READ THIS, PICTURE THAT

EKPHRASTIC NARRATION IN THE WORKS OF PALOMA DÍAZ-MAS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Read This, Picture That – Ekphrastic Narration in the Works of Paloma Díaz-Mas

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This study explores ekphrastic narration in six prose works of the contemporary author Paloma Díaz-Mas. Ekphrastic scholars traditionally examined the hierarchical relationship between painting and poetry, however; the corpus of this author’s works represents a modern perspective favoring a mutual enrichment of verbal and visual media. The theoretical history of ekphrasis presented traces the evolution of the intermedial relationship.

The short stories analyzed utilize diverse artwork: photographs, sepulcher, and painting. The verbal depiction of two tapestries pertains to one real, the famed Dame à la Licorne tapestries in Paris. The other, fictitious needlecraft, “Las sergas de Hroswith,” bears resemblance to the Bayeux Tapestry in dimension and theme. Analysis of these stories studies the effectiveness of the lexical versus the graphic media, expression of the senses and emotion, the role of the spectator, framing, plot, and interdependency between the two media.

Each section of the author’s acclaimed novel El sueño de Venecia, is penned in literary discourse that was popular in the respective era. The plot traces the history of an oil portrait of former courtesan Doña Gracia de Mendoza and her husband through
five centuries. The narration details the portrait’s provenance, beholders, framing, and physical changes that occur in artwork, some natural, some deliberate. The novel addresses the effects of modifications to the canvas, the varying reception that those changes cause, and incorporates elements of historiographic metafiction and postmodernism. In the last portion of the novel, the complicit reader judges the veracity or error of art historians’ findings about the portrait.

This study concludes that the gap between verbal and visual representation has narrowed and continues to do so at an accelerating pace as technology in our everyday lives fuses the two media.

My theoretical approach draws on the ekphrastic theories of W.J.T. Mitchell, James Heffrenan, Wendy Steiner, John Berger, Joseph Frank, and Margaret Persin. Commentary by Roland Barthes and John Tagg is applied to narration about photography. Susan Stewart’s writings on the five senses are utilized, those of Patricia Waugh as related to metafiction, and criticism of Linda Hutcheon with respect to postmodernism.
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Curriculum Vita
Chapter One - Introduction

Paloma Díaz-Mas’s passion for writing began at an early age. During her childhood years in Madrid she would often tiptoe to the back room of the family residence and stay awake after lights out in order to write.\(^1\) Her first collection of stories was published when she was nineteen. By surveying Díaz-Mas’s works one finds depth and breadth, as her writings span a diversity of both style and genre. They range from a drama, *La informante*, to her non-fiction book, *Los sefardies*, to short stories in the anthology *Nuestro milenio*, to novels such as *El sueño de Venecia* and *La tierra fértil*. In her 2005 autobiography *Como un libro cerrado*, Díaz-Mas offers readers glimpses of her personal life, details her evolution as a writer, and provides insight into what inspires her to write about particular places, events, and people. For Díaz-Mas literature is the music of life and books are the instruments (*Como un libro cerrado* 165), as she draws from both personal experiences and her scholarly knowledge to compose her works.

Díaz-Mas completed her education, both her bachelor’s degree (1971) with specializations in Journalism and Romance Philology and her doctorate (1981) *magna cum laude*, at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. From 1983 to 2001, she served as a faculty member in the Department of Philology, Geography and History at the Universidad del País Vasco in Vitoria, where she chiefly taught Golden Age topics. During a brief hiatus from that position, Díaz-Mas taught as a Visiting Professor at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Among her principal areas of scholarly interest and specialization are Sephardic literature and texts from the medieval and Golden Age periods. The author currently resides in Madrid, where she holds a post at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones. Since 2001, her work there has been centered in the Instituto
de Lengua Española. While previously employed at that institution Díaz-Mas researched and published studies of Sephardic literature.

Díaz-Mas’s dual role as scholar and academician has enhanced her literary creations. When asked during an interview if combining literary creativity, research, and teaching creates difficulties for her she replied “[n]o, porque, en realidad, es todo lo mismo. En definitiva, lo que hago es dedicarme a la literatura de todos los puntos de vista” (Diéguez 79). In a separate interview Díaz-Mas commented that the two roles are mutually beneficial, noting that “[m]i profesión me obliga, pues a un ejercicio de reflexión continua sobre la literatura” (Cornejo-Parriego 481). For example, the author interweaves her academic knowledge of the Middle Ages to enrich the period narration of her novels El rapto del Santo Grial and La tierra fértil as well as a number of her short stories.

Díaz-Mas’s erudite literary and cultural background appeals to a similarly sophisticated intended reader who is well versed in various fields of knowledge including art, mythology, chivalric tradition, Spanish literary conventions, and history. Kathleen Glenn theorizes that comprehension of any text “depends upon the experience and competence of its readers, and if they lack the requisite knowledge and sensitivity, their reading is impoverished” (Glenn 483). Glenn’s commentary is particularly applicable to the competence level required of a reader of Díaz-Mas’s texts in order to fully appreciate them. Margaret Jones concurs, writing that Díaz-Mas’s work addresses “un lector bien versado en los movimientos literarios y sus convenciones; sólo este lector ‘ideal’ puede entrar de lleno en el juego de adivinanzas y estimar el talento de la escritora para captar la esencia de cada período” (Jones 83). Among Díaz-Mas’s works, El sueño de Venecia in
particular solicits the reader’s complicity, which yields a more polyphonic reading. Jones comments that although the author’s texts are not generally humorous Díaz-Mas writes with

un tono jocoso, paródico que invita al lector a participar en el divertimiento literario. Ésta y otras técnicas crean una relación muy fluida entre el triángulo texto-lector-autor. Generalmente el lector tiene una posición privilegiada en cuanto al texto (comprende las “bromas” intertextuales; comparte la omnisciencia de la narradora, etc.). (Jones 85)

Díaz-Mas’s writings are enriched by allusion, extratextual references, and an overall intricacy of plot and technique that make for a rich reading experience that empowers the reader to participate actively in the creation of textual meaning. Consequently, the reader frequently becomes an accomplice while reading her texts. Having read all of the author’s works, I see a progressive refinement of style, as her later works exhibit multifaceted narration. To this end, Díaz-Mas utilizes a variety of literary techniques such as parody, irony, demythification, humor, and ekphrasis. Often the narration that results from these techniques undermines traditional literary and cultural paradigms.

The author’s profound knowledge of literary styles enriches her predilection for interweaving classic genres and literary forms into contemporary works. Díaz-Mas’s narration is frequently a mélange of old and new, of fiction and non-fiction, that includes a large number of characters. This literary approach typifies Spanish post-war women writers according to Phyllis Zatlin, who comments that “women’s narrative is also in the process of reexamining – and undermining – literary genres and conventions” ("Freedom to Express the Feminist Perspective” 30). In *Voices of Their Own*, Elizabeth Ordoñez affirms this idea and notes that the use of humor is crucial as “now the voice is that of reveler, joker, irreverent deconstructor of revered traditions and respected texts” (149).
María Pilar Rodríguez posits that Díaz-Mas’s propensity for historiographic fiction is a typical tendency of numerous female writers of the 1990s to “indagar en el presente y pasado de la nación para propiciar el rescate de espacios alternativos borrados por discursos previos y la revisión de versiones incompletas de la historia” (Rodríguez 77). Díaz-Mas’s penchant, as well as that of some of her fellow contemporary female authors, for rewriting classic literary forms constitutes a foray into new interpretations that question the boundaries that formerly marked women’s narrative.

Although many of Díaz-Mas’s works have women as protagonists or central characters she, like various other contemporary Spanish women authors, eschews the label of author of feminist texts. She prefers to be known first as a writer and second as a woman and verbalized this perspective in an interview noting that “las mujeres que escribimos en España en general nos gusta que nos consideren como escritores, o sea, como un escritor que es mujer” (Ferrán 339). Díaz-Mas becomes annoyed when “por el hecho de ser mujer te exijan que escribas en revindicación femenina” (Diéguez 88). Moreover, during her interview with Rosalia Cornejo-Parriego, Díaz-Mas states that she resists stereotypical feminist writing that is “muy directamente militante en el feminismo, una literatura casi panfletaria, sobre problemas y temas de mujer y creo que la resistencia a ser metidas en un ‘ghetto’” (486). The author also rejects the idea of directing her writing to “un público exclusivamente femenino” (Cornejo-Corriego 487). In *Contemporary Spanish Women Writers and the Publishing Industry*, Christine Henseler sums up Díaz-Mas’s comments on the feminist issue concluding that “Paloma Díaz-Mas agrees that her work displays feminist concerns, but she rejects the idea of having to write
as a woman” (15). Díaz-Mas rejects the notion of being catalogued as a feminist writer or establishing gender-centered parameters for her writings.

Díaz-Mas has a long-standing affinity for the genre of the short story, five of which receive critical attention in this study. In fact, her first work published in 1973 was the collection *Biografías de genios, traidores, sabios y suicidios según antiguos documentos*. The ludic tone of the book alerts the reader to the imaginary nature of the characters described, despite the text’s initial declaration that research on those characters has been done in archives and abbeys. The number of characters in this book, ninety-five in all, the novelty of the names created, along with the brevity of description that compresses detail into short bursts of narrative, make for a fascinating work. The eclectic selection of characters indicates that the book reads better as an author’s brainstorming to develop numerous, offbeat characters rather than a series of short stories. The narrator explains that the work was inspired by a man in the town square, nicknamed “The Uncle,” who devoted his whole life to writing a poem. Ironically, upon his death it was discovered that the poem consisted of a mere three lines. Another vignette describes Madison Smith, whose job entailed turning on a red warning light in a factory in case of emergency. Smith worked in that capacity eight hours a day for fifty years and never illuminated the emergency light to signal a crisis. Another character, Izidoro Cabrito Lechuga, ironically dedicated his life to an association that fought against ridiculous and crude surnames. It does not take the reader long to realize the supposedly real characters are humorous figments of the author’s fertile imagination.

One of Díaz-Mas’s principal areas of scholarly interest is *los sefardíes*, and in almost every one of her major literary creations there is a Jewish character. This area of
scholarly investigation finds eloquent expression in her essay Los sefardies: historia, lengua y cultura (1986), which was a finalist for the Premio Nacional de Ensayo and has been translated into English. The extensive study focuses on the history of Sephardic culture including examples of coplas, refranes, consejas, and romansas. The essay offers detailed information with respect to the origin of Sephardic Jews, their troubled history, and their diaspora up to and including the last decades of the twentieth century. Díaz-Mas also edited a critical anthology titled Romancero that was published in 1994. Most recently she penned Fronteras e interculturalidad entre los sefardíes occidentales (2006). She concludes that lamentably as the Sephardim population spreads around the world and gradually adapts to the local language, coincidentally the culture tends to die out as the use of the Sephardic language diminishes (Los sefardies 235-53).

The motivation for Díaz-Mas’s deep interest in this ethnic group can be found in her 1983 play, La informante, which won the Premio de la Ciudad de Toledo. She writes that her play was based on a study done in 1970, which was formulated from a series of interviews undertaken in the United States on behalf of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. The plot revolves around two women; the first is Elena, who is studying in Israel on a scholarship, and the second, Luna, an octogenarian Israeli Jewess who has extensive knowledge of Sephardic culture, folklore, history, and customs. A parallel exists between Díaz-Mas and Elena with respect to their objective to preserve Sephardic culture. During the play Luna inquires if Elena is Jewish, and Elena replies that “[n]o, no soy sefardí y tampoco soy judía. Soy española” (La informante 15). Elena later explains her own motivation, and possibly Díaz-Mas’s for studying Sephardic culture: “esas cánticas y esas consejas, como usted las llama. Y yo no quiero que se
pierdan” (La informante 18). Both the character Elena and Díaz-Mas have a substantial knowledge and profound appreciation for Sephardic culture and hope to preserve it.

In 1984 Díaz-Mas’s novel El rapto del Santo Grial was published and named a runner-up for the Premio Herralde de la Novela. The author’s fascination with the medieval time period, so apparent in El rapto del Santo Grial, stems from reading El Cid and a fondly remembered childhood event that Díaz-Mas recounts in Como un libro cerrado. When she was twelve years old, Díaz-Mas’s father took her to the ancient fortress town of Ávila, where she was allowed to roam the walled city at her leisure one day, map in hand (of course the dangers of a child alone in a town in those years were minimal as compared to today). She cites that trip as a catalyst for her interest in the era, noting that “[n]o sé si mi pasión por la Edad Media nació o se consolidó aquel día, descubriendo yo sola el urbanismo del medievo . . . Quizás en aquella aventura de los doce años estaba empezando a escribir ya, sin saberlo, novelas como El rapto del Santo Grial o La tierra fértil” (Como un libro cerrado 105).

Díaz-Mas’s feminist parody El rapto del Santo Grial demythifies King Arthur’s Court, Camelot, and the quest for the Holy Grail. In the novel, Díaz-Mas explores the dichotomy of woman as object versus subject, disorients the reader via defamiliarization of traditional expectations of the chivalric novel, and includes discourse that breaks the frame of traditional chivalric codes of conduct and their respective gender specificities. For example, the knights that set out on a sea voyage to find the Grail are “landwrecked” instead of shipwrecked. Traditional gender paradigms become inverted when the damsels hold the knight captive and ravish him, rather than the expected opposite scenario. This and other events described in the text prompt the reader to consider the novel as a more
cultured, literary version of the classic Monty Python film *The Quest for the Holy Grail.* Ironically, the knights do not want to find the Grail — for if they do, what will their mission in life be? The parody in the novel also operates on a linguistic level. One example is how the female *Caballero de morado,* clothed in the international feminist color, must prove her worthiness as a member of the Knights of the Round Table. Much of the debate about her merit centers around double *entendres* regarding arms and knightly competence, including discussion about a sword and its sheath, a phallologocentric pun of the two words *vaina/vagina.* The tragic death of the female knight, ironically at the hands of her beloved, who does not recognize her clad in armor, is caused by his inability to read between the lines of traditional male chivalric discourse. Tragically, the male knight’s beloved is the victim of the confines of that discourse.

The next of the author’s novels published was *Tras las huellas de Artorius* (1986), which was awarded the *Premio Cáceres de Novela,* traces two parallel narrations. The protagonist, Marta, is working on a problematic thesis that seeks to identify the author of a medieval text titled “Conversión y penitencia de San Florio el ermitaño.” Aside from describing Marta’s academic profession as a Spanish linguist, the narrator muses about Marta’s quotidian life and her colleagues in humanistic and often anecdotal terms. I suspected when reading the novel that it is largely autobiographical, and Díaz-Mas confirmed that notion in *Como un libro cerrado* (196). The narration flows awkwardly in this work, dissimilar to the polished style of Díaz-Mas’s later writings. During an interview the author herself acknowledged the book’s shortcomings commenting that “[s]í, és a otra novela inmadurísima” (Ferrán 329).
During the late 1980s, Díaz-Mas spent time as a faculty member and Writer-In-Residence at the University of Oregon at Eugene. By drawing on that experience she wrote a collection of short travel essays entitled *Una ciudad llamada Eugenio*, which puts forth a light-hearted but often profound commentary on American popular culture and lifestyle in a university town. Díaz-Mas remarks on the suitability of her experiences in Eugene as basis for her book, commenting that “[r]ealmente la universidad es una especie de microcosmos autosuficientes, y eso me parece interesante en el sentido de que se vive muy intensamente la vida universitaria” (Cornejo-Parriego 488). Margaret Jones comments on Díaz-Mas’s defamiliarized, yet humanistic point of view by noting that “la capacidad de situarse dentro y fuera de la situación para poder participar en ella y hacer comentarios al mismo tiempo; la tolerancia benévola por todo lo humano” (84). In *Una ciudad llamada Eugenio* Díaz-Mas seizes the opportunity to describe her experiences from a dual perspective, that of a member of an American college community and a European scholar.

At the beginning of this travelogue, Díaz-Mas informs the reader that while photographs and post cards may serve as a thumbnail sketch of a trip and provoke recollections, she considers them an incomplete repository of memories and experiences. Díaz-Mas warns that photographs have their limits and cautions that entonces podrá sustituir mis recuerdos inexistentes por falsos recuerdos, derivados no de la contemplación de la realidad sino de la contemplación de sus reproducciones fotográficas. Un viaje de papel que, a fuerza de ser hojeado una y otra vez, acabará por suplantar al viaje verdadero y me obligará a recordar para siempre no el país que vi, sino el que he fotografiado. De hecho, estas cartulinas han comenzado ya a laminar mi memoria y a sustituir mis recuerdos verdaderos. Intenté rebelarme contra esa maldición de memoria fotográfica. (*Una ciudad llamada Eugenio* 8)
With respect to a record of her time in Eugene, Díaz-Mas expresses her preference of the verbal medium of recollection to the graphic one. She states that words serve her memory better than photos, “esos recortes de cartulina recortada”, and declares that “a partir de ahora, lo que recordaré de ese país – cada día que pasa más lejano – no será lo que vi en él, sino lo que de él he escrito” (8). Nevertheless, in a section of Como un libro cerrado, “El ojo que mira,” Díaz-Mas accounts for the source of her passion for photography, her father. She explains that for her, her father’s “cámaras fotográficas . . . eran su afición y pasión” (107). Later in this study two photographs described in the short story “En busca de un retrato” will be compared and contrasted, in order to evaluate their relative ability to portray their multi-faceted subject.

Among the practices that Díaz-Mas finds puzzling in Una ciudad llamada Eugenio are the American viewpoint that squirrels are cute, as to her “sin su cola la ardilla no sería más que un ratoncito histérico” (38), that many children teach their parents about recycling rather than vice versa (40), the paradox of designing our environmentally friendly parks so meticulously and then littering in them so profusely (141-42), and how much decorum for leaving a party in America differs from that of Madrid (146). Her defamiliarized perspective provides other interesting commentary such as her description of “grown-up hippies” (20), co-eds who come to class dressed as if they are going to the beach in Hawaii (27), and how sweetly many Americans talk to their dogs (73-4).

The author’s novel published in 1999, La tierra fértil, was awarded the 2000 Premio Euskadi and was a finalist for the Premio Nacional de la Crítica in the same year. It is Díaz-Mas’s lengthiest work, at 632 pages, and tells a tale of vengeance packed with
intrigue, murder, and double-crosses set in Middle Age Catalonia. The novel highlights the author’s profound knowledge of and predilection for the Middle Ages, as previously noted in reference to *El rapto del Santo Grial*. The plot incorporates many cruel, brutal cultural practices that were typical of the medieval era as well as various elements that can be linked to Biblical archetypes. Customs of the age such as *droit de seigneur* and the credence given to omens, for example a person having eyes of different colors, play an important role in the narration. In an interview, Díaz-Mas cautions that we should view such practices through the proper temporal frame, and adds that “un error en el que no se debe caer es en el juzgar el pasado con los mismos parámetros morales que el presente... cosas que podrían ser perfectamente habituales en la edad media y que hoy en día nos escandalizan como injusticias atroces” (Ferrán 343). In his study of the *Lady and the Unicorn Tapestries*, Sutherland Lyall echoes Díaz-Mas’s cautionary advice when he warns that “we must be careful not to apply it [the past] to the mind-set of the present.” He points out that much of the knowledge is from monastic or clerical origin, but states that thankfully the “mediaeval was not entirely centered on the cloister or laborious scholastic interpretations of obscure theological points.” Much of the secular information centers around daily existence and the cycles of life during the time period. Nevertheless his comments include an existence not dissimilar to that in Díaz-Mas’s novel *La tierra fértil* where “[...for many, if not most, people of the Middle Ages – even in the royal or ducal courts – life was short and brutal.” Lyall invokes the title of William Manchester’s acclaimed work, *World Lit Only by Fire*, to depict the harsh realities of the era, “[w]ith its recurrent famines and epidemics, its interminable and unspeakably cruel wars, its ignorance, religious bigotry and persecution” (*The Lady and the Unicorn* 9-13).
The protagonist of the novel, Don Arnau, returns to his ancestral home after five years to find that his father has been murdered by Don Bertrán, Don Arnau's best friend. Thus ensues the cycle of hate that repeats itself throughout the story, within which Don Arnau avenges his father's death by murdering Don Bertrán. Subsequently a religious pilgrim, Joan Galbo, lodges at Don Arnau's castle. Joan's sister was raped by Don Arnau when she was fourteen, and Joan intends to avenge that deed by killing his host. Ironically, given those circumstances, Don Arnau bestows knighthood upon Joan and the reader can glean that a homosexual relationship develops between the two men. Women play a marginal role in the novel as they are occasionally used as political pawns and produce two sons for Don Arnau. Although the feudal lord achieves success on the foreign front, affairs on his home turf are declining. The Catalonians successfully defend their lands against the French, who have the support of the Pope; however, an evil vassal of Don Arnau, Mataset, causes domestic troubles. Fueled by the machinations of Mataset, the relationship between Don Arnau's two sons, Ramón and Oliver, deteriorates. Eventually, Mataset convinces Oliver to perpetrate fratricide. Problems with the fiefdom continue as a famine strikes the estate, Mataset drives a wedge between father and son, and a witness to Ramón's murder comes forth. Don Arnau disinherits his son Oliver and challenges him to a duel in an effort to end the bloodshed and bring peace back to the land. Despite Don Arnau's exemplary chivalrous conduct and victory at the duel, Mataset persuades Oliver to commit patricide. Oliver reigns for thirty years and, as history repeats itself, he is ultimately slain at the hand of one of his own sons. Díaz-Mas underpins this text with her profound historical knowledge of the era and brings the cycle of medieval brutality, from which escape is difficult, full circle.
Since her early days as a writer, Díaz-Mas has been a successful author of short stories and has had a numbers of her stories published in anthologies that include the writings of various authors. The author’s volume of her own stories Nuestro milenio, published in 1987, was runner-up for the Premio Nacional de Narrativa in that same year. In addition, several of her short stories have been translated and published in English magazines. Five of the author’s ekphrastic short stories will be discussed later in this study.

Díaz-Mas’s continuing attraction to writing short stories defies some of the drawbacks with respect to commercial and critical success of the genre. She acknowledges that reviews of her stories are not always glowing and cites the central problem that “los libros de cuentos en España se leen poco, a diferencia de Hispanoamérica donde la gente parece que lee mucho cuento.” She points out that in Spain, stories that achieve considerable success are frequently penned by an “autor muy consagrado para que la gente lo compre por el nombre” (Cornejo-Parriego 484). Despite writing three critically acclaimed lengthy novels, the brevity of the short story poses a challenge that entices Díaz-Mas because

es un género que plantea un gran reto al escritor: se trata de contar algo de forma muy condensada, economizando recursos, cosa que a veces es más difícil que explayarse en una narración extensa (Encinar 87).

Selected short stories of this author are incorporated in anthologies such as Relatos eróticos and Cuento español contemporáneo. “La discreta pecadora, o ejemplo de doncellas recogidas” is included in the former and is written in a parodic tone similar to El rapto del Santo Grial. The yarn derives its form from Cervantes’s novela ejemplar and is emblematic of the author’s partiality to rescripting classic Spanish literary forms and
adding an ironic twist. The protagonist, from a well-to-do Extremaduran family, is a pure and modest damsel who never ventures forth from the house without her duenna, even to Mass. She becomes obsessed with the hagiographic accounts of notorious sinners who are given a great penance. During the damsel’s quest to emulate such historic religious figures she flees her home dressed like a man, penniless so that she will have to sacrifice her virtue. Unfortunately for the damsel she cannot find any takers along the peregrination road to sin. She initially accompanies two cardsharps who are posing as pilgrims, but upon discovering that he is actually she they take flight, fearing that she is an apparition that someone sent to convert them. Still determined to sacrifice her chastity, she encounters a Castilian shepherd who mistakes her for the image of the Virgin in his church. When she offers herself to him, he perceives the damsel as the devil in disguise and he, too, runs away. Having no luck she heads for the “wicked” port city of Valencia, where she is kidnapped to a Berber galley and taken to the oddly blonde-haired captain. Upon seeing the extraordinary Spanish beauty on board his ship, the captain is struck by Cupid’s arrow, which in this case does not discriminate between Christians and Moors. They sail off to Algiers, where the damsel converts to the law and religion of the land, and they live happily ever after. This tale presents a radical departure from the stereotypical storyline of the novela ejemplar, in which Moors are traditionally dark and evil, and it is the fair, faithful Christian who comes to aid, succor, and rescue the damsel and return her unharmed to her Catholic society. Conversely in “La discreta pecadora, o ejemplo de doncellas recogidas”, the heroic fair-haired Berber captain and the young virgin find happiness upon leaving the Christian land and faith to embrace Islamic
territory and religion, thus breaking the literary and cultural norms of the genre and inverting its traditional paradigm.

In a more contemporary/science fiction vein, the author’s short story “La niña sin alas” presents a defamiliarized, yet poignant, viewpoint of maternal behavior. The tale relates the trials and tribulations of a fortyish career woman who, despite being warned during her pregnancy that her fetus would be born with the defect of not having wings, carries the child to term. As a mother, the woman experiences the joys and heartbreaks of a parent with a handicapped child, including in this case a disintegrating marriage. As the story is underpinned by humankind’s archetypal fascination with flight, the woman reflects on past times when people could not fly and hugged with arms instead of wings, how skin-to-skin contact between mother and child has diminished due to the integument evolving into feathers, and how odd it is when her child attempts to walk first instead of fly.

