Demythification of Romantic Love in the West: An Analysis of Little Narratives in José Luis Sampedro’s *El Amante Lesbian*
Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 2

1 Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 4

1.1 Objective of the Analysis ................................................................................................. 7
1.2 Disposition of the Work .................................................................................................. 8
1.3 Corpus of Study: El amante lesbiano of José Luis Sampedro ........................................ 8

2 Historical Background of the Myth of Romantic Love ....................................................... 9

2.1 What is the Myth of Romantic Love? ............................................................................... 9
2.2 Context of Emergence ..................................................................................................... 10
2.2 Evolution of the Myth in the West ................................................................................. 11
2.4 Legacy of the Myth of Romantic Love .......................................................................... 13

3 Theoretical and Methodological Background .................................................................... 14

3.1 Theoretical Background .................................................................................................. 14
  3.1.1 Construction and Demythification of Myths ............................................................... 14
  3.1.1.1 The Need of Demythifying Romantic Love ......................................................... 16
  3.1.2 Feminism and Gender Studies .................................................................................. 18
  3.1.3 Constructionism and the Social Construction of Love .......................................... 21
3.2 Methodological Background .......................................................................................... 23
  3.2.1 Little Narratives as Counter-Myths of Romantic Love ........................................... 24
  3.2.2 Narrative Resources .................................................................................................. 26

4 Interpretative Synthesis of El amante lesbiano ................................................................. 28

5. Analysis of El amante lesbiano ......................................................................................... 30

5.1 Reconstruction of the Sexual Identity: Mario’s little narrative ..................................... 30
  5.1.1 Social Construction of Mario’s Identity .................................................................... 32
  5.1.2 Reconstruction of Mario’s Identity: Miriam ............................................................. 37
  5.1.2.1 Space-Time Importance ....................................................................................... 38
  5.1.2.2 Absence of Society ............................................................................................... 41
  5.1.2.3 Influences in the Reconstruction .......................................................................... 41
  5.1.2.4 Reconstruction and Possession of the Mother ..................................................... 46
5.2 Reconstruction of the Myth: Mario and Farida’s counter-myth ...................................... 50
  5.2.1 Demonic Modulation of Marriage ............................................................................ 51
  5.2.2 Mythical Modulation in El amante lesbiano ............................................................. 53

6. Conclusions .......................................................................................................................... 59

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 62
1 Introduction

Romantic Love, “In ceasing to be a god, he ceases to be a demon”
– Denis de Rougemont

Many are the great stories that shaped what has now become the Western World. The West is a story of conquest, evangelization, wars, industrialization, social revolutions and science. It is a continuum of interrelated events that developed a certain way of thinking and of living, which now define us, regarding the many backgrounds, both as a Western culture and as Western individuals. But the West is also a story of love. This sentiment has become one of the founding pillars of our reality. Love has been the reason of religious schism, an opposing force to industrialization in the shape of Romanticism, and love comes to us every day through our televisions and radios in the shape of soap operas, movies and music.

Love in the West has been defined by what Denis de Rougemont denominates the Myth of Romantic Love, a grand narrative whose traces go back to the literary production of the Middle Ages. Since then, it has become a fundamental part of the cultural production of the West, and it has permeated (and even shaped) the different manifestations of the arts, such as theatre, painting, music, cinema and literature. But this Myth has not been immune to time, and it has evolved and adapted according to the different eras and parts of the Western World. This is a clear proof that the Myth is not of the same nature as those belonging to religious beliefs. The Myth of Romantic Love is a social convention, the result of diverse sociocultural realities that came into existence and prevailed in time due to specific needs and tastes. Therefore, it is possible to keep track of such changes, because love is a human need which cannot disappear or be ignored, and so it is present throughout all human history.

1 They are many and different the works that consider Rougemont’s work the main source of study when dealing with Romantic love: Beigel 1951; Goode 1959; Bullough and Mondschein 2009; Kreimer 2004 and 2009; Sampedro 2005; Esteban 2009.
2 For a definition of grand narratives, go to section 3.2.1.
3 For a definition of the Myth, go to section 2.1.
4 Just to exemplify, while in Sweden it is completely acceptable and even expected from a couple to live together before marriage, in countries like Mexico it is not common and somewhat unacceptable, although both belong to the Western culture. However, this thesis will not focus on cultural differences, but will take a more general scope of the Myth, its evolution and its demythification.
5 This will be discussed in section 2.3.
6 In the present, a brief review of such evolution is found in section 2.3. For an in-depth analysis and track of such changes, see Rougemont’s Love in the Western World.
From the end of the 20th C. to the beginnings of the 21st C. with Postmodernity, many myths are being disregarded or have changed, leaving aside their ‘mythological’ status. This is result of the greater importance reality holds in our lives. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue on this subject in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*. They suggest that everyday life is the reality par excellence (21), while fiction is a distorted reality that has a secondary importance. Fiction is becoming more a reflection of such everyday reality instead of a pattern or a source of archetypes to be used in everyday life. The grand narratives are taking a secondary, marginal place, whereas the little narratives are becoming apparent and central (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*). This will be discussed further in this paper.

In 2000 the Spanish novelist José Luis Sampedro (1917) published a novel where Romantic Love took a different shape than the conventional Myth. *El amante lesbiano* is a story of love that fights back the Myth and the sexual conventions resulting from this grand narrative. The literal translation of the novel to English is “*The Lesbian Lover*”; however, in Spanish the adjective “lesbiano” is presented as masculine thus making reference to a lesbian man and not to a woman. In the novel the socially unacceptable is not only desired beyond restrictions, but it also becomes redeemed. The Myth of Romantic Love is deconstructed in the Outsides, the fictive, dream-like setting of *El amante lesbiano* where everything is possible in order for

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7 It is important to note that earlier efforts have been made to accuse the Myth of being a fallacy. For example, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote during the 17th C. in Mexico about women’s unfair conditions due to the way love is expected to be between a man and a woman. In one of her most known poems she writes:

Silly, you men –so very adept
at wrongly faulting womankind,
not seeing you’re alone to blame
for faults you plant in woman’s mind.
[…] Whether you’re favored or disdained,
nothing can leave you satisfied.
You whimper if you’re turned away,
you sneer if you’ve been gratified.
[…] Still, whether it’s torment or anger –
and both ways you’ve yourselves to blame –
God bless the woman who won’t have you,
no matter how loud you complain. (Sor Juana 111,113)

For a deeper view of Sor Juana’s works, see Alan Trueblood’s translated anthology of the poet.

8 For the rest of this paper I will refer to the novel with its Spanish title, for it is more specific about the conflict of the plot. However, due to the fact that the language of the paper is English and that its main audience is not Spanish-speaking, I will present the English translation of the novel’s quotes in the body of the text, and the originals in Spanish as footnotes. The same will apply for any other source in Spanish being quoted in this paper. All the translations are mine, unless other reference is made.

9 *Las Afueras.*
Love and identity to be accomplished. The life of its main character, Mario, becomes a little narrative where freedom is accomplished and love is experienced in unexpected ways.

Few analyses have been made of novels like *El amante lesbiano* where little narratives seek to deconstruct the Myth of Romantic Love. Most of these analyses focused on the work of feminist and/or women writers, and they focus mainly in gender roles and sexual inequality. On the other hand, the analytical works related to the Myth of Romantic Love are generally diachronic, showing how the Myth has evolved through time, as the case of Rougemont’s essential work, *Love in the Western World* (1957). Others, as C. S. Lewis’ *The Four Loves* (1960) or M. C. D’Arcy’s *The Mind and Heart of Love* (1947) seem to be more philosophical than literary, although they rely on literature as the main source for exemplifying the different hues of Romantic Love. In the case of Sampedro’s novel, after an extensive research I could only get hold of one previous formal analysis of this novel by Emilia Cortés Ibáñez (2008). Most analysis of José Luis Sampedro’s work deal with his most popular novels such as *La sonrisa etrusca* (*The Etruscan smile*) and *Octubre, octubre* (*October, october*). A more extensive analysis of Sampedro’s novels is presented by Manuel Quiroga Clérigo (1986), but this is a general survey of Sampedro’s first five novels only, which don’t include *El amante lesbiano*. Therefore, this thesis is innovative both in its topic and its corpus of study.

The present work results also from the conviction that the perception of love is changing in the Western World, and that the Myth of Romantic Love is taking a new reality that is dethroning it from its status as a myth. This new reality is that true love is free of boundaries and that it is for everyone, not following expectations or conventionalities. The importance to analyze such topic from a literary perspective results from the close relation between love and literature. José Luis Sampedro’s *El amante lesbiano* is clear evidence of how postmodernism is deconstructing such Myth, and an image of how the problematic surrounding sexual conventions is not anymore a topic for feminist theorists or critics only. In the post-modern era any writer and philosopher is entitled to fight back Love and Sexual conventions, anyone

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10 Knowing that “[t]he evolution of Romantic love took shape first and foremost as a literary phenomenon. Although love has always been a favored theme of literature, it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that literature itself became the favorite site for the expression and the experience of love” (Landgraf 30).
who, as Sampedro, thinks his or her “main interest is understanding life and expressing [their] insights about [it]” (Sampedro, _Contemporary Authors Online_).

Moreover, the study of Celia Valiente on the Research of Gender in Spanish Society (2002) proves that, in Spain, there is a shortage of formal research on gender as related to literature. Gender is usually seen from the realms of politics, economics and society. However, “the field of feelings, emotions, love, and intimacy is almost an unexplored territory” (771), together with the sexual dimensions. _El amante lesbiano_ was published on the year 2000, yet in December 2002 Valiente writes that “scholarly studies on gay and lesbian sexuality have developed with difficulty and later in Spain than in other Western countries chiefly because of the former hostile political context” (777). Therefore, the novel of Sampedro is a pioneer in its context, which makes it more relevant for the present analysis. Moreover, if this kind of novels can be already found in Western contexts that are behind sexual openness and that still are somewhat conservative, this points out to a tendency.

1.1 **Objective of the Analysis**

The objective of the present work is to analyze José Luis Sampedro’s _El amante lesbiano_ as an example of how postmodernism is abandoning the Myth of Romantic Love as a grand narrative, and instead is opting for the creation of little narratives in the way of counter-myths, where the conventions of gender roles and romantic elements are being disregarded. This analysis is also an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Why are little narratives used in _El amante lesbiano_ to deconstruct gender and Romantic Love?
2. What results from the demythification of Romantic Love in _El amante lesbiano_?
3. Through which strategies is the Myth deconstructed in the novel?

It is also expected that this work will give a limited vision of why the current Western world is opting for the abandonment of the Myth of Romantic Love and which new variables arise in order to give new definitions of what love is. Moreover, although some feminist and gender studies theories are used for the analysis, it will also be proven how gender equality has ceased to be a cause only for women and feminists, to become a general demand of gender and sexual freedom by both men and women.
1.2 Disposition of the Work

In order to fulfil the aforementioned objectives, this work is divided into six parts. The first one is the present Introduction, where apart from the Objectives and the Disposition of the work there is also a presentation of the Corpus of Study, *El amante lesbiano*. The second part is the Historical background, with an overview of the origins and evolution of the Myth of Romantic Love, as well as a description of its main characteristics and elements. The third section consists of a Theoretical and a Methodological background in which the theories and methods used for the analysis are presented. For the Theoretical background the focus is on the Construction and Demythification of myths, the theories of Feminism and Gender Studies concerning our analysis and a review on Constructionism. For the Methodological background the focus is on the construction of little narratives as the main method of analysis, along with the inversion of the patriarchal system and the demonic and mythical modulations as narrative resources used by José Luis Sampedro to create a counter-myth of Romantic Love in *El amante lesbiano*. The fourth part is an interpretative synthesis of the novel, which is then followed by the Analysis. Finally, there is a sixth section for Conclusions and some final thoughts.

1.3 Corpus of Study: *El amante lesbiano* of José Luis Sampedro

The novel to be analyzed for the present thesis is *El amante lesbiano* of José Luis Sampedro, its first edition of 2000 published by Plaza & Janés. The novel is about freedom and the abandonment of conventions that deprive men and women of pleasure. It was chosen because it is a story that reflects the negative effects that the conventions surrounding the Myth of Romantic Love have over the construction of sexual identity and love relationships between individuals. Sampedro writes a story that fights back the supposition that the most ideal kind of love is the one portrayed by the Myth. His proposal in *El amante lesbiano* is that ideal love and sexual identity are in fact boundary free, different for every couple and every individual. Moreover, it is also conveyed in the novel that social conventions are dangerous when they force the individual to repress his true feelings and desires.
José Luis Sampedro (1917) is a Spanish writer with an extensive literary production\(^\text{11}\). So far, his most controversial novel is *El amante lesbiano*, a novel that became in Sampedro’s words, “a reaction to so much social repression” (*Conversaciones con JLS. Con Antonio Lucas*). As a writer, he believes in humanism and human kind. Yet, he sees the current society as being fooled by the Western ideological system that predisposes men to suffering in life in hope of a future happiness (*Ibid*). His approach to life differs completely from this vision, for he preaches the joy and pleasure of living, following the Greeks in their belief that man is the measure of all things (*Conversaciones con JLS. Con Marilò Hidalgo*). He thus opposes to social constructions constraining individuals, one of which is the Myth of Romantic Love.

### 2 Historical Background of the Myth of Romantic Love

#### 2.1 What is the Myth of Romantic Love?

If Romantic Love was to be defined as it is portrayed by such Myth, there is one element that encloses all of its essence: suffering. The Myth of Romantic Love is the myth of impossible love exclusively between a man and a woman, a love destined to be unsuccessful and fatal\(^\text{12}\). But no matter the inevitability of this suffering, the couple’s love is enforced and maintained thanks to passion. Passion becomes a leading force, source of a cathexis important more in the emotion it causes to the self rather than the image of the other. In order to maintain this passion, the lovers endure several obstacles. However, these obstacles only intensify the emotions, transforming pain into passion, longing for the other, longing for “the promise of phantom bliss” (Rougemont 174) that will never occur. Eventually this *phantom bliss* will only be acknowledged to be possible in the afterlife, and so this is why the Myth deals with death (32). It becomes a sort of paradox: passion becomes a desire of death but it makes the couple feel more alive for being involved in such a passionate state.

\(^{11}\) His works include *La estatua de Adolfo Espejo* (1939, published 1994); *La sombra de los días* (1947, published 1994); *Congreso en Estocolmo* (1952); *El río que nos lleva* (1961); *El caballo desnudo* (1970); *Octubre, octubre* (1981); *La sonrisa etrusca* (1985); *La vieja sirena* (1990); *Real Sitio* (1993); *El amante lesbiano* (2000); *La senda del dragon* (2006) and *La ciencia y la vida* (2008) – see *Contemporary Authors Online*.

\(^{12}\) In its beginnings suffering and the impossibility of love was present from beginning to end. It later became more what we now know as Romantic love, where there might be a happy ending, yet the plot is characterized by obstacles and suffering of the heroes and heroines.
Different reasons can be pointed out on why Romantic Love became a myth. For example, C.S. Lewis says that “[e]very human love, at its height, has a tendency to claim for itself a divine authority” (8). Humans need to make of love something divine, something sacred, because it is a basic need that has an enormous force and influence in everybody’s lives. But when looking for more empirical reasons why this mythification of love was needed, answers point mainly to women. In the Middle Ages they had a very passive role in daily life, so they felt the urge for passion to help them cope with routine. This gave love enough strength and time to become embedded into Western literature and culture in the later shape of Romantic Love (Beigel 1951; Rougemont 1957; Bullough and Mondschein).

