

EVOLUTION OR ETERNAL RECURRENCE? SOCIAL
COMMENTARY IN EDUARDO MENDOZA'S
DETECTIVE SERIES

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ABSTRACT. Eduardo Mendoza's nameless detective has appeared over the last thirty-six years as the main character of five different novels. During this time, the character has evolved from an incarcerated mental patient to, after his discharge, being the only legal worker in a local Chinese restaurant and raconteur detective, and Spain has evolved from the political, socio-cultural, and judicial labyrinth entanglements of the Franco dictatorship. Doubtless, each of the five novels demonstrates that, while similar in nature, each also corresponds to the historical "moment" in which it was created. That Spain has changed is unquestioned: by 2015 the Franco dictatorship is firmly over, Spanish currency is the euro instead of the peseta, one can openly criticize the government and individual politicians themselves, immigrants have changed both the demographics and cultural norms of the Peninsula, and Spain is no longer an isolated country more closely aligned to Africa than to its neighbor, Europe, to the north. However, Spain is still very much the same as before: corrupt politicians remain in many positions of power, Spain is still questioning its identity as a European member (and the fervor in Catalonia for independence has not abated) and small mom-and-pop shops are still the norm for every-day shopping needs. That is, in spite of all the changes inherent in, and arising from, a society transitioning from a repressive dictatorship to an established and stable form of representative government, Eduardo Mendoza best demonstrates both the evolution and the *eterno retorno* nature of Spanish society by employing the same oligophrenic detective in each of the works—a character who, while also evolving over the nearly four decades of the series, still finds himself in essence on the fringes of the society about which he, as insightful as ever, comments.

KEY WORDS: detective fiction, Mendoza, eternal return, immigration, mimeticism, post-Franco Spain

Eduardo Mendoza's nameless detective—called by many critics as simply "X" and by others as "Ceferino", the alias with which he first presents himself¹—initially appeared in *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (*The Mystery of the*

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1 In an interview with Óscar López in October 2015, Mendoza emphasizes the anonymous nature of the character: "Sin nombre, desde luego. Porque no lo tiene, nunca lo

Bewitched Crypt, 1979), being temporarily released from a Barcelona psychiatric asylum in order to solve the disappearance of a girl from a local boarding school. Recognized for his eccentric personality and his ability to circulate among and communicate with baser members of society, the protagonist has received much critical acclaim over the last thirty-six years, during which time Mendoza has published four additional works with the main character: *El laberinto de las aceitunas* (1982), *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001), *El enredo de la bolsa y la vida* (2012), and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015).² The first two novels end with the narrator returning to his incarceration in the mental ward, but at the beginning of the 2001 work the aforementioned psychiatric institute is slated for demolition to make way for additional housing during the real-estate boom, all the patients are suddenly declared cured and promptly discharged, and he takes over the management of his brother-in-law's dilapidated beauty salon. In 2012, the anonymous detective once again appears as the main character, still in charge of the beauty parlor, and becomes involved in finding his friend and former psychiatric-ward companion, the disappeared Rómulo el Guapo. True to past form, he employs much artifice and humor in his parodic quest. However, unlike in previous works the character now appears to possess a level of unforeseen sagacity and maturity not present in the previous novels. By the end of this narrative, in fact, the reader senses that much has changed and he may, someday, become a somewhat productive member of society. In the 2015 narrative, X is still working at the Chinese restaurant; in fact, he is the one who has the legal papers keeping the establishment open since he does not pertain “al abultado colectivo de los sin papeles, como le sucedía al resto de los trabajadores de la empresa así como a los socios capitalistas, los proveedores y buena parte de la clientele” (“to the massive group of illegals, as was the case with the rest of the workers in the business as well as the capitalist partners, the suppliers and a large part of the clientele”, Mendoza, 2015: 9). While remaining true to the extensive use of hu-

ha tenido...Aunque alguno ha salido alguna vez por ahí...Hay quien le pone algún nombre. Sobre todo, los que hacen trabajos académicos [...] Pero no tiene nombre [...] Es un personaje anónimos. Esto forma parte del personaje” (“Without a name, of course. Because he does not have it; he never has had it...Although one has appeared from time to time...There are those who give him a name. More than any, those who write academic papers [...] But he does not have a name. [...] He is an anonymous character. This forms part of the character”).