“La discreta pecadora, o ejemplo de doncellas recogidas” and “La niña sin alas” represent a small sample of Díaz-Mas’s short stories, which encompass varied time periods and themes. While both stories have female protagonists that defy the social conventions of their time, the former is set in Spain of many centuries ago and the latter in the future when human appendages have evolved appreciably from what their form and function are in present times. These two selections are emblematic of the author’s ability to develop narration across time periods and sub-genres.

One of the primary factors that make Díaz-Mas an extraordinary author is her ability to master multiple genres: drama, short story, non-fiction, and the novel. This coupled with her erudite cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge create rich and
polyphonic texts directed toward a cultured reader. Frequently the author re-scripts traditional Spanish literary forms using techniques that include parody, humor, and the inversion of traditional cultural and gender paradigms in a manner that makes the works interesting to a contemporary reader. In a limited number of Díaz-Mas’s works, ekphrasis serves to further enrich the narration, all of which is the central analysis of this study.
Chapter Notes

1. This biographical note is discussed on the book cover of *Biografía de genios, traídores, sabios, y suicidios según antiguos documentos*.

2. *Coplas* and *romansas* are two of several types of short lyric poetry that cover a variety of topics. They were traditionally passed down orally through generations and addressed such topics as history, holidays, foods and cooking, and mourning, among others.

3. Margaret Jones writes that the book reveals as much about the author as about the town of Eugene. Jones comments that Díaz-Mas has “un ojo agudo y el talento de transferir lo visual a lo escrito; el sentido de humor y de ironía que brota de lo que ve; la apreciación por las vivencias y diferencias de los otros; la capacidad de situarse dentro y fuera de la situación para poder participar en ella y hacer comentarios al mismo tiempo; la tolerancia benévolas por todo lo humano” (Jones 84).

4. Díaz-Mas includes another detail of Don Arnau’s bisexual history. In *Como un libro cerrado*, she reveals that the character Don Arnau “había sido violado” at some point in his life, but adds that Díaz-Mas “no podía describir cómo fue, porque aquello había sucedido durante los años oscuros de su cautiverio como prisionero de guerra” (*Como un libro cerrado* 83).
Chapter Two - History and Theory of Ekphrastic Criticism

Given that ekphrasis is central to many of Díaz-Mas’s works and to this analysis of them, a brief history of ekphrastic criticism is in order. Verbal and visual representation and communication have been studied since Classical times, and such scholarly investigation continues in the present century. In *Culturating Picturacy*, James Heffernan posits that few areas “more clearly demonstrate the heuristic efficacy of relational thinking than that of art and literature” (9). Traditionally the poetic medium has occupied a place of privilege in the ranking of verbal and visual representation. However, during the twentieth century this static ordering has evolved into a more dynamic interchange between the lexical and graphic realms and ekphrastic study has increasingly begun to encompass the prose genre in addition to poetry. Selected texts of Díaz-Mas present the reader with what I have come to think of as literarture, a fusion of art and literature. In the variety of examples of ekphrastic prose selected for this analysis there exists an intermedial relationship that delivers varied successes and failures of ekphrastic prose, and therefore, establishes metaekphrastic commentary. Based on the ekphrastic works in the study there is no clear-cut privilege of one medium over the other. In some cases varied receptions of the same work of art within one work provoke the reader to assess the value of each medium of representation, leading to evaluation of ekphrastic literature in general.

Operating under the assumption that language and culture are inseparable entities, I preface this overview of ekphrasis with consideration of visual and verbal text availability to the common citizen, the growing rate of global literacy, and proliferation of access to the internet. One should remember these factors when evaluating ekphrastic
theory, literary works, and criticism in order to facilitate their analysis relative to their respective temporal and cultural frame.

As a species, *homo sapiens* initially relies more on visual skills than verbal ones at various stages of linguistic development. It would be remiss to disregard our original dependence on our visual capacity, and the eternal influence of optical traditions on verbal texts. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger points out that for infants and toddlers, seeing comes before words, “[t]he child looks and recognizes before it speaks,” but he also quickly points out that the relationship is frequently problematic, that “what we see and what we know is never settled” (7). Similarly, Heffernan emphasizes that “children learn to read picture books first” (*Culturating Picturacy* 12). Furthermore, he and Guillermo De Torre also note that some of the earliest known examples of pictorial art are the cave drawings in Lascaux, France, and Altamira, Spain, which relate the native flora and fauna to the use of icons in the development of visual art (*Culturating Picturacy* 20), and posits that “[l]a literatura de Cromagnon está pintada en las cuevas de Altamira” (13). Anthony Monegal echoes ’s observations by commenting that “[o]ur oldest images are bare lines and smudged colors. Before the pictures of antelopes and mammoths, of running men and fertile women, we scratched lines or stamped palms on the walls of our caves to signify our presence, to fill in a blank space, to communicate a memory or a warning, to be human for the first time” (*Literatura y pintura* 15).

The rise of Johannes Guttenberg’s printing press (c. 1440) can be cited as a leap forward for the distribution of the printed word, which, combined with the advent of the lithograph in the eighteenth century, are points of departure for the increased accessibility of both the visual and verbal media. Murray Kreiger comments on the physical evolution:
of the written text by tracing the shift from oral to written texts, from scrolls to pages, to
the earliest books, which were ornate and expensive. He describes early tomes, which
were illuminated, emblematic and "extremely decorated works of visual art, a weighty
physical object to be treasured for the painting as a craft, as well as the precious materials
that went into it" (Ekphrasis 116). Kreiger also points out that these texts included more
material signs than later or present day texts that exhibit the standardization of type and
the loss of graphics that represent natural signs. Since the times of those medieval texts,
quantum leaps have occurred in terms of both printing and accessibility, such as
paperback books, and more recent devices such as the Kindle®, which makes verbal and
audio texts readily transportable and accessible in mobile form anywhere in the world
where internet is available.¹ However, in The Language of Images, W.J.T. Mitchell sees
modern accessibility as overkill:

[O]ne of the most striking features of modern culture has been the
intensive, almost compulsive, collaboration between practitioners of the
word and practitioners of the image. We inhabit a world so inundated with
composite pictorial-verbal forms (film, television, illustrated books) and
with the technology for the rapid cheap production of words and images
(cameras, Xerox machines, tape recorders) that nature itself threatens to
become what it was for the Middle Ages: an encyclopedic illuminated
book overlaid with ornamentation and marginal glosses, every object
converted into an image with its proper label or signature. (1)

Mitchell advises that we must consider our contemporary perspective, or cultural and
personal repository of artwork already viewed when we view images of the past:

[O]ur readings of ancient texts and images cannot help but be inflected by
our experiences with television and cinema. The claim that all media are
mixed, all arts composite arts, may actually sound like common sense to a
generation raised on MTV. Another answer, however, would stress that
the purification of the media in modernist aesthetics, an attempt to grasp
the unitary, homogeneous essences of painting, photography, sculpture,
poetry, etc. is the real aberration and the heterogeneous character of media
was well understood in premodern culture. (Picture Theory 107)
Mitchell’s commentary is especially relevant to contemporary existence as multimedia technological applications increasingly insinuate themselves into our daily life.

Berger remarks on how socio-economic status contributes to the accessibility of artwork and offers statistics that validate his claim that “an interest in art is related to privileged education” (24), which inevitably adds a political twist: “[t]he art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class” (86). Moreover, Berger cites the time period in which oil paintings in particular were a status symbol, “[o]il painting, before it was anything else, was a celebration of private prosperity. As an art form it derived from the principle that you are what you have” (Ways of Seeing 139). Initially only the church and the wealthy had access to fine art through their private collections, but eventually the “lesser artists copied masterpieces for the lower classes” (Hagstrum 26). Wendy Steiner cites a serendipitous benefit of ekphrastic study of any era when she writes that “the interartistic comparison inevitably reveals the aesthetic norms of the period during which the questions is asked” (The Colors of Rhetoric 18). Berger offers a concise example of this cultural framework, citing the medieval concept of a physical hell, as relative to the concept that “fire meant something different then than now” (Ways of Seeing 8). Unquestionably, as human linguistic skills grew the relationship between visual and verbal representation became problematic and frequently polarized between “la palabra y la imagen” (166). Theoretical struggles have ensued to define the dominant method of representation, to assign a semiotic and presumably more scientific scheme to classify the interaction between the two realms. Prominent literary and linguistic critics have outlined the shortcomings and virtual impossibility of that endeavor. Mitchell comments that “[t]he history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for
dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a 'nature' to which only it has access” (Iconology 43). Modern literary criticism encourages, rather than discourages study of the lexical-graphic interrelationship.

Various definitions of ekphrasis exist, the most literal rooted in the word itself, which comes from the Greek verb *ekphrazein*, meaning a “plain declaration, description or interpretation of a thing” (Oxford Dictionary 782). Its relation to literature has been defined by a number of critics in different ways. In The Sister Arts, for example, Jean Hagstrum defines ekphrasis as texts that “give voice and language to otherwise mute art objects” and he cites the Greek etymological meaning as “to speak out or tell in full” (18), while Simon Goldhill cites Theon’s maxim that “ekphrasis is a descriptive speech that brings the thing shown vividly before the eyes” (3). In A Museum of Words, Heffernan offers a definition that he acknowledges is “simple in form, but complex in implications: *ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation*” (3), and he further classifies the ekphrastic poetry that he analyzes as an extension of the title of his work “a museum of words – a gallery of art constructed by language alone” (8). In addition, Heffernan characterizes ekphrasis as a perpetual offshoot of literature that “reveals again and again this narrative response to pictorial stasis, this storytelling impulse that language by its very nature seems to release and stimulate” (A Museum of Words 425).

Mitchell gives ekphrasis the moniker of a “curiosity: it is the manner of a minor and rather obscure literary genre (poems that describe works of visual art) and a more general topic (the verbal representation of visual representation)” (“Ekphrasis and the
Other” 696). Valentine Cunningham emphasizes the power of ekphrasis to create a perception of authenticity:

[the painting or tapestry or whatever aesthetic object is gazed at, described, made present in such texts, offers what Roland Barthes called “the effect of the real,” “l’effet du réel,” the knowable, touchable real, in a more certain style than writing itself can ever do, and making the painting and so forth a subject, or object, of the writing is, in effect, a way of laying claim, by proxy, to the presence, reality, truth of the writing. (“Why Ekphrasis?” 62)

An ekphrastic object can be any number of items, and Mitchell notes that the earliest examples of ekphrastic poetry are centered, not on poetry as one might anticipate, but rather on “utilitarian objects that happen to have ornamental or symbolic visual representations attached to them.” Some examples are “goblets, urns, vases, chest, cloaks, weapons armor, and architectural embellishments such as friezes, frescoes and statues” (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 703). The earliest examples of ekphrasis were fundamental to use, rather than being strictly ornamental in nature.

Ulrich Weisstein delineates sixteen categories that serve to classify a work as ekphrastic, three of which are central to this study: “[l]iterary works that describe or interpret works of art . . . literary works so designed as to stimulate the reader’s visual sense,” and “[l]iterary works concerned with art and artists, whether real or imagined” (Baricelli 259-62). I beg to differ with Cunningham when she states that it does not matter if ekphrastic works are real or fictional, when she declares that “I don’t think that matters all that much, either in theory or in practice” (57). In A Museum of Words, Heffernan signals the importance of this distinction between real or imagined art.

In one sense,

[the availability of a painting represented by a poem should make no difference to our experience of the poem, which, like any specimen of
notional ekphrasis— is made wholly of words. But the availability of the painting allows us to see how the poem reconstructs it, how the poet’s words seek to gain its mastery over the painter’s image. To see the difference between a passage about an imaginary work of art and a poem about a real one is to learn something of what has happened to ekphrasis in our time— especially as poetry enters what I call the museum of words. (7)

It does make a difference in the practice of reading ekphrastic prose, as I shall later enlarge upon with respect to the novel *El sueño de Venecia* and Diaz-Mas’ two short stories about tapestries, in which one series of woven panels is real, and in the other imagined. As Mitchell points out, we are surrounded by common interartistic forms of which we may not be readily cognizant such as photographic essays, films, plays, newspapers, cartoon strips, and illustrated books, all of which combine “different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes” (*Picture Theory* 94-5). Furthermore, Mitchell asserts that the photographic form is underpinned by an interartistic relationship that entails the “suturing of photograph and language” (*Picture Theory* 212).

Historically, beginning with the Classic Greek and Roman civilizations, many scholars have commented on the visual/verbal interrelationship, founding the poetics platform for subsequent ekphrastic debate. Plutarch quotes the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (c.556-c.468 B.C.) who said that “painting is mute poetry and poetry is a speaking privilege,” thus giving equal weight to the two media (*Moralia* ‘De Gloria Atheniensium’ sect. 3). Goldhill further analyzes Simonides’s quote, explaining that “artists and writers seek the same effects with different materials . . . one (the painter) uses ‘colors and designs’ and the other (the poet or prose writer) uses ‘words and phrases’ and ‘their underlying aim is the same’ (“What is Ekphrasis For?” 5). The words “ut pictura
poesis” (as is painting, so is poetry) of the Roman poet Horace (65-8 B.C.) placed the two arts on equal footing and became one of most frequently cited ekphrastic quotes (Ars poetica I. 361). Despite the longstanding popularity of this quote, Hagstrum postulates that Horace’s quote has been somewhat decontextualized and poorly interpreted, pointing out that Horace “ignores systematic argument about the relations of the arts and merely strikes out fortuitous and memorable parallels.” Hagstrum further explains that “Horace is saying that some poems please only once but that others can bear repeated meanings and close critical examination.” Horace extends this theory to painting in a manner that, according to Hagstrum, is without warrant (The Sister Arts 9).

The high valuation of painting has not always been the case. Ulrich Weisstein notes the lack of consideration for the visual arts in antiquity and the Middle Ages when painting and sculpture ranked only slightly above the crafts or arts of making, and by citing a passage from the periodical Athaneum, tells us how painting was downgraded, that it did not even have its own Muse, and that its lack of a Classical god leaves it “out in the cold” (“Literature and the Visual Arts” 251). Hagstrum concurs with this observation, noting that despite Plato having said in the Republic that “[t]he poet is like a painter” (x. 605 a.), he virtually ignored the art of sculpture and mentioned painting in only the most cursory fashion, linking it with weaving, interior decoration and architecture” (The Sister Arts 3). Hagstrum assents with respect to the devaluing of painting, and further concludes that “the educational ideals of Greece were always dominated by poetry, music, and rhythm” (The Sister Arts 9). To the contrary, he notes that in Classic Roman times “[e]kphrasis, in its broadest sense, was an admired and fully
approved trick of the rhetorician’s trade and as such was a regular scholastic exercise”
(The Sister Arts 29).

Aristotle spoke of enargeia, which Steiner characterizes as mimetic and
“imagistic or pictorial approach to writing” (Colors of Rhetoric 12). Similarly, Diane
Chaffee maintains that enargeia as a literary feature “assists the writer in evoking vivid
imagery while he paints vibrant pictures of real or imagined art objects” (“Visual Arts in
Literature” 318). The Greek sophist Philostratus the Elder, who is credited with being
the father of art criticism, wrote the lengthy tome Imagines during the third century A.D.
(A Museum of Words 8). Hagstrum credits him with recognizing the ekphrastic potential
of prose, with its greater capacity to expand, to “see the potentially intimate relationship
between pictorial description and total structure,” and comments that Philostratus “looks
upon verbal expression as painterly, but he also considers painting literary” (Hagstrum
31-2). Efforts to align poetry and painting rather than separate them took root in literary
criticism centuries ago.

The gold standard by which ekphrastic criticism in western literature is now
eminently measured is the description in Homer’s Iliad of the shield that Hephaestus
made for Achilles. Heffernan concurs with the ageless influence of Classic ekphrasis,
noting that since Homer’s epics are generally dated to the eighth century B.C., about the
time that writing originates in Greece, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that ekphrasis is
“as old as writing itself in the western world.” He further comments on the profound and
enduring effect of Homer’s verbal recreation of the shield as the earliest example of
western ekphrastic literature that also “is paradigmatic, establishing conventions,
contentions, and strategies that would inform ekphrastic poetry for centuries to come” (A

Museum of Words 9). Achilles’s shield, fabricated from bronze, tin, gold, and silver, featured a concentric circular organization that depicts a plethora of themes including: war and peace, the cosmos, agriculture, festivals, marriage, litigation, dancing, singing, and acrobatics, thus becoming both a symbolic item, one that offers protection, as well as an iconic one, representing various facts of Greek life and history of the era.9 The passages from Homer’s epic that describe the shield are of the utmost importance as they serve as a point of departure for all subsequent renderings of ekphrasis. Heffernan articulates this theory clearly highlighting that “[i]n writing at length about visual art, Homer . . . frankly invites us to measure the newborn powers of writing itself against those of a much older mode of representation, and this is the invitation latently or manifestly made by all ekphrastic writing from Homer’s time right up to our own” (A Museum of Words 9). Heffernan’s comments echo the timeless nature of lexical and pictorial interaction.

During medieval times art and Christianity functioned in a complementary manner and classical pictorialism/mimesis continued to flourish. Nevertheless, an interdisciplinary religious polemic of spirituality versus sensuality ensued. On one hand the eye “being the window of the soul, was regarded as the most spiritual organ of sense perception,” while to the contrary representational art “was also seen as the mirror in which the sensuous and sensual nature of the world was most palpably reflected.” This controversy led some theologians to eschew painting as a false representation, and St. Augustine to prefer music and architecture to painting and sculpture (Weisstein 253).10 Thus, the devaluation of plastic art based on its sensual capacity carried with it a concomitant lack of expansion in ekphrastic literature, although Hagstrum points out that
the “practice of association of poetry with the graphic arts was by no means destroyed” (47). Contrary to Hagstrum’s assessment of St. Augustine’s hierarchal perspective, Edward McComick notes that until the end of the Middle Ages painting was considered a nobler art, so poets borrowed freely from it and attempted to “paint” their words (Lessing xiv). Alberto Manguel points out that during this time formulaic correspondence occurred. For instance, the chromatic spectrum was codified “attributing symbolic values” to some colors; for example the color blue “was often associated with the color of the Virgin Mary, the color of the sky after the clouds of ignorance have been dispelled” (32). Julia Kristeva echoes this observation that “[t]he second half of the Middle Ages (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) was a period of transition for European culture: thought based on the sign replaced that based on the symbol” (38).11 However, an analysis of that transition should be mindful that change was tempered by religious attitudes.

Although the Renaissance marked a rebirth of Roman and Greek Classicism, there were some new attributes given to the revised arts of Antiquity. Mimesis began to evolve into representation that reflected not only an object, but also encompassed the individual and world at large. The shift of art in literature away from mimesis gave it more autonomy, a voice of its own that minimized its role as device of replication. Concurrently, the emergence of the importance of the individual, the quest for order and ideal form, the rise of science, and religious reformation occurred, and were portents of the age of enlightenment. At the same time, as the Church’s role as the foremost patron of art diminished, a rising merchant class emerged, which would provide a new pool of benefactors.
Berger agrees regarding the emergence of the consciousness of individuality and awareness of history, of when “[a]n image became a record of how X had seen Y” around the beginning of the Renaissance (10). Most scholars of ekphrasis view the period as one in which poetry and painting existed on more or less equal footing; for example, Renaissance lyrical refrains often were parallels to repetitions found on building facades of the same era (Hagstrum xiii). Hagstrum cites the renewed interest in the examination of the pictorial aspect of Classic art and texts, and cites the 1541 statement of the Roman critic Pompei Gauricus that “[p]oetry ought to resemble painting” (61). Weisstein observes that

[t]he aesthetic emancipation of the visual arts, coupled with the emancipation of the painters and sculptors (whose exodus from the artisans guilds culminated in the foundation of academies of what then became known as the fine arts), occurs in the Italian Renaissance, where ut pictura poesis is literally taken to imply the equality of the two arts, if not, as subsequently, the superiority of painting over poetry. The reversal is effected in Leonardo da Vinci’s comparison of the arts. According to the scale of values presented in Leonardo’s so-called Paragone, painting excels over both music (because it “does not fade away as soon as it is born”) and literature (253).

Clearly, Da Vinci elevated seeing as the superior mode of reception. Steiner concurs with Weisstein’s assessment of Leonardo’s perspective, which implies that painting need not use words, for it “already speaks the language of things, a language known to all people and one more immediate than any words can be” (Pictures of Romance 6), and that Da Vinci equated painting as mute poetry and poetry as blind painting (Form Against Content 22-3). Steiner notes one feature of the Renaissance era narrative that will become important later: when traditional narrative patterns are broken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: “[t]he Renaissance proscription against temporal disunity narrative unfolding was so powerful, in fact, that the general art-historical use of the term
‘narrative’ seems incomprehensible to literary scholars, for whom such limitations would be the undoing of conventional storytelling” (*Pictures of Romance* 2).

Emblematic poetry penned during the Baroque era, such as George Herbert’s “Easter Wings,” constitutes an outstanding example of ekphrasis. Hagstrum sees during that century a desire for the “union of sense and thought in art,” as well as a highly “congenial association” between poetic and graphic texts (94). Weisstein points out that in C.A. Du Fresnoy’s *De Arte Graphica* (1668) the two forms are not only like sisters, but that they indeed are sisters. Weisstein further cites the Italian critic Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo as classifying the two realms as not only sisters, but as twins “*quasi nate ad un parto*” (*Interrelations of Literature* 254). He also stressed that form became less important than the experience to which it could lead, and that art challenged viewers to search beyond the artwork for ideological realities (94-101). sees the intermedial relationship in a slightly different fashion, maintaining that “[d]esde el final del Renacimiento, más exactamente la gran llamarada del Barroco, el arte se desacralizó, estuvo regido por lo humano” (46). Steiner comments that during the Renaissance and Baroque periods the point of intersection between poetry and painting depended on the conceptual splitting of form and content and that such a split would be “untenable” (*Colors of Rhetoric* 93). During the Renaissance and Baroque eras, ekphrasis blossomed with the lessening of religiously grounded parameters and began to put more emphasis on the human interaction with the external world.

One of the most quoted and debated ekphrastic treatises, even in present day criticism, was written during this era: Gotthold Ephraims Lessing’s *Laocoön*, based upon Classic poetry and sculpture.¹² With few exceptions, Lessing’s landmark essay, written in
1776, serves as a springboard for later commentary dissonant to the theories that he espoused. Steiner notes the strength of his essay by commenting that “[a]fter over two hundred years, the critical orthodoxy of ut pictura poesis had been exploded by Lessing, whose Laokoön had so sensitized critics and artists to the differences between artistic media that the analogy of spatial painting to temporal literature now seemed counterintuitive” (Pictures of Romance 56).

Lessing’s essay establishes a number of dichotomies between poetry and plastic art, and clearly favors the former as the superior medium. characterizes his essay as one that creates “una barrera o antagonismo radical entre uno y otro arte” (161). Diane Chaffee concisely states that Lessing “claimed that literature and plastic art could not share each other’s fundamental characteristics; language was temporal and painting spatial” (312). Primarily Lessing makes the distinction that poetry represents successiveness because it can produce its effects based on a series of instants, while painting can only depict an instantaneous event or moment “frozen” in time. In reference to sculpture Lessing postulates that, “this single moment, if it is to receive immutable permanence from art, must express nothing transitory” (Laocoön 20). According to Steiner, Lessing’s distinction between spatial and temporal art is underpinned by the notion of “the inability of painting to include temporally or logically distinct moments” (Form Against Content 7-8). Kreiger emphasizes Lessing’s elevation of the word being “important as it has capacity to yield moving rather than still pictures” (Ekphrasis 5). Hans Lund echoes this commentary in Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Transformation of Pictures, explaining that “pictorial art functions simultaneously, according to Lessing, whereas the literary presentation, by gradually adding new
elements, assigns to the whole, and functions successively. Regarding Lessing’s
definitive split between the two realms of representation, he concludes “that literature is
more suitable for narrating a dynamic event, while pictorial art is better for depicting a
static narration” (23). Steiner makes a provocative statement with respect to the possible
reasons for Lessing’s distinct split between the two forms of representations when she
comments that “[c]ertainly this [delineation between painting and poetry] would tend to
reinforce Lessing’s absolute split of the spatial from the temporal arts. What is seemingly
missing in pictorial narrative is some way of ordering the visual medium” (Pictures of
Romance 14). Heffernan takes exception to Lessing’s hypothesis and sees appropriate
critical temporal framing as lacking: “[h]ence Lessing’s notion that ‘the artist’ can depict
only one moment in a picture and cannot use more than one picture to represent an action
is an utterly arbitrary imposition of post-Renaissance conventions on Mycenaean or
simply ancient Greek art” (A Museum of Words 14). As Lessing states there exists
something akin to infinite narrative space for the poet, a lack of limits, while proposing
that the very nature of plastic art imposes inherent parameters on the visual artist. He
maintains that “each variation, which would cost the artist a separate work, costs the poet
but a single pen stroke” (24), “whole categories of pictures, which the poet claims as his
own, most necessarily be beyond the reach of the artist” (76), and “poetry has a wider
range . . . there are beauties at its command that painting cannot command” (50). He
gives the poet even freer rein by allowing that “[t]here is nothing to compel the poet to
compress his picture into a single moment” (Laocoön 23). Nearly three hundred years
after Lessing penned his essay, it continues to carry substantial weight in ekphrastic
theory.
As we read in *Iconology*, Mitchell articulates undercurrents that reveal Lessing’s perception of the danger of graphic art to poetry: “immediacy, vividness, presence, illusion and a certain interpretive character give images a strange power.” Therefore, painting must be held in check, as ancients knew, by ‘the control of civil law’” (*Iconology* 108). He states this more strongly in “Ekphrasis and the Other”: “Lessing’s fear of literary emulation of the visual arts is not only a fear of muteness or loss of eloquence, but of castration” (698). Thus, what began as a vague uneasiness when one realm of representation was compared to another has developed to a fear of confronting difference, a paranoia of “otherness.”

