

OLYMPIC BARCELONA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH DISPLACEMENT AND SATIRE IN EDUARDO MENDOZA'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

This article aims to explore displacement and satire of ways of urban life in the Mediterranean before and after the Barcelona Olympic Games of 1992 in three of Eduardo Mendoza's novels: *Sin noticias de Gurb* (1991), *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001) and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015). These three novels testify to and fictionalize an alternative narrative (featuring the other side, the margins, the outskirts) of the euphoric development of contemporary Barcelona and how the city has undergone urbanistic, political, and structural transformation for the international event with its repercussions in the social fabric. Paying attention to their excentric narrators interacting with different classes of people, such developments are inscribed in Mendoza's novels through senses of displacement and effects of financialization, while interacting with the language of humour and satire as critical prism to the representation of the absurd happening to various characters mainly involved in a crime situation. Taking into account some of the ideas from influential and emerging studies on crime fiction and the Mediterranean especially by Barbara Pezzotti and Stewart King, this article's angle through satire in Mendoza's novels are considered creative displacements in language, geography, and narrators, rendering them a critical method of how culture and society in contemporary Barcelona (represented through characters, autochthonous and issued from migration) has distinguished itself from other places of the Iberian Peninsula but unites with the rest of the Mediterranean on its worldly aspirations and outlook at a certain cost to urban life. The article will develop displacement and satire through the construction of the city, the novel as space of interaction, and the role of money and financial imaginaries. Mendoza's novels that feature pre- and post-Olympic Barcelona fit the discussions within the framework of Mediterranean literature, as Mendoza's lucid satirical worldview in fiction commonly resonates with the complexities of contemporary life, such as the challenges that come with the transition and the perception of the local culture in a multicultural environment at a time when the state of politics and financialization that have become intertwined.

Keywords: Barcelona, Eduardo Mendoza, novel, displacement, satire, financial imaginaries

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This article explores urban ways of life and the Mediterranean in three of Eduardo Mendoza's Barcelona novels and how senses of displacement interact with the satirical commentary of the city's financialization leading its consideration as a world-class city since the Olympic Games of 1992. As a drastic turning point for the urbanistic, political, and structural transformation of the city, the mid 1990s also established Barcelona as a site for discussing policies, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED). The city then serves since 2008 as the headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean, an organization that promotes dialogue and cooperation in the region from the policy standpoint. Those events, collaborations, and organizations in the Mediterranean stand for, as Kristin Platt writes, "a kind of coexistence, a sense of peace between the people and the sea, sometimes even a mutual ignorance. It is the political powers that have caused enmity and destruction, while the sea promised advancement, emancipation, culture and freedom."¹ Intersecting current trends in the literary realm, the interest in the Mediterranean space has risen as well in search of a common practice through networks "in an era of migration, decolonization, and globalization, in which nation-states continue to perform important functions but no longer have the integrative power to create comprehensive identities."² In a way, Eduardo Mendoza's novels set in Barcelona participate in the interest of readers about the contemporary Mediterranean, thus exposing them to the dynamic realities and challenges of displacements that the world of fiction can open through the lens of satire as a critical discourse. I use displacement to interpret Mendoza's work as movement, mobility, and migration, but also re-emergence after disappearance and silence. Barcelona's situation counts among the important post-industrial port cities of Catalonia and Spain that connects to the rest of the Mediterranean through commerce, culture, and tourism. These highlight Spain's rapid economic growth and specialties as pivotal in the region, but they also come with challenges of its sustainability that is subject to criticism and thus open the discussion about urban identities in the Mediterranean through literary fiction.

Born in 1943 in Barcelona, Mendoza is a major literary figure in contemporary Spanish literature connected with displacements and as a witness of major world sociopolitical transformations from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. He has dedicated a career as a

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- 1 Kristin Platt, "Constructing the Idea of 'Identity' in the Mediterranean: Patterns and Practices," in *The Mediterranean "Other" – The "Other" Mediterranean*, ed. Medardus Brehl, et al. (Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019), 43.
 - 2 Angela Fabris, et al., Introduction to *Sea of Literatures* (De Gruyter, 2023), 3.

professional translator and a writer and has become a renowned novelist in the Spanish language having won several literary prizes, including the prestigious Premio Cervantes in 2016. He is also considered among the pioneers of the new Spanish novel by the end of the Francoist dictatorship and cultural censorship in late 1975. Mendoza happens to be immersed in this movement along with his peers Juan Marsé and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán that also have written about identity of characters living and representing different neighbourhoods of Barcelona, as well as the centre-periphery relationship with Madrid, thus asserting their autochthonous voices of Barcelona. Their novels claimed Catalan culture using the Spanish language as their vehicle of transmission to reach wider readership to express their cultural difference.³ As Edgar Illas points out about the language choice: “Their success must obviously be attributed to the merits of their works, but the fact that they chose Spanish instead of Catalan was also key factor toward the dissemination and canonization of their fiction.”⁴ Language choice carries its implications of the exclusion of works not written in Catalan from the label of Catalan literature. That is why the frame of the Mediterranean gives a sensible space as “fictional representation and construction that evokes reality in different ways”⁵ to consider the multimodality of Mendoza’s fiction as an aspiration and an outlook to the sea but also as an interaction with a variety of literary forms through satirical content and the parody of the realist novel and crime fiction.