- 2 In English, *The Labyrinth of the Olives*, *The Boudoir Adventure*, *The Entanglement of the Stock Market and Life*, and *The Secret of the Missing Model*. Subsequent references to these works in this essay will be, respectively, *La cripta*, *El laberinto*, *El tocador*, *El enredo*, and *La modelo*. All translations of titles and quotes within this essay, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

mor, *La modelo* is unlike the other novels in the series in that it is divided into two main sections, each with its own investigation: a recounting of an investigation that originally occurred in the 1980s which X “decide que lo resolvió mal. Y entonces [in the second part] vuelve a buscar a los protagonistas de ese caso, y los va reencontrando” (López “decides that he resolved poorly. And then [in the second part] he returns to seek out the protagonists of that case and goes about meeting them again”). In Mendoza’s latest novel, then, the reader is exposed to “los cambios en los hábitos y las formas de vida, los valores, y desde luego las transformaciones de la propia ciudad” (Rodríguez Fischer, “the changes in habits and forms of life, values, and of course the transformations of the city itself”) between pre-Olympic and current-day Barcelona in the juxtaposition of these investigations. In this essay, I compare and contrast the presentation of both X and Spain, vis-à-vis Barcelona, throughout the series to show that X’s evolution is not due simply to having aged and managed to survive thirteen years in the outside world, nor to his being cured by the renowned psychiatrist Dr. Sugrañes; instead, X’s transformation parallels, in large part, Spain’s evolution from “una sociedad pre-posfranquista” (“a pre-post-Franco society”), in the words of X, to one in which Barcelona—“la Meca del turismo internacional, salvo para los islamistas, que ya tienen su propia Meca” (Mendoza, 2015: 271)—questions both its inclusion as a part of Spain and Eurozone economy. That is, an examination of Eduardo Mendoza’s detective series reveals a main character and a society profoundly changed through narratives that reflect the ongoing evolution of Spanish norms and behaviors.

Various critics have noted over the years the presence of social commentary in these novels by Eduardo Mendoza. David Knutson, for example, states that “Mendoza writes his city with the bleak, hopeless outlook that is typical of the detective novel, focusing on people who must struggle to survive in a society that reserves its privileges for a select few” (Knutson, 2006: 52). Kalen Oswald examines the “social criticism inherent in the novels” (Oswald, 2002: 48), proposing that “The interaction of X with the other characters and his observations of the space in which he moves give significant insight to many problems and insecurities prominent in Barcelona during the Transition and the beginning of the Socialist ‘Cambio’” (Oswald, 2002 :49). Chung-Ying Yang notes that “Mendoza integra en su obra el cuadro crítico social, la acción violenta, los personajes duros y marginales que afirman la presencia de la novela negra americana” (“Mendoza integrates in his work social criticism, violent action, hard and marginal characters that affirm the presence of the American hardboiled”, Yang, 2000: 162). Tiffany Trotman has observed that “Eduardo Mendoza uses his works as an instrument of social critique built upon parody and an ironic inversion of the North American detective novel” (Trotman, 2013: 19). And, most re-

cently, César Coca (2015) has argued that “la habitual galería de personajes de Mendoza [...] son un retrato de un tiempo y una sociedad” (“the habitual gallery of characters by Mendoza [...] are a portrayal of a time and society”). Thus, the critical establishment frequently posits, but fails to examine thoroughly, the social commentary of this parodic hardboiled series.