In reaction to Simonides’s famous maxim that “painting is mute poetry and poetry is a speaking picture,” Lessing views the interrelationship as overkill, which heightens the idea of otherness. Lessing is outraged that

in poetry it has engendered a mania for description and in painting a mania for allegory, by attempting to make the former a speaking picture, without actually knowing what it could and ought to paint, and the latter a silent poem, without having considered to what degree it is able to express general ideas without denying its true function and degenerating into a purely arbitrary means of expression. (5)

Hagstrum cites the limitations that Lessing establishes for plastic art as a type of emotional vacuum eloquently summarizing Lessing’s theories with respect to both the language of representation, diachronic and synchronic time frames, and identifies a defect of visual art as:

[i]he plastic arts, he believed, were intended to express only the beauty of physical form and not the meanings of the mind and emotions of the heart. In plastic art baroque motion and baroque allegory were unacceptable to Lessing, and only the austere, simple, nude beauties of ancient marbles were allowable. For poetry another condition was desirable: action should predominate – full-bodied, expressive, even violent action; the decorum of natural beauty should be eliminated and word-painting discouraged. Each
art should live contentedly within its own borders. Painting, a spatial and visual art, should not strive to become a temporal and psychological art; and poetry, a temporal and intellectual art, should ignore the demands of line, space, color, and simultaneity of effect. (155)

Hagstrum states that “[t]he principal superiority is that the poet leads us to the scene through a whole gallery of paintings, of which the material picture shows only one” (72), while painting “must renounce the element of time entirely . . . especially progressive actions” (Laocoön 77). One of the few critics that puts a positive spin on Lessing’s famed essay is Valerie Cunningham. In “Why Ekphrasis?” she signals the contemporary value of his writings: that “Lessing’s old contention that the linear and the spatial make a difficult mix is still worth thinking about, afforced of course, by more recent modernist and postmodernist skepticisms about the aporias of art history and art criticism, the difficulties implicit in the attempt to translate the visual into the verbal, what we see into what we say” (67). In essence, Lessing denies that there can be any interplay between chronology and fluid temporality.

As the Renaissance drew to an end and ushered in the Neoclassic and Romantic periods, the flow of ekphrastic criticism slowed. Hagstrum analyzes English art and poetry of the late seventeenth century, primarily the neoclassical works of Dryden, Pope and Gray, wherein the gaze of poetry was turned outward and generated a type of “mirror image” that manifested itself in literature, art and the idealization of nature (129). Furthermore, the intermedial relationship was enhanced as many poets and painters of the era were good friends and possessed considerable knowledge of the famous paintings of the masters. Both poets and painters tended to apply “terms of painting to the criticism of poetry”, thus forming a sort of pantheon and practicing “friendly emulation” of each medium that created a “musée imaginaire” (129-30). The neoclassic influence fueled the
continued interest in pattern poems, and frequently poetic themes centered around painting or other art works. The exception to this easy going interdependency between poetry and painting, as Hagstrum points out, was that some poetic focus on metaphysical rumination led to his characterization that occasionally the visual and verbal arts were “quarrelling sisters” (113). In addition, Hagstrum notes other intermedial practices of the day that were often confined to Britain and that included the ferme ornée (gardening as landscape painting), the “picturesqueness” of architecture, the novel and engraving, poetry and sculpture, play-acting and painting, music and gardening (133). These liaisons can be seen as precursors to the twentieth-century attempts to find similar media interrelationships that will be discussed later in this study. Similarly, Lund points out the popularity of the interrelationship exhibited by tableaux vivant at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth in Europe.13

Romanticism, accompanied by its predilection for music as well as the parallels of human emotion and nature, often sought to echo sentiments of longing and nostalgia. During that period comparison of poetry and painting was, as Steiner aptly puts it, relatively “dormant” (131) with respect to ekphrastic criticism, and “tended to diminish” (2) as the painting-linguistic analogy lost its authority (The Colors of Rhetoric 15). In the same work she further observes that during the time when the Romantic period was in full swing “art was no longer prized as an imitation of reality, but as an expression of the human spirit” (The Colors of Rhetoric 14). The typified literary focus during the Romantic period overshadowed ekphrasis and led to a type of dormancy for visual representation in lexical texts.
Almost two centuries after the first written and well-documented renderings of ekphrasis occurred, the field underwent a marked expansion in the twentieth century. Due largely to the phenomenon of photography and cinematography becoming commonplace, the inclusion of the novel, the global flourishing of the internet, and digitalization. The arrival of modernism and postmodernism has been accompanied by a varied array of textual innovations, both lexical and graphical, for example historiographic metafiction, cubism and concretism. Concomitantly with the proliferation of visual media, attempts were made to “scientificize” ekphrasis: semioticians, structuralists, and others attempted to delineate the framework and scientific paradigms to explain and chart ekphrasis. Needless to say, by and large these individual efforts foundered as the paradigms were grounded on a series of binary oppositions. Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal and Carlos Feal note a more global, inter-disciplinary approach:

[c]riticism in the poststructural and postmodern veins has been working toward a fuller integration of literature and other fields, especially the visual arts. Disciplinary boundaries are being crossed-and crossed out-as quickly as cultural maps are redrawn . . . we are particularly invested in finding appropriate critical strategies that combine psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics, and philosophy (Painting on the Page xiii).

The efforts of linguists and literary critics to analyze and deconstruct ekphrasis into discrete units have typically not been embraced due to the modern and postmodern shift to a more interrelated and inclusive mindset.

A successful and enduring critical focus of the twentieth century is the analysis of the temporal/spatial dichotomy, the catalyst for which was Joseph Frank’s 1945 landmark essay entitled “Spatial Form in Modern Literature.” The treatise constitutes a reply in counterpoint to Lessing’s theories of medial separation, and is of particular relevance in this study with reference to Díaz-Mas’s novel El sueño de Venecia. Frank espouses a
nearly symbiotic affiliation between the two the verbal and the visual, and theorizes a process he terms “reflective reference” which will be central to the analysis of that novel.

Certainly one of the premier ekphrastic principles of the twentieth century is the time/space continuum, which was articulated by Frank in the aforementioned article that first appeared in the Sewanee Review (1945). This groundbreaking essay shaped the theories of infiltration within the continuum shared by the verbal and visual arts. Frank begins with a quote of André Gide about the usefulness of Lessing’s study, referring to the treatise as “one of those books that it is good to reiterate or contradict every thirty years or so,” and sets forth his reasoning for discounting the importance of Lessing’s theories (1). Frank credits Lessing for his contribution to “the history of criticism and aesthetics” but proposes that Laocoön lacks “any fecundating influence on modern aesthetic thinking” (1), due to the fact that Lessing’s studies were based upon pictorial poets and allegorical paintings, chiefly due to their popularity in Lessing’s day.

Moreover, Frank notes that Lessing’s choice of verbal texts completely ignored the novel. With respect to the time/space issue Frank observes that, “Lessing had advised poets to prefer action to description, and not to dwell on picturesque details, because action harmonized between with the linear-temporal character of language” (116). Frank contends that Lessing’s concept of form “is necessarily spatial because the visible aspect of objects can best be presented juxtaposed in an instant of time” (7). In short, he implies that in modern criticism, Lessing’s work constitutes a type of contemporary anachronism, as the artwork is from the Classic era. Similarly, Mitchell mentions that present day visual texts have diminished modern man’s ability to identify with artistic artifacts from antiquity.
Frank highlights the impact of the novel in his analysis. He posits that the novel “focused attention on the opposition between the temporal nature of the narrative medium (language), and the experiments of Joyce, Proust, and Djuana Barnes, who broke up narrative continuity in order to portray the prerreflective stream of consciousness of the interweaving time-shifts of memory, or who composed in terms of symbolic imagery” (115). The break in continuity serves to insert space into narrative traditionally controlled by chronology.

Frank refers to novels written by Gustave Flaubert (Madame Bovary) and James Joyce (Ulysses) to illustrate his concept of novelistic spatiality. In the case of Madame Bovary, Frank refers to Flaubert’s famous country fair scene, where action occurs simultaneously at three locations, and Flaubert describes it in a manner that appeals to multiple senses of the reader. Moreover, Frank points out three vantage points and theorizes that “the physical position of each level is a fair index to its spiritual significance.” He points out that verbal description of those vantage points parallels “a method we might as well call cinematographic since this analogy comes to mind” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 16). Frank explains, but since language proceeds in time, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up the temporal sequence. And this is exactly what Flaubert does. He dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between various levels of action in a slowly rising crescendo . . . . This scene illustrates, on a small scale, what we mean by the spatialization of form in a novel. For the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narrative is halted: attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning. (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 16-7)
The commentary that Frank offers on that scene in Flaubert’s novel exemplifies the notion of the verbal/spatial interrelationship and oncely defines its elements. With reference to *Ulysses*, Frank indicates that Joyce’s intention is to “give the reader a picture of Dublin seen as a whole – to re-create the sights and sounds, the people and places, of a typical Dublin day, much as Flaubert had re-created his *comice agricole*” (19). Frank emphasizes Joyce’s similar goal, to create a unified scene, composed of “simultaneity occurring in different places.” To this end Joyce, like Flaubert, switches back and forth between different scenes happening at the same time. Frank notes that Joyce employs this technique most consistently in *Ulysses*, when the author “breaks up his narrative and transforms the very structure of this novel into an instrument of his aesthetic intention” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 19). Chaffee offers a similar view, postulating that “by arresting time in space through composite descriptions of plastic art or by employing the techniques of juxtaposition and simultaneity, writers produce visual art” (“Visual Art in Literature” 318). This device suggests cinematographic montage and the integration of “split screen” features in movies and television.

Frank also focuses on the concept of writings of a celestial type, of “pure time” and “reflective reference” found in the writings of Marcel Proust. For Proust, such a “fragment of time in its pure state” (23), was the perfect fusion that occurs when “the physical sensations of the past come flooding back to fuse with the present,” creating a Proustian reality that is “real without being of the present moment, ideal but not abstract” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 23). Frank links this temporal concept to one of spatiality, noting that “pure time”, “obviously is not time at all – it is a perception in a moment of time, that is to say space” making this conceptual model of the passage of
time two dimensional (26-7). He concludes that spatial form is the “structural scaffolding of Proust’s labyrinth masterpiece” (28), and that “his use of spatial form arose from an attempt to communicate the extratemporal quality of his revelatory moments” (61). Thus, it offers us a “vision of reality that has been refracted through an extra-temporal perspective” (37).\(^\text{15}\) Weisstein also brings to light Proust’s unique mastery of combining description and temporality as: “Proust, for example, could insist that taste and smell, the most ‘primitive’ senses, are precisely those that allow us to recapture the past, and thus to restructure our lives” (255-56). In *A la echerche de temps perdu*, Proust employs sensory reflections to usher the past into the present.

“Reflexive reference” is the term that Frank assigns to the narrative process that runs parallel to “pure time,” which I see as a moment of epiphany. Although Frank primarily applies this notion of “space-logic” or “reflexive reference” to poetry, it also applies to novels, as I shall later relate it to *El sueño de Venecia*, wherein according to Frank’s model there exists “the necessity to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 71).\(^\text{16}\) Jeffrey Bruner extrapolates from Frank’s theories and extends them to encompass painting. Bruner points out that “by emphasizing the synchronic relations within the narrative over the diachronic nature of narration, Frank’s theory of spatial form equates the reading process with the manner in which one views a painting” (“A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words” 73). By framing Frank’s concept of “reflective reference” in a postmodern perspective based on mutual illumination, Weisstein declares that “[o]ur postnaturalistic age has lent itself especially well to this approach on account of the many spatializing trends in poetry,” such as
imagism, concrete poetry, and the kind of reflexive reference discussed by Frank
(“Literature and the Visual Arts” 255). Adopting the same theoretical posture Mitchell
espouses a similar viewpoint, calling for a more collaborative consideration of the
temporal/spatial aspect of the two realms saying that “[f]ar from being restricted to the
features which Frank identifies . . . (simultaneity and discontinuity), spatial form is a
crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in all ages and cultures”
(The Language of Images 273). So, Mitchell challenges that the burden of proof lies not
on Frank to prove the existence of spatial form in literature, but for those who reject that
notion to prove the absence of it. Thus the importance of Frank’s essay to this study is
twofold. It provides clearly described and textually corroborated examples of spatiality in
the novel, and models theoretical terminology, such as “pure time” and “reflexive
reference” in an enlightening manner that will be of great use in the analysis of works of
Díaz-Mas.

Approximately two decades later, in Murray Kreiger’s book the chapter titled
“The Ekphrastic Principle and the Still Movement of Poetry” (or Laokoön Revisited),
also addresses the time/space issue.17 Like his predecessor Joseph Frank, Kreiger refutes
a good deal of Lessing’s exclusionary theories. Kreiger also offers a significantly
modified version of Frank’s tenets on the space/time issue by adopting some formalist
and humanistic postures which ultimately temper the differences between the two
critics.18 In “Ekphrasis and the Temporal/Spatial Metaphor” Gwen Raaberg offers astute
commentary claiming that, “Kreiger seeks to redress the balance between the temporal
and the spatial in literature and place the human form-making capacity at the center of his
system” (34).
Kreiger cites the problematic, often paradoxical concerns that arise when assessing how verbal arts take on the added dimension and “the spatiality achieved in words is to be a hard-won victory over the inherent transience of verbal sequence” (*Ekphrasis* 205). He addresses the dual space/time function of poetry and acknowledges a poem’s “internal functioning and its relationship to an external reality, which creates a doubleness for its contiguous relationship to a temporal external world, a metaphor which constitutes its own reality spatially within the poem” (Raaberg 39). Raaberg concurs with Kreiger’s view that “literature as a spatial form is paradoxical,” that it is both “presence and illusion,” in terms of temporality and spatiality (Raaberg 36). In other words, Kreiger maintains that the spatiality of literature is doubly grounded in its physical, literal space on a page, as well as its space construed by extra-textual, figurative components. Kreiger refers to literary devices that lend spatiality to verbal texts: “the play of meaning, ambiguity, punning – give form, body, spatial presence to the word” (Raaberg 41). On a most elementary level, Raaberg points out that “literature as a printed medium is an invariant spatial sequence and is an object which occupies space.” Moreover “[a]t the next level of experience . . . conceptual mapping or spatializing is involved in any attempt to conceptualize a pattern, a structure, a field of relationship (all spatial metaphors) developed by the repetition or juxtaposition of key words, ideas and images, which must be spatialized and held in the mind” (36). Thus, with his concepts of doubleness, of presence, and of illusion Kreiger does not refute the idea that literature is temporal, but theorizes that the spatial aspect of literature cannot be denied.

Steiner offers a similar inclusionary analogy of the time/space dilemma with a humanistic twist noting that “[t]he ekphrastic moment is thus important not only as a
explanation of the relation between art’s stasis and the constantly shifting reality that it represents, but of the mind and reality too, for ‘time is a storm in which we are all lost’” (The Colors of Rhetoric 189-90). Krieger’s theories, and Raaberg’s incisive commentary on them, call for a moderate approach, a balance between spatiality and temporality in lexical and graphical textual analysis. This approach, as Raaberg postulates, questions “theoretical extremes that would force apart existential and conceptual experience, linguistic process and literary form, time and space” (43). I find a parallel between Kreiger’s commentary of the modern perspective on ekphrasis with that of Mitchell: “[f]or the modernist, language is to have it both ways, sharing the temporality of experience and yet, giving it the unity of human comprehension by imposing a spatial form upon it” (Ekphrasis 206). The latter opines that

[t]he argument, then, that literature differs from the plastic arts by it “reading time” and by its presentation of narrative or fictive time crumbles on any close inspection. The parallel claims that spatial forms are static, closed systems which can be completely apprehended in zero time is similarly fallacious . . . Instead of viewing space and time as antithetical modalities, we ought to treat their relationship as one of complex interactions, interdependence, and interpretation. (The Language of Images 276)

Thus, these three modern critics, Steiner, Kreiger, and Mitchell call for scholarly interest to center on an integrative perspective, one that is underpinned by an intermedial focus on the time/space continuum.

Several critics have commented on the unique properties of photography and cinematography, particularly in terms of temporal framing, photography’s ability to freeze a moment in time. Given the amount of time that has elapsed between the publication of the writings that I cite here, we must keep in mind that with the invention of such photo-altering programs such as Photoshop®, photography has lost a degree of
verisimilitude as a mechanical record, given that photographs can be significantly modified on a computer. Such alteration can be done not only by the photographer, but by anyone else who has access to that photograph in digitalized form. In his 1980 book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes offers his personal musing on the importance of photographs, their mutual qualities, and their effect upon the viewers, including himself. The majority of the photos that Barthes includes in his essay pre-date 1950, and of that group most are portraits. More than a decade later, John Tagg penned a book on photography *The Burden of Representation*, that incorporates Barthes’s earlier work as a point of departure. However, Tagg extends his analysis to the socio-historical fields, examining photography’s role as documentary, institutional record, or surveillance tool. Mitchell accords photography certain unique and potent qualities, affirming that “our willingness to accept photography as natural and mechanical records of what we see underscores the power of our belief that certain kinds of pictures achieve significance because they are “natural” – meaning that such pictures are related to what they depict in exactly (or roughly) the same way that vision is related to what we see” (*Iconology* 234). That is to say, the distance between the natural object and its representations is less than if the natural sign has a textual visual signifier, and there exists the belief that this diminished, less adulterated representation lends itself to greater correspondence between object and sign. However, Berger urges caution in assessing photography’s mechanical aspect as proof of absolute veracity. He points out that “[e]very image embodies a way of seeing – even a photograph. For photographs are not as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photograph selecting that sight from an infinity of other
possible sights” (10). In this context, photography is similar to historiography, given that the photographer selects and excludes the framing just as the historian does, and the beholder needs to keep this in the back of his or her mind. Berger applies these ideas even to snapshots, and we need only think of the actions of professional photographers [waiting or creating a certain light, having subjects group together to strike a pose, gesticulating to gain the attention of a baby or animal, etc., all of which constitute framing and manipulation of the resultant image]. According to Steiner, photography has profoundly changed the priorities of painters in the twentieth century; when she comments that “the ease with which a camera manages to capture moments of real action makes the complementary act in painting seem not only metaphoric but lacking immediacy” (The Colors of Rhetoric 48). Weisstein views the decades of the avant garde as having influenced all forms of art in the twentieth century and precipitating the turning of literature to the plastic arts for help, particularly after the ascent of cinematography, thus engendering the debut of “mutual illumination of the arts” as a scholarly discipline (257). Mitchell predicates that cinema “more than any other art reveals the power of the image to express temporal, narrative and discursive orders” (Iconology 5). These advances in visual technology, photography and cinematography influenced other modes of visual representation.

Berger claims that the power of oil painting, despite its formidability as a medium was ultimately supplanted with the advent of the photograph. In reference to the former, Berger writes, “the basis of (oil painting) as a traditional way of seeing was undermined by Impressionism and overthrown by Cubism. At about the same time, the photograph took the place of the oil painting as the principal source of imagery” (84). While I concur
with Berger that the supplantation took place in the cultural mainstream for the small percentage of the population possessing extreme wealth and its accompanying purchasing power, the monetary value of paintings has increased dramatically over the last decades, for both contemporary and old masters paintings. A corollary of the avant-garde movement in art was the concomitant collision between art and commerce. 

Contradictorily, Berger enumerates painting’s exclusive power as its special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the luster, the solidity of what it depicts. It defines the real as that which you can put your hands on. Although its painted images are two dimensional, its potential of illusionism is far greater than that of sculpture, for it can suggest objects possessing colour, texture, and temperature, filling a space, and by its implication, filling the entire world. (Ways of Seeing 88-9)

Steiner reflects on the change of perspective in the twentieth century, in contrast to the mindset which precedes the more contemporary point of view: “moderns did not intend a return to the mimetic theory of the eighteenth century. Art was not conceived of once again as a copy – and hence inevitably an imperfect copy of reality, but instead as an independent object with the same degree of ‘thingness’ as objects in the world” (The Colors of Rhetoric 16-7). While the old thought process was to examine the parallels between painting and literature, the modernists exhibit a preoccupation with the points of intersection between art and life. Similarly, Mitchell signals a distancing from older primary poetic concerns of time over space, narrative over description, and the medium over the message (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 715-16). The function of both media of art began to move from relatively exact mimesis of art and literature to a more diverse correspondence that is frequently influenced by extra-textual factors, including human experience.
In a similar vein, in *Iconology*, Mitchell describes the expansion of the foundation of ekphrasis: “[s]ince the end of the eighteenth century Western culture has witnessed a steady stream of innovations in the arts, media, and communication that make it hard to see exactly where the line might be drawn . . . it is no wonder that the polarity of ‘painting versus poetry’ seems obsolete, and that we prefer to use more neutral terms like ‘text versus image.’” (49). Theo D’Haen cites the effects of postmodernism on readers commenting that “[t]he much-vaunted fragmentation of postmodern texts often involves combining fragments of different type text,” and cites a pastiche of those varied types. He observes that “[r]eaders are never allowed to sink back comfortably into one particular text type; they must constantly gauge which type of text they are being exposed to and rearrange their interpretive conventions accordingly” (“Frames and Boundaries” 432).

The classic ekphrastic paradigm that pairs poetry and plastic art did not diminish in popularity from the twentieth to the twenty-first century despite the extension into prose, novels, and theater. Margaret Persin brings this tradition to the forefront in her 1997 book *Getting the Picture*, and there is an abundant number of scholarly journal articles available on this topic. Persin’s intermedial study focuses on Spanish poetry of the twentieth century, and includes references to existing plastic art, wherein she emphasizes the complexity of the paradigm and ambivalence of the visual/verbal relationship across genres. Given Kreiger’s theory of illusion/presence in addition to the time/space and lexical/graphical concepts, ekphrastic characteristics can be labeled as opposing ones. Therefore, one can also assume that these features may take on the roles of mirror images of each other, in one sense replicas, yet in another reverse representations. Persin comments on this possibility of auto-referentiality commenting
that "if the representation of the visual art work is deferred or re-presented in a work of
ekphrastic literature such as drama, narrative or poem, the issue of self-referentiality
becomes all the more vexing, since the self-referentiality of the visual work of art must
pass through the paradoxical prison house of language," which "forces the reader to read
in a variety of directions" ("Reading Goya’s Gaze with Concha Zardoya" 75).

The twentieth century is replete with ekphrastic theater, and Phyllis Zatlin defines
ekphrastic theater as "a play in which actual or imaginary visual art by historical or
fictional artists are described, interpreted or made to come to life as an integral part of the
play’s dramatic action" ("Ekphrastic Theater and the Contemporary Stage" 203). Zatlin
offers a classification and brief catalog of contemporary peninsular Spanish ekphrastic
dramas.19 She notes that ekphrastic theater is alive and well in contemporary Latin
America (and American) theater and theorizes that far more than in literature, multiple
components of a stage production (costumes, music, stage, etc.) enhance the ekphrastic
factor. She further claims that "[j]n theater, far more than in literature, meaning is created
by a complex interaction of sign systems" (203). Furthermore, Zatlin cites the unique
difference between framing on a page or of a canvas, as contrasted with the framing
simultaneously delineated and blurred by the borders of the stage as movement is
included on that stage." She points out that theatrical spatiality has the effect of
"transporting us (the spectator) to the moment of the painting’s creation or by having the
figures from the painting step out of the frame, thus blurring the line between ‘reality’
and art" (205). Simon Goldhill also acknowledges this intimate relationship between
ekphrasis and theater noting that "[r]hetorical theory knows well that its descriptive
power is a technique of illusion, semblance, of making to appear. The inherent multi-
dimensional nature of dramatic production of a theatrical production brings ekphrasis particularly close to the theater – the space of seeing and illusion” (3).

Both Goldhill and Heffernan highlight the heightened interest in ekphrasis over the last twenty years. Heffernan points out that it has become a “major intellectual industry and that much of the study is comparative” (A Museum of Words 1). He notes the new complexity of what he terms a

museum of words – a gallery of art constructed by language alone. But the metaphor gains a special resonance in this century, when ekphrastic poems typically evoke actual museums of art along with the words they offer us the whole complex of titles, curatorial notes, and art historical commentary that surround the works or art we now see on museum walls. (A Museum of Words 8)

Goldhill adopts an optimistic posture, highlighting that a great deal of “positive time” has been spent by Classicists “outlining the formal elements by which an ekphrasis can be recognized, and producing innumerable narratological analyses of how ekphraseis and surrounding narratives interrelate” (“What is Ekphrasis for?” 1). Oddly, a subsequent quote in the same study seemingly contradicts this observation of success when Goldhill mentions that rhetorical theory is a mechanism for “exploring the productive gap between theory and performance” that leads to visualization, thus implying that a gap would impede a cohesive poetics of ekphrasis (15).