With time, the Myth stopped being an escape from reality and became a cultural force that shaped society in the way interrelations between sexes occurred. People began to consider Romantic Love as the way love is supposed to be, and so the roles of a woman and a man in a couple began to be fashioned as those role-models pictured in the many stories Western culture has forged around the topic.

2.2 Context of Emergence

The Myth of Romantic Love dates back to the 12th C. in Europe, starting with the myth of Tristan and Iseult. It was born in the south of France from the clashes between the heretic Cathars and the Orthodoxy of the Christian Catholic Church. This first stage is today known as cortezia or ‘courtly love’, a literary religion of chaste

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13 Some of the rich women of the time became patrons of the literature and arts, because this was their only entertainment. This is why the first texts in Provenzal are songs and poetry, for most of these women were illiterate in the Middle Ages, and so troubadours would entertain them with such lyrical productions (See Bullough and Mondschein). Furthermore, Amor in Provenzal, as opposed to the French, is of the feminine gender (Rougemont 84).

14 Tristan and Iseult is based on a Celtic legend, whose original poem is lost. Yet, there are several later versions from which the main elements of the legend have been derived. There are two adaptations made in the 12th C. One is a French version attributed to Beroul; the other is the one made by the Anglo-Norman poet Thomas, whose adaptation is supposed to be a softer version of the legend. Besides, there have been other adaptations, like the medieval German version by Gottfried von Strassburg, probably based in Thomas’ version. In the 13th C. it became a prose romance associated with the Arthurian cycle. From this version Sir Thomas Malory was inspired in the 15th C. to make the legend a part of his Le Morte Darthur. In the 19th C. these medieval versions were discovered and Richard Wagner composed the opera Tristan und Isolde inspired in the version of Strassburg (see “Tristan und Isolde” Encyclopædia Britannica; “Tristan and Isolde” The Oxford Companion). Rougemont claims that there is another story that can be seen as the first appearance of a passionate couple, dating the year 1118: the story of Abélard and Héloïse (Rougemont 67).

15 The expression “courtly love” was first used in 1883 by Gaston Paris, and later used by historians to identify the type of love proclaimed by the Provenzal troubadours (Denomy 46).
love. During these times, Christian faith ruled every aspect of life, love included. The Orthodoxy believed that love between God and man was meant to be unhappy because of man’s sin nature; but human love could be successful for it was love devoid of perfection (see Rougemont). However, marriage was becoming more a matter of social and economical bonds, and arranged marriages became more common (Beigel 1951; Rougemont 1957; Bullough and Mondschein 2005).

As opposed to the Orthodoxy, the Cathars believed men could become one with God. Human love was destined to failure, for it was love between two imperfect beings. This belief, among with the principles of the sect, earned Catharism the accusation of heresy, and as such it remained hidden. In this secrecy the troubadours, many of whom belonged to this sect (Rougemont 89), started to compose lyrical pieces concerning this human Romantic Love and they became ‘messengers’ of the newly born Myth. Believers of the sect supported them, and so they started to move around Europe in order to spread this new religion of love (see Rougemont).

### 2.3 Evolution of the Myth in the West

In order to understand the current state of the Myth, it is important to have a quick look to the most important stages of its evolution in the West\(^\text{16}\). Although the narration *par excellence* according to Rougemont is the myth of Tristan and Iseult, the majority of manifestations came from troubadours writing about cortezia, songs and poems in provenzal. These songs and poems describe the passion and mysticism love raised in poet, and they dealt with spiritual matters only. These then travelled across Europe, first to the North and then to other areas.

In the 13\(^\text{th}\) C. the Myth was strong in Italy with Dante and the *dolce still nuovo*. The lady started to be based on real women, and not on symbolic references of an ideal one (Rougemont 180). Both Dante and Petrarch had their muses, existing ladies with a name, giving the Myth a more attainable nature, though still platonic in

\[^{16}\text{This Myth is typical of the Western culture, where suffering is considered as an essential part of love and even a sort of virtue, something that would make love more real, purer and more authentic. Roxana Kreimer mentions that in the East and Plato’s Greece love was seen as pleasure, voluptuous desire that could be enjoyed but didn’t have to be attached to marriage. In the East, love as conceived by the West is even despised and seen as a frantic disease (Kreimer in Zafardini).}^\]


essence. Romantic Love started to be reified\textsuperscript{17}: in the Baroque, sex was integrated with love in relations outside of marriage (Beigel 329). In the 17\textsuperscript{th} C. the mystical elements were degraded and the bourgeoisie introduced the happy ending to satisfy the desire of social order in literature (Rougemont 198). With the French Rationalism in the 18\textsuperscript{th} C., the Myth was shadowed. Love and war became a matter of tactics (269), whereas passion and impulse were regarded as low.\textsuperscript{18}

The reawakening came later with Rousseau, and then with the German Romanticism in the same century, which showed the Western world was still not ready to put the Myth aside. This was also the result of industrialization. Romanticism became a rebellion against the dehumanization and materialism enhanced by this phenomenon (223). The need to fight back mechanicism developed from the changes in the family structure. Fathers had to work more, so their authority was decreased. Children would spend more time with the mothers, and then would have more access to a more emotional maternal figure (Beigel 329).

This reawakening lasted until the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} C. Romantic Love was embraced by both the upper and the middle classes, and was then considered an essential requisite for marriage (330). After WWI\textsuperscript{19} and WWII the Myth lost much of its essence for people was in need of a sense of order and stability. The dangers of unleashed passion\textsuperscript{20} became apparent. As Romantic love is also the result of passion, people started to question the advantages from practising love in this way.

In the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} C. and this new 21\textsuperscript{st} C., the Myth is encountering new opposition, particularly from movements such as Feminism and Gender studies and even social philosophies as Constructionism. These ideologies target the Myth as responsible of certain definitions of sexual identity that oppress and imprison the subject into a patriarchal system\textsuperscript{21} that, according to the current state of mentality, is obsolete. Moreover, psychologists, marriage counsellors, and just anyone concerned

\textsuperscript{17} Concerning the Renaissance and the Baroque, it is interesting to note that this reification was also present in other forms of art. For example, in painting, nudity and sexuality became a main element, particularly when depicting the female body (Gilboa 879).

\textsuperscript{18} However, the resulting couple conventions from the Myth in the 18\textsuperscript{th} C. were still present. Beigel makes allusion to Lady Montague, who wrote about women in Vienna in 1716: “every woman of social standing had two men, her husband and her lover. Everyone knew of it and it was a serious offen[c]e to invite a lady to a party without asking both of her men” (330-331).

\textsuperscript{19} WWI refers to the First World War, as WWII refers to the Second World War.

\textsuperscript{20} War is seen as an instinct as well as love. They can both rely on passion as a main source of energy. The fidelity the German people had on Hitler had similarities to the emotions depicted in the Myth of Romantic Love as the blind ardour or the privilege of ideals over life itself. (Rougemont 281)

\textsuperscript{21} For a definition of the patriarchal system, go to section 3.1.2.
by the issue target the defining aspects of the Myth as reasons why love relationships tend to fail, especially after marriage. Modern magazines and websites dedicated to give ‘dating tips’ to their readers constantly advice to be more rational, more demanding and even more sexually open and independent when knowing and dating a partner, all courses of action in contradiction to the Myth. Under these conditions the present analysis is set, in order to show how new counter-myths are being raised from literature in order to dethrone Romantic Love.

2.4 Legacy of the Myth of Romantic Love

Romantic Love became a model to be followed when practising the fine art of love, and all the stories and manuals following the Myth were supposed to be exemplary of how love is really like. Since then the Myth has stayed through the centuries in the cultural productions of the West, particularly in literature, where it became perhaps the topic par excellence in more than one literary period and genre (Rougemont 175).

This has, of course, left a legacy in the sociocultural reality of the West, both in a positive and a negative way. For example, Romantic Love is targeted today as one of the main reasons why relationships don’t work.

Another problem related to the presence of Romantic Love in the West is gender inequality. Pilar Sampedro claims that Romantic Love is, in a certain way, a reason for gender violence ("El mito del amor…"). In the Myth women hold a passive role that makes them the object of men’s passion and instinct. So, though women are placed in a high position, for men are the ones doing all the deeds and winning the female’s heart, women are characterized in the Myth by a lack of actions, dependant

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22 To exemplify, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan®, Glamour®* and *Elle®* are international magazines for women with segments especially dedicated to Relationship, Dating and/or Sexual Advice. For example, in its Online Website, *Cosmopolitan®* holds several articles on Relationship and Dating Advice. In one, “The Secret Happy Couples Know”, the next is present as introductory paragraph: “When you first fall in love, everything you share produces an adrenaline rush because it’s all brand-new. But, as you’ve no doubt figured out, that mind-blowing novelty factor does inevitably start to dissipate, and you settle into more of a routine. That’s when the love buzz is in danger of being replaced by, well, boredom” (Lucia). *Glamour®* and *Elle®* hold similar sections on their Online Websites.

23 This of course should not be interpreted as that any relationship started in or having Romantic love as an element is destined to failure. There are some marriage analysts who see Romantic love as a force that may keep a couple together long enough to built a stronger, more real bond of love (Goode 39). However, these cases need both persons to be aware of this situation and become active in building the relationship further. Beigel refers in this case to couples whose sole base is Romantic love.
mostly on the man’s determination. This created a role of the female as passive, thus fortifying the patriarchal system of male dominance (Ibid).

3 Theoretical and Methodological Background

3.1 Theoretical Background

In the Theoretical background the concepts and theories that underlie the topic and the methodology of the present analysis will be presented. First there is an exposition of theories related to the Construction and Demythification of Myths, with an explanation of the characteristics and the elements that make up a myth, as well as the difference between the phenomenon of their death and the demythification process. These theories are essential to understand why and with what elements Romantic Love is heightened as a myth and what the demythification of Romantic Love in El amante lesbiano consists of. The second section deals with Feminism and Gender studies, which are proposed as theories that helped support the creation of little narratives aiming to the deconstruction of the conventions of Romantic Love. In Sampedro’s novel the characters’ stories are like these little narratives escaping the conventions originated from the Myth. Finally, Social Constructionism is also introduced, for Myths and Gender are treated in the analysis as social constructions. Moreover, Constructionism is closely related to the construction of little narratives, which shall be an important resource for the Methodological background.

3.1.1 Construction and Demythification of Myths

Myths can be defined as “specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience” (Encyclopædia Britannica). However, the Myth of Romantic Love differs from such a definition, and therefore it is important to define the constituent elements of a myth that permits the existence of social phenomena sharing the same status. Collectiveness is the feature that makes a myth prevail over time, and it is also the force that brings them into existence. Associated with this collective nature, the main reason a myth is created is to become a model of behaviour.
When defining a myth, Rougemont says it is a story summing up “an infinite number of more or less analogous situations” (5); Mircea Eliade says myths give models of behaviour; and Northrop Frye that myths and literature become an analogy of life, being myths the most abstract form of analogy (134). This condition responds to a main need why myths come to existence: the hardness of life is attenuated with the creation of mythologies, for they become models to be followed or, at least, looked upon.

When analyzed as narratives, excluding all religious matters, myths are not seen as models of behaviour, but as archetypes. Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, defines myths as:

an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience. In terms of narrative, myth is the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire (Frye 136).

So, myths are also related to human desire, the strongest manifestations of it.

The process in which a myth stops being a manifestation of these strong desires and its sacredness is over is known as demythification, and the main reason for this to happen is the myth becoming popular, becoming a commonplace. When dealing with narrative forms, Frye places the mythological narrative as the most archetypical form of narration, while naturalism is the least archetypical. When an originally mythical narration stops being archetypical and becomes more natural, closer to real life, this narratives is demythified. However, it is important to distinguish between demythification and the death of a myth.

The death of a myth is actually considered as part of the evolution mythical narrations undergo. When myths ‘die’ they are later expected to ‘resurrect’. Using the Myth of Romantic Love as an example, there have been times in the history of Western thought when it was abandoned, when it ‘died’. French Rationalism in the 18th C. is one of these moments. However, this death is more a ‘putting the myth aside’ with the possibility of bringing it back, as it happened during the German Romanticism. Frye puts it in different terms. He explains that myths die when the mythical elements are replaced by naturalism. But this ‘death’ leads to a revival and

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24 Mircea Eliade uses the term demythization, and refers to it as the time when a myth is “emptied of religious meaning and become a legend or a nursery tale” (Eliade 111). In the present work the term demythification is to be used.

25 This death is related to the idea of the eternal return, the belief that the world “must be periodically renewed or it may perish” (Eliade 43). This eternal return means that myths go back to the primordial times once in a while, and the process or evolution of the myth begins once again.
rebirth of mythological narratives, and that can be seen in how the Myth of Romantic Love came back with German Romanticism.

On the other hand, demythification deals with the content of the narrative itself, with rewriting or reconstructing it in order for the myth to become a more faithful depiction of reality and not an archetype. The myth is no longer a story of supernatural beings and supernatural actions, but of common beings and events that can be easily related to every day’s life. The myth is not killed nor put aside; it is just devoid of the mysticism and the sacredness that makes it a myth.

3.1.1.1 The Need of Demythifying Romantic Love

When the society of chivalry ceased to exist, the Myth of Romantic Love became more mundane, which made its influence even greater. It wasn’t anymore the love found among those belonging to knighthood or the court, and it spread rapidly to everyday life. This lead to the popularization of the Myth, which slowly took away its sacredness until it became more ordinary. Literature has much responsibility on this process of popularization (Rougemont 248-249). The Myth found in literature its best messenger, particularly with the rise of the novel on the 18th C., when it became the genre of the middle class. As it became popular, with time the forces that originated the Myth stopped being important: religious beliefs and society for example. Thus, the mythical force of Romantic Love started to fade away.

Also, whereas the Myth became necessary in the Middle Ages to relieve the frustration resulting from religious and social strains, the current state of love and sexual openness makes it unnecessary. Today there is no contempt towards sex, and it stopped being a matter of marital obligation for procreation only.

Another reason for the demythification of Romantic Love is its narcissistic nature. Many authors share this idea of Romantic Love as being selfish and narcissist (Rougemont 1957; Young-Bruehl 2003; Kristeva 1987). This concept goes back to the Greeks, who recognized that the sexual instincts were more related with the ego; “they explained that our human trouble is that when we fall in love we fall in love with ourselves” (Young-Bruehl 280), just as Narcissus did. The other person becomes like a ‘mirror’ that reflects what the ‘Narcissus’ wants, his desires. For the Myth, the woman is usually that pond where the man can look at himself.
Being then the man the active subject in a Romantic Love relationship, the woman becomes the ‘reward’ obtained after all obstacles, the goal and the price. This situation objectifies women, for the requirement for them to be eligible as the object of love answers only to superficial standards. There is always idealization in this sense. Julia Kristeva points that:

Rooted in desire and pleasure […] love, as everyone will agree, reigns between the two borders of narcissism and idealization. Its Highness the Ego projects and glorifies itself, or else shatters into pieces and is engulfed, when it admires itself in the mirror of an idealized Other (6).

