely different from the one the author expects his readers to endorse, and it is chiefly through structural irony that Hortelano guides them toward the desired socio-ethical conclusions.³⁰ These conclusions, however, do not appear to entail any specific radical solution, and certainly not a violent Marxist revolution carried out by the proletariat, because all of the social groups presented in the novel are tangled up in the same deceitful and inauthentic social and existential net. On the contrary, Hortelano leaves it up to each reader to devise his own solution, which in the end would have to be, at least for this reader, an ethical project of self-transformation, rather than a radical political program. It is for this reason that García Hortelano’s work is far from having lost its relevance in the current context of democratic Europe, let alone in that of the new Eastern European democracies.

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²⁹ Although the absence of signs did not mean the absence of facts, nor did a sign, or a memory, Darío’s precise recrimination, need determine a lifetime. A life was something more confusing, more unstable than any isolated fact or any purpose. He would start again to look for Lupe, to play "poker", to accumulate confusion, to kiss Meyes, to chat with Neca, to grope Carmen in the corner of the corridor.

³⁰ In this regard, my approach in this essay has been closer to Wolfgang Iser’s reader-response theory, rather than that of Sartre and Castellet. In *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Becket* (1978) and in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1980), Iser discusses the various techniques used by an author to guide the reader toward a specific reading. Here I have shown that structural irony is one of these techniques. Unlike Castellet and Sartre, however, I don’t believe (nor does—we have seen—Hortelano) that an author can guide the reader all the way to political action—that is not the role of the literary work, but that of political pamphlets and manifestoes.

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