At the same time, that Mendoza’s detective is different from the typical literary character of detective fiction is reflected in the critical establishment’s evaluation of him from the beginning. Knutson’s valuably summarizes the early reception of the character by noting that: “Samuel Amell distinguishes [*La cripta* and *El laberinto*] because they completely enter the tradition of the *roman noir*, the hard-boiled detective novel... Genaro Pérez notes that these [same] novels can be considered as a ‘variation’, an inversion, and a ludic and parodic deconstruction of said subgenre. [...] These two novels [...] can be considered among the best of the subgenre in contemporary Spanish narrative” (Knutson, 2006: 47). Additionally, Hector Brioso Santos calls Mendoza’s narratives “picarescas”, while Trotman describes them as “carnavalesque”. José Valles Calatrava (2012) says that *La cripta* and *El laberinto* “tienen ecos del relato gótico y picaresco y utilizan como investigador a un loco innominado, ratero y bebedor de Pepsi-Cola. El intento de parodia del género a través de la esperpentización de personajes y presentación de la sociedad española y el lenguaje abarrotado, de frases largas y estructuras sintácticas complejas, con frecuentes contrastes y concatenaciones, son las características determinantes de su obra” (“have echoes of the picaresque and gothic story and utilize as an investigator an unnamed madman, pickpocket and drinker of Pepsi-Cola. The parodic intent of the genre through the *esperpento* quality of the characters and the presentation of the Spanish society and crammed language of long sentences and complex syntactical structures, with frequent contrasts and series of circumstances are the determinant characteristics of his work”). Robert Spires at his turn simply affirms that “Mendoza deserves major credit for providing an alternative mode of novelistic expression [to the ‘new novel’ of the 1960s and the self-referential fiction of the 1970s]” (1996: 77). And Jiri Chalupa argues that “El protagonista de su trilogía posee una increíble capacidad de mimetismo e improvisación y sabe imitar, cuando se lo propone, el modo de hablar de casi todas las clases características que componen la sociedad de sus tiempos” (“The protagonist of the trilogy possesses an incredible capacity of mimeticism and improvisation and knows how to imitate, when he proposes to do so, the manner of speaking of almost all the characteristic classes that compose the society of his times”, 2007:104). In sum, doubtless is the fact that Mendoza’s protagonist—if he can be called such since more seems to happen to him than due to his actions—evolves over the thirty-six years encapsulated in the series.

An examination of the various titles of the series themselves reveals Mendoza's portrayal of Spain's democracy as both simultaneously evolutionary and of an *eterno retorno* ("eternal recurrence") nature. David Gómez-Torres (2004) notes the labyrinth construct of *La cripta* and *El laberinto*, saying that "La otra versión del laberinto son los laberintos-enigmas que el 'detective' tiene que resolver en ambas novelas; en principio la desaparición de una niña en una y las apariciones y desapariciones de una maleta con dinero en la otra" ("The other version of the labyrinth are the enigma-labyrinths that the 'detective' has to resolve in both novels; in principle, the disappearance of a girl in one and the appearances and disappearances of a suitcase with Money in the other"). Yang expands on this point, postulating, however, that in these two works the labyrinth is more than merely structural: "Todos los personajes se ven inmersos en una red laberíntica, en busca de su propia verdad, pero son incapaces de salir" ("All the characters are seen immersed in a labyrinth network, in search of their own truth, but are unable to leave", 2000: 162). While Spain, as a country, is ultimately able to come out of the political, sociocultural, and judicial labyrinth entanglements of the dictatorship, it should be remembered that at the time of the publication of *La cripta* King Juan Carlos had only recently taken the throne, after having sworn allegiance to Franco's Movimiento Nacional only ten years prior. Additionally, *El laberinto* appeared in print in June 1982, little more than a year after the events of 23-F, a key turning point in the labyrinth evolutions of the Transición, which many historians do not consider complete until the election of Adolfo Suárez in October 1982, or even 1985 or 1986 with Spain's entry into the European Economic Community and NATO. Suffice it to say, both of the first two novels were written before Spain had settled firmly into a democracy and while Mendoza was still living in New York, working as an official translator at the United Nations.