During the twentieth century, attempts were made to establish a poetics of ekphrasis using both linguistic and rhetorical frameworks. As Murray Kreiger points out, “[t]he rise of semiotics in our (twentieth) century brought modernist poetics to their concentration upon language as the seat of poetry’s special powers” (Ekphrasis 205). Nevertheless, none of these attempts was more than marginally successful and some concluded that there was more of a division than a correspondence. Goldhill, for
example, sees rhetorical theory not so much as a book of rules for ekphrastic writing but as “a way of exploring the productive gap between theory and performance” (15). Hans Lund comments that New Criticism focused on a uniform structure and agrees with Roland Barthes that the reader/beholder paradigm is extraordinarily complex. Lund emphasizes that pictures are polysemic, and that the beholder “chooses some of the signifieds and leaves others out.” This process is dependent on the individual reader’s codes, thus creating a “floating chain of signifieds,” which are inherently difficult to classify and order (32). In Iconology, however, Mitchell has a view contrary to Barthes, who sees language as the way to order all arts – “even non-linguistic substances” (56). Mitchell maintains a point of view opposed to analyses based on the verbal sign frequently espoused by semioticians. He offers evidence that “an empirical survey of works that attempt grafting of verbal and pictorial signs (illustrated books, narrative painting, film, and drama) does not immediately lead us to the conclusion that such hybrids are possible” (Iconology 62), thus disqualifying semiotically based study as the viable, superior form with which to assess the lexical/graphical relationship. He does espouse the utility of semiotics as “a promotional strategy for elevating the dignity of all sort of signs and communicative activities” (Iconology 62). A direct correspondence between semiotics and ekphrasis is difficult to structure, unless the paradigm has elastic parameters.

Wendy Steiner explains that “[s]tructuralism, especially its French and Russian schools, has turned to language as a model for understanding all cultural phenomena” (The Colors of Rhetoric 51). In that same work, Steiner cites a variety of futile studies that endeavored to define intermedial relationships which include an attempt to match
musical tones and colors. In addition, efforts by Stéphane Mallarmé and others endeavored to correlate vowels and colors (52). Another attempt tried to delineate a correspondence between grammar and the geometry of painting, while yet another sought to define the interrelationship by diagramming plot by employing spatial elements (57). Mitchell reports of one study that sought to liken the linear-spatial opposition “to the bicameral or hemispheric theory of the brain, and to equate narrative linearity, language, and temporality with the left hemisphere, spatial, pictorial, and atemporal consciousness with the right” (The Language of Images 293). Steiner maintains that these proposed correlations fail because “[h]owever suggestive the correlation . . . the sets of rules in each pair do not carry the same authority for each art” (The Colors of Rhetoric 60). Weisstein voices even stronger concerns, underscoring that “one of the most frequent methodological errors . . . has been the failure to recognize that a feature literally present in one art is only figuratively present in the other” and insists that there is an “unbridgeable gap between visual depiction and verbal description. Words can be sufficiently evocative to excite the visual imagination; but a literal transfer from one medium to another is impossible” (268). The conclusions of these critics reiterate the difficulty of establishing a direct correlation between the lexical and graphic media. A more reasonable approach would be grounded on the identification of points of intersection.

Steiner describes how Ferdinand de Saussure’s relates synchrony and diachrony to paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of language, along with Roman Jakobson’s focus on the contrast of linguistic sequence and the simultaneity of phonemes (The Colors of Rhetoric 51-2). She identifies the central issue that undermines these
approaches, as the fact that “literature does not present the problem regarding minimal units that painting does” (53). This viewpoint eschews multiple attempts to establish discrete units of correlation of the visual and verbal realms. Heffernan examines similar attempts to concatenate ekphrasis to Noam Chomsky’s theories of linguistics, which was extended to Ernst Gombrich’s ideas of pictorial competence. On a similar note, Kibedi Varga outlines ventures that aimed to schematically relate ekphrasis with morphological and syntactical principles, and notes the most pressing problems with that enterprise as hierarchy, taxonomy and methodology, which arise from concerns centered on the “legitimacy of composing verbal and visual artifacts or transferring methods used in one field to the other” (“Criteria for Describing Word-and-Image Relations 31). Varga queries, “[c]an a word be translated into an image and vice versa? Or is every parallel an interpretation, that is, an admission of the impossibility of translation? When we interpret we betray; we delete and add. There are some fundamental epistemological limits to our endeavor” (51). I favor his analysis of ekphrastic reception’s inherent problem: “in the case of the complete union of verbal and visual elements, we cannot switch from one way of perceiving to another; we in fact perceive in two different ways at the same time. In other words, to read a visual poem is to betray it; to restore it to verbality is to eliminate half of its meaning” (37). This commentary shows the inherent difficulty in attempting to find methodological terminology that works equally well for both media, and Varga concludes that this is fundamentally “the question of the ontological status of interpretation and the potential autonomy of visual experience” (52). I find humor in Mitchell’s assertion about the difficulties of an intermedial grammatical comparison: “[t]here is nothing to distinguish
grammatically a description of a painting from a description of a kumquat or a baseball game” (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 700-1).

Despite these claims of the illegitimacy of workable comparisons, Steiner provides two satisfactory examples of ekphrastic interrelation of two elements of postmodernism cubist painting and concrete poetry. She clearly delineates visual and verbal counterparts with respect to cubism:

[t]he units in cubist painting, . . . were made deliberately ambiguous in their reference, as if to show the semiotic nature of painting where even what reference there is is never direct and simple. The techniques of passage and collage were enlisted here, respectively making the edges of objects appear and disappear, and clouding the distinction between elements of the art world and those of the object-world beyond it. The literary methods of punning, contradiction, parody, and word play create a similar state of ambiguity in modern writing, both in terms of the multiple reference of words and the multiple levels of reference – to the world, the text, or language in general. (The Colors of Rhetoric 181-82)

Steiner’s analysis of concrete poetry elevates it to the level of a sublime, harmonious fusion of visual and verbal elements, explaining that “[i]t is the most literal realization (in all but its acoustic variety) of the painting – literature analogy that I know . . . it overcomes some of the barriers that stand between words and things . . . the poet makes the boundary between poem and painting as indistinct as possible” (The Colors of Rhetoric 198). As a result, Steiner says, concrete poetry has gone a long way toward becoming Simonides’s “speaking picture” (The Colors of Rhetoric 199). She explains that this creation succeeds as concretists deliberately turn the most nonconcrete aspects of language to their purposes. The normal determinacy of reading sequence is loosed . . . in order to open the literary text to the eyes as if it were an object rather than a linguistic sequence. Through the free play of perception that results, the concretists overcome the alleged stasis of the word (The Colors of Rhetoric 208).
Furthermore, this modern “semiotic concreteness” is grounded in the diminished status of the “mirroring function” of poetry, while elevating its “paradoxical status as signs of reality and as things in their own right ” (The Colors of Rhetoric xii).21

One of the side effects of efforts to find common ground between the two realms was the emergence of a suspicion of otherness. Ekphrastic study frequently focuses on qualities of each realm that are readily classified as binary oppositions, which establish an ever-widening gap between lexical and graphical media. Many of the aforementioned studies yield a series of binary oppositions that create what Heffernan refers to as a “friction” or antagonism between the lexical and graphical fields. According to Heffernan, this theoretical discord occurs during the translation from visual text to verbal text because by “turning of fixed forms into narrative, ekphrasis entails prosopopeia, or the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object.” He clarifies that “[b]ecause it verbally represents visual art, ekphrasis stages a contest between rival modes of representation: between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image” (A Museum of Words 6-7). He personifies the relationship on an emotional level, almost emulating a sibling rivalry, saying that ekphrasis is a literary mode that “turns on the antagonism” and that it “commonly reveals a profound ambivalence toward visual art, a fusion of iconophilia and iconophobia, of veneration and anxiety.” The verbal representation of plastic art, Heffernan posits, relies on its ability to “evoke its power – the power to fix, excite, amaze, entrance, disturb, or intimidate the viewer – even as language strives to keep that power under control” (A Museum of Words 7). Grant Scott interprets the struggle between the two media in psychological terms, “[e]verywhere in ekphrastic studies we encounter the language of subterfuge, of
conspiracy; there is something taboo about moving across media, even as there is something profoundly liberating. When we become ekphrastics, we begin to act out what is forbidden and incestuous; we traverse borders with a strange hush, as if being pursued by a brigade of aesthetic police” (The Sculpted Word xiii). While Françoise Meltzer envisions a “reciprocal” exchange between the two media, Mitchell views this exchange as having a negative consequence. He describes this fear as one that engenders an “ekphrastic fear” that “perceives this reciprocity as a dangerous promiscuity” (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 698). Furthermore, Mitchell describes the intermedial relationship as contrary and unclear. “[I]ike most master-slave relationships, the relation between literary time and space, narrative and description, diegesis and mimesis” is “filled with ambivalence” (“Space, Ideology and Literary Representation” 92). Indeed, as Steiner states, “the history of the interartistic comparison swings back and forth like a pendulum between eager acceptance and stern denial” (The Colors of Rhetoric xi).

Despite this “frictional,” competitive, and sometimes less than civil kinship between the two arts, those conflicts, thankfully, metamorphosize into a constructive mind-set. In The Colors of Rhetoric, Steiner notes the Sisyphean pattern of the painting-literature analogy, and, despite her belief that “there can be no final consensus about whether and how the two arts resemble each other” we can experience a “growth in our awareness of the process of comparing them, of metaphoric generation and regeneration” (2). Even the title of Mitchell’s article, “Ekphrasis and the Other,” acknowledges this feeling of unease, and he suggests that “the central goal of ekphrastic hope might be called the overcoming of Otherness” that occurs when poetry encounters those “rival, alien modes of representation, called the visual, graphic,
plastic, or ‘spatial’ arts’ (699). Ultimately, Mitchell sees ekphrasis as a positive entity, as it transcends from “ekphrastic hope,” wherein the “impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a ‘sense’ in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it do: to make us see” (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 696). Ekphrasis succeeds, according to Mitchell, when “something special and magical is required of language” and he fundamentally hopes and believes that it does (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 700). While the positive aspects of intermedial exchange seem to outweigh the negative ones, Heffernan, Meltzer, and other scholars perceive a certain uneasiness inherent in the correspondence between the two media.

An integral part of ekphrastic analysis involves examining how we read pictures and how words paint them, even if this process ultimately cannot be mapped out. Michael Baxandall, in his work Patterns of Intention, comments that, “we do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures – or rather, we explain pictures in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification” (1). In Painting and the Novel, Jeffrey Meyers comments on the potential of ekphrasis to compel the reader to create a visual image,

[b]y reproducing paintings visually, by describing them verbally, by interpreting them iconographically, by looking at them with the same attention and intensity as the novelists, we can attempt to see what they saw and make that idea correspondence between their visual images while writing and those in our minds while reading. (1)

Various studies have sought to describe the relationship between viewing art and verbally describing it. Baxandall subscribes to the notion that “interpenetration” occurs between the visual and verbal texts, although the analysis of “this relation is complex and sometimes problematic” (Patterns of Intention 1). He inquires, “[d]oes or might a
description of a picture reproduce the act of looking at a picture? The lack of fit here is formally obvious in an incompatibility between the gait of scanning a picture and the gait of ordered words and concepts” (3). Antonio Monegal also emphasizes that the pattern of viewing a work of art is not random; with regard to paintings, he comments that “[e]l ojo recorre la superficie pero no la recorre de manera desordenada. Los movimientos siguen una gran secuencia específica o al menos la trazan,” and he notes that pauses are an integral part of the process, “las pausas y sus acentuaciones particulares son factores constitutivos de la unión o de fusión” (Monegal 101).

With reference to the physical act of viewing a picture, Steiner reports that “psychologists have shown that visual perception is not an instantaneous feat but a similar fusing of temporally successive perceptions into a synthesis. Thus, both temporal and spatial art involve sequence and simultaneity in their concretions” (The Colors of Rhetoric 200). Baxandall offers a description of how we first scan the picture as a whole, and then continue to gaze in an overlapping fashion, both in terms of time and surface area scanned, as well as describing it as an “untidy and lively affair” (1). He points out that an exact correspondence would be unwieldy, that if the written word followed this process exactly the pace would be painfully slow. “The description would surely be an elephantine nuisance, lumbering along at a rate of something less than a syllable an eye-movement.” Baxandall specifies the factor than makes the beholding process efficient: “[o]bviously the optical act of scanning is not all there is to looking: we use our minds and our minds use concepts” (Patterns of Intention 4).

Mitchell concurs that many extra-textual factors influence our visual experience of viewing painting, which is “moderated by one sort of ‘report’ or another, from the
things that we are taught to see in and say about pictures, the labels we learn to apply and manipulate, to the descriptions, commentaries and reproductions on which we rely to tell us about a picture” (Iconology 117-18). When he enlarges upon a theory of Roman Jacobson, Lund also recognizes the effects of outside influences on the reception of a text. “As a receiver of the visual message of pictorial art, then the observer, while interpreting, always makes a choice among the pictorial elements and, on the basis of these elements, he creates what Roman Jacobson calls a “simultaneous synthesis” (33).

Yet another important consideration in ekphrastic study is the bi-fold temporal framing of literature: the reading process, of both lexical and graphical texts occurs over time, and as Manguel notes “[w]hen we read pictures – in fact, images of any kind, whether painted, sculpted, photographed, built or performed – we bring to them the temporal quality of narrative” (Reading Pictures 13). Thus, the temporal nature of narration seeps into visual artifacts, almost as if via osmosis, and vice versa. Steiner confirms this notion when she reports that in both cases “the arts approach each other by appropriating a crucial feature from the other that it lacks – visuality in poetry, motion in painting” (The Colors of Rhetoric 12). Formulaic explanation of how we “read” pictures is impossible to pinpoint. However, Baxandall’s, Mitchell’s, and Monegal’s commentaries describe the process and the accompanying temporality integrated into the viewing of art.

Ekphrasis demands a multi-tiered mode of reception and Christine Henseler notes the complexity of the process when she posits that it is, “multifold – from image to viewer, from viewer to writer, from writer to reader from reader to imaginary viewer – and ironically points to an inherent scotomatic relationship” (37). An added layer of
interpretation is noted by Persin, who asserts that “the reader must determine what type of relationship exists between the I/eye of the poetic text and that of the visual work of art” (“Reading Goya’s Gaze with Concha Zardoy and María Victoria Atencia” 76). To complicate this process even more, one must consider that it contains an element of auto-referentiality. For instance, Berger takes the point of view that “[t]he painter’s way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on the canvas or paper. Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way so seeing” (10). Persin also assesses the intricacy of the receptive process, along with her thoughts about the auto-referential aspect:

[but if the representation of the visual work of art is deferred or represented in a work of ekphrastic literature such as drama, narrative or poem, the issue of self-referentiality becomes all the more vexing, since the self-referentiality of the visual work of art must pass through the paradoxical prison house of language . . . The act of reading is inscribed upon the ekphrastic text, serves as its basic and very obvious presupposition, and in point of fact, doubles the reading process. (“Reading Goya’s Gaze with Concha Zardoy and Maria Victoria Atencia” 75-6)

I agree with Persin’s assessment that a positive effect of this doubled receptive process is that it also doubles what she classifies as “fascination” (76). With respect to ekphrastic texts, the notion of auto-referentiality further complicates and enriches the text/author/reader paradigm by inserting another party, the artist. This addition adds another facet to the prism of textual self-referentiality.

The discussion of framing is inseparable from the idea of reading pictures. Cultural, social, national, ethnic, and socio-economic frames are obvious extratextual frames, and these factors establish a dialogic exchange among artist, author, and reader. Persin concurs with this theory and reiterates that “[t]he poet’s point of view concerning
the art object, sensory, philosophical, ideological – enters into a dialogue with the reader”
(“Reading Goya’s Gaze with Concha Zardoy and María Victoria Atencia” 76). In
“Frames and Boundaries” Theo D’Haen lists subtle, yet easily identifiable textual and
spatial frames:

[f]ictional, spatial and temporal frame brackets may be opening and
closing cues, titles and subtitles, episode conventions, chapter headings
and breaks, and material factors such as the covers and dust jackets of
books. Among directional conventions we find punctuation, temporal and
spatial sequencing, speaker identification tags, epilogues and prologues,
parenthetical and editorial comment, authorial comment, epigraphs, and
footnotes . . . Spatial brackets include the picture frame and the empty
space surrounding the framed picture, especially in present-day museum
conditions. Directional conventions include the artist’s signature,
perspective and other representational devices, and painterly signs such as
contour lines. (“Frames and Boundaries” 430-31)

Frames may be broken and works may be reframed. This process, of course,
significantly affects the reception of the artwork, and I will later offer commentary on
this eventualty within the context of El sueño de Venecia. The presence of the artwork
within one of the frames that D’Haen mentions, a book cover, is of particular importance
in that novel, as the artwork on the front cover symbolizes the mutilation of the portrait
and its original frame, and its subsequent reframing.

In conclusion, we can assess past ekphrastic theory and examine to what point it
has evolved. After hundreds of years and countless ekphrastic studies, can we identify a
unique analysis, theory, or treatise that is singularly useful and can be applied across a
spectrum of texts? In the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-
first, there is a curious lack of canonical ekphrastic criticism. For Steiner ekphrasis
cannot be corralled: “[i]t is a field in the broadest sense of the word: a mass of subjects
and theories with a checkered disciplinary past stretching back to the earliest Western-
and Eastern—thought" (Poetics Today 2). Lund cuts to the heart of the matter, commenting that "[p]ictorial art expresses something that is difficult to express verbally, it transmits knowledge existing on a non-verbal level" (Text as Picture: Studies in the Literary Transformation of Picture 26). To phrase the misconnection in a colloquial manner, the essential problem is like the proverbial difficulty of comparing apples and oranges. We could readily make lists of their likenesses and differences, but some features on each list would not readily translate well onto the opposing list.

Decades ago Weisstein also acknowledges the absence of a cohesive formula for ekphrastic analysis and, in a more contemporary vein Mitchell similarly notes that

[although we have thousands of words about pictures, we do not yet have a satisfactory theory of them. What we have is a motley array of disciplines—semiotics, philosophical inquires into art and representation, studies in cinema and mass media, comparative studies in the arts—all converging on the problem of pictorial representation and visual culture. (Picture Theory 9)]

Many interartistic studies offer remedies to this conundrum. Similarly, in The Colors of Rhetoric, Steiner asserts that ekphrasis, and modern literature in general, exceeds the capabilities of any one discipline and calls for a new era in "the discipline of literary study," that integrates "verbal art in a system that includes the visual arts, criticism and philosophy," and defines the parameters of a proposed new utopian generation of criticism as one that is "as broad as culture itself, but the relation between literature, painting and art theory forms the very core" (The Colors of Rhetoric 218). While Mitchell often adopts an optimistic tone with regards to ekphrastic investigation, he ironically declares in Iconology that "the riddles of language or imagery" won't be solved (8). Thus, the cultural forces that help to shape artistic literature are another obstacle to
defining the ekphrastic process, as those influences extend both the borders of art and literature into other disciplines.

Several critics have eloquently articulated the intermedial obstacles that confront ekphrastic scholarship. Mitchell cites the need for a strong, yet cautionary body of criticism, “a hard, rigorous relativism that regards the proliferation of signs, versions, and systems with skepticism, and yet recognizes that they are materials that we have to work with.” He further postulates that “[t]he project of linguistic imperialism runs aground on the very notion that seemed to keep it afloat, and the hope for a rigorous distinction between images and texts, pictorial and verbal signs once again eludes us” (Iconology 58-63). He laments, using a metaphor similar to that of Persin: “[f]or modern criticism language and images have become enigmas, problems to be explained, prison-houses which lock the understanding away from the world” (Iconology 8).

Prominent critics continue to suggest guidelines, interdisciplinary yet understandably vague, as to what the canon of ekphrastic criticism should encompass, all the while expressing an undertone of the impossible quest to be highly specific. Weisstein calls for “a mentality that seeks reciprocal enlightenment not in rational comparison but in the creative intuitions” (256). Ironically, Mitchell invokes the often maligned ideas of Lessing, who, he asserts “has far more to teach us as a fountain of associations concerning the art than he does as a builder of system.” Furthermore, Mitchell proposes that “the relation of arts are like those of countries, of clans, of neighbors, of the same family. They are thus related by sister- and brother-hood, maternity and paternity, marriage, incest, and adultery; thus subject to versions of the laws, taboos, and rituals that regulate social forms of life” (Iconology 112).
I support Mitchell’s assertion that the analogy of the artistic interrelation follows the patterns of a social one, one with ever-changing dynamics, one that espouses a diverse mediation between the two realms of representation, that we “historicize” it, “and treat it not as a matter for peaceful settlement under some embracing theory of signs, but as a struggle that carries the fundamental contradictions of our culture into the heart of theoretical discourse itself. The point, then, is not to heal the split between words and images, but to see what interests and purposes it serves” (Iconology 44). Furthermore, echoes this approach, explaining that “lo que importa es analizar la frecuencia o la calidad de sus logros y sus fallos” (186). Mitchell proposes two other analogies for intermedial examination: “[o]ne model might be the relation between two different langua that have a long history of interaction and mutual translation” and the other might be based on “the relationship between algebra and geometry” (Iconology 44). By extension, these analogies allow that diverse disciplines of knowledge can co-exist and enrich each other, but we must always be mindful of their individual intricacies and idiosyncrasies. This perspective infers wider, more universal implications to the intermedial dynamic: “[t]he attempt to overreach the boundaries between one art and another is an attempt to dispel (or at least mask) the boundary between art and life, between sign and thing, between writing and dialogue” (Poetics Today 3).

In spite of our current postmodern outlook, Steiner looks to the past when she comments that “interart research has a neo-baroque quality consistent with the postmodern delight in diversity, incongruity, and abundance serves as a source of contemplative pleasure, as well as instruction” (Poetics Today 3). This commentary of Steiner’s and other postmodern critics calls for a more integrative, dialogic process of
comparison, one similar to a familial relationship, founded more on links between visual and verbal modes of representation, rather than a static, hierarchal paradigm. But a cogent model does not currently exist in critical literature. The central idea of my study is the idea that the selected ekphrastic works of Díaz-Mas possess a dynamic, integrative pattern. This intermedial pattern of exchange facilitates an auto-referential perspective with respect to the verbal/visual interplay. This interactive paradigm concurs with this current state of ekphrastic criticism and reflects the exponential growth of intermedial phenomenon is our everyday life. Furthermore, the comparison and contrast of Díaz-Mas’s intermedial works engender criticism of ekphrastic literature itself. To carry this progression one step further, the corpus of the author’s work studied here is metaekphrastic, and its analysis is underpinned by a self-conscious and self-referential perspective on the use of plastic art in literature.

Beginning in Classical times, many of the aforementioned critics have noted that the verbal/visual intermedial relationship is fraught with difficulties. Despite the void left by the lack of a cohesive and useful body of criticism, if we consider the rising profusion of ekphrastic works and their growing appearance in popular culture, we can assume that the interrelationship can and does occur, with appreciable success, regardless of the hurdles, with increasing frequency in literature as well as in our every quotidian lives as we mediate the world-at-large.

I conclude this chapter with the paradoxical notion that the attraction of ekphrasis is the very impossibility of succinctly delineating the correspondence between the two realms. The joy, knowledge, and mutual illumination reside in the explorative process, of finding correspondences and noting differences, not in mapping out standardized results.
Cunningham’s article titled “Why Ekphrasis?” reaches the same conclusion when she writes: “what is truly insurmountable can never be surmounted. But ekprasticists – even the most postmodern ones – keep on trying, because they keep on hankering. And that, I suggest, is why ekphrasis” (71).
Chapter Notes

1. In *Culturating Picturacy*, Heffernan cites both Berger and Baxandall who point out that with the reproduction of art—from engravings in the eighteenth century, to colored slides and photographs in the twentieth, the discourse for art criticism has been altered. “Instead of recreating in words the picture that readers cannot see for themselves, the modern critic need only point to a picture that all can see—point to whatever he or she finds important” (42).

2. On pages 84-7 of *Ways of Seeing*, Berger explains this assumption based on Claude Levi-Strauss’s commentary on Renaissance paintings and owners/merchants in Venice. Levi-Strauss describes how the possession of oil paintings became a status symbol.

3. This valuation of practical items that double as works of art, rather than items of a singularly decorative nature such as paintings, further supports the theory that painting as a medium came to be valued late in the Classic era. One such art form, dating back to the sixth century B.C. in Greece, is the epigramma, which in that age “referred to an inscription in verse, usually placed on a statue, tomb or funerary column” (Hagstrum 22-3).

4. Curiously, Steiner is the only critic who clarifies that during the time period that Simonides uttered his famous quote, poetry was accompanied by music (*The Colors of Rhetoric* 12).

5. De Torre states that the weight of Simonides’s maxim that equates painting with mute poetry and poetry with a speaking privilege has been blown out of proportion. He comments, “es absurda porque nunca pretendió erigirse en dogma y pervive sencillamente como una agudeza epigráfico” (Minorías y masas en la cultura y el arte contemporáneo 168).

6. According to Hagstrum, Plato saw less interrelationship between the visual and verbal modes than Aristotle, who outlined such ideas in his *Ars poetica* (5-6).

7. The ekphrastic tradition of Philostratus was continued by his grandson, Philostratus the Younger, and by Callistratus, both of whom wrote collections of prose about real or imaginary paintings (Hagstrum 30).

8. With regard to eastern literature, the ancient Chinese proverb “Is a picture worth a thousand words?” raises the converse question “Are a thousand words worth a picture? The opposing questions may well be the springboard for the examination of ekphrasis in oriental culture. The original quote reads “One picture is worth ten thousand words” and is attributed to Frederick R. Barnard. It was first published in “Printer’s Ink,” 10 March 1927 (*The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*).
9. Heffernan further indicates that Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, and Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, in conjunction with Homer’s writings, “allow us to construct a ‘canonical genealogy’ of ekphrasis” (*A Museum of Words* 9).

