

Plotting Postmodern Being  
in Itziar Pascual's Père Lachaise

John P. Gabriele  
The College of Wooster

One of the important elements of postmodern literary expression that is a recurring feature of Itziar Pascual's theatre is the retreat from the concept of a unified subject and the affirmation of decentered subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Pascual's plays disavow a world of consistent and stable characters. Her works center on the uncertainty and ephemeral quality of life and the loss of all absolutes. Her dramatic universe is populated by individuals who are unsure of their personal histories, identities, and/or surroundings, as witnessed consistently throughout her career in such works as Fuga (1993), El domador de sombras (1994), Las voces de Penélope (1996), Blue Mountain (1998), Ciudad Lineal (2000), Pared (2005), among others. Pascual does not construct characters in accordance with conventional practice. They are not socially and politically fixed, the product of an unchanging and identifiable reality. Instead they are ambiguous beings, the product of a shifting and undependable reality. Locked in a world where all spatial and temporal absolutes have been effectively erased, her characters are unstable and indeterminate, the very embodiment of the ontological crisis that so distinctively defines the postmodern condition.

Unlike her previous plays in which setting is characteristically unspecified, Pascual sets the action of Père Lachaise (2003) in an identifiable and concrete location, the Parisian cemetery of the same name, an ideal location for characters who embody the chasm between the real (life) and the unreal (death). In the cemetery, a labyrinth of crisscrossing paths where boundaries of space and time are contested, the six characters—

two visitors to the cemetery (Cundo, Carlota), a caretaker (Michel), and the spirits of three people interred therein (Secundino Pérez, Isadora Duncan, El Ilustre Anónimo)—seek to gain a better understanding of self and other. Père Lachaise is a liminal space in the strictest sense of the word, a place where life and death come together, past and present are fused, and permanence and transience may be said to coexist. Thus it provides a textually, contextually, and theoretically appropriate setting for plotting the loss of self in the postmodern world.

The postmodern design of Père Lachaise is made obvious well before the action begins in what Pascual says or implies regarding time and space in relation to her characters. Cundo, who has come to the cemetery to find the tomb of his grandfather Secundino Pérez, a Spanish Republican exiled in Paris since the end of the civil war, is “convencido de que otro mundo es posible.” He suffers from a crisis of self-identity: “Está buscando su lugar y su ser.” Carlota’s character, Cundo’s younger sister, also exhibits an element of uncertainty: “No está segura del presente, pero confía en el futuro.” Michel, like Cundo and Carlota, is equally “unfixed,” a term used by Jeanette Malkin to describe the characters of postmodern drama (19): “Vive a medio camino entre la nostalgia, la soledad y el miedo al presente” (17). To underscore that Cundo believes in more than one reality and has not yet found his place in life and to emphasize that Carlota and Michel are linked to more than one time period is to suggest from the onset that they are unable to organize space and time into a coherent experience, that their world is not spatially and temporally stable, that their selves are in flux.

The dead characters also underscore spatial and temporal confluence and instability. They too are plagued by existential crises. Secundino lived and died in exile

in France. Haunted by the memory of the comrades who remained in Spain and were executed, his spirit wanders aimlessly through the cemetery, the interspace between life and death, unable to overcome his guilt. The spirit of Isadora Duncan, herself a foreigner, roams Père Lachaise, trapped between the world of the living and what lies beyond it. Unable to accept the tragic death of her two children, she exists in a permanent state of denial. Secundino's and Isadora's conditions mirror what they experienced in life. As expatriates, characters who crossed national borders, and who were laid to rest in foreign soil, they personify James Clifford's definition of "postmodernity" as "the new world order . . . of rootless histories" (1). In death, as in life, their characters are not anchored in a single concrete reality. The same is true for El Ilustre Anónimo, an "espíritu enigmático" (17), who, having failed to defy his father's insistence that he dedicate himself to the family tradition of "Letras y Derecho" (47), exists in a state of perpetual regret in death for not having imposed his personal will in life. He is an anonymous being, a nameless character, the sign that his self remains as undefined and unfulfilled in death as it was in life. Unable to resolve the anguish of life's experience, Secundino, Isadora, and El Ilustre Anónimo are fixed in a liminal space: "Aún no han alcanzado la ascensión" (17).

Space and time, which are traditionally used to provide structure for the evolution of plot and story, take on a destabilizing effect in the hands of postmodern authors. In postmodern texts, space and time cease to be sharply delineated in order to create a sense of instability, which is, according to Martin Travers, symptomatic of the "dissolution of the self in the phenomenal world" (222). The personification of "tiempo" and "lugar"

and their inclusion in the list of dramatis personae is an early clue to Pascual's unconventional dramaturgy:

TIEMPO: Una velada calurosa de agosto de 2002. Entre el mediodía y el atardecer. El cementerio se cierra a las seis de la tarde.

