

**Fragmented Characters/Fragmented Narrative Voices:  
Textual and Extratextual Devices in *Desde la sombra* (2016)  
by Juan José Millás and *La habitación oscura* (2013) by Isaac Rosa**

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## 1. Introduction

With postmodern texts leading the way, fragmented narratives are key in the construction of twentieth and twenty-first century novels, most especially in the novelistic production after World War II. Fragmentation can occur at different levels; it may affect the diegetic truth of a plot through the portrayal of fragmented subjects or be found at the level of syntax structure, sometimes extending to an extradiegetic dimension via the use of different narrative techniques such as disjointed plots and nonlinear or *in media res* accounts of events. From James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) to Luis Martín Santos's *Tiempo de silencio* (1962) or *Música de cámara* (2013) by Rosa Regàs, modern and contemporary literature, both Spanish and otherwise, has seen a variety of fragmented subjects, narratives and plots used with a wide range of effects and purposes.

This article will examine both fragmentation as part of the plot (in the case of *Desde la sombra* [2016]) and as an extratextual feature that occurs at the narrative level (in *La habitación oscura* (2013)). With wildly different styles and approaches, these two authors construct very unusual and distinctive worlds in which fragmentation is portrayed intriguingly, embodied by subjects in the case of Millás and narrators in Rosa's text. But aside from the literary skill with which these different types of fragmentation portray, what is it about their depictions which makes these texts stand out from the rest? And why compare the two? As the next few sections will show, Millás's and Rosa's texts reveal ostensibly different depictions of fragmentation, yet their underlying arguments do not differ drastically from each other. With the exploration of 'Otherness', through the main character's personality disorder in *Desde la sombra*, and the polyfacetic narrative techniques of *La habitación oscura*, the two novelists construct some of the most anomalous worlds in order to show us that, ultimately, the strangeness of these spaces is much closer to our reality than it may at first seem.

Thus, as well as *how* fragmented subjects and narrations are portrayed in these two texts, in this article I attempt to examine the bigger picture and explain *why* fragmentation emerges as a defining trait in the latest novelistic production of some of the most important contemporary Spanish authors.

## 2. *Desde la sombra*

Fragmentation might well emerge as the single concept through which Millás's entire oeuvre could be framed. In the words of Juan Antonio Masoliver Ródenas:

En el siglo XX [...] recuperamos el carácter fragmentario o inabarcable propio de los viajes interiores a través del recuerdo, del sueño, de la imaginación y de la reflexión monologante. El siglo XX recupera la modernidad creada por Cervantes, y queda claro que la narrativa de Juan José Millás se inscribe en esta modernidad. (2009, 49)

Indeed, Millás's characters' 'inner journeys' take some of the shapes mentioned by Masoliver Ródenas. As an author who is interested in portraying the problematic search for identity, a sense of 'Otherness' and multiplicity often accompanies his protagonists. In *La soledad era esto* (1990), for instance, Mercedes lives convinced that she has an 'antípoda', a woman on the opposite side of the world who is identical to her and whose actions inadvertently dictate Mercedes's life. In *Laura y Julio* (2006), the notion of symmetry and a search for identity strikes again when Julio moves into a flat and adopts the previous owner's identity. In *Desde la sombra*, Damián Lobo's exhilarating internal journey is taken to another level when the interior monologues that typify Millás's previous texts become transformed into vivid and heated interior dialogues around which much of the plot is centred.

Before we examine Lobo's interior dialogues and the fragmentation that accompanies them, the intricacies of this complex plotline need to be summarised in order to understand the role of the protagonist and his 'Others'. An introverted and lonely individual, Lobo works in the basement of a company that he eventually gets fired from. With hardly any real-life interactions, the vast majority of his contact with the world is a product of his imagination. In fact, his life revolves around the made-up stream of televised interviews in which he is a famous guest on the talk show of sensationalist journalist Sergio O'Kane. Needless to say, in real life, Lobo has a far more anodyne and meaningless existence. However, this seemingly empty existence takes a turn the day he loses his job and, in a fit of frustration, commits petty theft in a flea market by stealing a small tie clip from a vendor. In order to avoid the police, he hides inside a large wardrobe in an antiques stall and, while he waits inside for the police to leave the market, someone buys it and the piece of furniture gets delivered to a family home (with him in it). This incident gives way to Lobo's new and most peculiar existence. Hiding in the wardrobe, now part of a family's home, he decides to remain there concealed instead of attempting to sneak out and return to his old life.