In another place I comment on various cultural phenomena as present in *La cripta embrujada* and *El tocador*. More specifically, I argue that "The construction of X's personal identity in the 1979 novel [...] parallels the ongoing identity-construction simultaneously occurring in Spanish society in that both are, at the time, in a state of flux, feeling their way after having been tentatively freed from the repressive confines of institutionalization, and searching for what will provide the most favorable solution to their immediate needs" (Oxford, 2007: 62). By some twenty years later, however, society in Spain had matured such that the reforms of 1986 had resulted in a shift of the burden of mental healthcare away from the state, "the 1970s search for identity [in *La cripta*] seemingly has morphed into a 1990s perception [in *El tocador*] of the inherent corruptness of politicians" (Oxford, 2007: 64), and Barcelona was partaking in the real-estate boom at least tangentially related to the 1992 Olympics. Given Mendoza's proclivity of cul-

tural commentary in the early novels of the series, it is only natural that he would continue such in the later narratives. In fact, in his interview with Óscar López, Mendoza admits that *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* “es una visión fugaz y poco profunda de este fenómeno de los cambios de Barcelona, que me interesa como interesan las cosas de este tipo. Y porque creo que es interesante, que es importante, cómo evolucionan las cosas” (“is a fleeting and superficial vision of this phenomenon of the changes in Barcelona that interests me as things of this sort interest me. And because I believe that it is interesting, that it is important, how things evolve”).

Doubtless, X’s evolution mirrors that of Spain’s; as Spain distanced itself from the dictatorship, it began to enjoy the boom years of the late 20th/early 21st century. In fact, in spite of the more recent economic turmoil in the country, it should be remembered that in 2001 the International Monetary Fund issued a statement in which it said that “Among the larger euro area economies, Spain has shown the most sustained dynamism over the past five years. And even in the current adverse global setting, output and employment have continued to expand more rapidly than the euro area average” (“Spain”). As a reflection of the housing boom, Mendoza’s detective is freed from physical incarceration at the psychological institute in *El tocador* (2001) and, in the words of Stewart King, “Al abrazar una vida tranquila y sin complicaciones como peluquero [...] nuestro héroe se niega a asumir la masculinidad dura promocionada en la novela negra” (“Upon embracing a tranquil and uncomplicated life as a beautician [...] our hero refuses to assume the hard masculinity promoted in the hardboiled novel”, 2005: 207). While *El enredo* (2012) opens up with the protagonist still in charge of the beauty salon, he now faces almost weekly visits from the bank demanding payment on the outstanding credit³ and is amazed by the constant stream of people entering and leaving the Chinese variety shop across the street. In fact, one of the more overt social commentaries in this work concerns the proliferation of Chinese boutiques and the recent economic downturn in Spain; as the author explains (in jest?) in one interview, “Los chinos me parecen el misterio más grande de nuestro tiempo. Dominan el mundo unos que venden bombillas que se funden antes de enroscarlas” (“The Chinese seem to me to be the largest mystery of our time. They dominate the world those who sell light bulbs that burn out before they are screwed in”). Later, in the same interview, Mendoza also states that “[en España] Hemos sido

3 On 8 June 2012—*El enredo de la bolsa y la vida* appeared in bookstores on 8 April 2012—Reuter’s provided an overview of the ongoing, near collapse of Spain’s banking system, noting that “Spain’s banks are suffering a hangover from the effects of a near-decade building boom that ended in 2008 leaving lenders saddled with around 300 billion euros (\$374 billion) in loans to housebuilders [sic], equivalent to nearly one third of the country’s gross domestic product” (“Timeline”).