LUGAR: Cementerio de Père Lachaise, junto al Boulevard de Ménilmontant. En París. 44 hectáreas para condensar la vida, la libertad, la dignidad y la memoria. (17)

To personify elements traditionally used to fix characters and stabilize narrative is a means of contesting the ground rules of conventional theatrical representation at a textual level, the traditional relational hierarchy between time, space, and subject. Pascual's intention is to suggest that time and space are no longer ordered nor ordering concepts. While she does not entirely deny time's ability to provide a specific frame of reference ("Una velada calurosa de agosto de 2002"), she does choose the transitional part of the day ("entre el mediodía y el atardecer") as the appropriate time for the action. Similarly, as we shall see, her choice of Père Lachaise is indicative of her preference for an intermediary place as the appropriate setting.

Père Lachaise is a naturally postmodern place, both in a literal and a figurative sense. It is a concrete place where we might say the living and the dead meet. More important, however, is what its symbolic meaning implies for the nature of being in the postmodern world. Those who have studied the metaphorical significance of cemeteries have demonstrated that they symbolize "liminal places" that "bridge notions of self and other, time and space," that they are "places where geography and chronology are reshaped and history is spatially spread out," and therefore constitute appropriate

localities for focusing on "negotiations of identity formation and . . . construction" (Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 95; 96). By setting her play in Père Lachaise, a location defined by spatial and temporal intricacy and interconnectivity, "un laberinto,"(35) as Carlota calls it, "un jardin suspendu où l'écho du temps ricoche sur le clavier du souvenir," as Michel Dansel refers to it in the epigraph to his book on the Parisian cemetery's history, Pascual has chosen the ideal place to meld the real and the unreal, the tangible and the intangible, and the concrete and the elusive to posit a postmodern discourse.<sup>2</sup>

In the postmodern world, art increasingly holds the mirror up to art. Postmodern authors, as critics have illustrated (see Broich and Pfister), frequently allude to or embed within their own works other works to convey the extent to which postmodernity is a culture of textual, contextual, and ideological interconnectivity. The primary objective is to violate conventional practice, to undermine the traditionally superior status of reality by suggesting that it no longer holds a position of privilege in artistic (re)production. These allusions and references may also serve to underscore the subtextual premise of the author's own work. The opening stage direction of Père Lachaise is an example of how Pascual relies on the reference to other artistic expression, in this case painting, to reinforce visually what she states in a preliminary note about her text: "la estética . . . no responde a una convención naturalista" (17).

"Mientras el público accede a la sala," writes Pascual, "un ciclorama muestra una reproducción de Tour Eiffel aux arbres (1910), de Robert Delaunay," which is followed by the projection of "Il Nord-Sud (Velocità e Rumore) (1912), de Gino Severini . . . , Estudio en Montparnasse (1926), de Christopher Richard Wynne," y "por último . . .

una reproduccion de Perfume de huelga general (Buen Olor) (1960), de Jean-Jacques Lebel" (21). Like all avant-garde artists, Delaunay, Severini, Wynne, and Lebel stretched both the social and aesthetic limits of art by experimenting with subversive and transgressive forms of artistic expression.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, they frequently used images of specific cities, as in the cited paintings by Delaunay and Severini, or general metropolitan settings or themes, as in the paintings by Wynne and Lebel. Projecting images of the work of these experimental painters before the performance begins constitutes a visual pre-text of the (con)textual complexity that Pascual sets out to dramatize. Just as these painters challenged traditional mimetic practice by melding lines and shapes in their depiction of the city, Pascual depicts the cemetery of Père Lachaise as a place of converging and overlapping borders and boundaries, a world of chaos and commotion, a microcosm of the city in which it is located: "Sonidos yuxtapuestos, inconexos, rumores . . . Pasos, trenes y metros que se aproximan, locutores englobados de radios anitguos, aplausos, pasos marciales . . . , alarmas, melodías y canciones fragmentarias, voces entresacadas . . . , autobuses . . . , aviones que aterrizan y despegan, canciones silbadas, pasos. Muchos pasos" (21). Having conveyed in a variety of ways that what follows does not conform to conventional design, the action begins.<sup>4</sup>

Cundo announces that "he venido a París, al cementerio de Pére Lachaise . . . a buscar la tumba de mi abuelo" and Carlota reveals that "estoy embarazada" and "que deseo tanto ser madre." Their introductions confirm that Père Lachaise is a place where the present (Cundo and Carlota), the past (the grandfather), and the future (Carlota's child) converge, a place where time stands still, a notion reinforced by what we read when Cundo and Carlota each pose to have their picture taken: "Cundo posa. Tiempo

detenido," "Carlota posa. Tiempo detenido" (23). Cundo immediately goes off alone in search of Secundino's grave. Carlota, more concerned with satisfying her hunger, remains behind. Cundo enlists Michel's help to locate his grandfather's tomb. He asks for directions in English. Michel makes it clear that he does not understand English and responds in French. Cundo, nonetheless, continues to use English. At one point in the conversation, Michel asks if Cundo is Spanish, but not before he has given him the directions: "Tout à droite. Là" (31). In time, Michel explains that his mother, who lived and died in France, was Spanish and that since her death he has not returned to Spain, which leads Cundo to ask, "¿Y no le llama aquello? Son sus raíces." (32). The conversation continues to reflect the postmodern premise of Pascual's play. Despite the language barrier, Cundo gets the directions to his grandfather's tomb, a sign that linguistic uniformity is unnecessary or "superfluous," as Douwe Fokkema puts it, in achieving productive discourse in the postmodern world (48). More importantly, spatial indeterminacy is once again highlighted as a reflection of the loss of self. Michel, and for that matter Michel's deceased mother, is an expatriate like Secundino Pérez and Isadora Duncan. Consequently, he inhabits a reality of spatial ambiguity and uncertainty in life just as Secundino and Isadora did in life and subsequently in death.