When the family is at home, he hides at the back of the large piece of furniture, listening in on all their conversations and learning about their routines and, when everyone is at work or school, he comes out to help with the household chores, moving stealthily so as not to leave traces of his presence. As a spectral resident in Lucía and Fede's home, he finds a satisfying routine taking care of the cleaning and tidying up of the house, something that only Lucía notices. Lucía, who lost her twin brother when she was young, has always been prone to believe in ghosts, so when she notices a presence in her home, she is quick to think of a spectral being. She and Lobo begin communicating via the circling of words in her own books about ghosts and, one day, he starts to surf the Internet in search of online forums about paranormal activity and, in order to promote his own spectral persona, he starts signing his name as "el Mayordomo Fantasma", "iniciando un periodo de fama que, a diferencia de la que había disfrutado con Sergio O'Kane, era real, pues sucedía fuera de su cabeza" (Millás 2016, 110). The pseudonym is quickly picked up by the ghost aficionados and he eventually becomes an Internet celebrity.

Both his real life in the wardrobe and his imagined life as part of the conjured-up television show seem possible for Lobo, who speaks of them as if they were both plausible and compatible: "El armario empotrado y este plató son ahora mis lugares y puedo ocuparlos a la vez al modo en que una idea puede estar de forma simultánea en dos cabezas" (Millás 2016, 166). In fact, in his words, we detect that Lobo feels as though he were really moving between the physical space (wardrobe) and the psychological one (TV show): "Dado que la aventura real de Damián y su presencia en el show imaginario sucedían de forma simultánea, tenía que moverse a una velocidad de vértigo entre una instancia y otra" (Millás 2016, 41). However, readers understand that the textual reality of his wardrobe life is the only diegetic truth and

that the other dimension corresponds to an imaginary world that only exists in his mind. As such, the way he is able to jump between these two realities could also have a different reading: if we consider Lobo's imaginary world as a second fictional layer that exists within the textual reality, then his incursion in this fictional world could be read as an ontological metalepsis. As Jan Alber (2016, 203) explains, "[t]he term denotes jumps between narrative levels that involve actual transgressions of ontological boundaries". Here, no "actual transgressions" take place because readers know that the world Lobo jumps into is a figment of his own imagination rather than a fiction within the textual reality, such as a novel or a film. However, the question of a potential metalepsis in this text poses a challenge to the very fabric of fiction for, what is a novel or a film if not the made-up creation of someone else? Whilst there are differences between the nature of these two invented worlds (the made-up world of a novel or a film is, at least in principle, a finished product and, hence, more 'solid' or 'established' than someone's imagined scenarios), these differences are not significant enough for the metalepsis not to be taken into consideration. Moreover, Lobo's musings when he speaks to his made-up hosts point in the direction of a metalepsis:

Sus preguntas [las de O'Kane] estaban siempre cargadas de ironía, a veces de mala intención, y de insinuaciones sobre una posible patología mental de su invitado. Pese a ser consciente de que *O'Kane era creación suya*, Damián guardaba hacia él un resentimiento que de un lado le extrañaba y de otro le parecía lógico. (Millás 2016, 97; my italics)

Indeed, in the interactions between Lobo and his fictional characters, there are allusions to the act of writing, entering the metaliterary game which authors like Unamuno established with characters such as Augusto Pérez in his novel *Niebla* (1914). Here is another example of their bitter interactions (a tone which was also common between Pérez and his author):

—Olvídame —le tuteó con agresividad-, las entrevistas contigo eran imaginarias, tú eres imaginario.  
—¿Acaso te crees más real ahora que cuando acudías a mi programa?  
—Sí —respondió.  
—¿Eres un fantasma real?  
—Exacto, eso soy: un fantasma real.  
—Los fantasmas reales no existen.  
—Tú eres el que no existe.  
—¿Por qué hablas conmigo entonces?  
—Por costumbre. Vete. (Millás 2016, 123-24)

In the light of this dialogue, we shall take into account Gerard Genette's (1980, 234-35) definition of the literary phenomenon, which he describes as "any intrusion by an extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by the diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse". In his description, the literary theorist encompasses 'jumps' in every direction between different levels of fiction, this one being the "diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe", as exposed by the two examples from the text.