Displacement and satire: constructing Mendoza’s Mediterranean city

Satire, for Simon Critchley, is a form of language and discursive practice that “is not an alien form of humour, not something remote from everyday social interaction, but is as much part of the communicative competence of adult participants as puns, jokes and funny stories.”⁶ This way, satire is a critical discourse that employs humour to point out, following the classical sense, the vices and the follies of society. In this sense, the narrating character’s displacements (in many of the senses referred above), such as movement and mobility, allows the reader to experience the effect of satire. Thus, the relationship between displacement and satire is intertwined and dynamic, since they undergo a dynamic mutual activity

3 Stewart King, *Escribiendo la catalanidad* (Tamesis, 2005), 61.

4 Edgar Illas, *Thinking Barcelona* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62-63.

5 Fabris et al., 6.

6 Simon Critchley, *The Discourse of Satire* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2003), 4.

in written language. The satire that uses exaggerated, humorous, and absurd descriptions and dialogues is meant to criticize a group or an idea in a way that the reader of Mendoza's novels would imminently identify as a mechanism to displace meaning from the literal to the figurative sense that is subject to the interpretation of the reader. In other media, satire is a double-edged form of communication, especially in times of divisiveness and polarization. For instance, as Marijke Drees and Sonia de Leeuw point out, satire "crosses lines, contests boundaries and it operates at the limits of cultural values and principles."⁷ Given that, satire is a necessary form of expression in healthy democratic societies with intelligent and well-read citizens. However, satire also presents a necessary danger of misinterpretation, that is, the misunderstanding of satirical content is related to the reader's encoding only of the literal sense, which satire inevitably tries to cross towards a more meaningful and playful manner. In Catalonia, for example, satire is a way of deflecting and projecting its sociopolitical problems in an entertaining way, like in the case of the television show *Polònia* that features humorous sketches of political figures that regularly revolve around the centre-periphery questions and relationship between the Spanish State and the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Returning to the novel as medium of satire, the intersection of irony, absurd, and humour in reading the language employed by Mendoza's narrators reflects similar ways Cervantes intended his monumental knight-errand character Don Quixote to act in its archetypal role of the fool with his clarity of thought and perception found during his visit in Barcelona. Both Cervantes and Mendoza construct satirical discourse in the language employed by the narrators of their respective novels. The discourse may intentionally appear and sound dense during the narration yet enhances displacement as a distraction or an escape from authorities that pursue the characters. Such fluctuations in thought, discourse, and movement reflect the waves of the sea, this time transposed to the humour novels *Sin noticias de Gurb* (1991), *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (2001), and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (2015). Among Mendoza's contemporary works, these three novels serve as satirical commentaries of official discourses of Barcelona and align with the idiosyncrasy of their time as an important marker for the language and target of satire. They simultaneously reflect on the repercussions of Olympic Barcelona that altered the city through the years. As Joan Ramon Resina writes, "contemporary works [...] fed off

7 Marijke Meijer Drees and Sonia de Leeuw, Introduction to *The Power of Satire* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2015), 1.

of the expectation generated by the announcement of the Olympic Games hosting, or that exploit the reputation of post-Olympic Barcelona which became a success on the back of the promotion of the city.”⁸

Following Barbara Pezzotti’s major recent contribution on the Mediterranean *noir*, I connect Mendoza’s three novels with her formulations on the characterization of the detective and the city. Pezzotti describes Mediterranean detectives as “characters who need to negotiate their individuality in political contexts that impose cultural hegemony or an exclusive national identity.”⁹ Hence, Mendoza’s narrators in the three novels are unnamed or tend to adopt several names to perform such negotiations. In such an insightful and playful performance in negotiations and obfuscation, this relates to the concept of framing and unframing that Giovanna Summerfield and Rosario Pollicino employ. For them, the concept acts as an anchor to the diverse angles that the Mediterranean “is identity and at the same time weakening of identity, a mediation between departure and arrival, contact and conflict.”¹⁰ Mendoza’s novels, through the lens of Barcelona, engages with this through an interaction of the novelization of humour with urban phenomena where displacement and satire become a structure.

Mendoza’s literary depiction of Barcelona in novels has mostly been a product of displacements since he wrote about the Mediterranean city while being away, besides the fact that he recreates a satire of the city, where crime and transgression are constant, thinking about its absurd extremes and possibilities, thus contributing to alternative mapping of narratives about Barcelona and the Mediterranean around the Olympic Games of 1992. As Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider identify, “different groups may refer in their memories to certain events, dates, or epochs that have significance for their identities, but arrive at quite different evaluations.”¹¹ Mendoza’s novels generally make use of humour as an aesthetic and as a way of crossing borders of traditional genres of fiction, such as the realist novel, and text but also the satire of society and classes it intended to make fun of through peculiar use of language and accents, as well as references to high art, popular culture, comics, cartoons, crime,

8 Joan Ramon Resina, “An Enchanted Barcelona Mirrored in Fiction,” *Debats. Revista de cultura, poder i societat*, no. 1 (2019), 180.