siempre un país pobre y cutre, un país de bohemios y pícaros, y nos habíamos olvidado” (“Eduardo”; “[in Spain] we have always been a poor and seedy country, a country of bohemians and rogues, and we have forgotten that”), a statement foreshadowed by Hart’s assertion that “Most of the humor in [*La cripta*] is based on this theme: that Spain is basically shabby and second-rate as far as countries go, and that even its problems are of a second-rate variety, solvable by a *chapuza* here and another *chapuza* there” (Hart, 1987: 102). Little has changed in that regard in the 2015 narrative, a novel that “nos submerge en una Barcelona ‘capital mundial del baratillo y la idiocia’” (Santos; “submerges us in a Barcelona, ‘world capital of junk shops and idiocy’”). That is, Spain’s society once again is portrayed in this latest novel as a complex construct, further demonstrating that the various narratives of the series, while similar in nature, each correspond to the historical “moment,” socioeconomic, and societal transformations in which it was created.

Reflecting such changes, each novel’s ending also reveals important aspects concerning the parallel evolution of Spain and the detective over the thirty-six year period. *La cripta* ends with X having solved the disappearance of the girls from the boarding school but being transported back to the mental institution in spite of the authorities’ initial promises to the contrary. X, however, has learned to adapt to the restrictions increasingly imposed by the authorities throughout the course of the narrative: “Yo iba pensando que, después de todo, no me había ido tan mal, que había resuelto un caso complicado [...] y había gozado de unos días de libertad y me había divertido” (“I was going along thinking that, in spite of everything, it hadn’t gone so badly for me, that I had resolved a complicated case [...] and that I had enjoyed a few days of freedom and I had had fun”, Mendoza, 1996: 187) and that “ya habría otras oportunidades de demostrar mi cordura y que, si no las había, yo sabría buscármelas” (“there would be other opportunities to demonstrate my sanity and that, even if there weren’t, I would know how to seek them out”, Mendoza, 1996: 188). *El laberinto* similarly ends with X having solved the crime and being re-incarcerated in spite of the authorities’s promises of freedom, but the abundant allusions to remaining vestiges of Franquismo reflect many people’s concern at the time about Spain’s ability to transition successfully to a less authoritarian society:⁴

4 See, for example, Gunther, Montero, and Botella. It should also be noted that the attempted coup of 23-F only the year prior to the publication of *El laberinto* was made possible by the political vacuum created with the collapse of the Adolfo Suárez centrist government.

me arrastró [...] el comisario Flores [...] y salimos a la calle por una puerta lateral. No me esperaba allí una ejecución sumaria, sino el mismo coche-patrulla. [...] Y no pude por menos de preguntarme, [...] que cómo podía uno encarar el futuro con confianza y rectitud de miras si el pasado era una madeja entreverada de grietas y sombras, valga el símil, y el presente una incógnita tan poco esperanzadora. [...] Sabiendo que era inútil ofrecer resistencia, dejé que me cogieran por los tobillos y las muñecas, que me columpiasen dos o tres veces y que me lanzasen por los aires” (“pólice chief Flores drug me [...] and we went to the street through a side door. A summary execution wasn’t awaiting me there but the same patrol car. [...] I couldn’t help but ask myself [...] how could one face the future with confidence and forward looking if the past were a skein intermingled with cracks and shadows, pardon the comparison, and the present an unknown with such little hope. [...] Knowing that it was useless to offer resistance, I let them grab me by the ankles and wrists, swing me two or three times and launch me through the air”, Mendoza, 1982: 313-314).