The couple in the Myth relies on a constructed image of the other that usually doesn’t coincide with the real self of the person.

This is why love presented in the Myth is seen as feverish. The loved one is seen as ‘the other half’, a ‘soul-mate’ that in reality is nothing more than an idealization and projection of what the person beliefs should be his/her ‘soul-mate’. Postmodernity sees the individual as a whole, as a subject that cannot be split and that needs to have its own personal story (see section 3.2.1). Kreimer puts it as follows:

Although the loving embrace evokes the image of two halves joined together, we are not oranges sliced in half, we do not err in search of an original unity nor, we like it or not, is there something like a ‘soul mate’. What does exist is persons rather similar but different than us that we can eventually love, and the challenge to keep loving them will lie precisely in our ability to reconcile the differences²⁶ (Kreimer in Zanfardini).

This love is not based in idealization, but in the real knowledge of the other, and is not enhanced by the absence but by the physical presence of the loved one. Relationships based in this type of love last longer because is continually improving and constructing itself, and so when passion is over, love and sexual desire still remain (See Kreimer in Gafflogio and Zanfardini).

Furthermore, today’s Western society is working in order to obtain more equality between men and women, and thus there is a need to describe love roles in a different way (Heiss 577). In order to achieve this, women and men need to be able to be somehow equal. This equality would make mutual love possible, for only in this situation both are found in the same position.

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²⁶ Original: “Aunque el abrazo amoroso evoque la imagen de dos mitades que se unen, no somos naranjas rebanadas por la mitad, no erramos en busca de una unidad originaria ni, mal que nos pese, existe nuestra ‘alma gemela’. Lo que existen más bien son personas afines pero distintas a nosotros a las que eventualmente podremos amar, y el desafío de seguir amándolas residirá justamente en nuestra posibilidad de conciliar las diferencias” (Kreimer in Zanfardini).
In *El amante lesbiano* the Myth is presented as obsolete and decadent. The conventions of the Myth are presented in the novel as a mistake that constrains the individual sexually and emotionally. In the analysis it will be shown how relationships following Romantic Love as portrayed by the Myth are not successful in the novel, whereas those escaping its conventions are successful in making the couple happy. Sampedro’s novel has different voices pertaining to different types of relationships. Today’s differentiated society is characterized by many voices, and one strong voice of the 21st C. that is looking forward for a demythification of Romantic Love is Feminism and Gender studies.

3.1.2. Feminism and Gender Studies

The Myth of Romantic Love is neither the only nor the main reason why the West became a male-oriented society. However, it has been an important factor supporting such social configuration. As abovementioned, the Myth enhances a dynamic between sexes that generates specific gender roles. The man is portrayed as active whereas the woman as passive, and so the man is linked to strength and actions and the woman is linked to weakness and being beautiful. Feminism as an established voice and movement started in 1949 with Simone de Beauvoir’s work, *The Second Sex*, whose main idea was that women had been objectified by men throughout history, and that “[o]ne is not born a woman: one becomes one” (Beauvoir 371). Feminism starts as a movement in search for a radical transformation of a male-oriented society. There are different feminist postures, yet all of them oppose to the patriarchal system linked to power.

As the Myth is a force that enhances such system, feminist theories have been helpful in the demythification process, for they identify the misjudgements resulting from Romantic Love. For example, the feminine and the masculine roles are highly typified, not allowing homosexuality and also restraining how women and men should behave. Another criticized misconception is the assumption that the biological sex determines the gender role of a person (not just what the gender is but also how it is suppose to be lived), which is in fact a construction in the psyche of the person and then grows as a social construction. Furthermore, the value given to the superficial

27 *Original*: “No se nace mujer: se llega a serlo” (Beauvoir 371).
beauty and passiveness in the woman creates a system of opposition where the female is defined both by what the man wants and by what the man is not.

Helene Cixous believes that Western thought, particularly the literary culture, is trapped in a never-ending series of binary oppositions that always come back to the primal distinction of male and female. She calls this the patriarchal binary thought, and is based on the idea that for one of the terms of the binary to be given, the other has to be ‘defeated’ or absent:

the ‘victory’ always returns to the same point: It is hierarchical. The hierarchy subjects all conceptual organization to man. Male privilege, which stands in the opposition it holds, between activity and passivity. Traditionally, we talk about the issue of sexual difference by coupling it to the opposition: activity/passivity28 (Cixous 14-15).

The female is seen as the defeated or the passive. Under patriarchies, this is the only position for women, related to all the negative terms in the binaries: passive, nature, emotions, night, pathos, as opposed to the masculine related activity, culture, reason, day and logos.

As a way to oppose to this system, Cixous takes from Derridá’s deconstruction the idea of multiple, heterogeneous difference. There is no absence or presence, but a deferral of the terms: a woman stops being a no-man and simply becomes something different than a man. In order to overcome the patriarchal binary thought, literature needs to “strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality” (Moi 108).

Luce Irigaray says that women cannot be subjects, but they have to be objects functioning as the basis for the ‘true’ subject, the man. In order to change this reality in literature, the mythical discourse becomes the place where it is possible to hold “an experience of the loss of subjecthood, of the disappearance of the subject/object opposition” (136). This mythical discourse takes the form of a mythological, dreamlike setting with a relative time and space that resemble a pre-Oedipal29 world

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28 Original: “la ‘victoria’ siempre vuelve al mismo punto: Se jerarquiza. La jerarquización somete toda la organización conceptual al hombre. Privilegio masculino, que se distingue en la oposición que sostiene, entre la actividad y la pasividad. Tradicionalmente, se habla de la cuestión de la diferencia sexual acoplándola a la oposición: actividad/pasividad” (Cixous 14-15).

29 To further understand this distinction it is relevant to define what the Oedipus complex is. Elémore Zolla explains that the Oedipus complex is the “erotic tendency that drives the kid to the mother (hating the father), [a phase that] according to Freud every man must pass through” (292). It is thus a necessary phase for the construction of sexual identity. It has mainly three subjects: the mother, the father and the child. The role of the mother should be passive, working as the object of desire, while the role of the father is active and dominant. The child, being in love with the mother, feels a sort of
with no male/female distinction, and therefore with no subject/object opposition. Apart from the mythical discourse, there is also a recurrence in the use of wild or desert zones as the landscape in feminine-oriented literature, for in these places the writer can be free from the patriarchal system oppression for they are devoid of society and culture (Showalter 104).

Gender is a psychological and social construction. On the psychological part it is related to the Lacanian theory that differentiates an Imaginary Order (associated with the aforementioned pre-Oedipal period) from a Symbolic Order (associated with the post-Oedipal period). Every individual has two births: the biological and the sexed-subject. The pre-Oedipal period is when the child still hasn’t learnt to distinguish between the male and the female, and lives in a utopian Imaginary Order where the figure of the Mother embraces everything. Later, the recognition of the Father and his possession of the phallus is what makes the child enter the Symbolic Order, where gender is finally established. The male-child is defined as a phallus owner, whereas the female-child is defined as an incomplete man lacking the phallus (see Moi).

Gender studies offer also an explanation on the opposition of male/female from a sociocultural point of view. The biological sex only determines the anatomy of an individual, whereas the gender is constructed following the social strains such person experiences (Rubin 44). The anatomy is objective and it is evident from the day of birth. Gender is more complex, consisting of subjective individual factors as well as sociocultural ones (Lamas 2000; Ortner and Whitehead 1996; Rubin 1996; Scott 2000).

Gender is the result of immersing biological data into the sociocultural context, which thus determines patterns of what female and male behaviour ought to be. In this context there are religious, political, social and economical forces that constrain the gender definitions, and therefore create social inequality, where most power and privileges tend to go to men. Being gender-defined means not only to be seen as male/female, but also to learn the rules that the person is ‘obliged’ to follow, what is forbidden and what is allowed, and all this is learned socially through the family or other social institutions (Bedolla 12).

hatred towards the father for being more dominant and masculine than he is. The child creates a rivalry that finally gets solved with an attempt of competence towards the father that helps in the development of sexual identity as a male (293).

In *El amante lesbiano*, the actions take place in a world that resembles such Imaginary Order. For an extended analysis of this, go to section 5.1.2.1.

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30 In *El amante lesbiano*, the actions take place in a world that resembles such Imaginary Order. For an extended analysis of this, go to section 5.1.2.1.
The most influential institutions that influence the construction of gender ideology are kinship, marriage and prestige. Ortner and Whitehead propose that it is in fact kinship the most influential area of them all, and all the others refer to it. In patriarchies, families are male-oriented, and their social image is also pending more in the actions of its male actors and in the passivity of its female members.

Although José Luis Sampedro cannot be defined as a feminist author, he does point to some of the major problems discussed also by feminism and gender studies. Both set of theories become essential when analysing a novel such as El amante lesbiano. The problematic of the main character is the result of the upbringing he experienced in a family oppressed by the conventions of the patriarchal system. In the story, this system is deconstructed, the opposition of male/female is inverted and the gender is presented as boundary free. The main character goes through a reconstruction of gender, for the one he has is problematic to him, being the result of a family structure and upbringing characterized by frustration. Sampedro sets the story in a mythical setting, a dreamlike scenario as the one pointed out by Irigaray. Being in such an Imaginary order will make it possible for the story to be devoid of the patriarchal conventions, which will help the protagonist reconstruct his gender identity.

3.1.3 Constructionism and the Social Construction of Love

Just as gender is seen as a social construction, the Myth of Romantic Love has also been constructed through sociocultural forces throughout the centuries (Beigel 1951; Goode 1959; Heiss 1991; Kreimer 2004 and 2009; Sangrador 1993; Pilar Sampedro 2005). Today the social values that gave birth and force to the Myth of Romantic Love are losing power, and therefore the Myth is losing strength. As value changes, counter-values come into existence in order to replace the former, and these new values are then defined as the established ones. This counter-values then become counter-myths born in order to dethrone previous established ‘myths’ that are not suitable anymore with the changing social reality. These myths and their values become obsolete: this is the case of the Myth of Romantic Love.

One of these values is the importance given to realities other than everyday reality. Berger and Luckmann argue that when a group of people live together, their way of thinking and performing actions becomes habituated, as well as the roles played by all of them. These roles then become available to other members and the habituated
actions and knowledge are passed to the following generations, so they become institutionalized. In this process of institutionalization, meaning becomes embedded in society. This institutions help to economize the effort taken when performing social actions, just as myths helped by being models of behaviour (see Berger and Luckmann).

This habituated actions and roles are eventually perceived as independent and autonomous from the society that created them (Berger and Luckmann 21). They are seen “as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will” (89). Individuals lose track of the influence they have over these realities, and as generations pass by learning such behaviours, the patterns persist as objectified. This is why the Myth of Romantic Love became a myth: people lost track of its origins, thus ascribing it the quality of anonymity, and therefore sacredness.

Before the individual grows and develops according to the needs of his body, he is shaped by his socially constructed reality given in the first stages of development. This is how Romantic Love and the gender roles related to the Myth are embedded in Western individuals31. As members of the society they are born in, individuals are subject to a process of primary socialization that happens in childhood, and that is in charge of those significant others whose influence is great in the newly ascribed member (131). This socialization is in charge of shaping the identity of the individuals. Traditionally, identity was seen as something fixed, something constant throughout the life of an individual that helped identify the same person over time (Shoemaker 660). Nonetheless, with postmodernism identity is now seen as a constant construction, formed by the individual characteristics of every person, which are constantly shaped by social interactions that change over time (Páramo 541).

Although further processes of socialization and reconstruction of identity are possible, they will always present problems “because the already internalized reality has a tendency to persist” (140). Resocialization needs special conditions to be successful. This process resembles the primary socialization, and it has to have guidance that causes in the subject a strong affective identification as it happens in

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31 Goode points childhood as an important stage in which the conceptions of what is love are learned: “[A] predisposition of love is created by the socialization experience. (…) There is much joshing of children about falling in love; myths and stories about love and courtship are heard by children” (39).
childhood. The difference lies in that this process has to first dismantle the previous subjective reality, so that the new reality can be rewritten (157).

The increasing abandonment of the patriarchal system in the West is proportional to the increasing number of individuals undergoing a transformation that dismantles the traditional, former values regarding love and gender roles and adapts them to new social orders. Already institutionalized orders are always being threatened by the fact that “all socially constructed universes change, and the change is brought about by the concrete actions of human beings” (116). When many individuals sharing the new transformations congregate, new counter-definitions of reality emerge, and this triggers a change in the social order. The counter-reality eventually becomes habituated, and then naturalized in society.

The conflict of the protagonist of *El amante lesbiano* arises due to the social constructed patterns of behaviour that constrain men to a determined gender role and a determined way to experience love. It is learned through the novel that the primary socialization of the protagonist was full of repression for him to adjust to the conventions required for his role in the social institutions. But, in the story a process of reconstruction allows him to change that early socialization and to change his role and love reality. In the following section, the narrative resources employed by Sampedro to permit such reconstruction are explained.

### 3.2 Methodological Background

In the Methodological background the main resources used for the construction of the counter-myth of Romantic Love in *El amante lesbiano* are presented. The main resource comes from the critical theory of Jean-François Lyotard concerning grand narratives. This critical theory provides the Strategy followed in the analysis of Sampedro’s novel: to analyse the creation of little narratives as counter-myths of Romantic Love. Afterwards there is a presentation of the Narrative Resources to be identified in the novel as the creators of such little narratives: the inversion and deconstruction of the patriarchal binary system and the displacement of mythological elements.
3.2.1 Little Narratives as Counter-Myths of Romantic Love

The creation of counter-myths is a way to de mythify narrations in order to strip them of their mythological status. Mari Luz Esteban claims that, to deconstruct the idea of love so it serves for the up to date social and cultural purposes, new definitions of love need to appear. This can also be extended to gender roles deriving from the Myth, which would need to be redefined as well. It is true that the Myth is still alive; however, it is evident that new redefinitions of it are becoming stronger, like for example love between people of the same gender. This is evidence that “the hegemonic culture of love is a condition but it does not determine fully the ideology or practice of the people”\(^{32}\) (167): new love narratives are possible and viable.

This is the Strategy for the analysis of *El amante lesbiano*: the identification of those new narratives. Jean-François Lyotard, author of *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, deals with the *crisis of narratives* in the current era.\(^{33}\) He talks about a grand narrative (or *metanarrative*) that attempts to be the totalization of universal truth or unquestionable knowledge. This metanarrative has a metanarrator who gives voice to this common, popular knowledge. The presence of this metanarrator *legitimizes* such narrative (Lytard 34); that is, it gives it the status of ‘knowledge’, or using Berger and Luckmann’s concept, it becomes a higher institution. In other words: grand narratives are pieces of knowledge or of thought that are considered as universal and true. These narratives have a metanarrator, an authority of a higher level that cannot be pointed out: it resembles the anonymous narrators of mythology, who cannot be traced back, and this gives them the benefit of being unquestionable. However, they can be ignored or silenced.

Today the grand narratives cannot be relied on: “[w]e no longer have recourse to the grand narratives – we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse” (60). This is what the crisis of narratives consists of: the abandonment of the belief in such grand narratives, its heroes and functions. People cannot interrogate the metanarrators, but they can abandon them and create new narrations and knowledge.

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\(^{32}\) *Original*: “[L]a cultura hegemónica sobre el amor es un condicionante pero no determina totalmente la ideología o la práctica de la gente” (Esteban 167).