This interaction between different diegetic levels complicates the question of real and imagined 'Self' and 'Other', and becomes a game of mirrors in which the position of the reader grows as uncertain as Lobo's perception of reality which, as is evident by the quoted dialogues and comments above, is dominated by the existence of an 'Other'. Thus, the common point of the imagined and real spaces that Lobo inhabits in *Desde la sombra* is dominated by an 'Otherness' of sorts. In his imagined existence, Lobo's 'Self' is the very definition of fragmentation as we see him engage

in heated arguments with his talk show hosts; in the textual reality, his life in the wardrobe is mediated by his cyber alter ego known as “el Mayordomo Fantasma” through which he communicates with Lucía and others. Since Lobo’s existence is, in both cases, governed by the very notion of being someone other than himself, the next two sections will explore how the different types of ‘Otherness’ (imagined and real) unfold in each realm and why they become defining traits of who he is as a person. Given that his imagined self has accompanied him as long as he can remember, his imagined ‘Others’ will be explored first.

## 2. 1. Imagined ‘Others’: Lobo and his talk show hosts

In one of his best-known contributions to psychoanalysis, Lacan (1977, 2-3) describes how the child recognises his or her own image for the first time, and it is at that precise moment that a translation takes place: from the image of self to the idea of self. And so, when identifying him/herself in the mirror, the child also identifies with something from which s/he is separated: the act of identity occurs as an ‘Other’ (the image) that returns the gaze. The adoption by the subject of his/her objectified image consists of the child’s identity and perception of self both as ‘what I am’ but also as ‘what others and I see of me’. So without anyone to return his gaze, does Lobo experience the ‘Other’ in the form of made-up talk show hosts? Perhaps, but there needs to be more evidence to explain his experience of fragmentation.

In his analysis of previous Millásian novels, Samuel Amago notes the author’s interest in depicting “the process of self-knowing” and the impossibility thereof in connection to Lacan’s theory:

Jacques Lacan has written that the process of self-knowing is a constant and ever-changing struggle that can have no final conclusion. The novels of Millás dramatize the many different stages of the process and demonstrate that human identity is never perfectly complete. (2006, 79)

In this quotation, Amago is referring to *La soledad era esto* (1990) and the ways in which “to know oneself truly may be impossible, but Millás nonetheless points to the redemptive power of narrative” (2006, 80). Indeed, in this earlier novel, the protagonist requests reports from a private detective about her own daily routine as a way to ‘recognise’ herself. In *Desde la sombra*, Lobo’s need to be narrated is also obvious since that is the basis for his imagined scenarios, where Lobo does nothing but relate his misadventures. However, as opposed to Elena in *La soledad era esto*, who finds a real-life private detective to follow her and subsequently tell her about her own dwellings in the form of written reports, Lobo’s narration comes from within himself, as it is nothing if not a product of his imagination. Through the creation of this peculiar narrative of his life, he merges ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, as well as subject and object, narrator and narratee. All the different figments of his imagination are him, all arguing with and complementing each other to form the kaleidoscopic version of himself he conjures up, but this does not alleviate his anguish and distress.

Thus, “the redemptive power of narrative” that Amago was referring to, and which defined *La soledad era esto*, is taken to a different level here since not only is the notion of the ‘Other’ part of the imagined scenarios that Lobo invents, it is also one of three ‘Others’: Sergio O’Kane, Iñaki Gabilondo and, eventually, Iñaki O’Kane (which, as his name suggests, is a combination of the previous two). Their presence and narrative function in his life are something that he “necesitaba con desesperación” (Millás 2016, 127), as we see also in the previous two quotations where both the tense dialogues between creator and creation (Millás 2016, 123-24) and his anxious

reflections about needing O’Kane’s imaginary presence (Millás 2016, 97) do not stop Lobo from conjuring him up. And yet, despite his imaginary fame, Lobo still finds himself sad and lonely, wondering, “¿Por qué no era capaz de establecer monólogos internos, como suponía que hacía el resto de las personas? ¿Por qué había necesitado desde siempre a un intermediario para comunicarse consigo mismo?” (Millás 2016, 138-39). It seems as if, despite needing to be narrated through these figments of his imagination, the power of narrative does not emerge as quite as redemptive in Lobo’s imagined scenarios.