El tocador, meanwhile, ends in a more upbeat mood, with X solving the crime in question—the murder of an important businessman—being invited by the imposter daughter of the businessman to go visit her in New York and by a neighboring lady to go on a vacation with her to Benidorm. This novel is much more open-ended than the previous two, with an imminent change in X’s life apparently at the point of occurring: “ya llevaba invertidos en la peluquería ilusión, tiempo y esfuerzos sobrados y si finalmente me decidía a cambiar también de residencia, las habilidades de Cañuto podían resultarme de mucha utilidad” (“I already had invested excessive dreams, time and efforts in the beauty shop, and if I finally were to decide also to change residence, Cañuto’s skills could turn out to be very useful to me”, Mendoza, 2001: 350). The ending of *El enredo* reverts once again to X being resolute in the face of unfortunate circumstances. He is, however, and in spite of obvious, lingering psychiatric issues, still free from the institute but now working in the Chinese restaurant which has displaced the formerly languishing beauty parlor, determined to spend the remainder of his life in that employment. *La modelo* closes with X correctly ascertaining who are the guilty parties of the 30-year-old crime and his subsequent return to the Linier house, which he had visited in the course of his original investigations three decades prior. There, the maid informs him of the corruption and downfall of the Liniers, and their vacating of the premises, a moment when the neighborhood mutt “mordió a la señora en la pantorrilla y se escapó hacia el parque a toda velocidad” (“bit the lady on the calf and escaped toward the park at full speed”, Mendoza, 2015: 314). Interestingly, while critics such as Knutson (2006: 56-57) have interpreted various novels of the series to contain certain Aesopian morals, this most recent work overtly ends with a warning about the dangers awaiting those corrupted by power: “Dicen que en muchas cosas los perros son como las personas, y en lo de

morder, tienen toda la razón” (“They say that in many things dogs are like people, and in the matter of biting, that is entirely correct”, Mendoza, 2015: 314).

Late in *El enredo* the reader learns that X has fathered a child with Emilia, the young lady with whom he collaborated in solving the crime in *El laberinto*. Quesito, the thirteen-year-old child in question, has grown up hearing stories from Rómulo el Guapo concerning X’s exploits as a detective. When she receives a letter from Rómulo alluding to his own disappearance, she goes in search of X and manages to recruit him into searching for her missing father figure. Upon hearing her story, and even before learning her true identity, X’s “paternal” instincts kick in; he advises her to study hard, to stay out of trouble, to eat healthy, nutritious food, and to make something of her life. Upon seeing her leave the beauty salon “con paso lento por el calor y desgarbado por su edad y complexión, un vago sentimiento de conmiseración me impulsó a llamarla” (“with slow steps due to the heat and clumsy due to her age and build, a vague feeling of commiseration led me to call her”, Mendoza, 2012: 33). In spite of X’s reluctance to involve her in the search itself, over time she becomes more and more important to the investigation. Once the real terrorist is apprehended and Rómulo is out of danger of being detained as an accessory, X snoops in Quesito’s purse and discovers her true identity and home address. The next day he goes to confront Emilia, but Rómulo appears and interrupts their conversation. Unsuccessful in his attempt to kill X and Emilia in order to protect his criminal misdeeds, Rómulo flees. Quesito, appearing out of hiding after having overheard all of the conversations, is so distraught that she also runs off, blaming X for destroying her life. X, however, is convinced that Quesito is in need of a father figure in her life and declares that “yo había decidido no hacer ningún tipo de mudanza, ni entonces ni nunca, por ningún concepto. Porque confiaba en que algún día, ni hoy ni mañana, ni en un año, ni siquiera en dos, pero algún día, Quesito recapacitaría sobre lo ocurrido, vería las cosas con otros ojos y depondría su enfado, y si entonces quería venir a decírmelo o a decirme cualquier otra cosa, era importante que supiera dónde me podía encontrar” (“I had decided not to move anywhere, not then or ever, under no circumstance. Because I trusted that someday, neither today nor tomorrow, nor in a year, not even in two, but some day, Quesito would think about what had happened, would see things with other eyes and would throw off her anger, and if then she wanted to come to tell me about it or to tell me about any other thing, it was important that she know where she could find me”, Mendoza, 2012: 267).