9 Barbara Pezzotti, *The Mediterranean Noir* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 28.

10 Giovanna Summerfield, “Introduction: Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities,” in *Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities*, eds. Giovanna Summerfield and Rosario Pollicino (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 3.

11 Fabris et al., 4.

food, fiction, history, music, television, and film that connect to the characters' way of being that result into a parody of forms.

Stewart King's *Murder in the Multinational State* excludes many well-known Spanish crime novel writers in the corpus, among them is Eduardo Mendoza, for "their crime fiction novels do not engage in a meaningful way with the issue of national or cultural identity."¹² In contrast, the focus on displacement and satire here highlights modes of giving meaning to a series of changes in human condition that literary fiction is able to capture. Contrary to King's more serious considerations and focus on national and cultural identity, Pezzotti finds that, through the figure of the detective, "Mediterranean crime fiction deconstructs monolithic ideas of national identities and puts liminality and hybridity [...] at the centre of the narrative."¹³ Mendoza's novels chosen for this study feature such liminal and hybrid characters that delve into a diverse setting around the discussions, developments, and repercussions of the Olympic Games of Barcelona of 1992. It is an event held under the socialist government (PSOE) led by Felipe González elected for office in 1982, as well as the respective governing powers in Catalonia (Jordi Pujol) and Barcelona (Pasqual Maragall). All political parties interacted and defended their own interests at the time mediated and deconstructed by history, identity, and money. Donald McNeill points out that "the city has followed a reasonably coherent and carefully rationalized urban policy, a situation which makes it unusual both within Spain and the wider European context."¹⁴ The euphoric political turn opened the city to globalization that gives way to the present Mediterranean metropolis through its urban makeover. As Illas writes, it is "a process of restructuring of their spaces in order to produce an appealing image of the city."¹⁵ This event symbolizes displacement and financial interests that intertwine the past, the euphoric present, and the hopeful future of Barcelona. John Hargreaves' study on the Olympic Games points out relevant sociopolitical aspects and tension of the region in the role of Barcelona as a metropolis in the Mediterranean, Catalonia as an autonomous community within Spain, and as a contributing part of the European Economic Community in 1986. Hargreaves writes:

The host city is not only an important industrial metropolis within the Spanish state: it is also the capital of Catalonia, a historic nation with a strong sense

12 Stewart King, *Murder in the Multinational State* (Routledge, 2019), 15.

13 Pezzotti, 29.

14 Donald McNeill, "Barcelona Urban Identity: 1992-2002," in *The Barcelona Reader*, ed. Enric Bou and Jaume Subirana (Liverpool University Press, 2017), 324.

15 Illas, 43.

of cultural identity. Given the past animosities between Madrid and Barcelona – not least during the civil war when Catalonia fought against Franco on the Republican side and suffered his ‘politics of revenge’ as a result – and given all that was at stake for Spain and for Catalonia economically, politically and culturally as a result of Barcelona’s successful bid for the Games, there were bound to be tensions if not outright conflict between them, in which Catalan nationalism would play a major part.¹⁶

In such an intersection, it turns out then that the role of the 1992 Olympic Games serves “as a symbol of a re-emerging Catalan nation and a post-Francoist Spain.”¹⁷ In Mendoza’s novels, this interaction is inscribed as an evocative tapestry of satirical commentaries through the passage of time.

Olympic Barcelona and the novel: dynamic spaces of interaction in the Mediterranean

Narrative voices and testimonies in fiction resonate with the puzzling and complex nature of urban and sociopolitical changes in Barcelona. Mendoza’s novels refer to the real sites and spaces in the city to which they correspond or some of which already vanished, demolished, or repurposed these days, an idea that Pezzotti calls as the Mediterranean detective’s infection to “a ‘topographic’ disease.”¹⁸ The novels offer a snapshot of the stratification of spaces through the characters’ living conditions as processes of how Barcelona reached its status as a modern Mediterranean city and how displacements have affected the identities of local neighbourhoods as well as the city life with gentrification. Put through the first-person narrators that testify their displacements through the city as a sort of subversion of the role of the flaneur, Mendoza’s novels play with narrative sequence, at times shifting chronological by employing a character’s reminiscence and reflection on the past at a later occasion. Pezzotti refers to this as “nostalgic look” that “allows a scathing critique of a difficult present, configuring itself as an ‘active nostalgia’.”¹⁹ This narrative technique provides a stratified and nuanced insight about the effects of events on the affected inhabitants years later. Since most of Mendoza’s characters reflect voices and actions of marginalized types from mainstream society, these charac-

16 John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia?* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

17 Illas, 2.

18 Pezzotti, 58.

19 Pezzotti, 58.

ters also hold a powerful satirical output whenever they voice a concern, which can be taken by readers as ironic, absurd, or humorous.