In his reflections upon the fragmented self, the philosopher William Matthews (2003, 215-16) offers an insightful observation which could enlighten some of Lobo’s feelings and behaviour: “there is such a thing as the narrative gap, the gap between the subject’s notion or sense of the design in their life and the reality of who they are”. Nowhere is the gap greater than in Lobo’s case: the reality of who he is (a solitary individual with an uneventful existence) is miles away from the subject’s notion of his own life (a celebrity who is constantly invited on TV shows so he can share his life with an ever-growing and excited audience). In other words, the imaginary ‘Others’, in helping Lobo develop a made-up narrative about his own notion of self, enable the greatness of this narrative gap, which continues to alienate him from the real world.

This alienation emerges as a somewhat self-fulfilling prophecy. He needs to be narrated by these imaginary beings to exist, but the existence of those imaginary ‘Others’ also seems to contribute to his further alienation. But what is the root of his ‘alienation’? The existence of an ‘Other’, as expounded by Lacan, only explains Lobo’s disorder partly since, as we have seen, he deals with a case of much more radical fragmentation that surpasses the psychoanalytical explanation for the need of an ‘Other’. The need to be narrated and the existing narrative gap also emerge as important factors to explain the multiple imaginary beings who coexist with him. But how do these made-up ‘Others’ compare to the newfound, more real ‘Other’ in his life?

## 2.2. The cyber ‘Other’: “el Mayordomo Fantasma”

Masoliver Ródenas (2009, 49) states that in Millás’s novels “el mundo real en el que se mueven los personajes es mucho más limitado que el de las evocaciones, fantasías, sueños o reflexiones”. Even though the critic was not referring to *Desde la sombra* in his article (which precedes the novel by seven years), this observation seems to be easily applicable to the novel we are concerned with, where the extreme confinement and limitations of a life in someone’s wardrobe are in stark contrast with Lobo’s celebrity status. However, the longer he spends in the wardrobe, the more he can do without his imagined TV appearances: “a medida que se identificaba con esos entes que vuelven de la muerte para ayudar a los seres queridos, O’Kane iba volviéndose más y más prescindible” (Millás 2016, 101). This suggests that his real life is somewhat more fulfilling than his imagined scenarios, as he asserts: “jamás me había sentido tan libre. Como si aquel armario fuera el centro del universo, como si el mundo se expandiera a partir de él” (Millás 2016, 87). Hence, in this novel, Millás’s character does find a reality that suits him even more so than his imagined world. In fact, the mere thought of having to abandon his new life in the wardrobe is enough to bring back the fear that dominated his previous existence, which he labels as one characterised by a “libertad ficticia” as opposed to this “nueva forma de libertad”, which he describes almost in psychedelic terms:

el pensamiento fluía casi de un modo involuntario, como si fuera un jugo más de los segregados por su organismo. Y el universo tenía cualidades de cristal, todo era transparente

para él, que venía, sin embargo de un mundo opaco en el que a menudo había dudado de su inteligencia. (Millás 2016, 112)

A feeling of regeneration and newfound freedom accompany this new life of his and, as such, “la idea de abandonar la casa, o de ser expulsado de ella, que le asaltaba de manera periódica, le producía una angustia sin límites, pues se sentía desligado por completo de la realidad exterior” (Millás 2016, 156).

As opposed to his appearances in the television show, this new form of ‘Otherness’ does not depend on his imagination, relying instead on new technologies, where his fame as “el Mayordomo Fantasma” spreads like wildfire. Upon his reflections on alterity and the role of technology, Jean Baudrillard (2008, 53) sees technological devices as a way for individuals to open a gap within them and inhabit ‘another world’: “technology offers a way to fall out of the world, to think another world, to create an other-world simulacrum”. However, in *Desde la sombra*, Lobo had already ‘fallen out of the world’ by living a parallel, imagined existence as a guest of the O’Kane/Gabilondo phenomenon. Now, as he embodies and embraces “el Mayordomo Fantasma”, he begins a period of his life which, as opposed to the previous one is, at least in theory, more grounded in reality (if we extend the concept of reality to cyberspace, and that is precisely one of the questions that Millás is asking with this novel). Regardless of how *real* online fame *really* is, his new popularity is rooted in this world more than it was before. In his analysis of *Laura y Julio* (2007), Mercedes Gutierrez García (2011, 549) examines the role of technology in relation to Julio’s identity, wondering if this “multiplicidad es la antesala a la recomposición-unificación, y por tanto, fase iniciática requerida, para alcanzar la individualidad”. *Desde la sombra*, too, portrays Lobo as a character whose construction of identity also seems to be aided by his own projection through technology, which allows for a more unifying sense of self than he had before. He exists with an ‘Other’, yes, but he feels a liberation and lack of fear that dominated his previous existence, when the ‘Other’ belonged to his made-up reality.