\(^{33}\) Lyotard is the first to refer to the current era as *postmodernism*. He claims that this age began at the end of the 1950s (3), as a result of the wars and the attempt to re-establish social order in a more effective way.
One of the main reasons of such abandonment is precisely the loss of legitimating force given to the metanarrators. This legitimation is given by the belief of people in the grand narratives. For example, religions are narratives originated by certain metanarrators (the gods, the saints, the first followers of the belief), and they later become institutions that are legitimized by its believers; the same happens with grand narratives. However, in the postmodern era, the metanarrator per excellence is closer to actual people, more practical, popular and real (35). The legitimization of knowledge is not anymore important only for the sake of knowledge itself, but for the self-management of humanity and its freedom. And as humanity is a complex of relations between individuals, there cannot be just one grand narrative, but many little narratives. A single grand narrative or just a few grand narratives would leave many groups outside the legitimization. But, in an attempt to fight for freedom, recurring to little narratives allow such groups to have a voice and narratives of their own, which become also legitimized and valid.

Little narratives are then smaller narratives or pieces of knowledge that legitimize the discourse of smaller groups of people (Lyotard 60). To illustrate, if the Myth of Romantic Love is a grand narrative concerning how love is suppose to be in the Western world, for example love exclusively between a man and a woman, a little narrative would be one possibility of love where love between two men is not only possible, but also legitimate. Little narratives can be seen in different levels of reality: they can be little narrative outside fiction, positioned in real life, but they can also be identified inside literature, inside a novel. In the present thesis, the focus is on both levels: how Sampedro’s novel presents little narratives inside its plot, but also how the novel itself becomes a little narrative of how love could be in life outside literature.

The inner little narrative in El amante lesbiano, a reality that follows its own rules and conventions, has as motto Love, and do what you will (Sampedro 9). It is a subjective reality belonging to the subconscious world of the dreams of the main character, and is therefore a possibility of reality, a machination responding to a personal necessity. This plot utilizes certain resources to stand as separate from the grand narrative of Romantic Love and gender identity.
3.2.2 Narrative Resources

The story of Mario, the main character in *El amante lesbiano*, is the little narrative to be analyzed as counter-myth of Romantic Love, working against such grand narrative that has imposed fixed gender roles and certain elements from the Myth as necessary for love. The narrative resources that will help determine such little narrative are the inversion and deconstruction of the patriarchal binary system and the displacement of mythological elements. As said before, the patriarchal binary system consists of binary oppositions that can be equalised to the basic opposition *male/female*. In *El amante lesbiano* the different oppositions are being deconstructed (in the case of the binaries that have in fact multiple choices and not just two) or inverted: these will be pointed out and analysed.

The second narrative resources to be analyzed, the demonic and mythological modulations, are from the theory of Northrop Frye. He proposes that narratives can take five modes according to the kind of narrative images they have. These are the mythical, the romantic, the high mimetic, the low mimetic and the ironic or demonic mode. For the present analysis only the mythical and the demonic shall be taken into consideration, being both the extremes a narrative can take according to this model. The other modes are not present in the novel, and this is evidence of how the author plays with the concepts of what is considered to be ideal and what not.

The Mythical mode has mythical, apocalyptical images like ideal worlds with gods, heroes, primordial times and all elements conforming a myth. The narratives in this mode focus on what is divine and coming from the true desires of humanity. For example, all the narrations on mythology depicting the gods and the deeds of extraordinary heroes would fit in such mythical mode. On the contrary, the Demonic or Ironic mode presents demonic images that create in the narration a world of what desire rejects. This is “the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion […]; the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly” (Frye 147).

Each of these modes presents differences in the images that characterize them, but they all fit in certain categories applying to both modes. For the present analysis, the categories proposed by Frye to be analyzed are those related to the divine world, the

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34 The other categories pertaining the heavenly bodies, the animal, the vegetable and the mineral worlds will not be used for their presence in *El amante lesbiano* is minimum or irrelevant.
ones related to the human world and those related to the Civilization world. The images of the divine world have to do with supernatural beings, with gods and goddesses, superheroes and events possible only thanks to divine interventions. The images of the human world deal with the cyclical rhythms of humans, like life and death, their development and social institutions like marriage. Finally, the images of the Civilization world deal with the images of sacred cities, important buildings and constructions with especial meaning to the narration (see Frye). Depending on whether the narrative is Mythical or Demonic, the types of images are different. For example, in a Mythical narrative the images of the divine world would comprise gods and heroes as main characters, while in a Demonic narrative the main characters would be demons, monsters or revengeful gods.

Frye talks about the possibility of a displacement technique, on of which is the demonic modulation, in which the images of the mythological would be reversed and presented as demonic. For example, a marriage usually being a representation of union and stability would be depicted after a demonic modulation as an infernal union, something undesired and unpleasant, almost infernal. In the present analysis this displacement technique is to be used together with its contrary: in El amante lesbiano there is also what can be called a mythical modulation. That is, the demonic imagery is presented in a mythical way, giving the human experience world a mythical, ideal sense. For example, the torture and the dungeon would then become ideal places, settings for true desire and love. The undesirable becomes desirable, or more likely it was always desired yet it was concealed. This is the way the little narrative is constructed by Sampedro, giving word to the silenced desire of the demonic and the silenced rejection of the divine. The Mythical and the Demonic balances.

As this analytical work is highly interpretative, hermeneutics is also considered as a methodology of analysis, used to interpret all signs and symbols in the novel. Hermeneutics deal with the idea that “the receiver is not the passive recipient of a fully developed sense, but an active agent involved in the making of such sense”35 (Selden et al 67). The reader interprets and constructs the meaning of the text by interacting with its elements, in this case the binaries and images to be analyzed. The text ‘creates’ this reader, orienting him with its inner logic. The present analysis is the

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35 Original: “[E]l receptor no es el destinatario pasivo de un sentido enteramente formulado, sino un agente activo que participa en su elaboración” (Selden et al 67).
result of my construction as a receiver. This is why I consider important to introduce an interpretative synthesis of the novel prior to the analysis itself.

4 Interpretative Synthesis of *El amante lesbiano*

*El amante lesbiano* is a story of unconventional love. This section presents a synthesis following a chronological order of the events, but the novel itself is characterized by a chronological disorder that keeps the reader uncertain of what is really happening to the protagonist throughout the story. The main character of the novel is Mario, an old man who suffers a heart attack after a check-up visit with his cardiologist. The readers find out about this event on the last three pages of the novel, where an external voice narrates on how a reporter is taking information from the doorman in the building in order to write the note for the newspaper. In his dying moments, Mario creates a dreamlike mental machination in which he escapes from the reality of his heart attack and he uses it in order to solve problems he has been carrying since his childhood concerning his gender identity.

The novel starts *in media res* with an already opened question\(^{36}\) of uncertainty that positions the main character in the unknown space of his machination: “What is this? Where am I?... I don’t know this place. How did I get here? What direction shall I given the taxi driver?”\(^{37}\) (Sampedro 11). He is never aware of the fact that everything he lives in that place is just in his mind, and so he begins his wanderings around the Outsides, where time and space are relative and anything is possible. There, he starts meeting again with key persons from his childhood who appear to him, looking just as they were when he was a child. He reencounters his mother, his auntie Luisa, his uncle Juan, God (or goddess, because this personal god of Mario will also change gender as the protagonist change), his father, and finally, with Farida, a woman he first met in his childhood.

During the time in the Outsides he lives in the house that was his family house, and which is lorded by the portrait of his mother. However, as his reencounters

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\(^{36}\) In Spanish questions are always opened with the symbol ¿. However, in the opening question of *El amante lesbiano* such symbol is missing, giving the sense that is an already opened question, missing its beginning.

\(^{37}\) *Original*: “Qué es esto? ¿Dónde estoy?... No conozco este lugar. ¿Cómo he llegado hasta aquí? ¿Qué dirección le habré dado al taxista?” (Sampedro 11).
happen and starts to reconstruct his identity, he starts to make of the house a sort of personal altar for the relics coming from those helping him built his new identity.

Mario is attracted to women but with the desire to be treated as one and to be dominated by them. These encounters with people from his past help him embrace his true gender identity, that of a lesbian man, and so he changes his name to Miriam, and begins to act like a woman. Farida, who in the Outsides is a recognized psychiatrist of a new science called Ipsotherapy, helps Mario to get to this true identity, and in the meantime they both fall in love, for Farida has also an inverted gender role: she likes to dominate men, result of her experience with rape when she was younger. After many tests and trials to help Mario become Miriam, they finally concretize their love in a symbolic honeymoon in the desert, where Farida becomes Mario’s true desire, his own mother. However, the traditional Freudian desire for the possession of the mother is here inversed in the character, for his true wish is to be possessed by her, to be dominated as it happens during the final sexual act. This possession, a twisted resolution to the Oedipus complex, happens exactly at the moment of Mario’s death. In just the last pages of the novel Sampedro reveals to the reader that the entire story has been a production of Mario’s mind in his dying seconds.

*El amante lesbiano* is a counter-myth, a little narrative where the undesired is shown as desired, and where new sexual and love possibilities are present. The convention, the Myth of Romantic Love with its gender definitions, have been treating stories like Mario’s story as ‘medical problems’ or ‘perversions’ that should be treated or disregarded. Such perversions are expected to be treated in order to re-adapt the individual back into social order (Berger and Luckmann 113). Yet, in *El amante lesbiano* the healing process is focused on bringing the individual back to his/her true nature, whichever this is. The discourse of the novel encourages the individual to go his own way, regardless of his direction, having only in mind the principle of St. Augustine that introduces the novel, “Love, and do what you will”\(^{38}\) (Sampedro 9). The following section intends to show how José Luis Sampedro accomplishes such message through the narrative resources proposed for the analysis.

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\(^{38}\) *Original*: “Ama y haz lo que quieras” (Sampedro 9).
5. Analysis of *El amante lesbiano*

As it has been discussed in the previous sections, gender restrictions are an essential element for the Myth of Romantic Love: the role of the man and the woman are fixed and they follow the conventions dictated by the patriarchal binary system. Therefore, one way to oppose to such myth is precisely to free gender of any imposition and let the couple be constituted by gender orientation. This is why the first part of the analysis deals solely with the gender issues of *El amante lesbiano*, for this is the main topic of the novel and the main strategy for demythifying love. The second part is focused on the elements directly related to the narrative, on the images corresponding to the demonic or the mythological modulation. These elements, along with the mentioned gender reconstruction, make of this novel a romantic story that breaks with the conventionalities of the Myth of Romantic Love.

5.1 Reconstruction of the Sexual Identity: Mario’s little narrative

This part of the work will analyze the reconstruction of the sexual identity of the protagonist following the theories of Constructionism, Feminism and Gender Studies already revised. This will show how the reconstruction is a way of little narrative on gender identity, for the case of the protagonist is not common. Thanks to a process of resocialization, gender is deconstructed in the novel through the inversion and deconstruction of binaries belonging to the patriarchal system. The different characters, specifically Mario, move freely around the possibilities of gender in the mind-generated world of the Outsides, thus breaking with this patriarchal system that ties individuals to a fixed identity.

There are several binaries in play in the novel. A first major binary being inversed is the importance given to the objective reality as opposed to the subjective one. *El amante lesbiano* is divided into two sections. The first part comprises most of the story; Mario is the narrator, the internal focalizer and the main character, who narrates his own actions, encounters and memories (Sampedro 15) as if he was living and recalling them in the present time (16). This first chapter, called *The Experience* (*La vivencia*) comprises all the events happening in the Outsides, the extended mental time of Mario’s dying seconds, and which is then subjective for relying only in the experience of the protagonist. The second part, *The Event* (*El suceso*), is considerably
smaller than the first one (barely three pages), and it gives the factual, objective
information of what happened to Mario: his heart attack and sudden death. This part is
narrated in the third person, with an external focalizer (a reporter), and though The
Event focuses on the death of Mario, its main characters are the reporter in charge of
the coverage of the accident and the doorman of the building who saw Mario falling
while he was having the heart attack.

The Experience is given outstandingly more importance than The Event; the
subjective, usually dominated by the objective, takes in this case the dominant
position in the story, and this way Mario is eligible to create this alter reality of his
own. He explains it in the following words: “sometimes we convince ourselves that
something that didn’t happen happened or, conversely, that what we lived didn’t
happen”\textsuperscript{39} (13). That is exactly what he is doing without consciously noticing it: he is
evading reality in those mortal moments of his heart attack and instead he ‘lives’ that
dreamlike experience that didn’t happen in real life. What is more, he is living the life
he never dared to live due to the social restrictions, and in order to overcome all the
repression he opts to reinterpret his past instead of trying to dispose of it.

Berger and Luckmann explain this process of reconstruction as follows:

Since it is relatively easier to invent things that never happened than to forget those that
actually did, the individual may fabricate and insert events wherever they are needed to
harmonize the remembered with the reinterpreted past. Since it is the new reality rather than
the old that now appears dominantly plausible to him, he may be perfectly “sincere” in such
a procedure-subjectively, he is not telling lies about the past but bringing it in line with the
truth that, necessarily, embraces both present and past (Berger and Luckmann 160).
Therefore, this subjectivity is not devoid of reminiscences of real, objective life.
Particularly the first encounters of Mario with his relatives (his mother, his auntie
Luisa, his uncle Juan and his father) are clear reminiscences of the past that,
nonetheless, reveal themselves with new information he ‘discovers’ through them.
These encounters follow a similar structure: a sudden, yet expected apparition of the
family member, who then gives Mario his/her version of the memories the protagonist
has talked about with he/she. Then, the relative ‘reveals’ the real story, the truth
behind the limited version Mario holds of the facts. These encounters then expose to
Mario a more complete image of himself and those loved ones he shared his life with.
Nevertheless, it is important to note the following: although the revelations are

\textsuperscript{39} Original: “a veces nos convencemos de haber sucedido lo que no pasó o, al revés, de que no ocurrió
lo que vivimos” (13).
presented as the ‘true’ version of events, they are still positioned in the dreamlike, subjective world Mario creates. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as objective revelations, but as machinations of the mind of the protagonist that sets them as objective by placing them on the mouth of other also machinated characters.

In this section both realities are separated: on the one hand the reminiscences from the past, key memories in the life of Mario that belong mainly to his childhood and the lives from those appearing relatives; on the other hand, the invented revelations that help him in the construction of his true gender identity. Apart from that, there are also events going on in the Outsides, those related to Farida and the Ipsotherapy, which are also machinations belonging to the subjective reality in the novel. The first part, based on the events that can be considered as real in the life of the character, those happening before his heart attack and outside the actions in the story, are realities that were shaped and interpreted from the patriarchal system point of view. The second part presents the subjective, invented machinations that break with the system’s conventions and permit the reconstruction of identity, through which the protagonist ceases to be Mario and becomes Miriam and, moreover, permits him to succeed in his long time desire of being possessed by his mother.

5.1.1 Social Construction of Mario’s Identity
In order to understand why Mario is in need of a reconstruction of his identity, it is first essential to know how this identity was constructed in the first place. This way, it is easier to understand why the need of Mario to abandon such first socialization, which is in fact part of the aforementioned abandonment to the conventions raised by the Myth of Romantic Love concerning gender. For this, emphasis will be made in the main influences he had during his childhood, remembering that these significant others are in the most influential in the process of construction of identity in the individual. These influences were his parents, his auntie Luisa and Farida.