10. In *The Sister Arts*, Hagstrum focuses on Christian iconic poetry and its goal to “make the object speak” and maintains that the mixed form was better than the verbal or visual medium alone (50).

11. In her book *Desire in Language* (38-41) Kristeva bases her conclusion on various works of art depicting Christ’s life.

12. Laocoön was a Trojan priest who, along with his two sons, was strangled by a huge sea serpent. The textual account of this event was chronicled by the Greek poets Euphorion and Arctius, in a tragedy by Sophocles and in Virgil. Pliny the Elder alluded to the existence of a sculpture depicting this event, that was crafted by Agesander of Rhodes and his two sons, circa 50 B.C. The whereabouts of said sculpture were unknown until it was rediscovered in 1560, pieced together, and placed in the Vatican (Laocoön ix-x).

13. I would like to acknowledge the presence in New Jersey of a public intermedial open-air museum in New Jersey that is reflective of the era discussed here, the Grounds for Sculpture, located in Hamilton.

14. Frank also comments on the prose works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Faulkner, and John Dos Passos in “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (115).

15. By referring to the last volume of Proust’s *Le Temps Retrouvé*, Franks notes Proust’s description of “quasi-mystical” experiences that gave the French author a “spiritual technique for transcending time . . . (which) enabled him to escape time’s domination” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 22).

16. In particular, Franks refers to Proust’s *A la recherche de temps perdu*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Barnes’ *Nightwood* for specific examples of “reflective reference” (“Spatial Form in Modern Literature” 28-58).


18. In *A Museum of Words*, Heffernan comments that Kreiger may have stretched his formalist views to the point where ekphrasis is synonymous with formalism (2).

19. Among the dramatists that Zatlin studies are Antonio Buero Vallejo for two plays related to artwork (*Diálogo secreto* related to Velázquez’s painting “Las hilanderas” and *El sueño de la razón* related to the artwork of Francisco Goya), as well as Francisco Nieva’s *Salvador Rosa*, and Martín Elizondo’s *Parvana para una infanta difunta* (which centers around “Las meninas”, both the original version painted by Velázquez and that of Picasso).
20. With respect to cubist art, Steiner most frequently uses artwork of M.C. Escher to substantiate her theories (*The Colors of Rhetoric* 159-74).

Chapter Three - A Trio of Short Stories

This chapter focuses on three of Díaz-Mas’s short stories that are prime examples of ekphrastic writing. The first, “En busca de un retrato” (1988), weighs the relative merits of two photographic portraits of the same subject. The second, “La obra maestra,” examines the mutable reception of an oil painting, while the third, “El tercer lugar,” explores the space that a sepulcher and its contents occupy in a museum. In each case the author adeptly leads the reader along a journey to a personal visualization of the artwork in the respective story. Although the visual medium in each story varies, a common thread is that each of these three tales is chronologically situated in the twentieth century. This trio of stories illustrates the fluidity of the lexical versus graphic modes of representation paradigm, as the narration does not consistently favor either realm of representation.

“En busca de un retrato,” contained in the anthology Cuento español contemporáneo (1993), relates the tale of a vain search for a photographic portrait of the person referred to in the dedication of the story as “mi abuela adoptiva” María. Curiously, the narrator does not disclose his or her gender, nor explain his or her relationship to the octogenarian María except to mention that “a la abuela María conocí siendo ella ya vieja, y yo casi tenía treinta años” (“En busca de un retrato” 90). Casually mentioned and equally nebulous is a familial connection between the narrator’s mother and María (92). Midway through the story, the narrator develops an “obsesión por ver una foto de la abuela María cuando era joven” (92). María finally concedes to share her wedding photo with the narrator, only after “años y muchos ruegos que me dejase ver la única foto que se conservaba de sus tiempos jóvenes” (92). The nuptial portrait serves as
a contrast to another photo that the narrator took, a candid snapshot. In his chapter "A Democracy of the Image: Photographic Portraiture and Commodity Production," John Tagg follows suit with W.J.T. Mitchell’s comments from *The Language of Images*, as discussed in Chapter Two, with respect to the insinuation of visual elements into present-age life. Tagg’s comments are salient as they taper from general photography to portraits when he comments that

[i]t is commonplace now to say that we could not go through a day without seeing a photograph. We are surrounded by advertising hoardings, newsho- phos, magazine covers, window displays and posters of all kinds. But amongst all these there is a special kind of photograph, more pressing and more intimate. These are the photographs that we carry in our wallets, set on our sideboards and mantelpieces, collect in albums, and stick in our passports, bus passes or student cards. They are images of ourselves, our family, our friends; portraits whose meaning and value lie in countless social exchanges and rituals which would now seem incomplete without photography. A wedding . . . a sporting victory, a departure for war; all these are sealed by the making and exchanging of a photograph – a portrait. Wrench them from their contexts and put them together and you have the ‘family’ album in which we make one kind of sense of our lives. (*The Burden of Representation* 34).

Perhaps the narrator is seeking portraits of María not only for aesthetic reasons but also to create a family order and history through the lens of a camera. In addition, as Mitchell points, out there may be an inherent power struggle as the narrator and often "[w]e as critics may wart pictures to be stronger than they actually are in order to give ourselves a sense of power in opposing, exposing, or praising them" (*What Do Pictures Want?* 34). Tagg outlines the history of photography from its primitive, labor-intensive forms of the medium’s infancy to the modern day, point-and-shoot snapshot. His essay also traces photography’s transference from the limited numbers of professional photographers to amateurs. The contrast between methods and products of professional versus amateur photographers is salient to this story.
Clearly the inclusion of photography in the story makes it ekphrastic. In addition, the narrator equates María, an ángel del hogar, to her home, commenting that “siempre tuve la impresión de que la abuela era la casa y la casa era la abuela.” Moreover, the grandmother, “con su pelo blanco nacarado y sus vestidos de dibujos pequeñitos y colores brillantes parecía una síntesis de la cocina blanca y de las cortinas de florecitas, o tal vez fuese al revés” (90). To drive home this complementary metaphor, the text vividly describes María’s interior decorations, particularly in the kitchen, the staircase that doubles as a greenhouse, food that she prepares, flowers, and the correspondence between colors in the house and the grandmother’s aprons. To orient the reader, the text enumerates items from that list that are familiar to a contemporary reader and tantalize the senses. The focus on color, light, and dimension suggests that not only the two photographs in the story are art, but so are María and her home, situated in mountainous countryside.

To bring the home to life, the narrator appeals to the reader’s optical and olfactory perception by describing “[l]as baldosas coloradas de la entrada cuidadosamente bruñidas con cera . . . tan brillantes que parecían pendientes con aceite y bajo el sol azaleas, petunias, cóleos,” curtains “de una cretona de florecitas muy limpia y muy planchada,” “nobles muebles de viejo roble,” “en la sombra helecho, hiedra enana,” and “las plantas de olor: la hierbabuena, el sándalo y la albahaca” (89). The recitation of scrumptious dishes that María prepares takes on a Proustian tone of nostalgia, a yearning for food prepared by the feminine hand. This list of cuisine that provides visual, taste, and olfactory stimuli runs the gamut from salads to main dishes to mouth-watering desserts:
“pato con peras y pollo con ciruelas, escudella y bacalao con pasas, escalivada y robellones de mil maneras, dorada crema y profiteroles calientifríos” (90).

María’s gastronomic talents include painstaking preparation with the freshest ingredients: “dedicaba desde muy temprano a picar verduras y mazar condimentos, a deshuesar frutas y tajar carnes, a caramelizar moldes, sabía hacer jabón, ligar el alioli, elevar montañas de espuma de una clara de huevo” (90). The narration gives dimension to the kitchen via detailing cooking utensils, “sartenes y pucheros, escurridores, mangas de pastelero, molinillos y ralladores, morteros y batidores, cuencos, ensaladeras” (90). Despite all this culinary activity, María remains neat and clean, “ceñida por su mandil de cuadros blancos y rosas” and follows a ritual of donning a special apron for Sundays “de piqué azul, con aplicaciones de flores blancas de guipur” (90).

The impossibility that any one photo can convey all the aspects of a very formidable María begins to assert itself. Moreover, the prospect becomes more remote when the narrator declares that the grandmother “era bella, hermosa como ninguna mujer que yo conociese” (90). Given Maria’s advanced age, a true representation of her in one portrait is further complicated by her passage through many stages of a long life and various roles that she has fulfilled. The narrator emphasizes complexity by commenting that “una vejez tan dorada y bella, tan pulcra y perfecta, tan vivaz y venerable, solo podía haber precedido una madurez espléndida, una juventud de belleza fascinante.” The narration catalogs the stages of María’s life “de niña, cuando con trenzas, una deliciosa preadolescente . . . con una trenza gruesa y pesada como una soga . . . que era la envidia de las niñas del pueblo,” as an adolescent “un poco rígida en su primer traje de mujer,” and later as a “mujer casada . . . una radiante madre que pasea en los brazos a su hijo de
seis meses ... una mujer madura y fuerte ... recién viuda” (91-2). This description brings to mind the standard of female beauty related to a woman’s crowning glory, her hair. As well as being a manifestation of fashion, hairstyle also relates to the stages of María’s life, the braids of childhood, the elegance of a young woman and the graying that results from aging. Maturation and life experience negate the ability of any one photo to capture in one graphic, simultaneous image all that María is and has been. Tagg warns that viewing photographic images from the past may induce a feeling of discomfort that is inevitable as “we must distance ourselves from it [the history of photography], question the naturalness of portraiture and probe the obviousness of each image. As we begin to do this, they must appear strange, often incompatible one with another” (The Burden of Representation 35). In view of Tagg’s comments, the discomfort of the narrator may be an integral part of the process of the quest for the perfect portrait of María. The narrator’s dislike of the wedding portrait may be generational, that is to say that he or she cannot appreciate the limited opportunities of decades ago for portraiture, both in terms of events and cost, for his or her adopted grandmother’s generation, as well as the highly stylized format of that previous era.

In this story the two available photographs for evaluation by the narrator vary widely. The first is described as an un-posed snapshot, taken by the narrator. Ironically, after having developed the film with that print while in the city, the narrator “ni siquiera recordaba haberle hecho ese retrato,” and suggests that María is a more viable subject within the frame of her country home environs versus being viewed in the narrator’s urban location. The purportedly candid photograph was ostensibly taken on “una mañana de verano ... en el primer sol de la terraza” (90-1). Barthes notes that often
photographers pose their subjects outdoors so that they are more “alive” than indoors in an attempt to make the photograph more authentic (Camera Lucida 14). This portrait of María reveals her “en su entorno de flores y baldosas rojas. . . sentada en su mecedora de cretonas . . . deshuesaba ciruelas pasas para un plato de fiesta.” This description continues the association of woman, home, and food as one entity. Upon reviewing the circumstances of the snapshot the narrator initially recalls that “la sorprendí así, como ella, sentada apaciblemente” (90).

As mentioned Chapter Two, in Ways of Seeing John Berger comments on the limits of photography as a true mechanical record. He points out the framing and manipulation of a photograph done by its creator with respect to variables such as posing, light selection, and gaining the subject’s attention. Oddly in this story the reverse occurs, as the subject herself, María, partially controls the image rather than the photographer monopolizing direction. Upon inspection of the photograph the narrator realizes that María was not surprised, rather

me miraba con el gesto pícaro de quien, pese a todas las precauciones por mí tomadas, no había sorprendida: sabía que yo disparaba la foto y había en sus ojos, en su boca, en las arruguitas de las sienes y de las comisuras de los labios un rictus irónico y pilluelo (“En busca de un retrato” 91).

Reminiscent of the Mona Lisa, María has a small ironic smile, an unreadable expression that connotes that the photo was not as candid as the narrator first assumed. Rather than the photographer controlling the outcome as Berger describes, María poses to a degree and uses facial gestures, therefore rotating the subject and photographer paradigm to sui: her wishes. Like Barthes’s mother, the abuela adoptiva “let herself be photographed . . . ‘lent’ herself to the photograph” (Camera Lucida 67). Barthes himself
confesses to manipulating the paradigm of the photographer controlling the pose of the
subject and his or her facial expression by admitting that

I decide to ‘let drift’ over my lips and in my eyes a faint smile that I mean
to be ‘indefinable,’ in which I might suggest, along with the qualities of
my nature, an amused consciousness of the whole photographic ritual: I
lend myself to the social game, I pose, I know I am posing, but (to square
the circle) this additional message must in no way alter the essence of my
individuality (Camera Lucida 11).

Thus, it appears the both Barthes and the abuela adoptiva intentionally control aspects of
their respective poses, namely their facial gesture, which is the opposite of the expected
dynamic between photographer and subject, wherein the photographer customarily
directs the subject.

Despite her advanced age, the grandmother remains a very active, vibrant,
optimistic person who endured multiple hardships, such as being widowed, and emerged
a stronger person. Those characteristics of aging that might be viewed by contemporary
viewers as negative are converted to positive traits, suggesting that María has aged like
the proverbial bottle of fine wine. For example, joints twisted by arthritis “no parecía una
enfermedad ni un defecto, sino la consecuencia de la evolución de la Naturaleza” (91).

The senior citizen’s appearance is looked upon in glowing terms:

[s]u pelo de nácar era casi de un azul untuoso, bajo ese primer sol de la
mañana, los ojitos azules casi parecían negros de tan vivos . . . el escote
en pico de su traje de lunares azules y amarillos se abría coquetón sobre un
busto de ochenta años sorprendentemente firme, reposaban sobre los
brazos de la mecedora los brazos de la mujer fuerte, y tenía el gesto
enérgico y dulce de quien ha hecho frente a muchas cosas y la mayor parte
de ellas despiadadas y terribles, la sonrisa burlona de quien sabe que peor
los hemos pasado y hemos salido adelante. (“En busca de un retrato” 91)

The narrator chooses to view the subject of the photograph as a sum of the grandmother’s
experiences and views arthritis, wrinkles and white hair as badges of life-experience,
wisdom, and strength. He or she eschews traditional markers of beauty such as youth, suppleness, and lack of gray hair.

For the narrator the long-awaited viewing of the young María, in her matrimonial portrait, turns out to be a disappointment shared with the reader. The text creates suspense as the portrait is revealed “[l]a sacó de una carpeta de cartulina crema con cantos dorados, entre dos hojitas de papel de seda finas como un soplo. Me preparé para ver lo que yo había imaginado como una belleza fascinante y deslumbradora” (92). However, the beholder of the sepia photo is sadly disappointed by the stiff pose, the lack of vitality and emotion of the young María and her late husband. In addition, contemporary holders of photographs are not accustomed to the nearly dichromatic appearance of sepia tinted photos.

Indeed, as Tagg traces the processes of photography historically, he remarks that “[e]ach of these images belongs to a distinct moment; each owes its qualities to the particular conditions of production and its meaning to conventions and institutions which we may no longer understand” (The Burden of Representation 35). The narrator describes the young bride and groom in a generic sense, as if “me miraba una pareja pueblerina . . . una muchacha de pueblo con su vestido de boda pobre.” In a parallel manner the description establishes similarities between María’s bridegroom and any number of young campesinos, “él empaquetado en su traje rígido, sentado en silla curul, con los zapatos demasiado embetunados y las manos toscas de quien trabaja en el campo” (93). María appears correspondingly unidentifiable and pedestrian,

ella en pie, no menos tosca e insulsa, una cara inexpresiva de ojos claros y cabello oscuro, de óvalo convencional y un poco burdo, dejando reposar sosamente sobre los hombros del varón sentado unas manos que, por no decir, no decían ni del trabajo ni del regado: podían ser las manos de cualquiera. Y eso era todo: una
muchacha de pueblo con su vestido de boda pobre, con un rostro de muñeca de china, con un cuerpo menudo como hay millares, con una mirada en que ninguna luz reflejaba. (“En busca de un retrato” 93)

For the narrator this portrait is disastrously deficient, as it cannot begin to capture the essence of the María with whom he or she is acquainted. The description of the portrait echoes Roland Barthes’s characterization of such a “[p]hotograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only the figures that it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave, they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies” (Camera Lucida 57). The reader can appreciate the parallel between the young bride and groom, motionless and expressionless in the stylized portrait, posed like the butterflies to which Barthes refers.

Of course, the reader must keep in mind the longer length of time that subjects had to pose in the era of sepia photographs as compared with snapshots that require little or no time to set up. Tagg traces the augmented accessibility of portraiture back to the invention of the daguerreotype in France, in 1839, which parallels the social change that afforded more commodities to the rising middle class. In The Burden of Representation, Tagg posits that portraiture is a model for capitalist growth in the nineteenth century. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rise of the photographic portrait which belongs to a particular stage of social evolution: the rise of the middle and lower-economic classes towards greater social, economic and political importance.” (37)

Given the prolonged time period that the María and her bridegroom must have held their formal pose for their wedding portrait decades ago, the quickly-taken snapshot of María brims with a spontaneity that the nuptial portrait lacks. The campesino couple may have looked so ill-at-ease and awkward because of the time required to hold their pose and, additionally, their social class unfamiliarity as consumers of portraiture that had
previously been reserved for the upper class. Moreover, the photograph lacks “la dorada vejez de la abuela María” (93).

In short, the narrator echoes the disappointment of Barthes’s in his search for the quintessential portrait of his late mother, the results of which leave him feeling that the “likeness leaves me unsatisfied and somehow skeptical” (*Camera Lucida* 103). For Barthes equates his quest for that portrait to “Sisyphean labor: to reascend, straining toward the essence, to climb back down without having seen it, and to begin all over again” (66). In his book *What Do Pictures Want?*, Mitchell approaches this struggle from a different angle. He points out the contradictory wishes “the picture wants to hold, to arrest, to mummify an image in silence and slow time. Once it has achieved its desire, however, it is driven to move, to speak, to dissolve, to repeat itself” (72). This dual nature of either photo of María makes it virtually impossible to find the perfect portrait of her. For the narrator in “En busca de un retrato” the analysis of this portrait is profoundly disappointing. As Barthes similarly points out, there is a personal risk involved in seeking an ideal portrait. He comments on his own experience noting that when “[a]pplied to someone we love this risk is lacerating: I can be frustrated for life of the ‘true’ image” (*Camera Lucida* 110). This is due in part to the inability of the portrait to portray the “whole” woman and the failure of the narrator to appreciate the technological process and social frames of the old wedding portrait. The nuptial portrait from this short story will be of particular importance in Chapter Five, where it will serve as a contrast to the life-like portrait in the first chapter of *El sueño de Venecia*.

The narrator judges the snapshot of the *abuela adoptiva* as a better representation of the woman than the wedding photo. However, neither specimen can adequately
graphically portray María, as over eighty years of living cannot be incorporated into one image. Mitchell comments on the limits of photography, its ability to physically capture an image, but to fail to adequately portray its subject:

[a] picture, then, is a very peculiar and paradoxical creature, both concrete and abstract, both a specific and individual thing and a symbolic form that embraces a totality. To get the picture is to get a comprehensive, global, view of the situation, yet it is to also take a snapshot at a specific moment – the moment when the click of the camera shutter registers the taking of the picture . . . To get the whole picture of pictures, then, we cannot remain content with the narrow conception of them, nor can we imagine that our results, no matter how general or comprehensive, will be anything more than a picture of images, objects, and media as they appear to some of us at this moment. (What Do Pictures Want? xvii)

This viewpoint suggests reasonable expectations of a photo and acknowledges that no one picture, or in this case portrait of María, will be the perfect image of her.

The narrator assigns a tone of immortality to the description of María’s natural beauty. “Su belleza se había forjado a lo largo de los años, como la belleza de algunos árboles, de algunas rocas, de algunos edificios nobles significados por las lluvias y los vientos que pulieron sus piedras” (“En busca de un retrato” 93). In this story, verbal representation does a more adequate job of portraying María, as it can incorporate her qualities and experiences forged over many different decades. Thus the dependence on lexical depiction reinforces Wendy Steiner’s interpretation of Lessing’s theory that pictorial art is unable “to include temporally or logically distinct moments” (Form Against Content 7-8). Similarly, Murray Kreiger notes Lessing’s lauding of verbal representation as having the “capacity to yield moving rather than still pictures” (Ekphrasis 5). These critics’ statements enforce the notion that visual art is lacking in its ability to present diachronic, rather than synchronic representation as it applies to photography.
In this first short story Díaz-Mas, through the voice of her narrator, offers two verbal portraits of the same subject. As a fair graphic representation of María, the more or less candid snapshot captures the essence of the woman, her environs and culinary skills on a rudimentary level, while the stylized wedding portrait fails miserably. More importantly, the verbal text functions as the superior method of description, as it can incorporate different eras of María’s life and transform her deformities caused by age into attributes linked to life experience and timeless beauty. A cinematographic representation of María would be the superior visual text to represent her, as it would be less subject to the limit of a synchronic frame than the diachronic progression of María’s life that a movie could yield. This form would capitalize on what Mitchell describes as the power of that medium to express chronology as well as narration (Iconology 5), and thus would rival the verbal text in adequately portraying the complexities of María.

Appearing in Díaz-Mas’s 1987 anthology Nuestro milenio the story “La obra maestra” deals with art, light, and illusion as well as the transitory and ephemeral nature of artistic reception. This short story, fraught with paradoxes, highlights the contradictions of an artist’s outward appearance as a quintessential Western dilettante while those who know him more profoundly realize that he is a devout Muslim. The text is grounded on the notion that reception often lies between what is seen and what is hidden, sometimes ensconced in plain view. In fact, the first five words of the story are “pese a todas las apariencias.” These words, like those that I will later note from the epigraph of El sueño de Venecia, serve as a thinly veiled warning to the reader that appearances can be deceiving. Like “En busca de un retrato” the gender of the narrator is
indefinite, as is how he or she became acquainted with the artist, as well as the social context of their relationship.

The protagonist of the tale, Amal, is a study in contradictions. He is unquestionably wealthy, his funding coming from “un anciano progenitor rico y lejano,” who “enviaba puntualmente cheques de muchas cifras” (“La obra maestra” 110). To complement his affluence, Amal is well-educated, well-traveled, and well-read. His outward appearance denotes impeccable taste, background, and savoir faire as

[a] primera vista, tenía un aire de tópico galán . . . tras sus trajes de impecable corte . . . tras sus zapatos italianos . . . tras sus pañuelos bordados . . . tras la conversación cortés y brillante . . . tras sus estudios universitarios de un par de universidades norteamericanas . . . tras su formación artística en Italia y Alemania . . . tras su dominio de cuatro o cinco idiomas occidentales . . . tras su cartera repleta de tarjetas de crédito (“La obra maestra” 109).

Even though Amal “desarrollaba su trabajo con la misma aristocrática ligereza con que sostenía una conversación mundana o emprendía un viaje a un país lejano,” his artwork was commercially successful and in great demand by dealers, galleries, and institutions (110). Despite his outward appearance of a modern, urbane, and sophisticated Western gentleman, the narrator informs the reader that Amal “se ocultaban unos sentimientos, unas convicciones y una moral que a todos se nos antojaban ancestrales, casi anacrónicas y, desde luego, incomprensibles en un hombre como él” (110). In short, “el pintor de moda en las subastas y en los salones, era un musulmán convencido, piadoso y estricto” (112). Amal’s persona is dual, publicly projecting an image at odds with his religious beliefs, visible to some, but hidden by the trappings of wealth and sophistication revered by many in Western society. This binary opposition further manifests itself in Amal’s artwork, in his obra maestra.
In keeping with the proscriptions of the Koran with regard to figurative art, the cornerstone of Amal’s fame rests upon the fact that “sus cuadros se poblaban cada vez más de unas líneas cursivas y elegantes que, sin serlo, recordaban poderosamente la escritura cufica, la que decoraba los paramentos de mármoles y estucos de los palacios, mezquitas y madrasas de su país natal” (111). After Amal’s vehement reaction when one of his friends jests about when the artist will paint a human subject, the narrator’s intuition leads him or her to believe that “Amal deseaba pintar una figura y aún más, que tal vez estuviera ya intentándolo a escondidas” (113). This intuitive conclusion turns out to be true, even though its perception has some caveats attached.

Quite a while after the charged conversation about painting the human figure takes place, Amal, “de una agitación inusual para él... balbuciendo,” calls on the narrator. The artist had finally reconciled his artistic desire to paint a human subject with his religious proscriptions. Amal confesses that he had spent years working on the project and that “le había costado mucho decidirse, muchas veces había destruido el trabajo ya hecho, había tenido múltiples y constante dudas de conciencia, creía haber encontrado por fin la solución, había pensado mantenerlo ocultado” (113). This confession lays bare the artist’s conflicted identity and by way of the painting he gives his mute thoughts visual voice.

In his chapter “Drawing Desire,” Mitchell addresses the antithetical connection between human desire and art,

human desire itself has traditionally been pictured in contrary ways: associated with the dark passions, appetites, and ‘lower nature’ of the brutes on the one hand and idealized as the aspiration to perfection, unity, and spiritual enlightenment on the other. It should come as no surprise that the desires of pictures would be bifurcated along similar lines. *(What Do Pictures Want? 61)*
For Amal, the central conflict is the Western-Christian embracing of figurative art versus the Eastern-Islamic proscription, the conflict caused by the addressing of his primal desires in the painting. Moreover, the erotic content of the cloaked image will violate Amal’s Muslim beliefs to an even greater degree.