It is, thus, the combination of what technology allows for and his contentment inside the wardrobe that leads him to an increasing sense of unity and comfort. The fears and anxiety from his previous life vanish as an act of identification begins to occur with his newly acquired form of this spectral ‘Otherness’:

se convertía en un fantasma verdadero pues lo cierto era que con el paso de los días se desmaterializaba, o eso le parecía a él. Contaba, desde luego, con su cuerpo para ir de un lado a otro de la casa, un cuerpo que seguía ocultando para no ser visto por ningún miembro de la familia, pero al mismo tiempo sus necesidades físicas disminuían de forma progresiva. Comía poco, algunos días prácticamente nada, aunque cogió gran afición al agua, con al que se identificaba por su transparencia, su capacidad de evaporación y su facilidad para cambiar de forma. (Millás 2016, 112)

### **3. *La habitación oscura***

This disturbing tale spans over fifteen years and revolves around the events that take place in a basement room where a group of friends in their thirties gather on evenings and weekends. A room that begins as a place they use to socialise, this basement space ends up becoming the centre of their lives when, after the lights go out one night and lack of inhibition leads them to exchange sexual partners, they decide to cover up the windows and turn the basement into a dark room. Their new dark den becomes the meeting point where they hide from their jobs, families, worries

and lives, sometimes sitting quietly in the dark for hours, but more often experimenting sexually in the freedom that the darkness allows. As the generation most affected by the economic crisis, this group of friends live through a number of disappointments, coming to realise the precariousness that will accompany their lives. The existentialist tone is close to a nihilist attitude in which the narrator, who identifies with all the members of the group, sees their lives as if they were in fast-forward mode, wondering about the purpose of it all:

Así, nosotros, si pulsásemos el botón de marcha rápida veríamos pasar nuestras vidas en aquel tiempo feliz: el día sigue a la noche y esta al día que apenas dura un par de segundos antes de sucumbir al siguiente anochecer [...] nos emparejamos, nos separamos, volvemos a emparejarnos, amueblamos casas y desamueblamos casas cuyos enseres empaquetados entran y salen desde pisos hacia furgonetas y luego de estas hacia nuevas viviendas [...] firmamos papeles sin parar. (Rosa 2013, 44-5)

In the middle of what seems like a meaningless existence, the dark room provides a hiding place, a space where they need not work extra hours, worry about job security, or figure out if they can afford to have children. However, this safe space eventually becomes a trap and the external world they were hoping to find shelter from finds its way in (and in the worst possible way).

Portraying a very different type of darkness from the one Lobo seeks in the depths of Lucía's wardrobe, *La habitación oscura* reveals a decaying society, and depicts a group of people who, perhaps not entirely unlike Lobo, appear to be in desperate need of shelter from their own lives.

### 3.1. Multiplicity through narrative techniques

Few texts in contemporary Spanish literature are as accomplished from a narratological point of view as *La habitación oscura*, where the combination of narrative voices turns this novel into a literary experiment that explores a truth that goes beyond its story plot and depicts the notion of fragmentation flawlessly. It was this skilful and peculiar narrative form which inspired this article's focus on an extratextual device for the analysis of this novel.

Defined as "un ejercicio de tremendo dominio técnico" (Jurado Morales 2014, 35), the novel's narration is notorious for its multiple voices, which move between first person plural and second person singular, with alternating short chapters that are narrated in the third person singular. The choice of the first person plural and second person singular voices is far from incidental; in his study about unusual forms of narration, Brian Richardson explores unusual narrative voices (that is, voices that are not first or third person singular) and their effects on their respective plots, noting how the 'you' and the 'we' are "the most widespread, important, and perhaps unnerving narrational stances" (2006, 14). To make an even more "unnerving narrational stance", *La habitación oscura* does not even stick to one, incorporating both of them instead.