The life of Mario before his presence in the Outsides (or before his heart attack) seems to be a constant effort to fulfil the roles expected from him. Of his childhood it is told about his frustration for not being able to be how his mother wanted him to be. Even in his juvenile encounter with Farida, he tries to look older and according to the image of a mature, dominant man: “I was so eager to look older than my short pants
made me look at my thirteen years”\textsuperscript{40} (Sampedro 53). After his childhood there is not much information on his adulthood, but may be only some comments on his wedding, its failure and some attempts to overcome his gender issues. Perhaps the most outstanding feeling that can be sensed from such reminiscences of the past is a sense of frustration: Mario constantly goes against his desires and his real self in order to see if he can fulfil the family and social expectations, for “there is no respect for those who reject the conventional way of living”\textsuperscript{41} (Sampedro 39-40).

The most important reflections of the protagonist concerning his past are those related to his parents, his auntie Luisa and his encounter with Farida in Toledo. The three of them are highly representative of his childhood, considering this is the time for the acquirement of gender identity. Coming after this, the comments about his marriage seem more the result of such biased constitution of the self. Although not much is said about the social reality of his past, it is implied in many ways that the conservativeness made it even more compulsory to follow the expected gender roles. His infancy occurred during the Francoist regime (mid-1930s – 1975), a time of extreme conservatism under the dictatorship of Franco (Valiente 767). This period lasted during Mario’s childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, and though it is not mentioned in the novel, there are some references to this extreme conservatism (Sampedro 25, 43). Society was a definite force oppressing the free development of Mario in his early years, but considering it is mentioned so few times during the novel compared to the memories related to his family, it is understood that his family was in fact the most important factor for his gender constitution.

**His Mother and his Father**

Mario’s mother is a strong woman whose image is always portrayed as dominant (19). She appears to him in the story just as his other relatives do; yet her presence remains close to Mario thanks to her portrait lording the family house. While the others appear and disappear leaving only a sensation of having been there, his mother’s presence is always there through her portrait.

Although she was not keen to follow social conventions considering her gender role as a woman, she finally got married to Mario’s father, even though all she wanted

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Original}: “Yo me desvivía por parecer mayor de lo que sugería mi pantalón corto a mis trece años” (53).

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Original}: “no se respeta a quienes rechazan el vivir convencional” (39-40).
in life was to live her own life (23). She blames this to social conventions that were against women at the time, and which she considers are still against them in the present of the story (26). After getting married and having Mario, she becomes the governor in her house, leading both the lives of her husband and her child. Somehow, his mother becomes an example of repression, of denying oneself the true desire in order to be able to function as a social individual.

Mario’s father, on the other side, is presented as passive, dominated by his wife not for being unable to be dominant, but because his nature is submissive. He is a professor interested in the works of Muslim mystics, an aficionado of music and apart from the interpretations given in the Outsides, which would not belong to the reminiscences of the past, his presence is rather minor regarding Mario’s formation. Compared to the mother, the father seems to be mostly remembered by Mario for being a loving and understanding parent, and not for forging his character or leading his way through life as his mother did.

The main problem with Mario’s identity is born from this family context. The character lives an anomalous Oedipus complex due to the roles played by his parents. In most cases, the male-infant seeks to imitate the fatherly figure because this is supposed to be the dominant one. In the case of Mario, his identity is constructed by a double imitation: as his mother was the dominant, Mario wished to imitate her femininity and he also wished to be hers, to be under her power; but at the same time, he unconsciously imitates the submissiveness of his father.

Apart from this development, Mario’s parents were always in conflict at the time of defining their son’s gender identity. It is said in the novel that his mother wished him to be dominant, as she could never be (42), whereas his father, being passive, would let his child be as he wanted. Since he was a kid, he had a liking for wearing his mother’s clothes (22), which would create conflict because his mother wouldn’t agree while his father would find that funny. As Mario’s authority figure was not the father but the mother, this growing repression pushed him to act in life according to his mother’s desires. But as these desires were against what he wanted to be, he always failed:

You were like you could: life didn’t offer you then the indispensable male model, and you could not invent it for yourself being just a kid. Therefore the disagreement. Your mother and

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[^42]: For a definition of the Oedipus complex, go to page 19.
you crossing each other in the night and blind for each other because of the same anxiety to find each other… Do not blame yourself because you were not her way\textsuperscript{43} (42).

Moreover, instead of having a desire of possession of the mother, like in a normal Oedipus complex, Mario’s desire was inverted: he wanted to be possessed by his mother, in all aspects. Therefore, this created a gap in their relation because what she wanted the most was for him to be a dominant man, completely the opposite to what the protagonist was seeking: “To become like her, as my body requested, caused her rejection and prevented me from being hers and for her”\textsuperscript{44} (80). After his marriage fails, Mario grows apart from her, for he blamed her for wanting him to be someone he just couldn’t (19). Her presence became somewhat irrelevant until the moment they meet again in the Outsides.

### Auntie Luisa

The reminiscences that seem to be the happiest for the protagonist are those concerning his auntie Luisa and his visits to Ras-Marif, the beach where she used to live. In here, life would pass in games, baths on the sea and rest in the humble house by the sea. Auntie Luisa is first presented by Mario as a primordial \textit{Eve} that lived in the earthly paradise of Ras-Marif. He sees himself as a \textit{naïve and disturbed Adam} (31) who would find absolute peace only next to his auntie.

Luisa presents to Mario an early sexual discovery, one that is described in the novel as innocent and naïve. She is the first woman he worships, drying her after their daily baths in the sea, smelling and touching her in the process, looking attentively at her see-through clothes, all this devoid of all sin because he was still too young to feel lust (33). With this close, almost sensual relation with his auntie, he grows to be a man attracted to women in a worshipping way, which forms part of his impossibility to be dominant. Also, this creates a sort of disappointment on him, for he grows with the idea that he and his auntie were meant for each other, yet the feelings he would feel were not really as passionate as they could be. This is why Luisa tells him she was always careful not to mislead him with this, for they were both submissive in need of a dominant other: “now you cannot go wrong. You have been through a marriage. We

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Original}: “Fuiste como podías: no te ofreció la vida entonces el modelo viril indispensable y no podías inventártelo tan niño. Por eso el desencuentro. Tu madre y tú cruzándoos en la noche y ciegos uno para el otro por el ansia misma de encontrarnos… No te reproches no haber sido a su manera” (42).

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Original}: “hacerme como ella, según me pedía mi cuerpo, provocaba su rechazo y me impedía ser de ella y para ella” (80).
were equal, of the same weak gender [...] we both need the complementary, the dominant, the one that makes us give ourselves to him or her"\(^{45}\) (34).

Later, as an adult, he recalls Luisa as a single woman trapped in Ras-Marif, and not anymore as an Eve in a paradise. He found out through his family about her later marriage to a man who abused her and was mean to her. What he knows about this marriage, along with his judgements about it, are also shaped by what his mother told him, by what she wanted him to believe. He never questioned such version, but in the Outsides his encounters show him another perspective of Luisa’s decision. This will be analyzed in section 5.2.2.

Farida

With the first encounters with Farida when he was thirteen, he feels his first true sexual desire and it is the only time in his life he felt a need to follow certain conventions in order to get a woman. He feels jealousy of his father for being a man, for being able to treat Farida in a way he couldn’t as a child (53). This jealousy can be comparable to the type of jealousy felt when dealing with the Oedipus complex, where the child sees in the father a power he lacks, and that makes the child want to imitate the father to accomplish such power. However, instead of feeling jealousy related to the relationship of the father and the mother, he feels it related to Farida, an unknown Berber woman that causes sensation to him. He met her for three days, and he says of those encounters that they:

> left so deep of an impression on the thirteen year old boy, that the everyday memory refused to stand the haunting memories, and moved them back to the dark memory, the underground, the one we store without knowing it until, as now, the hidden past emerges explosively\(^{46}\) (52).

When he and his father come back home from being in Toledo with Farida and her husband, he feels as if he had betrayed his mother, and he feels ashamed while being in the dinner table in her presence.

The third encounter with Farida is the most meaningful, for it is here where Mario seems to place his true sexual awakening when getting a glimpse of Farida’s tight in her hotel room. He says that she removed him of his childish innocence and brought

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\(^{45}\) \textit{Original}: “ahora no puedes equivocarte. Ya has pasado por lo que es emparejarte. Éramos iguales, del mismo género débil [...] ambos necesitamos el complementario, el dominante, el que nos hace darnos a él o a ella” (34).

\(^{46}\) \textit{Original}: “dejaron una impresión tan profunda en el muchacho de trece años, que la memoria cotidiana se negó a soportar el obsesivo recuerdo, y lo trasladó a la memoria oscura, la soterrada, la que almacenamos sin saberlo hasta que, como ahora, emerge explosivamente el oculto pasado” (52).
him to the sexed world (58), a world so much different from the one in Ras-Marif, a world of sensuality. However, he secluded this memory to a dark place, for he could never stop feeling guilty about ‘betraying’ his mother thinking of another woman, “something like an adultery, betraying mom…”(58).

The Resulting Identity

As a result from these influences, Mario’s identity before his heart attack is that of a repressed man that kept living under the shadow of his mother’s expectations. Since he was little he had access to sensuality and femininity, and there was a lack of a dominant masculine figure that would help him develop a dominant, active male gender role. As part of his efforts to fulfil the expectations of his mother, he got married to a woman he wasn’t in love with, and thus his marriage ended in divorce. He also tried therapies and even solicited sex from prostitutes and dominatrixes in a desperate attempt to prove he was like everyone else, to fit in the social conventions and the family expectations. At the end, he gave up and it is until his sudden heart attack that everything changes.

5.1.2 Reconstruction of Mario’s Identity: Miriam

Due to the impossibility of being what he always wanted in his real life, Mario turns to the world of the unconsciousness to resolve his gender issues. Real life is full of variables that predispose individuals before they even fully understand what they want in life. This makes real life more complex than it should be:

We are complicated and even more: we complicate ourselves. We create agonies for ourselves. What makes us who we are? Do biology, giving us some innate tendencies? Do mothers? Does society? Life itself with all its circumstances? And the role of chance, how important a small event can be!48 (38).

Through this experience Mario becomes aware of the Constructionist idea that identity is constantly constructed, and that it doesn’t have to follow the same path or conventions. He realizes that who he is, is the result of him being passive about his desires, of just obeying and letting others decide for him. He complicated himself: by

47 Original: “algo como un adulterio, traicionando a mamá…” (58).
48 Original: “Somos complicados y aún más: nos complicamos. Nos creamos angustias. ¿Qué nos hace lo que somos? ¿La biología, dándonos unas tendencias innatas? ¿Las madres? ¿La sociedad? ¿La vida misma con todas sus circunstancias? ¿Y cuánto juega el azar, cuánto peso tiene a veces un pequeño acontecimiento!” (38).
trying to satisfy his mother, he forgot to satisfy himself. So, in order to accomplish his desires, he has to go through a process of resocialization which will help him to reconstruct his identity. For this need is that he creates the dreamlike machination of the Outsides, and this section of the analysis focuses on how such machination helps him in his reconstruction.

In the Outsides all variables depend on one thing only: the true desire of the individual. For example, every time Mario needs to move from one place to the other in the city, a trolley passes just in front of him to take him where he needs to go. He does not need to pay for anything in the Outsides, and everything resembles the things he liked the most during his lifetime. Everything is at his disposition at the moment he needs it.

The most important variables that help Mario in this reconstruction are the relative time and space, the absence of society, the influence of his relatives and the therapy he undergoes with the help of Farida. The Outsides becomes the perfect setting for such variables, and in this environment he will have total lucidity to embrace all his past and reconstruct it, a clairvoyance that allows him to foresee what will happen and who he really is. This dreamlike world becomes for Mario a necessary extension of life, and as “[l]ife is always to begin”49 (64), thus he chooses to re-enact and reconstruct himself one last time before dying.

5.1.2.1 Space-Time Importance

Time and space are important for the reconstruction of Mario. The protagonist is sometimes worried that he will not have enough time to complete his transformation, but his personal god and his uncle Juan assure him constantly that in the Outsides, time is not important (189). What is important is the relativity of time and space, how they expand or contract depending on the needs of the protagonist.

The time of the novel is circular: it starts and ends in the same point of the story, though in two different reality planes. The moment when he has the heart attack is the exact moment when the first part of the novel starts, his dreamlike experience in the Outsides. In both the beginning and the end, there is a reference to the lobby of the building where the office of Mario’s cardiologist is, and there is also reference of him slipping. In the beginning this is attributed to the slippery floor: “[t]he floor of the

49 Original: “La vida es siempre empezar” (64).
lobby always slippery; good thing the doorman was there… But then, nothing: an emptiness and then see me in this place”\(^{50}\) (11). Yet, at the end of the novel the reader discovers that it was actually due to the heart attack. Here, it is the doorman who reveals such event: “[s]uddenly, waiting to see if he looked at me to say hello, I noticed something strange, an unsteady move, as if slipping… I went to hold him, and left him lying on the floor to go and ask for help because he had breathing problems”\(^{51}\) (251).

In the novel, there is an inversion of the binary formed by chronological time/psychological time. Circular time is appropriate of psychic realms, for the mind is the world of the subjective and its time is not chronological. Concerning the present analysis, Loyden Sosa argues that this psychical time is “the time of the myths and the eternal return”\(^{52}\) (14). This mythical time corresponds to the Imaginary order prior to the sexual definition of the individuals, found principally in the early childhood (see section 3.1.2.). Being released from restrictions of sexual definition, Mario has the opportunity to re-explore his identity. Time stops being an impediment, and its malleability allows him to meet again with key persons from his childhood, who now help him get rid of the mental schemes that tied him to an inadequate sexual identity. The past and the present are together at the same time.

The way characters are represented physically is naturally ambiguous considering the existing (or non-existing) time dimension in the Outsides. Mario is, at the time of the novel, around 70 years (12, 52); yet, he is portrayed as an agile, younger man (17, 44), and his depiction dressed as a woman makes the reader think of a young, sort of feminine man: “I’m flattered by some greedy male gazing towards me, going through my legs up to my waist all the way to my starched coif, still fearing they will not take me as a woman”\(^{53}\) (193).

Other characters are also presented younger than they would really be (some of them would even have to be dead, for they were adults during Mario’s childhood). For example, Chelo, the bartender in Cafeteria Veracruz, is portrayed as young as she

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\(^{50}\) *Original*: “El pavimento del vestíbulo siempre resbaladizo; menos más que el portero estaba allí… Pero después, nada: un vacío y verme en este lugar” (11)

\(^{51}\) *Original*: “De pronto, yo, que estaba pendiente de si me miraba para saludarle, le noté algo raro, el paso inseguro, como si resbalase… Acudí a sostenerle, le dejé tendido en el suelo para pedir auxilio porque respiraba mal” (251).

\(^{52}\) *Original*: “el tiempo de los mitos y del eterno retorno” (Loyden 14).