In the discussion of the Barcelona novel through Vázquez Montalbán, Resina signals important aspects of the tensions between the figure of the detective and the subject of crime from the Catalan upper classes: “for a quarter of a century, the bad guys in the Barcelona novels [...] had been un-faillingly identified as Catalans. That is, the evil was the *establishment* as a Catalan, and the detective, armed with moral superiority of his doctrinaire gaze, set accounts in the name of history, both Spanish and universal, as vengeful divinity that always knew the heritage of guilt.”²⁰ For Resina, the crystallization of image of the Catalans as the bad guys is related to money and business, as they “live in the upper part [of the city], even though the visible effects of their criminality appear in the underworld or in the city’s outskirts.”²¹ These elements appear as recurring elements in Mendoza’s novels as well. Since Mendoza and Vázquez Montalbán interacted in the same circle of Barcelona writers, Mendoza seems to honour his late friend in fleshing out what Barcelona and Catalonia has become even more, two and a half decades in the twenty-first century Mediterranean. The question of Olympic Barcelona is the turning point of reflection on how the characters’ lives have changed through displacement and satire.

In Mendoza’s novels, satirical content connects with the diversity of ways of life and possibilities in the Mediterranean space, at times converting them into recognizable heterotopia. The anonymous narrator in *Sin noticias de Gurb* is an alien captain, practically a parody of the figure of Christopher Columbus,²² that adopts a human figure and journals for the intergalactic spatial station all the misfortunes (according to our human understanding) it encounters in the city while seeking for its displaced (in the sense of disappearance and silence) subordinate travel partner named Gurb that has morphed into Marta Sánchez, a blonde Spanish singer. Both aliens learn about the planet Earth and especially how people in Barcelona live life before the Olympic Games. The city is filled with euphoria and excessive consumerism because of Spain’s recent transition to democracy, as well as its entry in the European Economic Community in 1986, hence its rapid financialization, as the city of Barcelona was proposed to be the next site for the Olympics that same year. On the other, the anonymous narrator of *La aventura del tocador de señoras* and *El secreto de la mod-*

20 Resina. 178.

21 Resina, 177.

22 David Knutson, *Las novelas de Eduardo Mendoza: la parodia de los márgenes* (Editorial Pliegos, 1999), 108.

elo extraviada shares similarity with the alien voice but is better defined by its play between mental instability and clarity through actions and dialogues that result into a morphed Quixotic, street-smart detective, and preferred alienated scapegoat by authorities and powerful Catalan upper classes. Stacey Triplette writes that “Mendoza’s social critiques are never truly aimed at marginalised groups. He plays on negative stereotypes in order to shame society, and by extension, the reader.”²³ As a character, it serves as parody and transgression of the detective sifting through the spirit of absurd, criminal, and wasteful times in a postmodern and post-industrial metropolis. For Pezzotti, the setting exudes its importance because of “the insoluble nature of the Mediterranean city’s problems of gridlock, pollution and political and financial corruption. It expresses a genuine concern for the urban environment whose scars have often been the result of such corruption.”²⁴ Her reading of Petros Markaris and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán fits with Mendoza as well, since the common thread of the Olympic Games is considered as “an opportunity to create business and is symbolic of a globalisation that – with its frenzy for building new infrastructures – erases history and local culture” and that “the Olympic Games business feeds political opportunism and crime,”²⁵ themes with processes that are worth examining in fiction.

In the satire of Mendoza’s Olympic Barcelona, the displacements of the narrating characters are propelled by curiosity and serve the purpose of interrogating the absurdity of the world that exerts violence toward them, thus making satire an effective discourse. Displacement translates to an active way of life, a life of wandering aimlessly to get to a certain point that gives way to make sense of the world. Readers get to know the identity in constant construction and change: this also makes obfuscation of these characters adaptable to their environments to shape in conversations but as well appear subtle in resolving their own issues and criminal enigmas thrown at them as challenges to surmount. This situation corresponds to what Pezzotti characterizes as their “transversal relationship with the city that allows them to experience both the spaces of the rich and the poor, and to interact with different social classes and ethnic communities.”²⁶ In some cases, the Mediterranean climate act in contrary to their futile success. Pezzotti writes, “heat, traffic and pollution problems are an ongoing

23 Stacey Triplette, “The Quixotic Detective,” in *Connecting Past and Present*, ed. Aaron M. Kahn (Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2015), 39.

24 Pezzotti, 64.

25 Pezzotti, 65.

26 Pezzotti, 75.

metaphor for the Mediterranean detective's inability to see past the web of lies and deceit preventing the resolution of their case."²⁷ For example, in Mendoza's novels, Barcelona's dry summers and brutal cool season, as well as sudden thunderstorms that appear as a natural force that becomes an antagonist, countering the alien's radioactivity that sparks fire on *chiringuitos* (Spanish) or *xiringuitos* (Catalan), these mobile businesses on the burgeoning streets of pre-Olympic Barcelona in *Sin noticias de Gurb*.