The shifting nature of the narrative voice also extends to gender, where the narrator remains purposely unidentifiable. A refusal to disclose the gender of the narrator, especially when he or she is involved in sexual acts, has been identified as a strategy that causes the most consternation and confusion amongst traditional readers (Richardson 2006, 4). When first person narrators who are directly involved in sexual acts within the plot (for instance, the narrator in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* [1992]) choose not to identify with either gender, this "silence and the extent to which it destabilizes both textuality and sexuality drive this novel as much as its surface plot" (Lanser 1996, 205). In *La habitación oscura*, the refusal to disclose the

narrator's gender goes beyond the silence of the narrative voice, opting, instead, for a constant shift between a male and female narrator:

Al principio, en la habitación oscura, *los hombres nos rehuíamos*, nos rechazábamos cuando nos encontrábamos y en un primer manoteo tocábamos el rostro áspero o el rostro sin relieve. *Las mujeres éramos* menos prejuiciosas, no evitábamos una boca como la nuestra si la oscuridad decidía emparejarnos. Pero en los hombres había una precaución de reconocimiento cuando nos cruzábamos con alguien y le tocábamos rápidamente la cara y el pecho para asignar una condición. (Rosa 2013, 58; my italics)

Given the prominent role of their sexual relations in the novel, merging both genders within the narrative voice exponentially increases the unsettling anonymity of these encounters in which the narrator encompasses it all: it is a 'he' and a 'she', it is one of the people who gather in the dark room and it is, most disturbingly, likely to be one of 'us' too.

### 3.2. First person plural: who is 'we'?

[S]on años en que nuestras cuentas bancarias se mueven a la misma velocidad que esta película que hoy proyectamos a ritmo enloquecido: ingresos y gastos, nóminas abonadas [...] letras, cuotas, facturas, compras, pagos con tarjeta, reintegros, transferencias, suscripciones, el giro de ese marcador en el que nunca permanece fijo un mismo dígito impone el ritmo al que circulamos por la ciudad. (Rosa 2013, 47)

How does the first person plural narrator shape a text like *La habitación oscura*? In what ways does it contribute to its literary complexity? First plural person narratives are mainly fluid since they refer to a number of people who "can grow or shrink to accommodate very different sized groups and can either include or exclude the reader" (Richardson 2006, 14). In the above quotation, the use of 'we' strongly suggests that we are all caught in a spending frenzy. The multiplicity depicted by the use of 'we' thus reaches

una dimensión cívica en la medida en que el nosotros entraña un discurso comprensivo, integrador y solidario [...]. El nosotros dota de un alcance sociológico a la obra: todos estamos implicados en lo que nos ocurre a todos. (Jurado Morales 2014, 35)

But what is "lo que nos ocurre a todos"? Much like he did with his previous novel, *La mano invisible* (2011), Rosa writes from a 'dimensión cívica', using the space of his novels to construct a shrewd criticism of labor conditions and capitalism. In *La habitación oscura*, the use of 'we' strongly suggests that we are all complicit in "lo que nos ocurre".

The all-encompassing feeling that we are all accountable for the frantic spending habits is achieved precisely by the use of this incriminatory first person plural which, as Richardson suggests, may easily include the reader. In his analysis of the use of 'we', he also develops the following paradox:

whenever a text uses a first person plural narrator to depict the thoughts of others, it necessarily straddles the line between first and third person fiction, as a homodiegetic character narrator discloses that which can only be known by an external heterodiegetic intelligence. These narrations are thus simultaneously first *and* third person discourses. (Richardson 2006, 60)

The use of 'we' is particularly intriguing in this novel because not only is the third person intrinsic to the 'we', but the narration also alternates chapters entitled



REC which are always narrated in the third person singular. Invariably, these chapters provide disturbing descriptions of individuals who are being filmed in compromising situations. Towards the end of the novel, readers learn that some members of the group are responsible for setting up these recordings to have material that could potentially be used to blackmail leaders and powerful individuals. This specific example reinforces the message that was sent with the use of 'we': that the group of friends may be both victims and also part of the system. In the face of 'we', readers may doubt whether they are included in the group. Are we also perpetrators and victims? How complicit are we? What do our own dark rooms look like? In answer to these questions, the novel's bold use of the second person singular, you, leaves little room to entertain the possibility that we, the readers, could escape the cycle: "No te quedas ahí. Vamos, entra" (Rosa 2013, 9).