\(^{53}\) *Original*: “Me halagan algunas miradas masculinas codiciosas, subiendo piernas arriba por mi talle hasta mi cofia almidonada, aun temiendo que no me confundan con una mujer” (Sampedro 193)
was when Mario used to go there, called Casa Velázquez back then. Mario lets her
know his impression on her looks, to which Chelo answers that “[p]eople do not vary
in the memory… we are as if you would come now to sit there again, in your little
table”54 (15). A most important example is Farida, who was already a mature woman
at the time Mario was 13 years old and yet, she’s presented without noticeable
variation by the protagonist (60, 86).

The space of the narrative also contributes to the possibility of inversion of the
patriarchal system. The landscape becomes ambiguous, reminding those dreamlike
landscapes of surrealist paintings: the eternal presence of a light that seems to come
from nowhere, the absence of the sun and the moon, yet vivid colours painting the
sky. The Outsides is presented as a multipurpose parking lot (Sampedro 15) where
people from the past reappear and where distances and locations are relative to the
needs of the protagonist, as before mentioned. A parking lot is, in itself, a place of
transition, a place to make a pause, to stand still for a while. However, it cannot be a
destination, for its main purpose is to be the rest place or the place to be still before
having to move again. The Outsides become the parking place Mario needs before
dying, a place to finish his unresolved gender and love issues. And as it is a place
created in his own psyche, it will therefore follow its own rules always at disposition
to Mario.

The most important place in the Outsides for the reconstruction of gender becomes
the desert behind the metal door in the clinic, another inversion of the binary
civilization/nature. As said before, deserts are shown in literature as places where the
patriarchal system is absent; in the novel it is even said of them that people from the
desert are closer to the feminine because of their close relation to nature (104);
civilization is not as real or honest as nature is. In this desert of their own, Mario and
Farida not only consume their weddings, but also it becomes the space where they are
alone, with no one else around, with no society, only the immensity (247). She tells
him she has never let anyone else enter that place, her place, only him. In there, both
become sisters, absent of gender and of social forces and restrictions.

54 Original: “[l]as personas en la memoria no varían… Estamos como si viniera usted ahora a sentarse
otra vez allí, en su mesita” (15).
5.1.2.2 Absence of Society

According to Constructionism, society as a whole is a major force that helps in the determination of the identity of a person. Moreover, Feminism and Gender Studies see in society a collective entity that enforces the patriarchal system and therefore impels the subjects to attain the gender role dictated by conventions. Society being so influential in this sense, it is most important that in *El amante lesbiano*, there is an almost total lack of society. In the novel there are few mentions on the social context of Mario, but the few existing remarks let the reader know that it was a determining factor in his life. For example, when he talks about his wife being unfaithful to him, he says that the infidelity didn’t bother him at all, only the gossiping and the mocking from the people (43).

Sampedro presents a dreamlike world without society in which the main character can act and move around without having to think on the opinion of the social forces. Therefore, there are no biases in his redefinition: he can become exactly what he wants this time. The author presents here the possibility of a world without those social forces, how would it be for the individuals to not be scared to be and act as they want, and how this absence make them go on with their desires. In the Outsides society is very limited, and the most it can be seen of it lies in interior places, which is in fact another inversion of the binary public/priv. Most actions occur inside the family house and Farida’s clinic, and the intervention of tertiary characters is minimum. The private (often associated with the feminine) is given more relevance, and this helps to give the sense of absence of society, of public life often associated with the masculine. In this private realm the different influences Mario will have can do so without external interventions, and so the reconstruction is more accomplishable.

5.1.2.3 Influences in the Reconstruction

The process of reconstruction of identity needs the presence of significant others to guide and help the individual. Mario’s reconstruction is possible thanks to such influences from his family members, who help him to disintegrate the limits that were raised for him since childhood and that made him arrive to an identity that wasn’t fit for him. The order in which these persons appear is relevant on the process of definition and the way the inversion of the binary system is being held. Also, some of
them appear more as living examples of other possibilities of gender and love (the cases of his auntie Luisa and his father), whereas his uncle Juan and his personal god have more the role of mentors in his path to reconstruction.

The Mother

The first one to appear to Mario is his mother. This first reencounter has mainly two functions in the reconstruction of Mario’s gender identity: she makes him be aware one more time of his problem of gender identification and she makes him feel one more time that repressed desire of possession of the mother. Her coming back takes Mario again to the Imaginary order previous to the establishment of the sexual identity, where the mother is the principal being and desire in the life of a child. The resentment he felt towards her after his marriage disappears as soon as he sees her sitting in the living room of the family house, and as soon as he sees her, he kneels and goes back to being like a child embracing his mother:

“It is true: mom smiles at me from her chair!... As an impulse I come to her and fall on my knees to embrace her in her seat, mi chest against hers, my tears on her cheeks, mi body shaking […] You’re still a child. My little boy!”55 (21).

As she is the first one to appear to Mario, the impression she causes is stronger compared to the other appearing relatives. This is to be expected because his mother is his true object of desire. And she is not only the first but also the last one to appear to Mario before The Experience ends (see section 5.1). In the last sex scene with Farida, when she turns Mario sees she looks exactly like the portrait of his mother: “[s]uddenly she turns her neck and is the living portrait of my mom, the three-quarters profile, now on top of me as I dreamed as a child before the sacred mihrab”56 (250). This enhances the sense of a circular time, for the first apparition of the mother is precisely the portrait, just in the first pages of the novel (19).

The relationship he has with his mother in the Outsides seems very sexual. He starts behaving as he used to do when he was a child, but now he is a 70-year-old man reaching ecstasy when he places himself between his mother’s thighs (20). The Imaginary order is a place where the desire of the mother is seen as innocent only due to the assumed innocence of the child. These approaches to the maternal figure in

55 Original: “¡Es verdad: mama me sonríe desde su sillón!... En un impulso llego a ella y caigo de rodillas para abrazarla en su asiento, mi pecho contra el suyo, mis lágrimas en su mejilla, mi cuerpo estremecido […] Sigues siendo un niño. ¡Mi niñito!” (21).
56 Original: “De pronto ella gira el cuello y es el vivo retrato de mamá, el perfil a tres cuartos, ahora sobre mí como soñé de niño ante el mihrab sagrado” (250).
such a natural and open way release him from the tension of not being able to get hold of her, and instead of see her as unapproachable as he used to in his adult life, he now sees her presence as ever changing but ever accessible.

Auntie Luisa

The second person to appear to Mario is his auntie Luisa when he goes to Ras-Marif to see if he can find her. With this encounter he realizes that his presence in the Outsides is for him to work on his identity problem. From Luisa he hears for the first time that his condition is that of submission, the same as his father (34). She makes him realize for the first time that what he needs is a complementary dominant, someone that allows him to act as the passive one he desires to be. Mario passed through a life of mistakes trying to please his mother, but it is until now, until this reenounter that he begins to understand that the problem is not what he does, but what he does not do.

Thanks to his visit to Luisa, he starts to break free from conventions. She opens his eyes to show him the most basic lessons: “Happiness… what is that? To feel alive; that’s the important! Or do you not understand now something so fundamental? Find out: among two there is always one who kisses and one who puts his face…”  

What he thought was prove of his masculinity (the love and attraction he always felt for Luisa), she helps him understand that it was simple identification with someone of his same gender: submissive. This helps with the dismantling of the old identity, and the new one begins to be forged.

Luisa also functions as an example of submission for Mario. He discovers that the supposedly bad marriage of his aunt actually made her really happy, and later he even finds out through his uncle Juan that her husband, abusing of her, also found happiness next to Luisa. After she died, Juan tells to Mario what happened to her husband:

“Days after the funeral of Luisa he went alone to the graveyard, he stood in front of the mound where the ordered memorial stone wasn’t yet placed, he put his service gun in his mouth and he shot himself. Need to be a victim? Feeling of devastation? Perhaps to discover

Original: “Felicidad... ¿qué es eso? ¡Para sentirnos vivos; lo importante! ¿O es que tampoco ahora comprendes algo tan fundamental? Entérate: entre dos siempre hay uno que besa y otro que pone la cara...” (34).
that he had loved her in his own way, without noticing it? Love has many incarnations!\(^58\) (233).

Discovering this other possibilities of love, even when they were socially reproachable, helps Mario in his breakthrough of what love and gender are really about.

**Uncle Juan**

The third encounter of Mario is with his uncle Juan. He is one of the characters that help the protagonist the most. Unlike his other relatives, Juan appears to him twice, the second time almost at the end when Mario has already become Miriam. Mainly what Juan accomplishes with Mario is to break with the more general prejudices he has live with throughout his adulthood. He teaches his nephew that “life is to breath and to enjoy it”\(^59\) (41) and not all the chimeras society made him believe were important. Life is not made out of words but of creation and destruction (40), of experiences and sensations.

What the protagonist recalls of his uncle is that he wasn’t an interesting or strong person, quite the contrary. In the Outsides he learns his uncle was in fact an adventurer, an intrepid man that opened his way through the Moroccan Empire (38). This gives him a certain authority that enables him to be trusted as messenger and as guide. His task is to reveal and clarify the lives of Mario’s mother, Luisa and even Farida, using such lives as examples for Mario to learn from them. He reveals how much Luisa loved being completely dominated by her husband; how Farida was raped and thus became enraged with men; and most important, how his mother’s expectations of Mario were not out of disappointment, but out of her own personal identity issues.

**Mario’s Personal God**

After Juan, Mario has a reencounter with God, or more likely, with his own personal god:

> I am god. Your own, of course; your god, without a capital letter. That’s why I present myself as you see me, according to your own style. If I were the official God you wouldn’t see me or,

\(^{58}\) *Original*: “Días después del entierro de Luisa acudió solo al cementerio, se plantó frente al montón de tierra donde aún no había podido colocarse la lápida encargada, se metió en la boca su revólver de reglamento y se disparó un tiro. ¿Necesidad de víctima? ¿Sensación de acabamiento? ¿Acaso descubrir que había amado a su manera, sin saberlo? ¡El amor tiene tantas encarnaciones!” (233).

\(^{59}\) *Original*: “Vivir es respirar y disfrutarlo” (41).
if anything, I would appear in the conventional manner: placed in clouds, with a triangle behind the head and long white beard…⁶⁰ (45).

This is a clear example of the importance of little narratives, where the relative becomes the most important for the individual. This god of Mario presents himself for the first time in the shape of a man (45); later, he becomes a goddess when the protagonist starts to discover his true gender identity:

“Here you have me and more comfortable than the first time, for now I can present myself as I truly am, your goddess […] Before the installed superstitions from your childhood still bewildered you and you imagined me as a male […] Now you see clearer and you contemplate your deepest truth, the ultimate: your personal god is a goddess”⁶¹ (103).

This deconstruction of god is a clear example of Sampedro’s purpose when using little narratives: everything is relative. And everything follows human desire. Mario’s desire of being a woman reshapes his whole life, god included, and this way he finally finds a guide in such goddess, someone who sees him as the individual he is and not as just part of a society or a human kind.

She becomes like a higher order consciousness for him, which helps him decide to get through with a total transformation. But being a personal goddess, she cannot tell Mario anything but what is available to the protagonist: she doesn’t know the heart or the mind of Farida, but she helps Mario to understand her behaviour and her words. When the protagonist falls in love with Farida, the goddess abides her place under his new object of desire, and she becomes also a worshiper of the Berber woman. Farida is, then, the major guide for Mario, the only supreme being he can conceive.

Farida

Farida is the fourth to appear to Mario. She is the most concrete of all the persons he meets with, the only one whose presence is constant and who seems to be corporeal in the sense that she doesn’t just ‘appear’ and ‘disappear’ throughout the novel. Her role will be double and definite for Mario: she will become his therapist and guide to discovering and embracing his new genuine sexual identity; but moreover, she will become the double of his mother, the dominant femina he always

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⁶⁰ Original: “soy dios. El tuyo, por supuesto; tu dios, sin mayúscula. Pore so me presento como me ves, según tu estilo. Si yo fuese el Dios official no me verías o, si acaso, me aparecería en la forma convencional: colocado entre nubes, con un triángulo detrás de la cabeza y larga barba blanca…” (45).

⁶¹ Original: “Aquí me tienes y aún más a gusto que la primera vez, porque ahora ya puedo presentarme como en verdad soy, tu diosa […] Antes todavía te ofuscaban las supersticiones que te inculcaron en la infancia y me imaginabas macho […] Ahora ves más claro y contemblas tu verdad más honda, la última: tu dios personal es diosa” (103).
wished to dominate him. The relationship with Farida will be analyzed further in section 5.1.2.5.

The Father

Finally, Mario also reunites with his father, whom he meets just after the first time he is with Farida in the Outsides. This reencounter brings the most surprising revelation: the affair of his father with a Persian man, Zadar. The figure of the Father is completely deconstructed here, depicted as a submissive, almost womanly. But this, instead of shocking Mario in a bad way, it makes him feel less a stranger with his gender identity, and it allows him to break with the walls of memory and convention that had him prisoner in a reality alien to him: “[a]ll that deplorable biography comes through my memory and falls apart, like the walls of Jericho in dust of oblivion, replaced by the glow of my new city, in which my father lives, the Odalisque”\(^{62}\) (81).

With this encounter he finally dismantles the previous identity, all the previous conventions embedded in his being. By doing so, he becomes ready for his process of redefinition, of reconstruction of identity. He now takes his father as his role-model, while his mother becomes only an object of possession that he will obtain at the end through Farida.

5.1.2.4 Reconstruction and Possession of the Mother

Now the process of reconstruction of Mario’s identity will be analyzed, having as starting point the moment of dismantling with conventions, just after he reencounters his father. When the protagonist begins to understand that he has been following a path outside his own desires and that he needs to finally become who he always wanted to be, the first thing that comes to his mind is the need of a guide, a master (42, 47). The new arrival of Farida provides this guide, who conveniently for Mario (or more likely as part of his machination) has become a psychiatrist and is an expert in Ipsotherapy. Farida describes this brand of psychology as helping people to live their lives according to their authentic being. Unlike traditional psychiatry, Farida

\(^{62}\) Original: “[t]oda esa deplorable biografía pasa por mi memoria y se desploma, como las murallas de Jericó, en polvo de olvido, reemplazada por el resplandor de mi ciudad nueva, la que habita mi padre, la Odalisca” (81).
explains to Mario that Ipsotherapy doesn’t see the patient as with a ‘sickness’ or a ‘perversion’.

This alternative to psychiatry takes the ‘problematic’ individual and show him/her that the apparent sickness is false, and so it helps them to develop their natural, individual instincts without concerning the cultural restrictions: “that is the Ipsotherapy. To teach how to fly with the owned wings, the natural ones prohibited by the system, after weaning the false ones, that didn’t allowed to fly”\(^{63}\) (93).

Concerning gender, Farida also teaches Mario about the distinction between sex, gender and sexual preference. Sex relates to the body anatomy, gender to a predisposition from the brain, and preference to whether the person is attracted to men and/or women (142-143). Finally, in Farida’s diagram there is also a distinction about the preference of the person whether they are dominant or submissive, thus having as a result 16 final possibilities compared to the single one admitted by the patriarchal binary system where the man is dominant with the submissive woman. It seems that Sampedro presents here, not an inversion, but a total deconstruction of the gender system, where all these 16 and more possibilities are presented not only as possible, but also as natural. With this, Mario finally discovers his true identity: “[m]y sex is masculine, but my gender is feminine, attracted to women and, to conclude, submissive. So I turn out to be lesbian”\(^{64}\) (144).