Searching for the exit but confused by the cemetery's convoluted network of pathways ("Todas las calles son iguales." [35]), Carlota also turns to Michel for directions. Working on a crossword puzzle, he tells Carlota that, "Yo también estoy en un laberinto de palabras." He is searching for a "dicho o cosa que no se alcanza a comprender" that "se aplica a personas de carácter impenetrable." When Carlota asks

how many letters are in the word, he responds "seis. Y comienza por e" (35). Unable to think of the word, he gives Carlota the directions to the exit:

Estamos en la Avenida Transversal número dos. Pues bien, debe tomar la Avenida de los Combatientes Extranjeros, alcanzar la Transversal número 1 girando a la izquierda, avanzar y proseguir hasta la Avenida Saint Morys y ya allí encontrará la Capilla y el Monumento a los Muertos, muy fácil, porque desde allí se ve la Avenida Principal. Aunque bien pensado, también puede tomar la Avenida Transversal número dos, pero en dirección contraria, tomar la subdivisión 76, luego 33, que desemboca, por lógica en la 32, sigue por la 16, toma la Avenida Casimir Perier y alcanza la Avenida de los Pozos y ya está en la salida (35-36).

The directions, despite Michel's claim, are anything but easy to follow, as anyone who has visited Père Lachaise can attest.<sup>5</sup> They reinforce that both the reality of the Parisian cemetery and Pascual's artistic representation of the same is complex and disorienting, an enigma at best, which not surprisingly is the six letter word that Michel was looking for as Carlota later realizes: "Enigma. Su palabra es enigma" (39). The significance of the symbolic borderlessness and mise-en-abyme-like make-up of the crossword puzzle and Père Lachaise, what Richard Cardwell would no doubt describe as "endlessly overlapping, enclosed networks of conceptual or structural space which form a kind of labyrinth leading to a shifting, ever-unattainable nucleus or centre" (271), reaffirms the concrete and figurative appropriateness of the cemetery as a place where characters struggle to locate their selves.



In a place void of spatial absolutes, it is normal for two realities to exist simultaneously as illustrated in the following episode. As the conversation between Michel and Carlota evolves, Cundo appears in different parts of the cemetery. First, we see Cundo, who, "ajeno a Michel y Carlota, sigue buscando la tumba de su abuelo" (35). This is followed by a scene in which Cundo "se ha detenido un instante, para beber agua y refrescarse en una fuente." Finally, we see him "observando un aspecto del mapa del cementerio" (37). As he looks at the map, his "movimientos . . . se transforman repentinamente en calidad e intención." At the same time we witness Cundo's "gestos espasmódicos," Michel tells Carlota how "las almas de los muertos que tienen cuentas pendientes" (38) populate the cemetery at night. Appropriately, he claims that "es fácil perder la identidad en Père Lachaise." As Michel explains that "los epíritus se acercan a los visitantes y se apropian por unas horas de sus cuerpos" (38), Secundino Pérez appears. Not surprisingly, "tiene un total parecido físico con Cundo" (40).

Secundino's appearance problematizes the already complex dynamic between reality and theatrical representation by making more perplexing the relationship between text and image. The breach of all traditionally delineated spatial and temporal limits and boundaries now materializes in Cundo who is transformed into his grandfather, fulfilling a prophecy made by Carlota early on: "Mi abuelo no está debajo de una losa. Está en nosotros" (28). In a world as complex as the one represented by Père Lachaise, the self is essentially volatile and the interconnectivity of the physical and spiritual is a natural consequence. Allowing Secundino's spirit to come to life by being reincarnated through Cundo's character, Pascual is able to (re)present the "unpresentable" on the stage, a phenomenon that Charles Campbell considers "central in the constitution of the

postmodern" (49). Cundo's transformation demonstrates in concrete terms that life and death coexist in Père Lachaise, that the physical world and the spiritual world have been indistinguishably fused. Thus we may infer that reality, or life, has lost its status as the undisputed point of reference in artistic production and that the unreal, or art, is equally authoritative.