Money and the financial imaginaries of displacement and satire in Olympic Barcelona

Reinhold Martin defines financial imaginaries as "cultural constructions through which circulate other cultural constructions, like 'money,' 'credit,' and 'architecture'."²⁸ The concept is worthy of attention and is present throughout Mendoza's novels in the spaces of Barcelona that have gone through the exchange of money resulting from investments and speculative financing. This also includes usage of these spaces for activities related to mass tourism of the region, as Illas writes that Barcelona not only "adjusted to this new situation rather quickly and became specialized in the industries of tourism, real estate and culture" but also "took on a dominant role in the transformation of the city."²⁹ Moreover, this type of activity is a product of the shift in the political realm as a displacement. Hargreaves attributes those shifts in political systems and corresponding financial activities that permeate into public culture and life, mainly through the emergence of "multinational capitalist enterprises; [...] vast population movements; growing environmental problems that transcend frontiers; and the apparent emergence of a hybrid, cosmopolitan 'global culture'."³⁰

In the discussion of those elements, Mendoza's novels depict power and conflict relations through the lens of money. Through descriptions and dialogues by characters around these spaces, financial interest expresses an initial desire of compensation and recognition for their precarious yet noble work by getting through their unusual lives. For instance, they must do transgressive activities in the margins away from public attention, for which the process, rather than the result, takes a major role. On the con-

27 Pezzotti, 61.

28 Reinhold Martin, "Financial Imaginaries. Toward a Philosophy of a City," *Pavilion: Journal for Politics and Culture*.

29 Illas, 1-2.

30 Hargreaves, 39.

trary, characters obsessed with finances would deal with transactions of illicit and suspicious nature that expose their status through their investments, material possessions, money-laundering activities, and lavish upper-class interests. Here, Mendoza uses financial imaginaries to satirize human nature, particularly the egoistic desire of social groups by attributing them incongruent behaviour and language, thus provoking laughter or rejection from the readers of the novels as a response. In this way, Mendoza takes advantage of satirical humour to address such an absurd way of life in a dynamic region of the Mediterranean.

The intertwined roles of displacement and satire with financial imaginaries in these three novels, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, and *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* employ humorous and absurd references to money. Its effects on people's behaviour are juxtaposed to the impoverished state of the urban space and culture for the sake of making accelerated profit or, if not, suffering from deficit, irresponsible handling or allocation of finances, especially as part of the urban renewal that came before and after the Barcelona Olympic Games.

In *Sin noticias de Gurb*, references to financial imaginaries goes in tune with the frenetic and frenzy constructions happening in the city of Barcelona, as the alien narrator observes throughout its displacements. The alien wanders the city and arrives at the Liceu, the Catalan opera house, even believing ironically that it must be the first coliseum of Spain and one of the best in Europe. There the alien finds out that actors and musicians are displaced due to lack of funding (“crisis financiera endémica”³¹) that permeates the cultural scene, but the street engineers and construction workers are curiously there to compensate for such lack, most likely through drilling and hammer noise which Mendoza puts to ridicule.³² This situation corresponds to what Pezzotti formulates as “part of the efforts to gentrify the urban environment which often feed – not always legally – into political and economic interests. Incessant roadworks and building sites are an everyday experience for the Mediterranean detective.”³³ Driven by the same curiosity as a detective narrator, the alien repeatedly observes that many museums as supposed repository of human culture, such as Museo de Arte de Cataluña, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, and Museo Etnológico, are closed due to constructions (“[c]errado por obras”³⁴), out of access and repurposed for the time being. While visiting the Museo de Arte

31 Eduardo Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb* (Seix Barral, 2019), 67.

32 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 67.

33 Pezzotti, 64.

34 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 145-46.

Moderno, the director tells the alien narrator that all the artworks are on a shipping container that might already be floating on the sea (“a la deriva por el Mediterráneo”³⁵) that explains the lack of cultural funding and immediate interest from the city agency, as the latter decided to demolish the warehouse where the containers originally were located. The director adds that the museum is currently functioning as a multipurpose space and is planned to become an amazing amusement centre. The only problem is that it would not be ready for 1992 because the construction could only start by 1998.³⁶ Through the lens of the alien, Mendoza pokes fun of the efficiency of extravagant urban projects and reconversion of spaces.

In other occasions, the alien finds out, as opposed to Don Quixote that does not believe in the use of money from his reading of chivalric novels, that one needs to have enough money to live in the city. The alien sneaks into a bank branch minutes before closing, requests to open an account and manipulates the financial system and bank transactions by adding several zeros (“catorce ceros al saldo de mi cuenta”³⁷) to his account balances in peseta, resulting into a satire of money laundering, a common narrative element in Mendoza’s novels. This financial manipulation insists on the image and concept of money as, in Fredric Jameson’s words, “abstract ... and empty and uninteresting.”³⁸ In the use of humour and satire, however, money rather becomes a dynamic component of critique in Mendoza’s world seen through the lens of an alien, especially that it learns the mechanisms of overconsumption in his repetitive journal³⁹ where it would enter a shop and buy compulsively in different shops and that in the end the alien decides that it does not give fulfillment (“Decido que el dinero no da la felicidad”⁴⁰). Out of ignorance, the alien does not realize that it already is a common saying for humans and proceeds to discarding all purchases without a trace. At some point, the alien observes some speculation of replacing the gold standard by a Spanish chocolate brand of Basque origin, Elgorriaga, as a reserve basis for world currency. Chocolate also relates to the alien’s singular addiction to churros, a pastry snack dipped into liquid chocolate; it becomes a comfort food for a stressful city life.