Eventually the narrator accedes to the painter’s wishes of total secrecy and agrees to render an opinion of the work but to never speak of it to anyone else. Upon accompanying Amal to a tiny attic studio, far from the artist’s usual workplace, the narrator cannot comprehend the Muslim artist’s excitement about the painting, which lacks a human figure. At first glance the canvas reveals a beautiful work done in oil “con una armonía especial en el movimiento de las líneas y una deliciosa sensibilidad en la combinación de los diversos tonos” (114). However, the painting is not in the least figurative, “no había en él ningún cuerpo, ningún rostro: sólo una amalgama de pinceladas de color” (114-15). Amal assumes his placid manner and advises the beholder, “¿cómo podemos gozar de la belleza sin la virtud de paciencia?” (115). Miraculously time, in hours and minutes, imposes itself on the visual text in a most graphic manner, by changing the very subject of the painting. Finally, hours after the narrator’s arrival at the studio as the setting sun enters the room, for a few brief minutes before sunset the figure reveals itself:

era una mujer y estaba desnuda, levemente recostada, con las manos abandonadas blandamente sobre el regazo. La carne rosada que parecía palpitar se distinguía sólo ligeramente de su cabello de destellos rojizos, y rojizo era también el vello de su sexo, y las arreboladas mejillas se fundían casi con el color del pelo y sobre la piel de rosa apenas destacaban los labios un poco más bermejo. Parecía arder en su reposo, como una rosa incandescente y febril. Era la mujer más irrealmente bella que había visto jamás. (115-16)
The artist has created what should have been an anathema to him, the figure of a nude woman. In one sense he has unmasked his true self in that the nude can be construed as a mirror image of himself in feminine form.

In this brief narrative Díaz-Mas explores multiplicity of reception, which in the case of Amal’s oil painting is a direct result of a natural circadian chiaroscuro effected by the light of the setting sun. The reddish glow of the setting sun enriches the colors rojizo, rosa, and bermejo on the canvas that depict the disrobed woman, and in her repose she “parecía arder” like the setting sun itself (116). The reception of the painting is governed by the presence or absence of a specific type of solar light, and in a limited interval during sunset at the clandestine studio that the narrator visits “se fue coloreando de un irreal tinte rosado que parecía conferir un latido de vida y de sangre a las mismas paredes” (115). The narrator notes the brevity of the reception of the nude: “[l]a contemplación solo pudo durar unos minutos: los de la puesta del sol” (116). As the color of the fading sunlight changed from rosy to violet and eventually to a dark blue, the woman “se iba diluyendo en una amalgama de trazos confusos, hasta que por fin la figura se hundió en la tela como se hunde una moneda que arrojamos a un estanque profundo” until suddenly, “el brillo desaparece ante nuestros ojos y no la vemos más” (116). Lamentably, Amal never extends the narrator another opportunity to gaze upon the disrobed beauty. Any circadian temporal frame other than sunset light obscures the forbidden image that Amal has created, thus making that proscribed nude human form suitably hidden by its ephemeral quality.

The narrator closes the story by informing the reader that, as far as he or she knows, the woman was never seen again despite the painting having changed hands at
least twice. After leaving the studio where the nude woman’s luscious image was briefly revealed, the oil painting was displayed “en la galería más prestigiosa de la ciudad” where she would be, in an oxymoronic sense, shrouded “bajo unos focos.” Nonetheless, those light sources were incapable “de poner de manifiesto su misterio” (116-17). The canvas was eventually sold for a handsome sum to “una entidad bancaria que instaló el cuadro como una joya en el vestíbulo de su oficina principal.” Ironically, it hangs in the public lobby “silenciosa y oculta . . . la más bella mujer que he visto: en un lugar donde nunca entra la luz incandescente del atardecer” (116-17). As in many of Díaz-Mas’ texts, the reader becomes empowered by previous information in order to fully appreciate the ironic conclusion that the portrait of the nude woman hangs in a public space, is owned by a traditionally conservative institution, and will never be seen. Like the woman hidden in plain sight, Amal’s private transgression is cloaked not in darkness, but in a light other than that of sunset, in a public venue.

The paradoxes of the receptive process inherent in this story are numerous: clandestine/public, ephemeral/eternal, the light of sunset/other lighting, vibrant/lifeless, and in plain view/hidden. A symbiotic relationship between verbal and plastic art exists, as one medium depends on the other for representation. Without the lexical text the simultaneous versions of the painting would be inexplicable, for if the viewer cannot behold the work of art for some fleeting moments at sunset, the hidden woman is imperceptible. This perspective aligns more with a contemporary ekphrastic theory that I previously mentioned that seeks to focus on what Jean Hagstrum termed the “congenial association” between poetic and graphic texts. This association serves to identify points
of intersection between the verbal and visual realms of representation, rather than foster division and exclusivity (*The Sister Arts* 94).

At first glance “El tercer lugar” seems a disorienting and macabre tale of an anonymous spirit trapped in a museum crypt. That is until the last paragraph, set off typographically from the rest of the story, implies that the artwork described may be found in the Cloisters Museum in New York City. In *El oficio de narrar*, Díaz-Mas confirms that her enduring fascination with the Middle Ages inspired her to write this story, and reveals that the ambiguity and confusion in the narration are deliberate.² The verbal text deconstructs a triumvirate of possibilities: spatial, religious, and narrative topics. In fact, sculpture is the most spatial art medium as it occupies physical space in three dimensions. In his chapter “What Sculpture Wants,” Mitchell opines that it desires “a place, a site, a location, both literally and figuratively.” Various distinctions exist with respect to the spatial impact of painting as opposed to sculpture and Mitchell observes that,

> the question of space, site, or location has always been a central issue . . . Unlike painting, it normally does not carry its frame with it, and is this much more sensitive to the issues of placement. It does not project a virtual space, opening a window into immensity as, say, landscape painting does; it *takes up* space, moves in and occupies a site, obtruding on it or changing it. (*What Do Pictures Want?* 249)

The sarcophagus lies in a suitable location, and moreover, the location of the sculpture and the museum personnel and visitors insure that another of its desires is fulfilled as “sculpture want also a place to be, a location or station or site where it can be seen, encountered by other bodies” (*What Do Pictures Want?* 259).

Although the visual artifact, a sarcophagus, is an unusual choice of plastic art for ekphrastic narration, it is nonetheless a viable example as it coincides with Hagstrum’s
aforementioned definition of ekphrasis as giving "voice and language to otherwise mute art objects" (The Sister Arts 18). Art historians have long classified burial receptacles as sculpture, and museums around the world exhibit early examples of Greco-Roman, Etruscan, and Byzantine cinerary urns and sarcophagi. One of the most cited examples of funerary art is the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, the city prefect of Rome who died in 359 A.D. Annually many tourists and art scholars visit the San Pedro church in Teruel, Spain, which was declared a United Nations World Heritage Site in 1986, to view the sepulcher of the legendary Amantes de Teruel. The term sarcophagus, of Greek derivation, literally means flesh-eating as it was once widely believed that the limestone used to construct the receptacle for human remains would consume them.³

The prevalence of such sepulchral chests begins in the second century, diminishes in the latter part of the fourth century, and regains popularity around the beginning of the twelfth century. This re-emergence of their use coincides chronologically with the information in the story. The initial use of sarcophagi reflected a change of religious perspective of the era as "Romans began to favor inhumation over cremation, a reversal of burial practices that may reflect the influence of Christianity and other Eastern religions whose adherents believed in an afterlife for the human body" (Gardner's Art Through the Ages 240). As time has gone by, these ornate burial receptacles, which were once predominantly classified as religious objects, have morphed into art objects.

The narration in "El tercer lugar" describes some standard features of the effigy plate of the sarcophagus. Particular mention is given to "los párpados de piedra piadosamente cerrados . . . los pliegues de su brial severamente dispuestos en líneas paralelas . . . el manto sobre los hombros que se alarga a los pies . . . el tocado bien sujeto
a la cabeza con apretado barbuquejo,” along with the requisite “perro fiel” at the feet of the stone carving that guards the dead for all eternity. The narrator humanizes the guidebook rhetoric by adding that the stone eyelids were “piadosamente cerrados por mano amiga y veneranda,” and questions how the pleats of the garment are horizontally uniform when the figure on the plate is reclining (“El tercer lugar” 105).

The human sense that lacks in giving life to this mute sculpture is tactile reception. As Susan Stewart points out, “[m]useums are designated as sanctified and inspiring places,” but concomitantly, “museums are institutions organized around an elaborately ritualized practice of refraining from touch. In contrast to times past, today museums are guarded against all practices of touching, ranging from breathing on the artwork to stealing it” (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 171-72). The viewer of the sarcophagus cannot appreciate the relief of the effigy slab that approximates the dimensions of its contents without touching it. Moreover, visual and tactile reception are intertwined; and as Stewart notes, “[w]hether we are thinking of paintings on canvas or the reliefs on sarcophagi, all visual forms, including the visual forms of poetry, have as well a tactile dimension that comes into play even if it is repressed” (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 162). The museum visitor, due to almost universal institutional proscriptions of touching the exhibits, is denied the full experience of the spatial dimension of the plastic art that touch would afford. Díaz-Mas’s description of the space in which the sarcophagus is housed is sufficiently spatial as she notes features of that part of the museum such as, “la bóveda inalcanzable que se cierra arriba, los imensos y prohibidos ámbitos que se extienden abajo” (105). However, the restricted space that the artefact, the burial container, occupies is off-limits to museum visitors, and deprives the
viewer of appreciating the relief of the effigy slab, the dimensions of the sarcophagus as a whole, its texture, its coldness, its hardness. Customarily, artwork in museums is cordoned off from the visitors by velvet ropes or other barriers that constitute a virtually impenetrable barrier between viewer and plastic art. In “El tercer lugar,” the essential frame of the artwork, the museum, is for the most part accessible to the visitors. However, the space immediately surrounding the sarcophagus and the container itself is out-of-bounds for the viewer. The more intimate frame of the artwork is, in effect, sealed off to the viewer’s touch and restrains the verbal rendering of that dimension of representation.

The museum guide at the end of the tale informs us that the “espléndido sepulcro yacente de una dama normanda” of the twelfth century is housed in the center of the museum’s Gothic chapel. This last portion of the story also reveals the provenance of the sarcophagus that was brought from Languedoc, France, in 1929 to New York by a Mr. Town. The artwork/sealcher once destined be moved into Mr. Town’s private residence was ultimately donated to the public museum. Just as the painting of the nude woman in “La obra maestra” is moved from a private to a public institutional venue, so are the remains of the woman of the sepolcher (“El tercer lugar” 108). In keeping with the title of the story, this is the third place that the woman, in her burial chest, has reposied. The first place that the woman was laid to rest was at the church in Languedoc, France. Secondly, she was slated to be housed in the Nuevo Mundo at a mansion on tony Fifth Avenue, but her final physical resting place became the New York City museum. Similarly, the painting in “La obra maestra” was moved three times, from the garret studio, to a gallery, and finally to the bank lobby. The idea of the sepolcher being situated in a Fifth Avenue
mansion, and the nude painting in the bank lobby are slightly absurd. These two venues, opposites in terms of public accessibility, underscore how reception of a particular artwork may vary when its architectural “frame” is modified.

The story title allusion to Dante, and his three domains of *infierno*, *purgatorio*, and *paradiso* is unmistakable, for since her death the inhabitant of the sarcophagus “ni el juicio ha sido ni ella fue a parar al deseado Cielo, al temible Infierno. Y nadie en su vida le había hablado de este Nuevo Mundo, de este Tercer Lugar; sin Gloria ni excesiva pena” (106). Her soul lies in suspended animation or *purgatorio*, not having received the final judgment to go to heaven nor to hell. Even the temperature fails to indicate those domains as in the museum “no hace ni frío ni calor” (107).

As a further inclusion of the concept of the third place for the tale, the narrative is layered in three voices. The mute art object “ella” has a voice and speaks for herself, albeit in a passive tone, “ella intuye sin poder ver” (“El tercer lugar 105). Somehow from the confines of her dark resting place “ella” perceives “luces que parecen días y oscuridades que semejan noches” and a night watchman who regularly “recorre el lugar con una luz en la mano; sus pasos crean ecos que se repiten y se repiten: parece que aquí hay multiples salas y numerosos corredores” (107). By employing sensate language the narrator brings to life the removal of “ella” from the French chapel and the voyage of the burial receptacle across the Atlantic, reporting that “de cómo llegó aquí sólo recuerda un largo silencio de siglos, un estrépito como de escoplos y martillos que parecían querer arrancar de cuajo su sepulcro de la vieja capilla en que fue enterrada.” After a voyage characterized by “el mecer lento y tenaz de una travesía inacabable hasta otro mundo” she arrives in that unpredicted world. It is doubly unpredictable as it is neither heaven or
hell, nor was it a known continent during the lifetime of the Norman woman who died in  
the twelfth century, before the discovery of the Nuevo Mundo. Most intriguingly “ella”  
recounts the actions of museum guests:

oyendo el misterioso y extraño desfile de seres errantes que pasan por aquí sin 
cesar, en una cadena inacabable. Algunos apenas se detienen un momento, otros  
deslizan pasando casi sin parar, muy pocos quedan algún breve rato que a ellos se  
les antoja muy largo; los hay silenciosos y solitarios y otros que parecen llegar  
acompañados y entonces se escuchan sus voces, por lo general susurros tenues  
parecidos a rezos, breves frases antes de escapar con pisadas cautas rumbo a otro  
lugar. (“El tercero lugar” 106-07)

With these words “ella” addresses and invites us, the readers, to experience everyday life  
from her perspective. Moreover, the whispered comments and softly spoken prayers of  
the museum visitors constitute the second layer of narrative voice. The third speaker, the  
museum guide, gives the third, formal, official description of the sarcophagus that begins  
with a direct request to both the museum patrons and the reader with the command  
“[n]ótese” (108).

In this story, Díaz-Mas expertly manipulates the traditional Christian vision of  
afterlife, and combines that with three narrative voices and locations to give voice,  
sensation and life to an old, stone work of art. Thus, an unlikely choice of visual text, a  
sarcophagus, successfully gains its own voice to convey to the reader of the verbal text.  
Once again, there exists an intermedial relationship between the lexical and graphic texts.  
The museum narrative, uttered by the guide, provides background about the physical  
artwork, while the voices of “ella” and the narrator address the sensations and  
bewilderment that “ella” experiences. Without the verbal text to engender those three  
voices, the sarcophagus would remain eternally mute. Conversely, the absence of a  
museum such as the Cloisters, and the physical and chronological framing that its
medieval architecture provides, would preclude the physical setting for the well-known art form, the sarcophagus, to function as ekphrastic artwork.

Despite the fact that these three short stories employ different graphical media, they share the trait of an interaction between the verbal and visual modes of representation that enhances rather than detracts from the overall content. In "En busca de un retrato," neither the highly stylized wedding portrait nor the snapshot taken by the narrator constitutes an adequate portrait of María, as the synchronic moment that it frames cannot capture the diachronic maturation process of the abuela adoptiva. The nuptial portrait harks from an era foreign to the narrator, one taken when posing was a long and complicated process dominated by a professional photographer, in an era when the middle and lower classes were relatively unaccustomed to being photographed. Although the snapshot better represents María, it cannot encompass her cumulative essence. Neither portrait can adequately summarize its subject, her home, her experiences, nor her ageless beauty. The deficiencies further serve to impede the function that Tagg delineates was photography's worth as a tool to record and organize familial ties grounded in shared events and their records. Without the accompanying verbal text, the two portraits would fail miserably to represent María. However, the verbal and visual media are equal with respect to their ability to represent chronology, since both the description of the pair of María's portraits and her age difference in each portrait indicates the time that has elapsed since her youth and dotage.

The idea of duality is also paramount in "La obra maestra." The artist, Amal, has created two versions of a painting on the same canvas that reflect the dichotomy of the contradictory religious and secular aspects of his personality. Dissimilar to "En busca de
un retrato,” the portrait in question is destined to be hidden, to camouflage the nude version at odds with its creator. The verbal text cannot convey the fleeting reception of the nude, nor its ephemeral transition from figurative to corporal art and vice versa that occurs during circadian change as the sun sets. The verbal text does give a good sense of the tiny studio, where the forbidden canvas is ensconced, as compared to the large bank lobby where is it hidden by a light source. Ironically the long time span of decades of aging and maturation in “En busca de un retrato” are easier to depict than the limited time frame for reception of the disrobed woman at sunset in “La obra maestra.” In both “En busca de un retrato” and “La obra maestra,” the lexical and verbal modes of representation create a symbiotic and rich interface for the reader.

The purposefully disjointed narration in “El tercer lugar” reflects the vagabond existence of the Norman woman’s remains and spirit. Rather than the duality of the two previous stories, here there is a trinity, reminiscent of the Holy Trinity and Dante’s La Divina Commedia. This concept of three carries over to the physical resting places of the stone sarcophagus and its contents as well as the narrative voice. Although a timeline is given for the history of the artwork, the text fails to provide the reader with a scale of time from the perception of “ella,” as for her time has been dilated to centuries and that expansive timeline is not sufficiently described. Merely reading the text cannot sufficiently delineate the spatial parameters of the museum room where the sepulcher is housed, the relief art of the effigy plate, nor the space within which the remains of “ella” and her spirit dwell as they are centered around a three dimensional concept which is extremely difficult to define on a page. The actual museum and work of art, or photographs of them would better serve to convey the spatiality of both of those spaces.
Nevertheless, the story conveys a vague portrayal of both time and space and bridges the gap between visual and verbal art.

Thus, the key to success for the narration of each of these stories is grounded in the intermedial relationship whose foundation is the meshing of time and space, of visual and verbal. The next chapter focuses on yet another visual medium, tapestry, where these same issues will be examined.

Chapter Notes

1. In another of Díaz-Mas's short stories, "El Señor Link visita a un autor," Díaz-Mas leaves the subject pronoun out. This omission makes ambiguous the gender of author whom Señor Link, who is an editor, visits. However, the resolution of that story suggests that the purpose of the vagueness was to insinuate that the editor was expecting a male rather than a female author. Perhaps in "En busca de un retrato" Díaz-Mas seeks to avoid gender-specific stereotypical perception of beauty, i.e. that men generally view younger women as beautiful according to stereotype.

2. In this case Díaz-Mas is quite specific with respect to the inspiration for the story, revealing that "me lo inspiraron (refiere también a su cuento "La fiesta pasa") lectura de un capítulo de un libro de Jacques LeGoff sobre el nacimiento del concepto del purgatorio en la Edad Media y la contemplación de una sala del museo neoyorquino The Cloisters en que se exhibían varias tumbas medievales." The author explains her deliberate vagueness about the entombed woman, "mi dama medieval no podía tener nombre porque, para empezar, ignoramos su identidad: pero también porque ese ambiguo <<ella>> protagonista contribuye a acentuar la confusión inicial acera del lugar donde se encuentra" (El oficio de narrar 117).

3. Careful attention to symmetry, as shown on the carefully chiseled pleating of the robe-like garment on the body of the effigy plate, is usually a trait carried through from the design of Byzantine sarcophagi (Vincent 41).

4. I employ the term chiaroscuro as an extension of its literal application to a specific work of art. In literal translations from Italian it means "light-dark" and by definition "in painting, the technique of modeling form by almost imperceptible gradations of light and dark. Its invention is generally associated with the career of Leonardo da Vinci. The effect is difficult to achieve in the clear quick-drying medium of tempera, and therefore is chiefly associated with the rise of oil painting, reaching a climax in the 17th century with the work of Caravaggio in Italy, Rembrandt in Holland, and Georges de la Tour in Lorraine.
Thus, my alteration of the term refers not to the gradation of light generated by the dexterous application of paint to the canvas, rather to the transformation effected upon the non-figurative art at sunset that unveils the nude concealed by other light sources.

5. Stewart cites an essay by Richard Wrigley that "describes the emphasis on close physical engagement with sculptures in the eighteenth-century French salons" and notes that this practice vanished after "the 1780s when practices developed to protect work within arm's reach from public spectators" (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 174-75). In 2008, I experienced the tactile perception of a number of Salvador Dalí metal sculptures that are on public display in Marbella, Spain, located in a small park that sits atop a subterranean parking garage. The ability to touch the sculptures enhanced not only my interpretation of each one, but also of the craft of shaping the metal. The park, adjacent to the promenade that runs along the beach, has no ropes, no guards, and no visible monitoring, which allows for uninhibited viewing, touching, photographing, even children climbing on the artwork. These liberties that contrast with the protective protocol of formal museums, yield a much-enhanced reception of the sculptures.
Chapter 4 - The Tapestries That Come to Life

Two of Díaz-Mas’s stories that describe two types of needlework, tapestry and embroidery provide us with a unique opportunity to study ekphrastic narration. Curiously, these art forms have not frequently served as a medium employed in interartistic study.¹ In spite of the shared woven medium of the two stories presented for analysis in this chapter, each tale exhibits some notable and unique variations. Notably, the allegorical tapestries that appear in the first story, “La Dama del Unicornio,” are well known, and Díaz-Mas informs the reader that she herself has viewed them. Despite their age, the weavings are in fine condition as a result of at least two restorations over the centuries.² The Lady in the tapestries is doubly a muse, both for the tapestries and for Díaz-Mas’s story. In contrast, the embroidered artwork that underpins the second story, “Las sergas de Hroswith,” is fictional and, according to the narrator, is in damaged condition. Regarding shared features of the two stories, The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries as well as the fictitious panels described in “Las sergas de Hroswith” were created during medieval times and thematically correspond to that era. In addition, the author takes the liberty of assigning a plot to both works of art. To mentally transport the reader into the time frame of the past corresponding to the narration in these two stories, and as we will later see in El sueño de Venecia, Díaz-Mas adeptly employs certain descriptive techniques, such as colors and beliefs typical of the era, practices of peace and battle, as well as appropriate flora and fauna, all of which lend an air of authenticity to the perspective of the medieval context.

Readers must take care nonetheless, to view these elements through a forgiving lens. In his study titled The Lady and the Unicorn, Sutherland Lyall echoes Díaz-Mas’s
cautionary advice that she applied to *La tierra fértil*, with respect to evaluating medieval customs and artwork by applying contemporary criteria. In particular, Lyall disfavors assigning iconic status to medieval visual elements, noting that “much of mediaeval symbolism had more than one concurrent and entirely opposite meaning” (*The Lady and the Unicorn* 147).\(^3\) Therefore, although it is worthy to include some commentary on elements of the visual components of the artwork, it is unwise to conclude that their meaning is immutable.

While many such studies have implicitly examined what people expect of visual art, Mitchell explicitly develops that as the central theme of his book *What Do Pictures Want?*. I extrapolate commentary from his work to apply to tapestry. Perhaps Díaz-Mas’s proclivity to create an active plot for tapestries reflects Mitchell’s commentary that

[It would be disingenuous, however, to deny that the question of what pictures want has overtones of animism, vitalism, and anthropomorphism, and that it leads us to consider cases in which images are treated as if they were living things . . . the living image is, in my view, both a verbal and a visual trope, a figure of speech, of vision, of graphic design, and of thought. (What Do Pictures Want? 10)]

Díaz-Mas’s literary melding of tapestry and plot exemplify Mitchell’s musings on what pictures, or in this case tapestries, desire.

Much factual information is available concerning the “The Lady and the Unicorn” tapestries currently on public display at the Musée National de Moyen Âge – Thermes de Cluny Museum in Paris, France, where I have personally had the opportunity to view them. In the *Nota Previa* to the story as it appears in *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, Díaz-Mas shares her personal views on what can be an author’s inspiration or catalyst for a literary creation. In addition, the author notes that interviewers often put forth the question of what incites an author to write about a particular topic. Díaz-Mas explains
that the inspiration is usually something quite intangible: “ese proceso de creación que hace que surja, como de la nada, una narración de algo inexistente y a la vez con visos de realidad.” As her commentary of the sequence of her writing process continues, Díaz-Mas’s delineation of how the chispa inicia, both literally and metaphorically, builds to become a text that takes on a Penelopean tone; “[p]roducimos entonces fragmentos de novela que van emborronando páginas, que tejemos y destejemos cuidadosamente …” (Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 93). Quite to the contrary of an intangible stimulus, “La Dama del Unicornio” is based on tangible art and resulted from the author’s visit to the Cluny Hot Springs with two friends in the spring of 1981. The author’s inspiration for this story is linked with a bona fide work of art, given that the reader’s probable visual familiarity with the “Lady and the Unicorn” frames the reader’s textual expectations and influences a belief in the narrator’s reporting and interpretation of the tapestries. For an American reader, the iconic unicorn tapestries at the Cloisters Museum in New York City, The Hunting of the Unicorn, may serve as a cultural benchmark for comparison and contrast. Previous exposure to either of these unicorn tapestries frames the reader’s textual expectations and influences an assessment of the author’s mastery of verbal rendering of visual art. This probable familiarity is contrary to the fictitious tapestries described in “Las sergas de Hroswith,” which affect the reader differently.

After having read the Nota Previa of the story “La Dama del Unicornio,” the reader has a firm idea of both the author’s inspiration and her notion of unrequited love as a theme. Thus, this story incorporates a fourth dimension to the ekphrastic reading paradigm, encompassing that of the author, the narrator, the reader, and in the case of this short story, the original artwork. The author’s disclosure that her viewing of the tapestry was a catalyst
for the writing of this story creates a transitional layer between the other components of the reading model.