Farida proposes Mario to follow a ‘treatment’ of Ipsotherapy under her surveillance, which will not only reconstruct his gender identity, but will also erase all the prejudices and conventionalities left from his past life. This treatment resembles the process of resocialization discussed by Berger and Luckmann (section 3.1.3 page). It has the guidance from persons that help establish a strong affective identification resembling childhood, the reencounter with Mario’s relatives and with Farida herself; and there is a social base functioning as a ‘laboratory’ (Berger and Luckmann, 157), which is the clinic of Farida. Moreover, it uses habitualization in order for Mario to get used to his true gender identity. Farida makes Mario wear female clothes, take sewing lessons, tie his ankles so he start walking in smaller, feminine steps. All these lessons, together with the treatment from the personnel from the clinic who treat him as female, help him embrace easier his new gender identity.

\(^{63}\) *Original*: “eso es la Ipsoterapia. Enseñar a volar con las alas propias, las naturales prohibidas por el sistema, después de desacostumbrar a las postizas, que no permitían alzar el vuelo” (93).

\(^{64}\) *Original*: “Mi sexo es masculine, pero mi género es femenino, atraído hacia las mujeres y, para concluir, sumiso. Así es que resulto lesbiana” (144).
Mario is also treated sometimes as a child, particularly by Farida. Being in a sort of Imaginary order, this allows the individual to give more relevance to what his loved ones have to say than, for example, society, which is in fact absent. Mario’s machination is structured in such sense, for although he mentions the time of the story as if it was just happening next to his visit to the doctor, in an actual real time, there are many elements from his past that make him resemble more vividly such years: post-cards from his childhood, the magazines he used to read, his mother’s shoes, the trolley that worked when he was young, etcetera.

Some other times Mario is objectified and is punished and tortured by Farida, thus having an inversion of the binary subject/object where the usual object is the woman: “Yet I am hers, reduced to an object, I am not of my own but hers. The pain of the punishment allows me to offer her a present, as she takes from me what I can give her” (Sampedro 177-178). His whole identification as submissive deals with this desire to be the object, and he even enjoys when, in the clinic, other patients don’t realize he’s a man dressed as a woman and see him with lust in their eyes.

With the help and examples from his relatives, his goddess and Farida, he’s able to dismantle the old identity and prejudices that keep him from becoming Miriam, his true gender identity. The final result is a complete inversion of the conventional binaries male/female and dominant/submissive. By being the male placed in the submissive role, it is then learned that the binary concerning the dominant and the submissive does not have to be a situation of unfairness:

> When the submissive is faced with the strong, daring him to degrade him and the strong reacts mistreating and humiliating, he does precisely what the submissive desires. That is he obeys him, he becomes in the instrument of the former, even though he believes to be dominating…” (69).

In the novel there appears the option of the androgyny, the gazelle heart man, which is treated as the ideal couple. Both Mario and his father are androgynous in the sense that they combine the qualities of both sexes. In the case of the protagonist, the final result is becoming into Miriam, a lesbianized reinterpretation of his sexual and preference identities: she is not a transvestite, but a woman with a biological masculine body:

65 *Original*: “Aún así soy suya, reducida a objeto, no soy mi dueña sino ella. El dolor del castigo me permite ofrecerle un presente, al tomar de mí lo que puedo darle” (177-178).

66 *Original*: “Cuando el sumiso se encara con el fuerte, retándole a que le degrade y el fuerte reacciona maltratando y humillando, hace precisamente lo que desea el sumiso. Es decir le obedece, se convierte en su instrumento, aunque crea estar dominando…” (69).
Learn to mentalize in a lesbian way these excrescences that hang on you. Accept your hypertrophied clitoris, greater than the common in women. Your ovaries are fallen, a prolapse that hang outside. Well then, this is why your vulva and your vagina lie back, confused with the anus, as in the cloaca of birds. Anatomic abnormalities that don’t erase your feminine mentality, neither your gender as active and convinced lesbian\(^\text{67}\) (163).

This is also why in the novel there are many instances where the grammatical gender referring to Mario changes from the masculine to the feminine. Unlike English, the Spanish language allows such ambiguities\(^\text{68}\), which become more common in *El amante lesbiano* after the reconstruction of Mario into Miriam.

But becoming Miriam is not the only ultimate desire Mario holds. Perhaps even more important is his desire of being possessed by his mother, a desire that comes from his childhood and that he could never accomplish due to his mother’s desire of him being the dominant. This desire of possession is not only sexual, but a wider desire that kept him living his life trying to please his mother. And still, he could never accomplish this, main reason for his dreamlike resolution in the Outsides. Thus, to validate this possession by the mother, to make it more plausible even in this subjective, unconscious world, he takes Farida back from his dark memory and turns her into a sort of alter ego of his own mother with the qualities he needed. Therefore, Farida share many characteristics with the protagonist’s mother: both like smoking and he thinks they look good doing it (Sampedro 62); both had a strong character (96); both say ‘Disgorge!’ as an order to confess and talk (115) and both tell him he has an ‘upturned ass’ (183).

At the end, Mario is successful in reconstructing his identity as submissive, lesbian Miriam. As said before, Sampedro is not interested in claiming men or women are unfair by being dominant or submissive. His approach is not Feminist in this sense, although he makes use of many of the ideas of such theory. His real purpose is to show the importance of liberty and relativity, to let the individual be free. Each one, male or female, decides if they are dominant or submissive, as Mario willingly decides to be submissive. Constructionism becomes an essential theory for understanding the importance of liberty for the individual, and to apprehend the

\(^{67}\) Original: “Aprende a mentalizar lesbianamente esas excrecencias que te cuelgan. Acepta tu clítoris hipertrofiado, mayor que el corriente en las mujeres. Tienes los ovarios caídos, un prolapso, que te cuelgan al exterior. Pues bueno, por eso tu vulva y tu vagina están situadas hacia atrás, confundidas con el ano, como en la cloaca de las aves. Anomalías anatómicas, que no borran tu mentalidad femenina, ni tu género de lesbiana activa y convencida” (163).

\(^{68}\) Just to set an example: “¡Me siento tan confuso [masculine gender] y a la vez tan exaltada [feminine gender]!” Translation: “I feel so confused yet exalted!” (167).
possibility of reconstruction of identity, no matter how embedded this one is in an individual, or at what moment of life this reconstructions is decided upon.

5.2 Reconstruction of the Myth: Mario and Farida’s counter-myth

This part of the work will analyze the way love is presented in *El amante lesbiano* as a counter-myth of the convention of Romantic Love. The theories to be used are the Construction of myths and the theory of Northrop Frye concerning the demonic and mythical modulations. This will show how love is in fact a relative concept, a macro-frame for an infinity of little love narratives as the one between Mario and Farida. This is then a counter-myth, opposing directly to the conventions. By the protagonist rejecting the imposed gender and changing in order to be loved by Farida, is an indirect rejection to the conventions raised by the Myth concerning love. Apart from this, the way their love grows, is also presented as in opposition to the convention of what romance is supposed to be.

*El amante lesbiano* also focuses in great extent on the love between Mario and Farida. Their relationship begins and develops in accordance to some of the most important elements of the Myth of Romantic Love previously presented (see section 2.3). For example, in their relation there are several separations that increase the desire in both Mario and Farida (Sampedro 64); besides, although their sexuality is very open, Farida hides her body from his sight, which also increases desire (65).

However, love is also deconstructed, and so demythified. Just as with gender and sex all options are plausible and free to happen; in the Outsides love is also free of conventions and strains. In *El amante lesbiano* “all and any love is Love when a real passion legitimizes it, curd into the marrow of the lovers” (80). There are several images that conventionally would be close to what Frye denominated the demonic world (see section 3.2.2); but in *El amante lesbiano*, such images are presented as idyllic and mythical, even as romantic and growing love between Mario and Farida. On the other side, the image of marriage, which would conventionally fit in what Romantic Love is, is presented in Sampedro’s novel as undesirable and erroneous. The analysis shall start with this demonically modulated image.

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69 For this section the relationship to be taken into consideration is only between Mario and Farida, for it is already understood that this implies also his feelings towards his mother.

70 *Original*: “todo y cualquier amor es Amor cuando lo legitima una pasión auténtica, cuajada en el tuétano de los amantes”(80).
5.2.1 Demonic Modulation of Marriage

In *El amante lesbiano* there are some images that resemble paradisiacal elements, conventionalities of what is Romantic that nonetheless are presented in a different shade. Sampedro presents such elements as undesired and even as *infernal* for they constrain the individuals to options considered as desirable for everyone but in reality, just one of many more options that are considered as ‘correct’ by the system. For example, Ras-Marif, the beach where Mario would spend time with his auntie Luisa, is presented as an *earthly paradise*, and Luisa is seen as *Eve* in such place (24). However, this paradise was nothing but a prison to her, “an exile; life imprisonment”\(^{71}\) (37).

Traditional marriage is one image demonically modulated in the novel; that is, is presented as undesired, as belonging to a demonic world that is against the individual. The idea of traditional marriage follows the conventions of the Myth of Romantic Love, for it is suppose to be a result of such Myth (see section 2.3). Marriage would then be, according to this, the official consummation of love in front of society, conventionally only possible between a man and a woman who believe they are meant for each other.

However, for Mario and Farida marriage is not the fulfilment or concretization of love, but an obligation they are forced to follow in order to fit in the social order they live in. In the case of Mario, his marriage was mainly for obedience to his mother, and with the belief that this would ‘correct him’. Divorce, on the other hand, became a liberation:

“My mother was wrong. She thought that would take me to the ‘right track’, the one she wanted, but it backfired. I wonder if another woman would had been better, but mine, my way of being a man didn’t turn her on… We consulted a psychologist, a psychiatrist; then my mother, with her fixed idea, connected with a therapist and I had some sessions… They were not bad but at this poing my wife said enough, she hooked up with another and we ended in divorce… What a liberation it was for me!”\(^{72}\) (207).

In the novel there is no information about his wife, because the couple is not important in that marriage. It became a prison, a torture that he had to undergo for

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\(^{71}\) *Original*: “un destierro; cadena perpetua” (37).

\(^{72}\) *Original*: “Mi madre se equivocó. Creyó que eso me llevaría al ‘buen camino’, al que ella quería, pero resultó contraproducente. No sé si con otra mujer hubiera ido mejor, pero a la mía, mi manera de ser hombre no la ponía en marcha… Consultamos a un psicólogo, a un psiquiatra; luego mi madre, con su idea fija, conectó con una terapista y tuve unas sesiones… No iban mal pero ahí mi mujer dijo basta, se enrolló con otro y acabamos en el divorcio… ¡Qué liberación fue para mí!” (207).
many years in his life. The union, usually seen as sacred and as an image of balance and stability is here a chain imprisoning, not just the protagonist but also the wife herself. She is unfaithful, yet she cannot be blamed for he agreed in the marriage for the wrong reasons.

As with Farida, marriage was a way of protection against men. Her experience with rape made her angry and seeking for revenge towards men, reason why she learned the arts of being a dominatrix. However, she had to marry a man in order to feel protected from the social pressure, as a way to keep them away from her. For this, she chooses a professor she had in University, who agreed to marry her without love:

“I got married when, disenchanted of my tyrannical grandfather, my parents died in a short time. One of my professors, and older man, was sweet, good, different; to marry him protected me against the rest. Soon he accepted to sleep separated y to have less nightly visits, already few due to his age” (209-210).

Her marriage doesn’t end in divorce, but it is a marriage not based on love, so it is fake, almost humiliating considering she had to sleep with a man she didn’t love.

The different marriages in *El amante lesbiano* fail and become a sort of prison for the characters. Mario’s parents got married for the wrong reasons also, and so their marriage is not the image of happiness it is suppose to be. His mother seems to love his father more to practice her liking for domination than true love itself, and so she grows apart from the family when she sees Mario cannot be the dominant man she wanted him to be (42). On the other hand, Mario’s father was also in the marriage just as a façade, waiting for his true love:

“your mother was who won me over because I guessed she was dominant. I decided to give myself to a Great Lady while a Great Lord appeared, even knowing this would cost to perform, in addition to my official duties, the role of husband and father” (71).

Marriage as a traditional institution is portrayed in *El amante lesbiano* as a deception, and not as the paradise on earth that is usually expected to be. The critique to marriage is not straight: there are no direct judgements towards this institution on the part of any character. And also, it is important to remember that Luisa’s marriage,

73 It was said in the evolution of the Myth that the bourgoise introduced the happy ending and marriage in the Myth of Romantic Love as a way to portray the ideal of social stability. See section 2.2.
74 Original: “Me casé cuando, desencantada ya de mi tiránico abuelo, murieron mis padres en poco tiempo. Uno de mis profesores, ya mayor, era dulce, bueno, diferente; casarme con él me protegía contra el resto. Pronto aceptó dormir separados y espaciar sus visitas nocturnas, tampoco muy insistentes por su edad” (209-210).
75 Original: “tu madre fue quien me conquistó porque la adiviné dominadora. Resolví entregarme a una Gran Señora mientras aparecía mi Gran Señor, aun sabiendo que aquello tendría el coste de desempeñar, además de mis funciones oficiales, el papel de marido y el de padre” (71).
although not the most conventional, is presented as successful in having a couple that loved each other (in their own way). This demonic modulation of marriage critiques how putting limits on love pushes people to marriage just to follow conventions or under false or weak pretenses, making them jeopardize their freedom.

5.2.2 Mythical Modulation in El amante lesbiano

In this section the images that serve for mythical modulation are analyzed. In El amante lesbiano love is constantly demythified by the use of images that oppose to the Myth of Romantic Love, but that are nonetheless depicting the existing love between Mario and Farida. The use of these images is a mythical modulation in the narrative: the otherwise demonic is presented as mythical, as completely desired (see section 3.2.2). Again, to explain this type of modulation, the example of Luisa is clarifying. It was said before that Ras-Marif, although it was depicted as a paradise in earth, for her it was like a prison. To get out of such prison she gets involved in a marriage with a man that treats her badly and humiliates her: “[n]ot only did he abuse his wife in their house, but he constantly humiliated her in public, especially in front of his friends, in orgies in which he made her provide the lowest services”76 (128-129). For Luisa this was her heaven, because being herself a submissive woman, being humiliated and dominated in such way was the epitome of love for her.

Mario and Farida, having a relation where dominance and submission are of utmost importance, their love is demonstrated in the least conventional forms. This also responds to the effort of Farida to break with Mario’s prejudices and limitations. These demonstrations of love can be seen through three types of images according to Frye’s theory: images of the Civilization world, images of the human world and images of the divine world. These images create their context, where they divinize their love and raise it from an otherwise perversion to a counter-myth of romantic love. This answered once more to the importance of little narratives, of the relative as true and legitimate in contrast to the convention. This counter-myth is a perspective, a little narrative of how love could also be expressed and lived apart from the already known way preached by the Myth of Romantic Love.

76 Original: “No sólo maltrataba a su mujer en la casa, sino que la humillaba constantemente en público, sobre todo ante los amigotes de su tertulia, en orgías en las que la sometía a prestar los servicios más bajos” (128-129).
Images of the Civilization World

The images of the Civilization world are correlates to the love of Mario and Farida. They become perfect settings that divinize their love and help with the process of redefinition of the protagonist. Frye illustrates a demonic world with deserts and waste land, a place with prisons and dungeons, with engines of torture and the like (Frye 150). All these elements are present in *El amante lesbiano*, but they become dear to the characters. Love is shown in the Outsides in the least conventional spaces. The treatment room in the clinic, full with torture and sadomasochism instruments is the perfect setting for love scenes worth of being envied (Sampedro 148). Also, Farida considers important to have a sort of ‘baptism’ to give Mario his new name, Miriam, and this important event takes place in her toilet room, using as baptismal pile a bidet (214).