Characters issued from migration seeking a better life takes up importance as visibility of diverse communities in Mendoza’s novel. In *Sin noti-*

35 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 145-46

36 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 145-46.

37 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 42-43.

38 Fredric Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital,” 264.

39 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 43-44.

40 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 45.

cias de Gurb, the alien notices the presence of a Chinese restaurant in the neighbourhood and through the use of indirect speech gets to describe the owner Pilarín Kao and his family as well-integrated in society, humorous, industrious, running their own restaurant business for sustenance and saving funds to visit their homeland one day (“su ilusión es volver a China; que para eso trabaja y ahorra”⁴¹). As the alien captain later reports and reunites with his subordinate Gurb, practically absent in most of the novel, this reminded the captain of the countless possibilities of innovating in the city and thus staying on Earth, an idea that divides both aliens. Meanwhile the more eased classes of Catalans are represented through stereotypes related to business and finance world as being the most loyal and best bosses and executives in the world, as Mendoza characterizes them in other novels.

In *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, the narrator is confronted with starting life from scratch after being finally being released until the mid 1990s by Doctor Sagrañes from the asylum, a controlled biopolitical space.⁴² He wanders the streets of Barcelona and notices significant changes of the newly renovated Raval neighbourhood filled with renewed energy of different demography and to make fun of changes, strangely, where the new walking paths serve exclusively for use with motorbikes, as part of the city’s plan (“esta década (feliz) a un proceso de saneamiento y reordenación”⁴³) that coincided with the Olympic Games. The narrator eventually manages to find his sister Cándida now married to Viriato. He later accepts to operate Viriato’s beauty parlour, El Tocador de Señoras. An attractive female client named Iveta visits the parlour and makes a deal with the narrator for a criminal endeavour to steal sensitive files at the office of El Caco Español, an obviously suspicious organization. The narrator even remembers the moment the head of the organization Manuel Pardalot, who dies shortly after, explains him the difference of such an accounting mission between the rich and poor classes, where money and reputation are at stake (“En realidad, se trata de una operación contable, no del todo correcta, lo admito, pero tampoco ilegal”⁴⁴), thus justifying the narrator’s role as fit

41 Mendoza, *Sin noticias de Gurb*, 119.

42 This protagonist has previously been a key character from Mendoza’s *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (1979) and *El laberinto de las aceitunas* (1982) conditionally liberated by authorities as a sleuth (character studied by Patricia Hart in *The Spanish Sleuth*). These novels represented the intersection of satire, crime and money situation in Spain in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, period that corresponds to the Spanish Transition to democracy after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco.

43 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras* (Seix Barral, 2001), 31.

44 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 45-46.

to do the odd job. The narrator describes and identifies himself as *purria*, self-defining as not pertaining to any clearly marked social status, which is a clear marker of distinction from the rest of the characters in the novel:

Yo no pertenezco a ningún estrato social. Que no soy rico, a la vista está, pero tampoco soy un indigente ni un proletario ni un estoico miembro de la quejumbrosa clase media. Por derecho de nacimiento pertenezco a lo que se suele denominar la purria. Somos un grupo numeroso, discreto, muy firme en nuestra falta de convicciones. Con nuestro trabajo callado y constante contribuimos al estancamiento de la sociedad, los grandes cambios históricos nos resbalan, no queremos figurar y no aspiramos al reconocimiento ni al respeto de nuestros superiores, ni siquiera al de nuestros iguales. No poseemos rasgos distintivos, somos expertos a afrontar riesgos y penas por resolver nuestras mezquinas necesidades y para seguir los dictados de nuestros instintos, resistimos bien las tentaciones del demonio, del mundo y de la lógica. En resumen, queremos que nos dejen en paz.⁴⁵

As in *Sin noticias de Gurb*, self-reliance also characterizes the African characters in this novel as a strong community through the presence of Mesón Mandanga, a social bar and club, that piques the narrator's interest as well as his companion in mission Magnolio ("su clientela, compuesta exclusivamente de negros"⁴⁶). On the contrary, local government and Catalan elites appear self-interested, power greedy, and unreliable.⁴⁷ Using Resina's characterization of the Catalan as the bad guys,⁴⁸ the distinction between the groups is clearly defined. In Mendoza's present novel, the corrupt mayor of Barcelona, representing the *establishment*, runs for re-election ("reírme como un cretino con las verduleras, inaugurar un derribo y hacer ver que me como una paella asquerosa"⁴⁹), proudly calling himself as Alcibiades for favours and privileges.⁵⁰ He also tries to clean his image from past dealings with Pardalot and his associates ("unos negocios fructíferos que ahora preferiría que no salieran a la luz"⁵¹). Later, as a part of finding out the truth, the narrator arrives at a mansion in Castelldefels,

45 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 215-16.

46 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 243-44.

47 David Knutson, "Still Crazy After All These Years: Eduardo Mendoza's Detective," in *Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Detective Fiction*, ed. Renée W. Craig-Odders, et al. (McFarland Publishers, 2006), 55.

48 Resina, 178.

49 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 221.