Whereas Pascual achieves spatial conflation by resorting to scenic simultaneity, temporal simultaneity poses a greater challenge because it is a concept that defies concrete representation even in conventionally constructed plays. Time, unlike space, cannot be superimposed to create a sense of simultaneity. Pascual solves this technical problem in part through character doubling. After Secundino appears, he is on stage with Carlota, who is reminiscing about her grandfather whose presence she cannot detect. Initially, Secundino "se acerca a Carlota" and calls her Dolores, his wife's name, thereby noting a striking resemblance between the two. "Es igual que ella," he declares. As Carlota continues to reminisce out loud about her grandparents, she mentions the songs her grandfather used to sing to her. Secundino then hums the songs and Carlota, who "siente su cuerpo pesado . . . se deja caer lenta y plácidamente entre los brazos abiertos de Secundino" (41). Although locked in two different time frames, there is interaction and communication between Carlota and Secundino at a contextual level but no dialogue per se. By allowing a character from the past and another from the present to coexist simultaneously on the stage, Pascual succeeds in undermining time's ability to contain and fix action. Indeed she allows it to stand still, as suggested at the beginning of the play when Cundo and Carlota pose for pictures and by the deceased characters for whom time is essentially nullified.

When El Ilustre Anónimo appears we note that "tiene un gran parecido con Michel" (43). Again Pascual resorts to character doubling as a means of giving physical presence to her otherwise unrepresentable characters. Secundino and El Ilustre Anónimo converse. El Ilustre Anónimo admonishes Secundino to forget the past, the obvious source of the latter's ontological dilemma, which has resulted in his failure to ascend to a realm of existence beyond that of the material world. "¿Por qué te aferras a seguir aquí?", El Ilustre Anónimo asks. "Es por los compañeros," Secundino responds. "Siguen allí, junto al castañar. Allí los fusliaron. Amasijo de huesos sin nombre. . . . Yo fui el único que sobrevivió. Conseguí huir. Yo sé dónde están. Si yo les olvido nunca les encontrarán. Ni siquiera una tumba" (45).

Secundino's character is fractured. His identity, as his liminal existence exemplifies, is in flux. His personal dilemma, like that of the other deceased characters in Pascual's play, embodies the temporal stasis. In not being able to accept the past, Secundino has permitted the past to invade the present. What is now the present (the realm in which Cundo, Carlota, and Michel exist) was from the perspective of the past the future. Metaphorically, Secundino's inability to come to terms with a past reality has resulted in a convergence of past, present, and future in which Secundino's character now exists. All temporal boundaries have been eroded; chronology is no longer a valid concept. Time in Pascual's Père Lachaise is at once continuous and confluent and, like space, a site where the splintered and fragmented nature of the postmodern self is exposed.

The scene between El Ilustre Anónimo and Isadora Duncan continues to build on the notion of the self in crisis. Like Secundino who "tiene un total parecido físico con

Cundo," and El Ilustre Anónimo who "tiene un gran parecido con Michel," Isadora "tiene un gran parecido con Carlota" (49). She, like Secundino, also finds it difficult to come to grips with the past. Her self is also fractured. Her spirit roams the cemetery in the same interspace as Secundino, unable to attain the next realm of existence because she fears that her children and she will be forgotten: "¡Patrick! ¡Deirdre! ¿Dónde estáis? . . . Nadie ha venido a vernos hoy. Ya nadie se acuerda de nosotros" (49).<sup>6</sup> Let us also not forget that Carlota is pregnant, which provides another parallel between the living and the dead. During their interchange, Isadora asks, "¿Por qué reniega de lo que fue? ¿Por qué nos oculta su nombre?" He responds with two of his own questions. The first fittingly summarizes the postmodern contexture of Pascual's play: "¿Existe una verdad única? Lo dudo" (50). The second aptly validates what we have witnessed all along, that is, that the nature of being in the postmodern world is essentially schizophrenic: "¿Acaso somos una sola persona, una única identidad?" (51). El Ilustre Anónimo's identity is also fractured.

The transformation of Cundo, Carlota, and Michel into Secundino, Isadora, and El Ilustre Anónimo is symptomatic of a loss of self. "Metalepsis," as Debra Malina has demonstrated, is a convention used by postmodern playwrights to dramatize "the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality endemic to the postmodern condition. More specifically, . . . to reinforce or to undermine the ontological status of fictional subjects or selves" (2). Through character transformation, Pascual is able to create the impression that her live and deceased characters occupy both the past and the present and the real world and the spiritual world simultaneously. Being in Pascual's play reflects what Steven Connor has said about temporal confluence. According to Connor, to run epic time (past) and contemporary time (present) together is "to view

history and human life as an endless series of cycles" (124). Life in *Père Lachaise* is indeed an endless cycle. Character transformation in combination with spatial and temporal simultaneity allow Pascual to create a non-cohering realm in which the concept of being is essentially diffuse and imprecise. Once Pascual has established that her play is enveloped in a space-time continuum, her characters straddle the borders of time and space as if it were a natural condition of their existence.