Moreover, the reader must be conscious that the verbal duplication of visual art is sometimes subject to the less than objective reception and verbalization of the visual text by the narrator. In turn, the reader-viewer oscillates between plastic art, lexical text, and mental image, all of which construct the reader’s personal version of the graphic image. The author’s own viewing of the tapestries in France yields this additional layer of representation of the real work of art. What is singular to this story in the scope of the present study is this transitional layer of reception engendered by the real work of art, the author’s viewing of the tapestries in France. Based on Díaz-Mas’s remarks in the Nota Previa, the reception of the artwork is followed by the narrator’s selection of which artistic elements to report and the assignation of meaning by formulating language to represent the visual text. Finally, the reader performs the two-fold visual processing of the words on the page; firstly the physical process of reading the verbal text on the page, and secondly, by a cognitive interpretation of the words that cause the formation of a personal mental picture of the art verbally depicted in the lexical text. This practice includes assigning shades of color and form to assist in conjuring up a mental image.

I reiterate that this multi-step process may be shaped to a degree due to previous familiarity of a work, and/or identification with a particular time period, style, or artist. Viewers of a known work of art approach a text with distinct presuppositions, which differ from their ekphrastic expectations based on fictional art. This perspective contradicts Valentine Cunningham’s assessment that neither theory nor practice is affected by the existence or imaginary state of works of art in ekphrastic narration. Furthermore,
Cunningham proposes that intermedial narration provides sufficient authenticity that eliminates distinction between ekphrastic texts that are based on real or fictional plastic art ("Why Ekphrasis" 62). On the other hand, Heffernan indicates a difference between the two alternatives and deems the disparity a positive attribute, stating that as we enter such a "museum of words," a distinction between real and fictional art further enhances interartistic reading as it allows unique assessment of the efficacy of ekphrastic narration" (*A Museum of Words* 7). This debate concerning the source of ekphrasis based on actual versus imaginary art will later be of relevance to this study when it relates to the fictional portrait in *El sueño de Venecia* which, although unreal, emerges in the reader's imagination with references and clues to its style and artist. The story, "La Dama del Unicornio," and the authentic tapestries about The Lady and the Unicorn are unique in this analysis as a means of weighing the relative merits and failures of the lexical and graphic texts.

The provenance of the *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries has been well documented. They were originally woven for the Le Viste family of the Lyon region during the fifteenth century and have been remarkably well preserved. Varying theories have been proffered as to a special occasion for which the tapestries were produced, though none has been deemed singularly correct. Tapestry fits Hagstrum's classification of an art medium rooted in practicality, as panels helped minimize the draftiness of the immense stone walls of old castles, and served a decorative function as well. Although the heraldic icons on the banners clearly pertain to the Le Viste family, there is no conclusive evidence as to why the tapestries were commissioned or the identity of the lady portrayed in the weavings. In fact, Lyall points out that notwithstanding speculation of the lady's identity there is a different woman wearing distinct resplendent attire in each
panel (*The Lady and the Unicorn* 48-49). The tapestries "existed in virtual obscurity in a château in a small town until being discovered in 1844 by Georges Sand"; thirty-nine years later they were acquired by the Cluny Museum (*La Dame à la Licorne* 64). Done in the *mille fleurs* style, thematically the six allegorical tapestries represent the five senses and, the sixth, *A mon seul désir*, love. ⁴

At the Cluny Museum the tapestry panels are displayed in a circular fashion, imparting an impression of seamlessness and uninterrupted time, and their size, averaging twelve by fourteen feet, makes the tapestries particularly impressive. This round display contrasts with the linear manner in which tapestries are traditionally hung on castle walls. The Cluny Museum display gives the spectator a feeling of being surrounded, almost embraced by the panels in the softly lit salon that is insulated from the outside world. Indeed, Díaz-Mas's description of the tapestries is quite faithful, albeit abbreviated, to those hanging in the Cluny Museum, as compared to the study by the museum's curator, Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, and my own viewing of the silk and wool weavings. ⁵ The architect of the salon in the French museum that houses the famed panels cleverly designed the access and egress to the room as an offset opening in the display rather than a traditional framed doorway. This architectural detail thus minimizes the break in the continuous round display. There is, however, a discrepancy with respect to the number of panels in the museum and Díaz-Mas's story. In view of this, it is unclear in what order the original tapestries were meant to be hung, thus the idea of beginning and end is blurred. Six panels of "La Dama del Unicornio" adorn the walls of the Cluny museum, while Díaz-Mas's text encompasses graphically separated sections of text and alludes to a possible missing seventh tapestry. The author has inserted a space with five asterisks that
appears three times to separate sections of her story, ostensibly to imitate a separate panel of the woven display. While the circular display of the tapestries certainly imbue spatiality into the lexical text that gives a sense of eternity, the chronological process of reading and the typographical breaks in the verbal text do not equate with time undivided. To the contrary, the latter factors lend chronological seaming to the visual text through punctuation, pagination, sentences, and graphic division such as spacing and the asterisks that Díaz-Mas includes. The sensation of uninterrupted viewing and time cannot be replicated in the lexical text. Furthermore, another factor that sets “La Dama del Unicornio” apart from “Las sergas de Hroswith” is that in the story based on the well-known tapestry series, Díaz-Mas breaks the temporal frame three times during the course of the narration, twice with anachronistic elements and once with metafictive commentary.

In addition to possessing artistic and scholarly interest, the theme of a damsel with a unicorn is iconic of medieval art. The tapestries have popular appeal as well, as evidenced by Tracy Chapman’s recent best selling novel *The Lady and the Unicorn* and the upcoming film based on that novel, and one need not search far to find forms or kits for needlework reproductions of the famous scenes. Lyall points out the ubiquitous design of the lady and the mythical unicorn during medieval times “in and on an astonishing range of materials from German ivory jewel-boxes, to marginal illustration in English illuminated manuscripts, and from small Netherlandish engravings to great French tapestries” (*The Lady and the Unicorn* 7). Moreover, Díaz-Mas’s fascination with the tapestries sparked her textual creativity:

[I]os tapices, con su colorido espléndidamente conservado durante más de quinientos años y con sus elementos simbólicos abrumadoramente presentes pero
para mí impenetrables, me fascinaron. Surgió entonces, en aquel mismo museo de Cluny en que nos encontrábamos, un título de novela que prometí escribir ... A lo largo de los años he ido escribiendo fragmentos, tentando posibles desarrollos de la trama a partir de una idea inicial: que el leitmotivo de mi narración había de ser la serie de los seis tapices, y que, desde luego, tenía que ser una novela de amor, y de amor no correspondido. (Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 94)

The author reports that she has written approximately one hundred pages about the tapestries and that they are often, like Penelope’s famed weaving itself, “tejidos y destejidos” (Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 94). The author further clarifies: “[l]os dejo dormir durante meses en sus carpetas, y luego los releo, y los retoco, y los reescribo sin saber muy bien por qué ni para qué.” Díaz-Mas leaves open the possibility that The Lady and the Unicorn may function as a leitmotif in a longer work in the future: “[n]o sé que llegará a ser La Dama del Unicornio ... Ahí van, por ahora, algunos de esos fragmentos queridos” (Revista de Estudios Hispánicos 94). In this story, the author embraces the archetype of female weaving, and the act’s significance as a symbol of waiting. Classical Greek mythological examples are Penelope, as well as Athena and her pupil Arachne, who is known in Roman myths as Minerva. The Bible refers to a good wife as one using a distaff and spindle in Prov. 31:19, and in 2 Kings 23:7 to the weavings of a woman, albeit a prostitute, and finally mentions the warp and woof of weaving in reference to a leper’s garments (Lev. 13:48-53). In more modern times, the cinematic protagonist Tita in the 1993 Alfonso Arau film, Como agua para chocolate, based on Laura Esquivel’s novel of the same title, crochets an afghan of epic length beginning on the eve that her sister marries Tita’s beloved suitor Pedro.

The gender of the makers of both the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries and “Las sergas de Hroswith” merits consideration, as the former contradicts and the latter confirms the expectation of female creation of textiles. Women’s role in weaving evolved over the
centuries and according to Merry Weisner in her chapter “Spinners and Seamstress:
Women in Cloth and Clothing Production,”

[un]like other crafts, the production of cloth and clothing throughout most of western history has been a women’s occupation. Until the late middle ages, all stages of production, from carding wool or cooking flax to making the final finishing touches on garments, were carried out in the home, usually by female members of the family or servants. (Rewriting the Renaissance 191)

However, in the post-feudal age, the rise of capitalism accompanied the burgeoning industrial age and the role of women was diminished, largely through their exclusion from guilds. Wiesner’s research details that commencing in the thirteenth century, “male artisans began to take over some stages of production from women, gradually forming guilds of weavers and cloth cutters.” Gradually the more complicated and profitable crafts were placed in the domain of male workers, and the “systems of apprenticeship were set up, which usually did not allow for female participation” (Rewriting the Renaissance 191). According to Wiesner’s findings, in Flanders, Italy, and Belgium women consistently performed the lowest paying tasks, such as boiling flax or spinning, while in Germany women participated in a greater variety of work but were excluded from completing finer work (191-200).

In her study World Tapestry: From Its Origins to the Present, Madeline Jarry echoes this observation, specifically as it relates to the materials used in the woof and warp of the La Dame à la Licorne weaving. Although, according to Jarry, women participated in some aspects of weaving, the finest woven products, namely those crafted from wool and silk like the Lady and the Unicorn panels, fell into the domain of male work (167). Through sociological analysis of historical data, Wiesner follows the advent of guild restrictions that were increasingly exclusionary to women beginning in the
fifteenth century, and she explains that “by the mid-seventeenth century, women were limited to the lowest paid and least pleasant tasks within the cloth industry” (202).  

Indeed, in Tracy Chevalier’s novel, The Lady and the Unicorn, a fictional version on the creation of the tapestries, such a hierarchy exists in the households associated with the tapestry’s creation. According to Chevalier’s plot, Nicolas des Innocents, cartoonist of the famed weaving, possessed talents that rivaled those of a skilled designer. The novel, set in Paris as well as the Brussels workshop of renowned master weaver George de la Chapelle, portrays women as auxiliary workers in the guild controlled industry as well as sexual objects in the storyline. Although integral in the everyday operation of the workshop, the women’s diminished role as helpers is consistent with Weisner’s and Brown’s findings. Thus, in reality, the archetypal expectation of women weaving is confounded by the historical frame of post-feudal Europe.

No matter what the gender of the gaze of the viewer of the tapestries might be, the issue of the artisan that created them elucidates various possibilities of gender-centered framing. Undoubtedly male hands, rather than female ones, wove the famed tapestries of the Cluny Museum that depict the Lady in the six panels. Conversely, embroidery remained the task of women and, therefore, the stitched band depicting the chivalric exploits of Hroswith and his men would have, in all likelihood, been fashioned by female hands. The visual text of “Las sergas de Hroswith” that records knightly pursuits was fashioned by female hands and opposes the traditional male genre of chronicles of the chivalric era. In spite of the tradition of men’s participation as subjects in that genre, both with swords as knights and pens as chroniclers, Diaz-Mas seeks to rescript texts from the middle ages from a female perspective. With a needle, women created “Las sergas de
Hroswith, a story of men who live and die by the sword according to chivalric code and, inversely, Díaz-Mas reinterprets the tapestries that were created by men at a loom, with a pen.8

Although the unicorn is chiefly a mythical creature iconic of the middle ages, Lyall cites the legendary beast's long presence in culture. Despite modern day knowledge of the animal's fanciful nature, Erlande-Bradenburg points out that "even in our own times it is surrounded with a aura of mystery" (La Dame à la Licorne 11). Fascination with unicorns is long-standing. For example, in the third century Herodotus wrote of the "horned ass of Africa," and Aristotle, Julius Caesar, Pliny the Elder, as well as various western and eastern religious texts, mention the fantastic creature. The unicorn was frequently depicted in bestiaries, Christian books of moral fables or "encyclopédias of the strange and wonderful animals of the earth" that featured both real and folkloric animals, such as the griffin, centaur, basilisk, mermaids, and mermen (The Lady and the Unicorn 133). This mixture of the real and fantastic, typical of the era, reinforces the words of both Díaz-Mas and Lyall that we must use caution when assessing middle age beliefs and practices through a modern day lens. A unicorn would not have been more incredible to a semi-literate medieval European denizen than, for example, a kangaroo, an echidna, or a ring-tailed lemur.

The stereotypical unicorn was a "horse-like beast, with a straight spiral-like horn in the middle of its forehead, often with a goatish beard and cloven hooves" (The Lady and the Unicorn 134).9 Despite the blatant phallic symbolism of the unicorn's horn, in medieval times the animal reputedly possessed extraordinary powers, chiefly the ability to purify water merely by dipping its horn into the fluid.10 That protuberance supposedly
could also protect against poison, or perhaps revive the dead. Some of the wealthy population routinely drank from what they believed were unicorn horns that were, in all probability, fabricated of narwhal ivory (The Lady and the Unicorn 141-143). This folkloric belief of the creature’s powers is a prime illustration of the disparity between modern day and medieval age perspective. Residents of present day developed countries with potable water readily available from faucets cannot identify with the concept of pure water as such a precious commodity. This belief presents a concise example of the need to be mindful of the relative perspective of time period which a work of art, be it lexical or graphic, recreates. In addition, many believed that the unicorn could allegedly be tamed by a virgin, as her purity would literally stop the animal in its tracks, often to subdue the creature so that it could be slain. The use of unicorns in art diminished during the mid-sixteenth century due to religious proscription.11

As a point of departure for examining “La Dama del Unicornio,” I will describe the tapestries in the Cluny Museum and follow with Díaz-Mas’s textual version of the weavings. The striking dark red background color of the *mille fleurs* design woven in silk and wool by the *tapiessiers* contrasts with an island-like medium blue upon which the lady, the unicorn, and other figures seem to float. Animals, domestic as well as exotic, birds, and plants woven into the red background at varying heights give the viewer the illusion that many of those elements are flying about the scene. At first glance the animals seem like mere ornamentation; however, we will see that they play an integral role in the rendering of the senses in the artwork. The *mille fleurs* motif, iconic of medieval weaving, is the first stylistic element that beckons the viewer to step back in time. The Lady and her maidservant, to a lesser degree, are opulently clad and coiffed. I
concur with Erlande-Brandenburg’s observation that the “brocades, silks and jewels have been rendered with extraordinary exactitude” (La Dame à la Licorne 11).\textsuperscript{12} The lion and the unicorn appear in every tapestry, while the maidservant is absent in two panels. The gaze of the animals is sometimes directed at the Lady, and in other instances at an imaginary point or seemingly at us, the viewers. Heraldic banners and pennants, both bearing the symbols of the Le Viste family, appear to stand upright or flutter in a breeze and are held by and interchanged between the lion and the unicorn. While the flora and fauna lent an air of botanical familiarity for the medieval French beholder of the tapestries, in our era we must eschew the tendency to assign them iconic significance, as according to both the author and Lyall, the potential for misinterpretation abounds in an analysis of the plants and animals from our contemporary perspective.\textsuperscript{13}

The issue of verbal and visual depiction of the five senses, Louise Vinge notes in The Five Senses, has been studied for many centuries and dates back to Classic times. In fact, the poetics of the perception and functions of the sense organs dates back to Aristotle, for example, in his works De Anima, and De Sensu et Sensibilibus (The Five Senses 15-17). According to Kerry McSweeney, vision is an adult human’s most acute sense, as it has the greatest number of nerve endings and fibers, followed by hearing. Sir Issac Newton’s publication Optiks, Mc Sweeney maintains, spurred the “valorization of sight as the supreme sense that occurred the late seventeenth century,” following the impact of Newton’s study (The Language of the Senses 6). Ironically, although vision is the most highly developed sense in adult humans, McSweeney points out that while in “childhood development of senses, tactile, and auditory” are highly important, adults rely on their sensory capacity in reverse order. (The Language of the Senses 4). Although
some studies endeavored to group or place the senses in a hierarchy, a lasting conclusion
prevails that there is overlap in some sensual perception, for example, vision and touch.
The visual representation of the senses in both of the tapestries examined in this chapter
offers salient insights into their graphic representation.

I have arbitrarily chosen to begin the description of the tapestries with Sight and
end with *A mon seul désir* (To my one desire), this being the order in which they are hung
in the gallery in the Cluny Museum without, of course, a sequence or indication of which
panel to be viewed first. In Sight, a tree flanks the Lady on each side, the unicorn has
reared up and sits with its front legs and hooves on her lap, and the oddly smiling bearded
lion sits up on its haunches with its front legs elevated. While vision is considered a
highly refined sense, it often plays a secondary role in the functioning of other senses,
specifically tactile and auditory reception. In spite of the panel’s primary dedication to
Sight, the interconnection between sight and touch manifests itself in the panel, for while
the Lady gazes at the mythical beast her left hand is resting on the unicorn’s withers, as if
to steady it or prohibit it from leaving her side.\(^{14}\) The Lady utilizes her legendary power
of virginity to still the beast. In her right hand, the Lady holds up a mirror that is turned
approximately seventy degrees outward, in which we see the visage of the unicorn. The
appearance of the mirror in the tapestry creates a *mise-en-abyme*, as the reflection in the
looking glass creates an internal reduplication of the unicorn that is already present on the
panel. This Chinese box effect, of art within a frame, the unicorn within the tapestry, and
the unicorn’s image reproduced on the mirror’s surface, points out more facets of the
artwork and spectator paradigm. The image within the frame of the artwork, of the
unicorn’s face in the mirror, transcends the frame and is received by the spectator, who is outside the graphic frame.

For Susan Stewart, there exists an often overlooked tactile component of viewing of tapestry since, “[i]n handicrafts that are two-sided, such as embroidery and rug making, there is often a front for viewing and a back that shows evidence of touching and making” (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 162). Given that tapestries are traditionally hung front side out, against a wall, the viewers are not cognizant of the tactile dimension of woven panels, which is certainly the case with the display of The Lady and the Unicorn tapestry; there is no access to the back of the tapestry. This lack of tactile reception of artwork harks back to Chapter Three, in which the absence of touching the sarcophagus diminished the scope of its viewing. Touch, Stewart maintains, functions through a complex interdependency of senses, chiefly between vision and touch. Primarily, “visual perception can immediately organize a field” and then anticipate touch’s “reception and the retrospective consequences that will be evoked” by tactile stimuli. Stewart also points out that “[a]lthough the hand is paramount, no particular organ is exclusively associated with touch; rather, the entire surface of the body is touch’s instrument” 162). The Lady’s grasp on the unicorn’s horn capitalizes on the most obvious and refined organ of touch – the hand. Certainly in some individuals, such as the blind, tactile perception can be significantly heightened. One need only think of how a person with sight and a blind person would discriminate between coins of different denominations in darkness, how the former would fumble without visual cues and the latter would readily separate the coins based only on enhanced tactile sensation.
In Hearing, the unicorn and the lion again symmetrically appear alongside the Lady, holding a pennant and banner respectively. While the maidservant operates an organ bellows, the Lady plays the instrument that features a carving of both the unicorn and a lion on its ornate frame. Most of the animals shown have their ears pricked as if they were trying to hear the music more closely. Auditory stimuli are received by more than one sense, and frequently involve vision and touch. Sound waves, in effect, touch our entire body, most importantly our ears where they eventually vibrate on our tympanic membranes. In a section of her book titled “The Experience of Beholding,” Stewart cites how vision plays into the auditory reception of the sounds of a stick running along a fence (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 145). The scene of the animals listening on the tapestries evokes a similar image that appears on the cover of Margaret Persin’s Getting the Picture, the iconic terrier mix dog, Nipper, looking into the large speaker, with ears pricked, of an RCA Victor Victrola. The dog simultaneously listens and looks for visual cues about the source from which the sounds emanate, thus embodying the combination of the two senses.

Dissimilar to the previous two scenes, four trees appear in Taste which is tied in with scent. To acknowledge the interrelationship between gustatory and olfactory stimuli, one need only consider how human taste is compromised when one suffers from nasal congestion, or that a cat refrains from eating if it cannot smell the food. In the tapestry the maidservant bows and holds a comfit dish from which the Lady distractedly picks a morsel with her right hand. Two of the creatures, a parakeet poised on her left hand and a monkey seated in front of her, each have received or stolen a sweetmeat. Three other animals appear to be begging for attention and a treat from the Lady: the lapdog sitting on
the train of her gown and the unicorn standing up on its hind legs. The lion, that has adopted the same posture as the unicorn, in addition, has opened its mouth and stuck out its tongue, as if ready to catch a tossed morsel. The background for Taste has four taller trees and in addition to the pennant and banner, the lion and unicorn each wear a shield emblazoned with the Le Viste emblem. The Lady admires a chain of carnations fashioned from the basketful of the flowers held by the maidservant. Behind the Lady, out of her line of sight, a monkey atop a small bench simultaneously steals a bloom from another basket full of flowers while sniffing a carnation, representing Scent, which is held in its opposite paw. The designers of the tapestries were clever to employ animals to depict olfactory stimuli, as many animals, especially canines, possess olfactory capabilities far superior to those of humans.15

In the panel titled Touch, the composition of the scene changes from the two previous panels. As in Sight, the maidservant is absent and the placement of the people, plants, animals, and banner give an appearance of extended height to the scene. The Lady, aside from her usual rich attire, wears a striking amount of gemstones and gold on her gown and headdress as well as at her waist and neck, which touch her bare skin. Two monkeys have, perchance, been chastised for their larcenous mischief in Taste and Smell, as one wears a collar attached to a chain and roller, while the other wears a tether of sorts around its midsection. The lion sits on the left while on the right the unicorn stands on all fours; both wear a shield with heraldic symbols. In the same panel of the tapestry the Lady, situated dead center, grasps the pole holding the banner in her right hand, while [l]a Dama tiene un espejo de mango en la mano derecha, pero no es ella, quien se refleja en espejo, es el Unicornio blanco que ella acaricia con su mano izquierda, un unicornio doméstico y retozón que parece sonreír, que
se acerca a la mano cariñoso como un perrillo ("La Dama del Unicornio" 95).

The phallic patriarchal symbolism is blatant as the Lady holds the horn in one hand and the shaft of the banner, a chivalric icon, in the other.16 With this action the Dama has literally and metaphorically taken control of her own sexuality. She possesses a heraldic symbol of male authority, the banner in one hand, and holds, with an affectionate touch, the horn of the unicorn, literally caressing and controlling the phallic symbol with her hand. In addition, the baldric that the unicorn wears to secure the shield emblazoned with icons of the Le Viste family could also function as a sort of collar, implying bondage, an extreme form of sexual control. In this scene, the Lady holds up a mirror for the spectators, who see not their own reflections, nor that of the Lady, but rather the unicorn’s face. This may puzzle the viewer that anticipated seeing the Lady’s reflection, since as John Berger points out, “[t]he mirror was often used as a symbol of the vanity of woman,” (Ways of Seeing 51). This reflection in the looking glass invokes a similar reaction as when we behold Velázquez’s famous painting Las meninas. Upon viewing that painting the viewers may be surprised to see the monarchs’ faces reflected in the mirror in the background of the painting rather than their own visage. The question of reflection develops into, as Mitchell concisely comments, “a picture about picturing . . . it deploys self-knowledge of representation to activate the beholder’s self-knowledge by questioning the identity of the spectator’s position” (Picture Theory 61). With respect to Las meninas, Mitchell points out that the painting “invokes the fiction of being surprised by the spectator, as if caught in the act . . . the picture only pretends to welcome us. The mirror does not really reflect us” (What Do Pictures Want 50). The tapestry reaches out to us from within the frame and beckons us to enter the courtly world. In addition,
Mitchell maintains that politics enter into the reflection of the King and Queen in Velázquez’s masterpiece,

[all these feints and deceptions remind us of the most literal fact about the picture: that the figures in it do not really ‘look back’ at us; they appear to do so. One might want to say, of course, that this is just a primordial convention in an enhanced, extreme form, posing its tableau vivant for sovereign beholders whose authority is subtly called into question even as it is complimented. This is a picture that wants nothing from us while pretending to be totally oriented toward us. (What Pictures Want 50)

These two clever uses of a looking-glass, one from painting and one from tapestry, reveal the intricate double nature of perspective that an artist creates. This dual nature questions not only how the image is reflected, but also how the interchange functions between subjects and spectators from inside and outside the frame of the artwork.

The last, most vibrant tapestry enigmatically titled “A mon seul désir,” features a decorated blue marquee with the French title written on its frame in gold letters. The tent is secured by ropes to two of the nine trees in the scene. Díaz-Mas’s short story lacks a verbal rendering of this visually climactic panel. The unicorn sits at the right on its haunches while one front leg secures the pole of the banner and the other holds back one side of the tent opening. The lion, on the left, does the same with the tent flap and banner but has its mouth open, as if panting or snarling. As the Lady stands centered in the drawn back tent flaps, the fabric draped back also represents the baring of female genitalia as the flaps may represent the opening of a bodice or the labia, inviting fondling or penetration. The Lady’s wardrobe in itself is symbolic of the dichotomy between virginal purity and sexual invitation. In each panel, the Lady’s garment is designed in two parts, an underskirt and a robe or gown. In each portrayal of the Lady, the robe or gown is split in the front, is draped back and away from her waist, or forms a bustle. This
fashion simultaneously cloaks and exposes the Lady’s body. Between the lion and the lady a lapdog sits atop a pillow on a bench, perhaps guarding the entrance to the tent and virginity. The Lady holds an ornate necklace in her hands, which she is ostensibly returning to a jewel casket held by her maidservant. This act may well signify the commencement of the ritual of undressing, disrobing her body and, like opening the tent flaps, opening the door to her sexuality. Again visual and tactile sensations interact, as the Lady gazes down as the jewelry in her hands. The representation of the necklace conveys a feeling of its heavy weight, of its pressure that Stewart considers an integral component of touch (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 162). The necklace’s size connotes worth and drives one to ponder how the large gems, in their heavy setting, would feel in one’s own hands. From an ideological standpoint, the act of returning the necklace to the box may signify that the Lady has begun to remove jewelry from a type of Pandora’s box, but has thought better of her action and is returning the article for safekeeping. A more Christian centered explanation of the Lady’s action interprets her return of the jewels as a renunciation of material possessions in favor of spiritual purity.