50 Alcibiades was an ancient Athenian politician that was in his youth under the influence of Socrates.

51 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 223.

a beach town outside Barcelona, where he is confronted with Pardalot's business partners, such as Agustín Taberner and Horacio Miscosillas, as well as Pardalot's daughter, Iveta (as opposed to the other Iveta, the impostor that appears in the parlour). Money has a double-edged power, as Iveta Pardalot, behind everyone's back, takes over the El Caco Español's holdings to close it and decides to liquidate the assets of the shareholders ("el capital de los restantes socios asciende a pesetas cero coma cero"⁵²) and donate the money ("donadas gratuitamente"⁵³) to a foundation that finances NGOs whose beneficiary account is held in Singapore. To add to the absurdity of the acts, everyone involved in the scene deliberates on who among them killed Pardalot, insults the narrator for meddling with everyone, exposes each other's secrets, and finally ends up killing each other in gun shots. After the fact, the narrator and the candidate mayor miraculously survive the slaughter and a mutual recognition from both removes the barriers of their class difference.

In *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, the presence of two temporalities in the narration showcases the life of key characters through time. As Pezzotti suggests, "walking through the city's streets in search of clues often turns from a physical experience into an emotional journey where space and time collide in a mental 'time travelling'."⁵⁴ Previously an asylum inmate and a beauty parlour operator, the narrator now works for a Chinese restaurant owned by a giant franchise chain. In midst of a food delivery, he suddenly runs into a dog that bites him. The dog bite resembling drug injection, the chemical reaction suddenly makes him time-travel and remember the fine details of his subjectivity as an asylum inmate in a past case associated with the murder of an aspiring young model in search of fame and money. This serves as a frame story to pursue his detective role to find out what has been of the Linier family, Cándida, Señorita/Coronel Westinghouse, and Señorita Baxter/Señora Montpensier. As a crucial piece of the mystery, the latter eventually ends up as the client of the food delivery in the present and the assassinated young model who herself orchestrates the entire crime scene in the past. The novel assembles points of view of the case from the narrator, witnesses, contacts, and, ultimately, Señorita Baxter/Señora Montpensier as a stratification of details and sequences where fame and money get involved. At the same time, the novel also makes fun and reflects the effects of the urban destruction and reconstruction of

52 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 325.

53 Mendoza, *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, 325.

54 Pezzotti, 68.

the old district, El Barrio Chino or El Raval, from the eighties to the late nineties famous for its red-light district, prostitution, petty crimes, and unsanitary living conditions, leading its endemic inhabitants to be displaced, either as continually homeless, squatters, or living in new neighbourhoods with humorous names (“en la urbanización de Santa Perpetua Bondadosa, más conocida popularmente como Yonkie Gardens”⁵⁵) still in pitiful conditions far from the city centre, like Cándida.

As part of the city’s architectural highlight, Antoni Gaudí’s modernist oeuvres, such as the well-known Sagrada Família, furniture, pavements, and several houses designed by him for affluent Catalan figures has attracted visitors and cash flow that contribute to creation of employment in tourism and cultural sectors. Despite such success, Gaudí does not escape from Mendoza’s humorous critique. Gaudí’s emblematic abstract rooftop design at La Pedrera, a building on Passeig de Gràcia, in Señorita Baxter’s satirical perspective, is the natural work of cows (“esto mismo, en más pequeño, lo hacen las vacas”⁵⁶) in her hometown Figueres, a city in Catalonia that also attract tourism for Salvador Dalí’s art.

The novel also includes a portion of young people on questions on recent Catalan independence, as they know about Coronel Westinghouse’s far-right political show. The narrator in displacement hears them speculating, as a reaction to the show and its particularly provocative host (“si encuentras el estudio de televisión y tienes ocasión de hablar con el bujarrón”⁵⁷), that in an independent Catalonia they would reset economical activities and the financial system from scratch, saying that they would be kicked out of the eurozone anyway and that there is no going back to the peseta and that there would not be rich, poor, and class struggle.⁵⁸ If Spaniards stop buying cava produced in Penedes, they propose absurdly replacing it by planting cannabis,⁵⁹ which may be a plausible yet ironic proposal of displacing a Mediterranean product. Contrary to the youth perspective, Coronel Westinghouse’s disillusion with governments echoes the way Barcelona’s modernization takes to be prosperous and filled with glamour also deceptively turns out to become instead the world capital of junk and idiocy (“la capital mundial del baratillo y de la idiocia”⁶⁰).

55 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada* (Seix Barral, 2015), 205.

56 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 289.

57 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 254.

58 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 254.

59 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 254.

60 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 271-72.