That parallels can be drawn between the living and the dead is also evidence of a world in which reality and fantasy are indistinguishable and the notions of permanence and the absolute are in a state of crisis. Textually and contextually fusing the realm of earthly reality with the realm of the supernatural is a sign that the border between life and death has become fluid and indistinct. The world Pascual depicts in *Père Lachaise* is a simulacrum in the strictest sense of the concept because it dramatizes the impossibility of separating "the false from the true, the real from the artificial resurrection" thereby making it impossible to discover "an absolute level of the real" (Baudrillard 6, 19). In *Père Lachaise* and *Père Lachaise*, life (reality) is just as much a retextualization and reappropriation of death (illusion) as death is of life. In perfect postmodern fashion, neither is more absolute, more authoritative, than the other.

As the first part of the play comes to an end, it is obvious that spatial and temporal boundaries no longer exist, nor are they necessary. Feeling terrible about having left his pregnant sister behind while he went off in search of Secundino's grave, Cundo expresses his concern. Isadora is present:

CUNDO: ¿Carlota?

ISADORA: No puedes dejarla sola

CUNDO: Me estás asustando.

ISADORA: Tienes que cuidarla.

CUNDO: Puede [Carlota] que tengas razón

ISADORA: Está embarazada, Cundo.

CUNDO: Me tienes que perdonar.

ISADORA: Prométeme que la cuidarás.

CUNDO: No me he dado cuenta.

ISADORA: Los niños son frágiles.

CUNDO: Soy un insensato.

ISADORA: Yo perdí a mis hijos, Cundo.

CUNDO: No debí dejarte sola.

ISADORA: Y fue el mayor dolor de mi vida.

CUNDO: ¡Carlota! ¡Carlota! ¿Me oyes? (54)

Although two separate monologues situated in different times and in different places, the conversation between Cundo and Isadora evolves as a single discursive unit. Spatial and temporal referents are no longer required to establish thematic logic, a sign that the traditional relational ties between subject, place, and time are no longer valid. More importantly, the realm of the material world and that of the spiritual world are so seamlessly interwoven that the past and the present are now one and the same as confirmed by what we read after Cundo calls out to his sister: "El espíritu de Isadora Duncan deshabita . . . el cuerpo de Carlota que reaparece" (55).

If the first part of Père Lachaise underscores the extent to which the absence of neatly defined and delineated time and space are indicative of the self in crisis, the second

part illustrates that both temporal confluence and spatial ambiguity can also prove a constructive way of resolving ontological crises. What transpires in part two conveys that being in the postmodern world is not a static inert phenomenon that can be confined to any one specific time or space, but that the postmodern self is, "an empty place," as Ihab Hassan puts it, "where many selves come to mingle and depart" (845).

Part two opens with a scene between Michel and Secundino, proof that the liminal world, the interspace created by the fusion of the past and the present and the realm of the living and of the dead, is the predominant reality in Père Lachaise. As Michel prepares to leave for the day, he addresses those who occupy the tombs he tends to daily: "¿Estáis contentos? . . . Ni musgo, ni polvo, ni ramas, ni papeles, ni piedras, ni óxido. Todo limpio. . . . ¿Os gusta?" Laughing, he continues, "¿Me oís? ¿Qué os parece?", to which Secundino responds, "A mí me parece que no puedes seguir así. Tienes un problema, Michel" (58). Michel "reacciona bruscamente" as if sensing Secundino's presence: "¿Eh! Este frío . . . . No es normal en verano." Secundino continues, "Es mal asunto desear la muerte en la vida. Siempre retrasas la salida. La vieja excusa del trabajo. No quieres salir" (58). Secundino calls out, "¿Estás sordo? ¿Por qué preguntas si no quieres oír?" So seamlessly fused are Michel's and Secundino's otherwise distinct personal realities that Michel is aware of Secundino's presence in physical and concrete terms: "¿Qué? (Mira alrededor.) ¿Sordo?, ¿Quién. . . ?". We then read that Michel "tiene una intuición." He turns, "se fija en una tumba," and mutters, "Secundino Pérez."<sup>7</sup> An interchange ensues:

MICHEL: Hoy han venido a verte. Tus dos nietos.

SECUNDINO: A mi nieta no le disgustas.

MICHEL: Tu nieto no habla muy bien inglés. Pero tu nieta . . . Tu nieta  
es . . .

SECUNDINO: ¡Dilo! Mi nieta es preciosa. . . . Dilo.

MICHEL: Tu nieta es especial. (59)

If the encounters between the characters in part one are proof that time and space are irrelevant in postmodern texts to the achievement of contextual coherence, then the conversation between Secundino and Michel is evidence that spatial and temporal referents are no longer necessary to the achievement of textual coherence either and that life and death are mirror images of each other. Michel reveals that Carlota has brought back memories of his wife Virginia, who died in a car accident for which he blames himself. Michel, like Secundino, is unable to come to terms with his feelings of guilt: "No frené a tiempo. No le vi venir. El camión se nos echó encima" (60). Like Secundino, he occupies a liminal space. Secundino refers to Michel as "un muerto viviente" (61), a concept which accurately describes all the characters.