Society’s evolution is also apparent in the types of crime/mysteries with which X is involved throughout the series. In *La cripta*, for example, direct incrimination of the government itself is still a risky adventure; instead, it is

an oligophrenic detective who rubs shoulders with the dregs of society to investigate the disappearance of a girl from a local boarding school. However, X soon discovers that the only way to solve this mystery is by unraveling the temporary disappearance some ten years prior of another girl at the same institution, the resolution of which reveals the cause of the kidnapping to be an attempt by shady investors to collect on a debt for dentistry equipment. By 1982, Spain had matured enough such that more overt criticism was possible and the government could be included as a culpable entity, and *El laberinto* involves X traveling to Madrid to pay a ransom for the Spanish Minister of Agriculture. While both the economic and political elements are also apparent in *El tocador*, for the first time in the series there is an actual murder which X is intent on solving, and the novel ends with a massive shootout between all the suspects involved. Only the mayor and X survive. The more immediately apparent social commentary has to do with the corruption of local officials; the mayor of Barcelona, in fact, survives the massacre because “La bala le entró por el culo y le salió por la boca. [...] no parece tener afectados los órganos vitales” (“the bullet entered through his butt and exited through his mouth. [...] it doesn’t seem to have affected the vital organs”, Mendoza, 1982: 334). *El enredo* contains the most complex crime of the series with the even more dire economic situation that Spain is suffering in 2012 omnipresent in the background. The mystery in question involves X’s solving the disappearance of Rómulo el Guapo, but along the way, he discovers that Rómulo has become involved with the international terrorist Alí Aarón Pilila, who has recruited Rómulo to assist him in assassinating German Chancellor Angela Merkel during her visit to an economic summit in Barcelona. To forestall such, X hires 160 Chinese immigrants to create a distraction at the airport, during which time X himself kidnaps Merkel and prevents the assassination. Again, however, the political element borders on the farcical as Merkel allows herself to be kidnapped, believing X to be the long-lost Spanish boyfriend from her youth.

Immigration is also presented in various novels of the series as another aspect which has affected and changed Spanish society tremendously, and it also appears to be a target of criticism by Mendoza in the 2001 and 2012 novels. As Luis Rosero-Bixby et al. (2008) note: “According to census and population register data, Spain hosted [a total of only] 350,000 foreigners in 1991, 1.5 million in 2001 and 5.6 million in January 2009; that is, the relative weight of foreigners in the total population increased from 0.9% in 1991 to 12% in 2009.” In the words of Tom Worden (2010), “at the beginning of the 1990s the population was made up almost entirely of Spaniards, with immigrants accounting for less than 1% of residents” but by 2011 immigrants “account[ed] for 12% of the population.” In *El tocador*, it is the African immigrants who are being portrayed; true to census data, that group

is the largest in Spain at the time, with 15.8% of all immigrants in Spain originating from Morocco in 2001. By the time of the publication of *El enredo*, however, the Chinese were the fastest growing immigrant group in Spain. As Suzanne Ma (2012) notes: “Nearly 18,000 new Chinese immigrants arrived in Spain in the three years ended December 2010 [...]. From 2007 until the end of 2011, legal Chinese workers increased 41 percent, while employed Moroccans and Ecuadoreans—the largest non-European immigrant groups—fell 23 percent and 52 percent, respectively, according to the labor ministry.” In fact, data from the 2001 Spanish Census indicates a total Chinese population of only 27,595 persons while the January 1, 2012 data indicates a projected total of 167,531 Chinese individuals, an increase of more than 500% in one decade. Clearly, however, by the time of the writing of *La modelo* the foreign immigrant population of Spain was in decline: a June 2014 press release from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas notes that as of 1 January 2014, the foreign-born population of Spain was down to 4.6 million, of which there were 164,555 Chinese (down from 169,645 just one year earlier), and in 2013 alone, there was a negative migratory balance of slightly less than 267,000 individuals leaving Spain (“Population”). Such patterns of influx and departures of new cultures, language, and business environments certainly parallel the descriptions by Mendoza of Spanish society of each of the novels and reveal an environment different from the one that X encountered on leaving the mental institute.