Along with *Sin noticias de Gurb* and *La aventura del tocador de señoras*, the implication of money laundering and living double lives gets inscribed in the case of Señor Larramendi, an alias to hide his real Catalan identity as Magí Amigó i Santaló. Larramendi works as a chef at Casa Rioja by day and a secret financier and executive at night, as he confesses in a letter,⁶¹ hired as a young graduate by discreet Catalan businessmen known as APALF,⁶² like El Caco Español, known to concentrating their efforts in developing the construction, transportation and tourism sectors, as previously referenced by Hargreaves and Illas. Moreover, as opposition to Madrid's economic plans for the Catalan region, APALF does evasion of capital to Switzerland, traditionally known for its financial secrecy. After Señorita Baxter's simulated disappearance from the public eye, Larramendi too disappears until he suddenly reemerges in politics as if by miracle to promote the upcoming Olympic Games. His character has an unfortunate fate because of his accidental death away from the chaotic city while swimming in Tamariu, Palafrugell, on the picturesque Mediterranean coast, as it coincided with the inauguration event of the Olympic Games in the summer of 1992.⁶³ In Mendoza's novel, Larramendi's death and the inauguration of the Games symbolize Barcelona's transfiguration: "el 25 de julio, justamente el día en que Barcelona celebraba con redoble de tambores el venturoso inicio de su transfiguración, el señor Larramendi fue enterrado con cargo al erario público, sin ceremonia ni testigos, en un pequeño cementerio situado a escasa distancia de Son San Juan."⁶⁴ The Linier family appears mentioned at the beginning and the end of the novel as a complete circle of money, opulence, and the appliances business turning bad. According to the new owner of the house, Lola Campos, their implication with trafficking, money laundering, and old methods of working with money, like APALF, have not gone to their favour ("actuaron de manera tortuosa y chapucera y se acabó enterando todo el mundo"⁶⁵). This indicates the classical Catalan cycle from the poor to riches to prisoner serves as a caution of high ambitions in social mobility ("favorece la movilidad social y previene la sobrecarga de la tradición"⁶⁶). Even the dog holds grudges against the family: the cleaning lady remembers the day the family must vacate their house for the last time when the dog suddenly appears by

61 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 185.

62 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 128-29.

63 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 300.

64 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 300-301.

65 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 311.

66 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 311.

surprise and bites Señora Linier as an expression of revenge.⁶⁷ The presence of the story about the dog bite in this novel refers to a sudden cynical point at the beginning and the end where the desire of revenge and closure sheds light to uncovering mysterious and obscure details about each of the characters involved in the cases. By using the same narrator throughout the series, this novel by Mendoza resolves the problem of the rich and corrupt Catalan that needs to pay retribution for thriving in crime throughout their life. Interestingly, Pezzotti writes, “The individual villain may be arrested, but the great villains, capitalism and a corrupt political elite, continue to plunder the city undisturbed and erase its history and memories.”⁶⁸ This shows that not all matters that appear resolved may remain unquestioned, even when money take precedence to displace problems where better resolutions are needed, such as the urban and social repercussions of the Barcelona Olympic Games to the entire city, involved in a satirical worldview in Mendoza’s novels.

All the novels explored never provide a satisfactory resolution, since it is a world of satire and an absurd random event by the return of some displaced character would sabotage the narrators’ plans, leaving them in an eternal helplessness, a common sort of Mediterranean detectives following Pezzotti’s interpretation. Here in Mendoza’s world, the journey and troubles as processes mattered more than the result in the end of the narrative. As Jasper Guldall, Stewart King, and Alistair Rolls point out, “the crime novel ends with an act of self-interpretation, presented explicitly in the form of the detective protagonist’s solution, which replaces mystery with what appears to be complete clarity in regard to actions and motivations.”⁶⁹ Although Mendoza does not strictly adhere to crime fiction but rather makes a parody of it, his novels nevertheless contribute to the understanding of urban settings but also the dynamic interaction of social groups in this part of the Mediterranean, affecting the last decades of the twentieth century into the new millennium. His representation of Barcelona, full of possibilities and contradictions, from different time periods surrounding the Olympic Games puts into dialogue different forces, such as displacement, financial imaginaries, and satire, to entertain and warn readers about the potential implications and consequences of the ambitions of a world-class city to a diverse stratum of populations. In Mendoza’s world, not everyone benefits from the changes, and these types of people affected are

67 Mendoza, *El secreto de la modelo extraviada*, 314.

68 Pezzotti, 68.

69 Jasper Guldall et al., Introduction to *Criminal Moves: Modes of Mobility in Crime Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2019), 5.

the ones that possess the clearness of thought rendered absurd to voice their critique. This includes emerging concerns of overtourism in major Spanish cities from the concerned locals because of the industries in which Spain has specialized for decades.

The Mediterranean imaginary in Mendoza's novels becomes a space that would continue to spark discussion about the unusual and unique challenges of the Barcelona Olympic Games of 1992 to society. This can be characterized as a turning point of the dialogue between past, present, future, considering continuity, disruption, and sustainability. In the Mediterranean coast of the Iberian Peninsula, the diversity of local and foreign perspectives morphs into a mosaic of renewed Catalan and Spanish cultures through contact with the cultures of the world issued from displacements and financial interests, while its writers especially enjoy editorial and book publishing industry concentrated in Barcelona as a cultural location. Resina contemplates that Barcelona "does not yet know itself, given that it still has not crossed the invisible line that separates the world from its representation."⁷⁰ Through Eduardo Mendoza's novelization of humour, Barcelona intertwines the challenges and contradictions of the unique lifestyles and identities in the Spanish Mediterranean (as opposed to Madrid, the interior capital away from the sea) and their effects as a reflection of displacement and satire of life worth examining its absurdities over time through the novel as an outlet of creativity, reflection, and renewal.

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70 Resina, 183.

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