Isadora reappears. As in the previous scene with Michel, Secundino acts as a catalyst for a heightened consciousness of self. Displaying a newfound awareness of the reason for his liminal existence and those of his fellow spirits, which no doubt is the result of his encounter with characters from the present, Secundino asks Isadora how long she will linger between two worlds and poses the same question to himself. Obviously conscious of the space-time continuum that characterizes their existence, he cautions that they run the risk of "repetir eternamente [sus] muertes." "Cada vez que te aferras a ellos [her children] te ahogas una vez más," he tells her. "Cada vez que me apego al castañar vuelvo a exiliarme." He ends by suggesting that part of the solution to their crises lies in



the present and the future: "[D]ejamos intervenir a los otros. A los que vendrán. A tus alumnos y mis nietos" (63).

Secundino recognizes that fusing the past, present, and future can have positive effects. His comments imply that the postmodern self cannot be contained within a single time or spatial frame of reference, that being in the postmodern world is at best a dynamic concept, a site of continual inquiry and exploration. Secundino's advice echoes what Andreas Huyssen says about the importance of present, past, and future in constructing identity in the postmodern age: "Remembrance as a vital human activity shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and to anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future" (9).

Both the living and the dead in Père Lachaise suffer from personal dilemmas they must learn to overcome in order to define their selves more concretely. Until such time as they come to a greater understanding of the self, they exist in an intermediary space between self-ignorance and self-knowledge, between acceptance and denial. It is evident that acceptance of the past can have anchoring effects on the self. As Cundo is standing at his grandfather's tomb and El Ilustre Anónimo is by his side, he announces that "sólo quería decirte [Secundino] que no te olvido. Ni a ti ni a tus ideas" (66). Cundo's admission is at once the solution to Secundino's dilemma and his own. Previously unaware of his grandfather's efforts and having obviously assumed some element of guilt as well, Cundo has come to a greater sense of self and other as El Ilustre Anónimo makes clear: "Si supieras cuánto le ayudas a tu abuelo. . . . Tu abuelo tuvo su tiempo, su libertad y su deseo. No vivas la herencia como una culpa pendiente." The dynamic relationship

of past and present also brings El Ilustre Anónimo to a greater knowledge of self: "Gracias por ayudarme," he tells Cundo. "Ahora sé que mis antepasados pueden perder ese aire rígido que guardaban en la biblioteca" (67). That a character from the real world and one from the spiritual world simultaneously experience a heightened consciousness of self is the ultimate sign that self and other are inseparable, that the self is mirrored in the other and vice versa, and that a greater knowledge of self is at once a greater knowledge of other. Having acquired a greater sense of self, the spirits of the three deceased characters finally ascend to the realm that lies beyond Père Lachaise: "Isadora, El Ilustre Anónimo y Secundino ascienden" (73).

As the play ends, we learn that Carlota's time in the cemetery has also been an enlightening experience. Talking to herself, she rationalizes: "Cuando Cundo te propuso venir a París, pensaste: . . . Venga. De momento huir. Y para huir, lejos basta. Unos días de distancia para ver las cosas claras. Y ahora, aquí, por fin, has comprendido un poco. . . . Raúl te estaba ahogando con el peso de sus quejas" (73). Michel too has come to terms with feeling responsible for the death of his wife as suggested by his decision to offer to show Carlota the city: "Tengo unos días de descanso acumulados . . . Podría pedirlos ahora y enseñarte un poco la ciudad" (77). Cundo, however, most directly conveys the positive results of the labyrinthine design of Père Lachaise. When Carlota asks "¿Qué has estado haciendo?", he responds, "Perderme. Como tú" and then adds, "Pero para encontrarse a veces hay que perderse mucho" (75). Michel informs Cundo that they have discovered "una fosa común de la guerra civil" with "más de una veintena de hombres, fusilados a las afueras de" Jaraiz de la Vera (76), Cundo's family's hometown. Cundo wastes no time in announcing that he must return at once, no doubt to

see to it that his grandfather's comrades are appropriately recognized. The live characters have also ascended, metaphorically speaking, beyond their liminal states, their conditions of uncertainty, and established a more secure and stable sense of self.

Not unlike the cemetery of Père Lachaise whose intersecting pathways and unexpected twists and turns can create the sensation that one is trapped in a world of lost absolutes, Père Lachaise depicts a world in which life (real) and death (unreal) can be read as intersecting paths in which the self cannot anchor itself firmly due to its ever convergent, ever confluent nature. Individuals from the past, the present, and the future become indistinguishably fused, proof that the self is not the product of single time, a single space, a single perspective, or more specifically, a single reality. The characters of Père Lachaise occupy, as Marc Augé would say, a "non-place, a place which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity" (78). Given what transpires in Pascual's play, we may conclude that being in the postmodern age is by nature unfixed, and more importantly unfixable, and that postmodern subjects are continuously crossing borders, repeatedly transgressing limits, and constantly negotiating boundaries.<sup>8</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Itziar Pascual (b. 1967) belongs to Democratic Spain's first generation of playwrights. Other representative members of the group include Lluïsa Cunillé (n. 1961), José Ramón Fernández (n. 1962), Carmen Delgado Salas (n. 1962), Antonio Onetti (n. 1962), Margarita Sánchez Roldán (n. 1962), Antonio Álamo (n. 1964), Alfonso Plou (n. 1964), Maxi Rodríguez (n. 1965), Rodrigo García (n. 1964), Juan Mayorga (n. 1965), Yolanda Pallín (n. 1965), and Rafael González Gosálbez (n. 1966). Pascual, like others

in her generation, most notably Fernández and Mayorga, began writing for the theatre as a student of the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático and now teaches playwrighting at the same school. Consequently, she and her fellow authors are well aware of the most recent theories about theatre, which find their way into their works, whether consciously or not.