### 3.3. Second person singular: 'Solo faltabas tú'

As a voice of narration, 'you', explains Richardson, is "particularly devious, since it can refer to the protagonist, the narrator, the narratee, or the reader" (2006, 14). In this text it encompasses all four, since the use of 'we' already includes protagonist, narrator and narratee. As for the reader, it is safe to say, s/he is being addressed directly too:

Solo faltabas tú y ya has llegado. Busca tu sitio, encuentra un trozo de pared donde no haya nadie apoyado, ve palpando los cuerpos a tu paso, sentados en el suelo como rocas agrupadas, hasta que después de tocar una cabeza no haya otra próxima, y déjate caer ahí, cierra el círculo. No hables, no preguntes. (Rosa 2013, 10)

As Alber posits in his study of narrative voices, "[t]he 'you' constitutes an element of instability, defamiliarization, and cognitive disorientation, that draws attention to itself" (2016, 86). Indeed, in this disturbing and claustrophobic tale, the feeling of disorientation achieved by the second person singular is significant, given that the narration not only shifts between first person plural and second person singular, but also uses 'tú' in the most disconcerting of situations:

Y una noche alguien te tomó la mano. Habías entrado buscando el lateral, te habías desplomado como si tus brazos y piernas se desencajasen y rodasen lejos del tronco, habías respirado llenándote y vaciándote hasta la punta de los pies, y de repente alguien te tomó de la mano. (Rosa 2013, 92)

The terror instigated by the use of 'you' in this instance is noteworthy since, as events in the dark room unfold, readers find out that the supposedly safe space has been the scenario for sexual assault and panic attacks, often filled with dirt and rats that stare at the individuals in the dark:

Y una noche gritaste. Rompiste el silencio, puedes decir que lo hiciste sin querer: solo abriste la boca y el grito se vertió hacia fuera, estalló [...]. Callaste y el grito seguía, tal vez todos cerramos la boca y no por eso se apagó, su eco agónico todavía cabeceó contra las esquinas varios segundos antes de desplomarse en el centro de la habitación y convertirse en un jadeo de alivio. (Rosa 2013, 164-66)

"Un jadeo de alivio" may be felt at the end of *La habitación oscura*, a sense of relief to be out of the darkness, but also an increased awareness that the darkness is man-made, it is part of "lo que nos ocurre a todos", a message that is aptly conveyed by the unusual practice of shifting narrative voices.

With this fluid narrative voice Rosa achieves “un correlato entre el discurso, el contenido y el lector marcado por la incertidumbre” (Jurado Morales 2014, 35). The type of multiplicity portrayed in the novel does indeed add to the anonymity in which the characters live in the dark, at the same time as it suggests two disturbing notions: on the one hand, the inclusive ‘we’ points to the fact that the narrator is not an external being, it is someone in the group; the lack of gender identification adds to the indistinctness of the voice, hence contributing to the ever-growing, unnerving feeling that the narrator could indeed be any of ‘us’. On the other hand, the use of ‘you’ reinforces the latter, suggesting that readers are part of the group who meet in the darkness, even if reading the novel in the comfort of their own home.

#### 4. Conclusion

In *Desde la sombra*, the notion of a schismatic or disjointed experience in the narration is achieved through Lobo’s personality disorder which extends to both the imagined and real realms. In the imagined realm, the ‘Otherness’ experienced by Lobo is dominated by a fear and anxiety that seem to disperse when he finds his place in the world. *La habitación oscura* portrays a type of fragmentation that comes from the voice of the narrator, which is not one but many and whose identity remains beyond elusive throughout the narration. There are many differences in these two approaches by Millás and Rosa, not least of which is the humorous tone inherent in Millás’s narrative, which contrasts with the gravity of Rosa’s. As far as their depiction of fragmentation is concerned, they also portray it from strictly different standpoints. Whilst *Desde la sombra* focuses on a diegetic picture of fragmentation centred around the novel’s main character, *La habitación oscura* opts to represent it extradiegetically through the multiplicity of the narrative voices. This in itself entails a very different approach to the matter. We could, however, ask the same question of both texts: who is the real ‘Other’? In *Desde la sombra*, the ‘Other’ seems to be explicit since it has a name, or even three: Sergio O’Kane, Iñaki Gabilondo and Iñaki O’Kane. However, the real alienating ‘Other’ is an implicit notion throughout the story, only made explicit at the end of the novel when Iñaki Gabilondo blames “el capitalismo sin alma” (Millás 2016, 140) for the kind of disorder that Lobo is suffering ‘unbeknownst’ to him: “De ahí el éxito de estos sistemas políticos y económicos, cuyo principal apoyo procede precisamente de sus víctimas” (Millás 2016, 158), notes the journalist, who explains to Lobo the rising popular interest in his peculiar condition:

Hemos recibido muchas llamadas interesadas en usted, en su existencia presente, desde luego, pero también en esa suerte de alienación, típica del capitalismo, que le ha conducido a convertirse en una estrella de la pequeña pantalla. (Millás 2016, 158)

Shaken by the economic crisis of 2008, the group of friends that gather in the dark confines of the ‘habitación oscura’ explicitly exposes the alienating ‘Other’ from the beginning. However, not innocent either, the narrative voice explains how they have all been complicit with their “idas y venidas, firmas, compras, rayas, viajes” (Rosa 2013, 57). When their lifestyles become unsustainable, the alienation is inevitable and their helplessness leads them to seclude themselves in the darkness of the room:

decíamos estafa, saqueo, robo, desmantelamiento del estado del bienestar, violencia económica, crimen social; decíamos capitalismo, la mayoría casi nunca lo habíamos pronunciado pero ahora lo repetíamos varias veces al día, capitalismo, capitalismo, capitalismo. (2013, 179)

In this quotation, a sense of responsibility and self-reproach arises: those who had been riding on top of the waves are now way under, and they find themselves thinking and speaking about capitalism for the first time. Are our capitalist societies the real, alienating 'Other' in both texts? Is the external world what is driving the characters to isolate themselves in dark rooms?

These questions and a comparison of the two types of alienation suffered by the protagonists of both texts lead to a number of intriguing ideas about what the different novels are proposing. Lobo's alienation appears, in principle, to come from within himself since it seems to be the product of his imagination and the depersonalisation disorder. However, his imagined reality is far from satisfactory and he, too, seeks the darkness of the wardrobe to hide from the external world, which emerges as the real alienating factor for him. In other words, he can identify with a ghost because, in his spectral state, he does not belong to the living, which is the same as saying that he does not belong to the world and to the society he would otherwise be expected to be a part of. *La habitación oscura*, with its multiple voices, suggests that the 'Other' is not inside ourselves and that it corresponds, instead, to the political systems that the characters of Rosa's novel try to avoid by hiding in dark spaces. But, at the same time, the characters feel complicit in the rise of capitalism, which they had benefited from until they became its victims. In other words, some of what they are hiding from in the dark room is also within themselves and, if we listen to the narrative voice, the novel is pointing at all of us.

When Frederic Jameson (1991, 372) notes "a postmodern schizo-fragmentation" in his discussion of the psychological effects of capitalism, he points to the incapacity to "organize [...] past and future into coherent experience" (1991, 25), which suggests a lack of unity similar to that posed by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his exploration of fragmentation:

work is divided from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal (...) And all these separations have been achieved so that it is the distinctiveness of each and not the unity of the life of the individual who passes through those parts in terms of which we are taught to think and feel. (1985, 204)

A version of this lack of unity is present in both of the analysed texts. Their stories belong to contemporary subjects whose most distinctive trait is an alienation vis-à-vis the external world, a shared feeling of having failed to succeed in the capitalist system, a sort of disenchantment with its promises and what was possible for them. However, the real fracture depicted in both Millás's and Rosa's novels is a disconnection between the internal and the external world. In other words, the lack of unity produced by the fragmentation depicted in these two novels refers to the seemingly unbreachable gap between the dark corners of these individuals' desires and what society expects them to be and do, whether this fragmentation is depicted diegetically or extradiegetically. In an attempt to escape the real world, characters conjure up television presenters and lock themselves in dark rooms but they remain unsuccessful because, as long as they are part of society, fragmentation is inherent in their existence in the world. Only when Lobo feels he is closer to a ghost than a person does he feel he is a part of Lucía's home, and then, when a sense of unity with his surroundings emerges, he ceases to appear in his made-up show. Crawling out of the wardrobe and into Lucía's bed, Lobo is ready to be a part of something.

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