Perhaps the most direct comparison of the changing landscape and society of Spain and Barcelona is contained within *La modelo*, as this novel is an examination of a mid-1980s crime that X re-examines some thirty years later. While no specific year of the assassination of the model is given, textual references indicate that such must have occurred within the 1986-1987 timeframe: Terry Venables is the club manager of Barça (138) and the owner of Casa Cecilia dozes off while watching “Los ricos también lloran” (“The Rich Also Cry”, Mendoza, 2015: 94).⁵ In both novels X is employed at the same Chinese restaurant, but the ownership of such has changed in the 2000s to a group of illegal immigrants. In the 1980s the crime scene is a residential building with a porter who, by 2010 and in accord with societal norms, has long lost his job and his apartment converted into an aroma-

5 Venables managed the Barcelona soccer team from 1984-1987. “Los ricos también lloran,” a popular telenovela produced in Mexico, first aired on Spanish TV in 1986 (Villagrasa). These two facts firmly plant the events of the original investigation with the 1986-87 time period in spite of the multiple references to the ongoing jogging fad—which only took off in Spain in the 1990s and is referenced to as “footing” in the novel, something that Comes Fayos notes as a “neologism [arising] at the beginning of the 2000s”.

therapy shop (214).⁶ While X has a cell phone of which he makes extensive use in *La modelo*, in the 1980s he was forced to resorting to making telephone calls in public telephone booths or other locations where he could borrow the fixed device; in the more recent investigation X goes to find a contact using the location that another person names after a Google search on her android cell phone (Mendoza, 2015: 253). Cable television has overtaken the airways in the third millennium—even la señorita Westinghouse has her own politically based show—while in the decade following Franco’s death the most prominent was “un televisor con antena de cuernos” (“a television set with rabbit ears”, Mendoza, 2015: 99). In the more contemporary section of the novel, Mendoza reflects society’s evolution through a myriad of cultural references: X promises to get his sister’s debtor to repay the loan “más los intereses que fija el Banco Mundial Europeo. Ya sabes cómo las gastan en Bruselas” (“plus the interest that the European World Bank establishes”, 2015: 209). The aromatherapy shop owner has built her business by using Facebook (217). The gym club membership files have all been digitized (233). Gay marriage has been legalized (268), and Barcelona’s tram system, Trambaix, originally started in 2004, X now uses as an enticement to lure la señorita Westinghouse into assisting in the latest investigation because she will need to travel on it in during the investigation and it “va de maravilla” (“goes marvelously”, 270).

Conclusions

Mendoza’s portrayal of Spain over the thirty-six years of the series has been both stable and varied: stable in that it is a verisimilar portrayal of the society at the time of the novel’s publication; varied in that Spain evolves tremendously over those thirty-six years. That Spain has changed is unquestioned: by 2015 the Franco dictatorship is now firmly over, Spanish currency is the euro instead of the peseta, one can openly criticize the government and individual politicians themselves, immigrants have changed both the demographics and cultural norms of the Peninsula, and Spain is no longer an isolated country more closely aligned to Africa than to its neighbor, Europe, to the north. However, Spain is still very much the same as before: corrupt politicians remain in many positions of power, Spain is still questioning its identity as a European member (and the fervor in Catalonia for independence has not abated), small mom-and-pop shops are still the norm, and Dr. Sugrañes is still being lauded as the renowned psychiatrist of

6 *El Digital D Barcelona* reported in 2014 that “Cada vez es más común ver fincas que sustituyen a los porteros por conserjes [...]. Este hecho está propiciando que el oficio del portero de toda la vida esté en peligro de extinción” (Pina García).

his day. That is, in spite of all the changes inherent in, and arising from, a society transitioning from a repressive dictatorship to an established and stable form of representative government, Eduardo Mendoza best demonstrates both that evolution and the *eterno retorno* nature of Spanish society by employing the same oligophrenic detective in each of the works—a character who, while also evolving over the nearly four decades of the series, still finds himself in essence on the fringes of the society about which he, as insightful as ever, comments.

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