<sup>2</sup> There are interesting comparisons to be made between Pascual's use of time and space in Père Lachaise and what Christian Charlet says about the Parisian landmark in his book Le Père-Lachaise au coeur du Paris des vivants et des morts. Charlet describes Père Lachaise as "un lieu d'activité incessante." He writes that "dès le matin, le cimetière s'anime telle une ruche bourdonnante . . . . Jusqu'au soir, cette activité ne connaît guère de répit et se combine avec l'arrivée des visiteurs, particulièrement nombreux dans l'après midi" (88). Taking into account what Charlet says about the afternoons in Père Lachaise, which is when the action in the play takes place, we may conclude that the afternoon is when the meeting of the living and the dead is most intense. Equally noteworthy is what Charlet says about the geographical location of Père Lachaise: "Il constitue . . . une voie de passage piétonniere importante entre le centre du XX<sup>e</sup> arrondissement et la limite du XI<sup>e</sup>" (89). Given Charlet's description of Père Lachaise as both a bordering and borderless place, Pascual no doubt took its physical features into account when choosing it as the setting for her play.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of the significance of the work of the artists to whom Pascual makes reference will suffice to illustrate why they constitute an appropriately visual theoretical preface to the play. Robert Delaunay (1885-1941) was an abstract artist who was heavily influenced by Cubism. He relied on the contrast of color and light to create works

characterized by the decomposition of form, the result of the amalgamation of objects whose distinguishing features remain intact but whose arrangement gives the impression of occupying more than one space simultaneously. Gino Severini (1883-1996) was one of the theoreticians of Futurism. Unlike his fellow Futurists, he was considered to be more neo-impressionistic in his approach to his subject matter. The sense of dynamic movement in his paintings is achieved through a prismatic perspective, one that produces a fractured view. Christopher Wynne (1889-1946) also began his career as a Futurist and, although he creates more traditional works in his later years, he characteristically relies on fluid lines and shapes to create the sense of a spatial continuum. Jean-Jacques Lebel (b. 1936) is a polyvalent artist whose experimentation with form and medium within a single work defies any association with the real world. Art, for Lebel, must give the impression of being an independent creative act. Delaunay and Lebel are Parisians. Severini is Italian and Wynne is British. Reference to these painters and the use of Père Lachaise are evidence of the increasingly more global approach that the playwrights of Pascual's generation adopt in their works.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to ensuring that Père Lachaise resounds of postmodernity at a textual and contextual level, the absence of physical features in the description of the characters, the personification of time and place, the projection of suggestive paintings, and the detailed accuracy with which Pascual relies on the physical features and geographical lay-out of Père Lachaise, which I shall come back to later, are conventions that guarantee that the play will also be postmodern in its staging. Pascual notes that the characters should be "interpretados únicamente por tres actores" and "se recomienda la supresión de toda escenografía corpórea, así como de cualquier elemento de atrezzo"

(17). The absence of conventional scenery and place and the fact that three actors are to play six characters means the performance will be characterized by the same radical indeterminacy as its textual counterpart. Like all postmodern playwrights, Pascual essentially deconstructs objective representation. Aided by the projected images of the paintings and the reality of Père Lachaise's naturally labyrinthine composition, her hope is that her audience can conceptualize what is not explicitly provided for the performance. This expectation on the part of most postmodern playwrights has led Jeanette Malkin to remark that "all postmodern dramatists" are "rather audience-dependent" (218).

<sup>5</sup> The directions Michel gives Carlota confirm that Pascual relies on Père Lachaise's natural maze-like features to reproduce an unstable reality on the stage in which to situate her characters. I can attest from personal experience that the directions Michel gives Carlota are accurate. Both sets of directions do lead to the main exit of the cemetery on the Boulevard Ménilmontant. But what at first appear to be clear and precise directions can potentially foil an individual's intention to find the exit. What is not obvious in the first set of instructions is that smaller parallel paths intersecting with other pathways run along the "Avenida Saint Morys" between the "Capilla" and the "Monumento a los Muertos," which could easily thwart one's efforts to reach the "Avenida Principal." The second set of directions is also potentially disorienting. The Avenue Circulaire, where the person following these directions would be, splits at both subdivision 32 and 16 to form a figure eight, another potential obstacle to one's efforts to reach the exit. Just as Pascual relies on Père Lachaise's unique feature as a naturally bordering and borderless place, she also relies on the cemetery's inherently convoluted

and complex make-up. Her calculated use of the Parisian landmark's physical characteristics for the purpose of theatrical representation gives added meaning to the postmodern notion of dramatizing "the ambiguity of art's interaction with life" (Corrigan 152). Evoking on the stage a convoluted world that is the mirror image of an equally convoluted concrete reality suggests that art and life are parallel concepts at best.