There are also references to Holy places, compared to certain locations in the Outsides, a deconstruction of the religious meaning of such places, taken here to express the devotion of Mario’s love to Farida. For example, there is in the clinic a metal door that leads to a desert where Farida has a tent to live there as her tribe used to live. For this door only her has a key, and so when Mario misses her presence he goes and cries on the door just like believers go and pray in the Wailing Wall:

“at the bottom, next to the stairs, I see that little metal door, the escape door to the desert, to the tent. I run there, I caress it, I slide next to it, sitting on the floor, my back against the metal barrier. I imagine that this is how the faithful go to console themselves to Jerusalem, near the Wailing Wall”77 (195).

Also, it is remarkable that the place where Mario and Farida consume their wedding is precisely that desert, the wasteland that is savage, uncivilized, and uncommon for a honeymoon. In their relative world, their little narrative, this is the optimal place, the best scenario in which they can finally love according to their true gender, without the presence of society, but not hiding in darkness, but in broad daylight (247).

Images of the Human World

The references to the human world are those related to the attributes given to humans in the narrative and also concerning their behaviour, in this case towards love. In *El

77 Original: “al fondo, junto a la escalera, veo esa puertecita metálica, la escapada al desierto, a la jaima. Corro allí, la acaricio, resbalo junto a ella hasta quedar sentada en el suelo, la espalda contra la barrera de metal. Imagino que así van a consolarse en Jerusalén los creyentes junto al muro de las lamentaciones” (195).
amante lesbiano, what is thought as degrading is in fact presented as more vivid and thus gratifying than what is conventional. This delicious degradation becomes the epitome of intense life, of an existence whose taste is strong enough to be lived. In the case of Mario, degradation reaches its peak when Farida penetrates him, just as men penetrated women. This is the last step of degradation, and at the same time, it marks the point where he is the closest to Farida: “[t]he last step towards degradation among your gender; the highest in your ascent towards femininity and towards me. You will feel me inside of you as the female feels the male”78 (239).

Some transitions in his gender reconstruction are given a religious status by the protagonist: tasks are being ritualized and objects are given the status of sacred relics. There is a recurrent use of images of Catholic rituals in order to perform the newly created rituals for his transformation. For example, after Farida gives him a pair of woman’s tights, he lives the process of wearing them as follows:

I get naked slowly, I wear the robe of Scheherazade, with its novice whiteness barely covering my sex. Sitting, reverent, I take the tights from over the couch, with the reverence I saw the priest dressing himself in the sacristy when it was my turn to help in the mass. I kiss one and the other, like he used to kiss the stole, before I wear them and one after the other, the tights again wake the sensuality and excitement of the previous time79 (151).

When he goes a step further to start wearing a complete woman’s outfit, he considers himself to be just a novice, and so chooses a simple tunic (158). These acts of transvestism lose any trace of perversion this way, by making them sublime.

He goes through two baptisms that constitute him as part of the new world he’s entering with Farida. Having a bidet as baptismal pile, he receives the consecration first with water, and then with Farida’s own urine. This otherwise humiliating scene, with Mario in between the bidet and Farida’s anus, receiving the stream of urine is heightened to the place of Christian sacraments, essential pillars for approaching God, in this case Farida, Mario’s true, ultimate goddess.

Another sacrament that is present is marriage. This marriage between Mario and Farida resembles the demonic parody of marriage described by Frye, where the two beings usually are committing incest or present a homosexual, forbidden couple (Frye

78 Original: “El ultimo escalón hacia la degradación entre los tuyos; el más alto en tu ascenso hacia tu femineidad y hacia mí. Me sentirás dentro de ti como la hembra siente al macho” (239).
79 Original: “Me desnudo despacio, me visto la túnica de Scheherazade, con su blancura de neófito hasta cubrir apenas mi sexo. Sentado, reverente, cojo las medias de encima de la camilla, con la unción con que yo veía al cura vestirse en la sacristía cuando me tocaba el turno de ayudar a misa. Beso una y otra, como él besaba la estola, antes de ponérmelas y una tras otra, las medias vuelven a despertarme la sensualidad y la emoción de la vez anterior” (151).
149). But in Sampedro’s novel there is no such thing as ‘the forbidden’, and their marriage is full of love, virginity and romanticism (Sampedro 240). Besides, a symbolical rape is part of the honeymoon, where Mario is given the opportunity to feel himself torn and penetrated as virgins are (241).

Degradation differs from the Myth of Romantic Love in many senses. For example, in the Myth it was implied that narcissism is a major force that keeps the lovers together: the idealization of the other keeps the love flame going, it allows to define the person for what he/she has in the other loved one. However, in *El amante lesbiano* humiliation and submission become the way to maintain and increase love. Being in the lowest position, becoming a slave to Farida, ensures Mario his position with her, even while being in total submission (190).

This counter-myth of Romantic Love proposes that love embraces all possibilities, sexual and non-sexual. The androgyny becomes an ideal lover, and incest becomes the perfect image of mutual, balanced love:

“I am yours [masculine grammatical gender] and yours [feminine grammatical gender]; I love you as you desire me and as you are, we both the two things, androgy nous. And besides, for being sisters, incestuous: we shall be everything”80 (248).

The climax of the novel and of Mario’s love story comes when, by being possessed and possessing Farida, she is transformed into his mother, the true love of his life as a child. This end can be compared to the typical ending of the Myth, where death takes the lovers so they can finally be together. The difference here resides that although this was impossible love, and it was also because of social pressures, it was a love between a son and his mother, a one-way love between a man with a gender identity problem and his idealization, not of his mother, but of the impossible possession of her:

‘Mom! Yes!’ claim my lips, just as my body explodes, it disintegrates all and shaking I empty myself in my lover, I’m empty in pain, the violent light stabs me and, blinding me with its fire, it buries me in the absolute night”81 (250).

The human possibilities of love are so vast, and by modulating the otherwise demonic, Sampedro accomplishes to create an unusual, yet believable portrait of love.

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80 Original: “Soy tuyo y tuya; te amo como me deseas y como eres, ambos las dos cosas, andróginos. Y además, por hermanas, incestuosas: seremos todo”

81 Original: “¡Mamá! ¡Sí!” claman mis labios, justo cuando mi cuerpo estalla, se disintegra todo y a sacudidas me vacío en mi amante, me vacío en dolor, me acuchilla la luz violentísima que, al cegarme con su incendio, me sepulta en la noche absoluta” (250).
Images of the Divine World

*El amante lesbiano* is full with images of the divine world. Mario’s love for his mother is presented as divine, as if she was a goddess whose presence reigns over Mario from his childhood until his reencounter with Farida in the Outsides. Mario describes her portrait in the house as follows: “she was our mihrab of the mosques, the guiding sacred niche of the faithful towards Mecca. In it, from her cloud of gauze around her shoulders, mom was the ideal, my benevolent magician, my shining sun”

(19). He continually acts like a servant praising a goddess when it concerns the matters related to his mother, like her portrait or her belongings.

Another figure that is being divinized is Farida. From the first encounter he had with her as a child he took her thigh as his “only and true god”

(57), and later in the Outsides she becomes his goddess, his gospel and his master. However, this goddess presents features that are contrary to what would be a mythical divine being. She is presented almost as a dominatrix, a dictatorship in charge of Mario’s transformation. She is the jailor and he’s the prisoner, but this to him means freedom, for he is hers in captivity (84). Moreover, both humiliation and threatening become a way to show love, a way to correct the way of Mario with toughness (94). By ordering him and telling him what to do, Mario feels an absolute freedom while being at her orders (98). Frye points that in the Demonic world “fate is administered by a set of remote invisible gods […] They demand sacrifices, punish presumption, and enforce obedience to natural and moral law as an end in itself” (Frye 147). Farida is somehow like these gods, but she is modulated into a more mythical world, because although she demands such sacrifices, she does this for love, because she cares of Mario. And the happiness of the protagonist is translated into being treated in such a way by Farida, while her happiness is to dominate him as so, to revenge her rape on the person she now loves. She is a revengeful goddess, angry and cruel at the time she is kind and tender.

This love grows steady from hate and love, physical pain and emotional exaltation. The image of the lovers suffering for not being able to be together is irrelevant in *El amante lesbiano*. Here, the counter myth, the little narrative is the lovers who suffer being together, because suffering makes their union stronger. Physical pain and

82 *Original*: “fue nuestro mihrab de las mezquitas, el nicho sagrado orientador de los creyentes hacia La Meca. En él, desde su nube de gasa en torno a los hombros, mamá era el ideal, mi maga bienhechora, mi sol resplandeciente” (19).

83 *Original*: “Me retiré llevándome aquel muslo erigido en mi dios único y verdadero” (57).
humiliation ensure them their fidelity and dedication to each other. Being Farida’s toy, her carpet to put her foot upon, her property, Mario feels certain about her love for him. And he, letting himself be punished, humiliated and beaten by her in total submission makes Farida trust in him, having shown that no matter how hard she shall push, he will still be devoted to his goddess.

The conception of paradise and love is also different in *El amante lesbiano*, relative to this love story. Mario learns that true paradise “requires to burn, to suffer, to embrace the offered suffering, the shared pain”\(^{84}\) (99). However, this suffering is different than the one pertaining the Myth of Romantic Love, for here pain doesn’t relate to the impossibility of love, but to pain itself, particularly psychological and physical pain. Punishment becomes necessary; it leads to possession and increases love. Mario and Farida don’t want to suffer, for they have suffered enough in life. But the pain they overcome through the novel is to become the perfect dough for the other, to become not the one entity the Myth claims, but equals, both up and down, both sisters and lovers.

\(^{84}\) *Original*: “exige arder, padecer, abrazar el sufrimiento ofrecido, el dolor compartido” (99).
6. Conclusions

This thesis has analyzed the novel of José Luis Sampedro, *El amante lesbiano*, having as main purpose to show how the Western Myth of Romantic Love is becoming obsolete and is being deconstructed by giving more importance to little narratives in the shape of counter-myths. As a starting point we presented an overview of the Myth itself, in order to understand its origins and evolution until our current era. Apart from this, a Theoretical and Methodological background were presented, which comprised Constructionist, Feminist and Gender Studies theories. Finally, the analysis showed how the novel is about freeing the individual, about giving the subject an opportunity to become what he truly desires, even if it has to be through a machination of the mind in order to overcome restrictions embedded in culture.

By analyzing the way the patriarchal system is inverted and deconstructed in Sampedro’s novel, we could see how the characters become free and more aware of themselves as the deconstruction is being held. Also, the discovery of similar cases disproving the official discourse Mario had embedded helped him overcome any doubt and gave him the chance to become Miriam, his true gender identity. Depriving the self from society is shown in the novel as a factor that frees instead of just leaving the individual with a sense of abandonment. Society is thought to be a way of organization and, thus, of protection. Yet, its reach can be so suffocating as to deprive its members from following their own nature.

After, by analyzing the images constructing the counter-myth of Mario and Farida’s love, it was seen how the Myth of Romantic Love could be, in fact, just one limited version of love. In *El amante lesbiano* all those images hardly associated with romance and passion become here heaven and paradise for the characters. All those images that would easily fall into morbidity or simple eroticism are shown in a romantic, loving way throughout the novel. Thus the importance of relativity and individuality, essential elements of freedom, for this can only be attained when the individual is able to express himself/herself in any way he/she desires, without contempt and without restrictions.

The case of Mario is the case of many people in the Western world who have been constrained by the conventions of love and gender in our culture. And these conventions have been embedded deeply in our minds due to their importance in all the cultural and social products of our society, including literature as a main trend.
“Literature gave passion a language” (P. Sampedro): with language, it gave passion and love a certain status, and thus the option to become an institution, as it sure did. However, the problem is not love itself, but the social interaction that was created around the concept of love.

Sampedro, as a postmodern writer, creates this little narrative to prove the possibility of going beyond conventions, of how love is possible even in the dungeon and even between two beings with a gender that’s not the same as their biological sex. But also, _El amante lesbiano_ shows the sad reality of those who are not being able to live the life they want because of all social restrictions related to gender and love. In the case of Mario, his grandiose love story is at the end shadowed by those final three pages that let the reader know everything was just a machination of his mind. All the love and freedom lived by him and the other characters in the Outsides is drown by the last words of the novel, coming from that impersonal, external narrator of _The Event_: “An event like many others”85 (Sampedro 253).

However, it seems that the main point Sampedro tried to prove is that human nature will always make us go further, and a strong will makes reconstruction possible. The concepts of gender and love can be social constructions, but the feeling of self is subjective and obeys personal impulses that go beyond society. When giving these impulses freedom, following the maxim of “Love, and do what you will” (9), there cannot be debauchery but liberty and autonomy, necessary characteristics for a humanistic society.

The Myth of Romantic Love is demythified in the novel because it is a false myth, a construction that was born under specific circumstances that are no longer valid. Love is not a religion and it does not have gods to look upon: love is a human feeling, a subjective reality that cannot be immortalize because its main elements are simply mortals. Sampedro is a writer who advocates freedom, and he shows how sometimes even love can become a prison that suffocates man. The strategies used by him are effective to prove that love is in fact a complex, varied human experience, where what most people would consider as inappropriate, for others is another way of expressing love.

Moreover, it is also important to remark again that Sampedro is not a known feminist or a fighter of woman’s rights. His novel is not even about a woman limited

85 _Original_: “Un suceso como tantos” (253).
by a patriarchal society, but about a man limited by the same masculine forces that would give him the privilege of being the dominant, active one. Freedom and will are so vast that sometimes to be free means to be actually a slave, in this case a slave for love.

It is impossible to state that the abandonment of the Myth is generalized in all of the Western literature. The West comprises many cultures, many countries and many groups that still follow what is suppose to be Romantic Love, and literature on the topic is still being written. However, when we say that the Myth is becoming obsolete is because cultural products like *El amante lesbiano* are increasing in number, and also because people is more aware of the effects the Myth have in their lives. In the thesis, we quoted several authors coming from different backgrounds, from literary theorists, feminists and writers to psychologists, marriage advisors and sociologists. Most of them claim the same idea: that people is realizing about the fallacies of conceiving love as a Myth, of falling into the game of Romantic Love. Love is already hard in itself, and thus building a model of love, instead of helping people to know what to do, it leaves them with little choice.

Will the Myth of Romantic Love finally end with such deconstructions? This is a hard question to answer, for this ideology is now an essential part of the West. But it does seem that in real life, in the practice, the Myth is overlooked more and more. This demythification answers to a need, not to get rid of the ideals of romance in the practice of love, but to open the way for all the other possibilities, for all the actors who don’t fit in the archetype. Everyone has the need to believe their love is extraordinary, that their relationship is almost sacred. And this is perhaps the best answer to why the Myth is demythified: because instead of helping make love something extraordinary, it condemns all the other possibilities of love to the mundane. The Myth, “in ceasing to be a god, he ceases to be a demon” (Rougemont 325).
Bibliography