<sup>6</sup>Isadora Duncan's (1878-1927) ashes are interred in the Columbarium in Père Lachaise. Given the geographical markers that Pascual provides, we can conclude that most of the action takes place in the area of the Columbarium, yet another example of the playwright's use of the exactness of the cemetery's physical layout to construct her text. Also worth noting is that Pascual uses the American dancer's real life experience to construct her character. It is a fact that Duncan's two children, Patrick and Deidre, died tragically as the result of a drowning accident. She herself died tragically when her veil became caught in the wheel of an automobile, an incident Secundino refers to in their encounter: "Pero el aire que te ahoga con el foulard es el mismo que les faltó a tus hijos" (63). The biographical accuracy regarding Isadora's character, like the layout of the cemetery, contributes to the seamless melding of the world of the audience and the created world of the stage in Pascual's' play.

<sup>7</sup>There is no tomb in the Père Lachaise for Secundino Pérez. When Cundo initially asks Michel for directions to his grandfather's grave, he is clearly looking for a common grave, "the grave of Spanish soldiers . . . , the Spanish soldiers who arrived in France, crossed the border. My grandfather" (30), not a specific tomb. There is such a tomb that memorializes all Spaniards who died in the name of freedom located on the Avenue Circulaire just above Transversal N° 3. The following words are inscribed on the

tomb: "A la Mémoire de Tous les Espagnols Morts pour la Liberté." Since it lies along the path Michel instructed Cundo to follow, it is only logical that the encounter between Michel and Secundino (Cundo's double) should take place there.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Barozzi describes Père Lachaise as "one of the most beautiful open-air museums in Paris" (12). It is fascinating to note the extent to which theories about museums coincide with theories about cemeteries. Museums, as Sharon Macdonald has demonstrated, are "key cultural loci of our times" because "through their displays . . . they raise questions about . . . identity . . . , and about permanence and transience" (2). They are the "embodiments", as she puts it, "of temporal relations and social remembering" (9). Kevin Herthington shares in Macdonald's claim that museums are unstable spaces when he refers to them as a space characterized by "ambivalence" and "uncertainty." He even describes a museum as a "contested space" from which "many actors" seek to project themselves and their ideas (162). In an increasingly globalized world in which the subject finds it ever more easy to cross borders of time and space, ever more easy to be here and there, metaphorically speaking, it appears that museums and cemeteries may be the inherently adequate spaces to contain such subjects.

#### Works Cited

Augé, Marc. Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. Trans.

John Howe. London: Verso, 1995.

Barozzi, Jacques. The Père-Lachaise Cemetery. Trans. Marie-Françoise Hamard.

Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 1990.

Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacra and Simulation. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The

U of Michigan P, 1994.



- Broich, Ulrich. "Intertextuality." International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice. Ed. Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997. 249-55.
- Campbell, Charles. "Representation and the Unpresentable." Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism 15.2 (2001): 49-67.
- Cardwell, Richard A. "Beyond the Mirror and the Lamp: Symbolist Frames and Spaces." Romance Quarterly 36.3 (1989): 271-80.
- Charlet, Christian. Le Père-Lachaise au coeur du Paris des vivants et des morts. Paris: Gallimard, 2003.
- Clifford, James. Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Connor, Steven. Postmodernist Culture. An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- Corrigan, Robert W. "The Search for New Endings: The Theatre in Search of a Fix, Part III." Theatre Journal 36.2 (1984): 153-63.
- Dansel, Michel. Au Père-Lachaise. Son histoire, ses secrets, ses promenades. Paris: Fayard, 1973.
- Fokkema, Douwe. Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984.
- Francis, Doris, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou. "The Cemetery. A Site for the Construction of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity." Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Ed. Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002. 95-110.

- Hassan, Ihab. "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture." Georgia Review 31 (1977): 830-50.
- Herthington, Kevin. "The Utopics of Social Ordering. Stonehenge as a Museum Without Walls." Theorizing Museums. Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. 153-76.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age." The Art of Memory. Holocaust Memorials in History. Ed. James E. Young. New York: Prestel, 1994. 9-17.
- Macdonald, Susan. "Introduction." Theorizing Museums. Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. 1-18.
- Malina, Debra. Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002.
- Malkin, Jeanette R. Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1999.
- Pascual, Itziar. Père Lachaise. Madrid: Asociación de Autores de Teatro y Consejería de las Artes de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2003.
- Pfister, Manfred. "How Postmodern is Intertextuality?" Intertextuality. Ed. Henrich Plett. New York: De Gruyter, 1991. 207-24.
- Travers, Martin. An Introduction to Modern European Literature. From Romanticism to Postmodernism. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.