The description of the tapestries offered by the story “La Dama del Unicornio” is not ordered by the separation of individual panels; rather, the author fashions an amalgam of the six panels that hang in the Cluny museum. It is, as Margaret Jones notes, a “juego entre descripción y comentario” (“La obra de Paloma Díaz-Mas” 84). The verbal world created is more fanciful than the tapestries, with flower-eating lions and pearl-eating birds, which represent the gustatory sense. Optical elements include colorful period descriptions of the flowers and the Lady, showing the viewer the reflection of the unicorn’s face in a looking glass (95). The narrator takes the liberty of describing what we know about the
tent, “en cuyo interior aunque no lo vemos – almohadones de raso diseminadas sobre un estrado” suggesting a nomadic, boudoir ambiance. The erotic furnishings of the tent indicate the scene set for a seduction, an awakening of the Lady’s sexuality, her longings, and the consummation of her desires. The sensuality of the accoutrements of the tent reveals hidden carnal desires of the Lady, at odds with the introspective and emotional longings of divine or courtly love. Tactile sensation manifests itself in a manner parallel to the visual text, by the Lady grasping the unicorn’s horn. Olfactory stimuli include the “maderas olorosas” of the tent poles as well as “las mil hierbas aromáticas” woven into the tapestry (95). The lion uses multiple senses when it “parece relamerse ante el exquisito plato que preparan las damas” as the sight and scent of the food cause anticipation of consuming the dish, that is underpinned by the superior olfactory acuity of a lion, as compared with a human. The “habitatión silenciosa” (97), devoid of noise, is contrasted with the implied sounds of the wind, “el céfiro” and “la lluvia que cae” (95). Prose narration is at a disadvantage as compared with poetry in the portrayal of auditory stimuli since silence, as well as the rhythm and cadence of poetic verse help create sound in that genre. Susan Stewart explains that:

as poetry establishes rhythms into measures, as it forms the coincidence of rhymes into patterns of expectation and surprise, sensations internal to individual persons are carried over into context-independent forms of tension and release ... Yet lyric also is made from silence, from the pull of sounds against sense (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 145-146).

As previously mentioned, the animals depicted in the tapestry indicate the reception of sound.

The equivalent of the enigmatic panel, “A mon seul désir,” evokes a series of dichotomies related to divine versus carnal love and who or what was the object of the
Lady’s affections that yielded the unrequited love to which Díaz-Mas refers. The characterization of the Lady as one who presides over her domain “enjoyada como una reina y hierática como una monja en éxtasis” (96) calls to mind Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s Baroque statue Estasi di santa Teresa d’Avila (Ecstasy of Santa Teresa) that is housed in the Cornaro Chapel of Santa Maria della Vitoria in Rome. While many perceive that the statue depicts the Spanish mystic in a moment of spiritual ecstasy, others believe that the sculpture portrays her in the throes of orgasm. Like the Lady in the tapestries, it is unclear if her love is sacred or profane, divine or carnal. The textual manifestations of the senses, both lexical and graphical, enrich the ekphrasis that generates the debate of the sculpture’s meaning, and the tapestry’s as well.

I suggest that we consider a non-contemporary variety of love when evaluating the visual and verbal forms of “La Dama del Unicornio.” In his analysis of the Lady and the Unicorn, Lyall refers to a type of love that “existed on an emotional level” – courtly love. Characteristics of such an emotional state were “a devotion that was generally also unrequited and didn’t really require requital.” Courtly love involved profound emotions and was for the most part never directly expressed and, therefore, was idealized to the point of being almost entirely intellectual. Moreover, this strong emotion was ever mindful of “the disastrous consequences of the ideal courtly love’s being ‘sullied’ by physical consummation” (The Lady and the Unicorn 97-98). Oddly, Lyall confesses that he doubts if courtly love “genuinely existed outside of the fantasies of the clergy and romantic manderings of poets and troubadours,” but still considers it a viable concept to apply to the tapestries (93). It is ambiguous if the unicorn is the Lady’s beloved, or if the animal is a proxy for a man who is present by absence for she “se da cuenta que él es una presencia en
ausencia, una aguda espina dorada, un clavo de amor insatisfecho” (97). Clearly the “espina dorada” and “un clavo” may function as phallic symbols of the unicorn’s horn. The unicorn at one point sits beside the Lady and “el unicornio parece soñar de rodillas, como un amante demasiado sumiso.” We must decide if the flirtatiousness of the unicorn, whose attitude suggests that it “espera que le saquen una foto” directs its actions at us or at the Dama (96-97). The casually mentioned pronoun él creates ambiguity as to whether it refers to man or beast, and the narrator of the story once subtly refers to a mysterious unidentified object of desire, “hombre desconocido,” making the choice more complicated (94). This vague reference makes the object of her desire present by his absence, and metaphorically the unicorn is his proxy inside the frame of the artwork.

As the tale continues the Dama is preoccupied with weaving a garland of corollas, “no piensa más que en esa guirnalda seguramente inútil y destinada a marchitarse en un rincón una vez tejida” (96). In a sense, these words suggest that the Dama, despite her activity, is a prisoner of her own weaving. The unicorn sleeps off to her side “como un amante sumiso” but, “[s]in embargo, hay entre él y la Dama distancia suficiente y suficientes obstáculos … como para que la Dama, dedicada por su entero a su tarea, no pueda verlo ni sentir su presencia” (96). The Lady, despite her best apparent efforts to be a subject, a doer, in the tapestries is condemned to be an object of adornment without voice. The Dama waits eternally for what or who is the object of her unrequited love, be it of a devotional or physical nature. Like Penelope she weaves and rips out her work; however, unlike the resolved destiny of Penelope, determined by her husband’s return, the Lady is destined to do and undo her weaving and fashioning “una guirnalda efímera” in a circle of time, without the possibility of escape from her task, nor the return of her loved one or her
affections (98). Moreover, this notion of perpetual weaving and ripping out of the work brings to mind an intermedial allusion to another of Velázquez's painting, Las hilanderas (The Spinners). The Lady, like the women weaving on the famous canvas, is forever held captive inside the frame of the artwork. Although the ladies in both examples are active subjects, weaving and spinning respectively, they can never complete their task as the artwork imprisons them at a moment forever frozen in time. Like Arachne herself, whose myth appears in the background of Las hilanderas, the women must endure an eternity of Penelopean travail, as each one "deseje lo ya tejido para luego volver a tejer" (La Dama del Unicornio 97). Their task centers on an endless skein of thread, literal and metaphorical, that binds them in eternity to their travail.

To draw the reader into the medieval time frame of this story, Diáz-Mas employs a number of literary devices. These literary strategies foment a mindset akin to the willing suspension of disbelief that one experiences when entering a theater, addressing our desire, if only briefly, to immerse ourselves in the fantastical world of unicorns and flower-eating lions of the short story. Mitchell comments that he believes "that magical attitudes toward images are just as powerful in the modern world as they were in the so-called ages of faith." He remarks on the variety of this desire to simultaneously embrace two planes of existence, noting that "[t]he specific expressions of the paradoxical double consciousness are amazingly various." The critic adds that beliefs span a wide realm and can be paradoxical, noting that, "[t]he most popular phenomena as popular and sophisticated beliefs about art, responses to religious icons by true believers and reflections by theologians" (What Do Pictures Want 8). If only briefly, we are drawn into
the frame of the artwork by visual enticements and surrender, from our modern perspective.

Given that in past times artists used basic and readily available compounds to mix colors such as lead and vegetable dyes, the names of colors reflect the chemical concoctions. The very first words of the story mention color, “el fondo carmesí ... del prado-mar.” The narrator refers to “blanco de albayalde” and “amarillo de cadmio,” referring to the chemical elements, some of which are toxic, that were traditionally used to mix colors (“La Dama del Unicornio” 94). One of the flowers mentioned, *la gualda*, or dyer’s rocket, derives its name from its ability to produce yellow dye. In “La Dama del Unicornio,” the narration is adorned with botanical elements and colors of medieval times. This use of antiquated vocabulary contrasts with the depiction of the grandmother’s home in “En busca de un retrato,” which is set in the twentieth century, as familiar descriptive diction in that story is easily recognized by a contemporary reader; for example, references to plants and their associated colors better known in our time including azaleas, petunias, ferns, and wandering Jew (“En busca de un retrato” 89). In the case of the Lady and the Unicorn the details tell us that the scene, “está cuajado de florecillas blancas, azules y gualdas, unas flores cuidadosamente delineadas un millón de plantas dibujadas ...una a una con hilos de lanas de mil gamas de verde” (94).

In this story and in other texts, the author uses what I term “jewel tones” as evocative tools. Color names may fall in and out of fashion over the centuries, but jewels retain their names and this standard appears again in the “Las sargas de Hroswith.” That is to say that objects and their colors are described by Díaz-Mas using a timeless comparison to precious and semiprecious gems and stones. The Lady wears “la diadema de carbunclos”
(97), her long tresses are “una cascada de oro viejo (94), and on her veil “se incrustan piedras preciosas del tamaño de una nuez” (96). Garment names indicative of the era specify “una Dama vestida de damasco rojo – bajo la sobresaya, un brial de ciclatón, coronada de lacrimosas perlas y velada con un tenue velo de la más fina seda” combined with “la diadema de carbunclos” (97). This panoply of colors lends authenticity to the medieval time frame.

Diáz-Mas animates her text through visual imagery of movement and the use of specific verbs tenses that give the impression that the action in the needlework scenes is unfolding right before the viewer’s eyes; in some cases she verbally portrays scenes reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch paintings with fantastic animals and objects flying about the background. By animating the static, mute tapestries, Diáz-Mas seemingly responds to Mitchell’s query “[w]hy do they (people) behave as if pictures were alive, as if works of art had minds of their own, as if images had a power to influence human beings, demanding things from us, persuading, seducing, and leading us astray?” (What Do Pictures Want? 7). The verbs, with few exceptions, are utilized in active rather than passive voices. The scenes themselves are described as occurring in a meadow, as blue islands, or a boat floating on a sea of red using present tense of verbs such as, “flota”, “deriva” (94-96). Animals and plants move on the panels, “revoltean perros, conejos, panteras sonrientes.” The narrator also speaks of a bird that has just stopped flying “de plumas azules y rojo collarín ha detenido un momento su vuelo para pasarse apenas sobre la mano enguantada de la Dama” (96). In addition, the plants are described in such a way that the reader perceives their present, recent, or future growth or blossoming, “corolas recién abiertas al fresco de la mañana, sus capullos semicerrados que adivinamos que abrirán hacia
mediodía" (94). This sentence, which anticipates the complete blooming of the flowers before midday, implies that the blossoms open during the morning hours, establishing a circadian frame for the panel. The flower can take on a life of their own when they “retoza en ese prado de cielo carmesí,” and four intricately woven trees “cambian continuamente de lugar como si jugasen a las cuatro esquinas” (95). The heraldic elements also connote motion as “[d]os bandoleras de medias lunas de plata sobre banda de azul que cruza un campo de gules ondean a un viento inverosímil que las empuja, simultáneamente, a la derecha y a la izquierda” (95). This narration rich with verbs of motion brings to life what was previously just a colorful series of intricate weaving on a linen canvas.

In contrast to the orderly display of the tapestries and the museum curators’ concise verbal rendition of them, Díaz-Mas’s version is a more random mixture. The narration includes two anachronisms and a metafictive comment. While the Lady holds up the mirror with the unicorn’s reflection she absentmindedly caresses the animal with her other hand. The narrator describes the Lady’s unreadable expression, “[b]ajo los arcos finos de sus cejas, los ojos de la Dama se entrecierran en un gesto no sabemos si de ternura hacia el Unicornio, de nostalgia o de hastío.” The next sentence breaks the narrative frame and addresses us, the readers and virtual beholders, directly: “Aunque sea de desprecio hacia nosotros, espectadores atónitos del prado carmesí incapaces de comprender ese mundo de leones que sostienen estandartes, de tapices florecidos, de unicornios nacidos y criados en palacio” (95). The first anachronism refers to photography and surfaces when the narration points out that the unicorn assumes “[u]na actitud de coquetería y un muchacho hermoso que espera que le saquen una foto” (97). Certainly the subjects of the verb saquen do not refer to the Lady or her maidservant of the pre-photographic age, and assuming that the
creature hopes and waits for viewers of the visual text to take a photo completely blurs the borders between past and present, between artwork and spectator. The second element that does not correspond to the middle ages is asphalt, which is mentioned in conjunction with falling rain, “la lluvia pasa y repasa su lametazo lángido sobre la ciudad oscurecida, ajenas pisadas casi chapotean en un asfalto dulcemente lamido por la continua, suave, acariciante lluvia que cae” (97). This anachronism perhaps refers to present day Paris, with it paved streets and breaks the frame of the tapestry’s display by referring to the rain on the asphalt outside, and refers to a modern time frame. Paradoxically, after Díaz-Mas craftily draws the reader into the medieval temporal frame, these three contradictory factors jolt the reader out of complacency. Theoretically, we could act as participants in the woven tableau by taking a photograph. Nevertheless, the author reminds us that although we may enter the gallery at the Cluny museum, or immerse ourselves in her lexical version of the weavings, we cannot fully penetrate the circular time of the Lady and are incapable of accurately interpreting the icons, the beliefs, and the practices of the middle ages, as well as responding to the coquettish posturing of the unicorn. Through ekphrasis, Díaz-Mas allows us to enter this domain, to mediate the present and past time frames by simultaneously mentioning anachronistic elements, yet incorporating them, almost seamlessly into medieval texts.

In the final section of the story Díaz-Mas, through the narrator, fulfills her wish to make “La Dama del Unicornio” a tale of unrequited love. The object of the Dama’s affections and desires is “una presencia en ausencia, una espina dorada, un clavo del amor insatisfecho,” which causes the double pain of poets in the same situation who are plagued not only by the wound, but also by the emptiness of their hearts (97). The parallel between
the Dama and Penelope echoes Díaz-Mas’s own words about her continuous fine-tuning of the story about the tapestries, “[y] así, en tardes largas de soledad y de invierno ella se complace en tejer y destejar la historia infortunada de un amor que nunca fue, en rememorar lugares y palabras, en evocar detalles que indican que sí, que él la ama y solo por un medio inexplicable huye” (97). This comparison strikes a metafictive vein, as the activity of writing is compared to the visual writing and re-writing that Penelope, the Lady, and the author perform.

While the Lady is protected from the elements and perils of the outside world, she nonetheless has been captured and held for eternity by myriad strands of woolen bonds that keep her forever on the wall of the museum and “[I]a Dama desteje en una hora lo que ha tejido en la hora anterior, como una Penélope enojada para quien los días fuesen más cortos que para el resto de los mortales” (97). Time is passing the Lady by more quickly than for those existing outside of the tapestry. Ironically, she is weaving with “una tela nívea hecha del recién hilado vellón de un unicornio blanco y deslumbrante como una nacarada luna” (97), a wool virginal, pure and untouched, like that Dama herself. The idea of vivacity in the tapestries withers in the last part of the story. The lion and the unicorn are “acartonadas estatuas que flanquean la escena”, a monkey appears bored as it examines “un primoroso castillo de flores,” and the Dama is “absolutamente absorba en los pétalos de una flor delicadamente sostenida por unos dedos marfileños sin sortijas” (98). The change from active to passive narration morphs from an active image into a still life. The Dama is condemned to a futile life of bittersweet remembrance of love, as she weaves an ephemeral, useless garland, “pasar la jornada en la inútil tarea de hacer y deshacer una corona que no
la coronará nunca” (98). She is doomed to repeat her task without end in autumn and winter, without the prospect of rebirth in spring or partaking of the lushness of summer.

Just as the ancient building of Paris’s Cluny Museum, once the site of Roman baths, beckons visitors to immerse themselves in textile art of the medieval era, the literary techniques that Díaz-Mas employs in “La Dama del Unicornio” facilitate the reader’s immersion in that era. The interweaving of Classical archetypes, chivalric symbols, and Biblical allusions, along with evocative color descriptions and verbal animation, yields a rich text that brings the Dame à la Licorne tapestries to life. The author capitalizes on the appeal and universality of focusing her story on sensual, and sensuous, narration that embodies the female perspective. Moreover, the author cleverly seizes the ambiguity of the “A mon seul Désir” panel for use as a foundation for her tale of unrequited love, striking a balance between the appearance of the tapestries themselves and the verbal text’s narrative.

Various similarities between the short stories “La Dama del Unicornio” and “Las sergas de Hroswith” include the common needlework medium, medieval theme, creation of a fictitious verbal plot by Díaz-Mas to complement the visual text, an epigraph, damage to the artwork from dampness and pests, verbal annotation on the artwork itself, and the mystery of why they were made. In her survey of Díaz-Mas’s works, Margaret Jones observes “el marcado énfasis en la descripción pictórica: la prosa de esta colección es gráfica, detallada, y rica en acumulaciones de sustantivos o adjetivos” (“La obra de Paloma Díaz-Mas” 81). Such textual enrichment includes color names related to the era and jewel tones that aid in orientating the reader to the historical time frame of the visual work of art. Although no arachnmonic features appear in “Las sergas de Hroswith,” the familiar pronoun form, vosotros, as well as nosotros, appear repeatedly in the text, implying a
personal connection between the narrator and the readers. The imperative form is routinely used to gain the attention of the reader using, for example, *ved, abridlos (ojos), delitáos*, as well as non-imperative verb conjugations that include *vemos, sepamos, veréis*, and *no podéis reconocer* ("Las sergas de Hroswith" 30-47). The tone of this voice roughly corresponds to that of the museum guide addressing the visitors in "El tercer lugar," as seen in Chapter Two.

While depiction of the senses in "La Dama del Unicornio" related to domestic pursuits, in "Las sergas de Hroswith" their portrayal revolves around journeys and armies, traditionally more male pursuits. Men wove the tapestry and women stitched the embroidery of the exploits of Hroswith and his men, the women's needles being the equivalent to the sword and the shuttle that the *tapiessiers* employed. In this manner the women embroiderers, and Díez-Mas herself as she substitutes then needle for the pen, utilize their respective tools for storytelling and rescript history through a feminine prism. The female creation of "Las sergas de Hroswith" is a counterpoint to "La Dama del Uncornio" that was woven at the looms by men.

The most striking disparity between the tales is the fictitious origin of the artwork featured in "Las sergas de Hroswith." Additional dissimilarities include the bellicose activity of the story in contrast with the sensual and contemplative theme of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries, Biblical allusions, gender difference (as only men appear in "Las sergas de Hroswith"), numerous instances of direct address by the narrator to the readers, as well as linear chronology that contrasts with circular time in both the lexical and graphic texts of "La Dama del Unicornio."
The contrast of chronology of the plots of each story is an extension of the notion of masculine versus feminine time. “Las sergas de Hroswith” follows a linear progression of time typical of historical narrative, especially when related to military events or a voyage with departure, adventures, and return. In contrast, in “La Dama del Unicornio” the circular time and the display itself represent unbroken cycles, moments of time frozen are woven into the tapestry, without specific goal, beginning or ending. In contrast to the unknown origin and creators of the La Dame à la Licorne tapestries, according to Díaz-Mas the creators of the embroidery of “Las sergas de Hroswith” are acknowledged as “los sabios y santos varones de la abadía de Saint Vieu” (29). However, based on the studies of Wiesner and Brown previously detailed in this chapter, it is highly improbable that the embroidery was done by anyone other than women.

Although Díaz-Mas includes two short lines of italicized dedication to the story, “Para mis compañeros de viaje. Y para Safer, que me mostró el tapiz,” there is no evidence to support the existence of any such artwork (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 29). This alleged statement of authenticity, a frequently used literary framing device, pales in comparison to the Nota Previa and the fame of La Dame à la Licorne tapestries. Nevertheless, it adds an aura of authenticity to the story and strikes a metafictive tone by striving to create a frame, insinuating that the artwork can be found in an unspecified museum.

The author acknowledges that her curious choice of the name Hroswith has its roots in medieval literature. The format of the artwork bears a resemblance to the Bayeux Tapestry housed in the Musée de la Tapisserie in Normandy, France. Actually, that artwork is not a tapestry at all as it is not woven, rather embroidered, as is “Las sergas de Hroswith, which consists of “multicolores hilos sobre blanquisima trama de lino”(29). Dissimilar to
the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries, the provenance of the Hroswith work is allegedly
unknown and “nadie sabe para qué fue hecha” (29). Similar to Díaz-Mas’s story, the
Bayeux Tapestry, which presents military outings, depicts episodes leading up to the
Norman conquest of England by William the Conqueror; the death of King Harold at the
Battle of Hastings in 1066, is annotated in Latin. The Bayeux version is extremely long for
any type of embroidery, measuring approximately 1.6 feet in height by 230 feet in width.
Similarly, “Las sergas de Hroswith” is “tan larga es que bien podría, serpenteando cual
delicado friso, recorrer los muros del más espléndido palacio, de la más magnífica catedral,
sin que a ningún recoveco le faltase su viñeta” (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 29).
Coincidentally, the relative length of the verbal texts of the two stories is commensurate
with that of the graphic texts as the longer artwork; “Las sergas de Hroswith” is
approximately three times longer than the story about the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries.
We can date the creation of the fictitious Hroswith tapestries to approximately one
thousand years ago, as the narrator clarifies that the “caballeros . . . todos murieron hace
mil años” (45). Estimates fix the date of the first public showing of the Bayeux Tapestry
circa 1077; therefore, the tapestries in Díaz-Mas’s story spring from a similar era.
Moreover, Díaz-Mas does not verbally depict a more modern hereditary coat-of-arms;
rather, she depicts shields lacking proprietary chivalric icons, indicating that, like the
Bayeux Tapestry, “Las sergas de Hroswith” represents an older chivalric era (Wilson 37).
The Bayeux stitchwork includes fables, and the “Las sergas de Hroswith” Biblical
allusions, incorporating references to the Saint Peter Fish (Matt. 14:15-21), the slaying of a
dragon by the Archangel Michael (Rev. 12:1-9), the resurrection of Saint Lazarus (John
11:38-53), and to a tempting golden apple (Genesis 3:3-12). 19
As previously mentioned, according to historical records, the *La Dame à la Licorne* tapestries were forgotten for many years and suffered substantial damage, which was later rectified through restoration. Much the same, the fictional embroidered band of the saga of Hroswith “desde el momento en que acabó acabada, ha permanecido enrollada y abandonada en un rincón de este desván - uno de los muchísimos polvorientos o enmohecidos desvanes de la abadía – sin que nadie le hiciera el menor caso” (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 30). The narrator insists that the minimal damage increases the value of the work as its enhances its antique quality; “su canamazo apenas ha amarilleado con el tiempo; solamente ha adquirido un suave tono marfil que acrecienta, si cabe, su suntousa apariencia” (30). Moreover, the reader is urged to overlook changes in color that may seem ludicrous “¿qué hay de malo en mirar el mundo con ojos de distinto color . . . acaso no podéis reconocer al valiente Hroswith, aunque tenga la cara azul?” (30-31). However, profound consequences result from more detrimental effects on the stitching: “los ratones parecen haber colaborado con las polilllas en la labor de raer, pues no son ya manchas y veladuras, sino francos agujeros” (46). The disintegration of the band is worst in the areas that were innermost when it was rolled up, “en las interiores tan comido de polillas, corroído por la humedad y manchado de orín” (45). Based on the damage noted, it is fair to say the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries are in much better condition.

Further along the voyage of Hroswith and his men on the linen storyboard, the needlework is so badly damaged that parts are indiscernible. In addition, the void in the tapestry, and the history of Hroswith and his forces, breaks the visual and narrative frame, drawing the reader into a contemplative state. The gap in the band takes on a power of its own by emphasizing the power of the artwork by its inverse - nothingness. Just as the
reader contemplates the unknown love of the Dama in Díaz-Mas’s textual version of the *Lady and the Unicorn*, the reader-viewer of “Las sergas de Hroswith” similarly conjectures about the missing events, the participants, and the outcome.

This break in the text raises questions of what is illusion and what is the reality portrayed. Valid doubts arise as to whether the damaged portion of the embroidery depicts the same city previously referred to, or another location that the men visited. In addition, the narrator implores an immediate viewing of the embroidered art by pointing out that

> hoy se despliega ante vuestros atónitos ojos: abridlos bien, pues tal vez seáis vosotros los primeros en verla desde que se acabó. Y ¿quién sabe si con un poco de suerte no seréis los últimos? Los designios de Dios son inescrutables y ni la más grande y poderosa abadía está libre de un incendio pavoroso en el cual ardan tapices, libros, rosas y hasta los propios solidísimos muros del edificio. (Las sergas de Hroswith 30)

This advice to hurry is reminiscent of the conclusion of Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose*, which ended with a conflagration. Irony manifests itself as the tapestry stops time, the viewers must make time accelerate to view “Las sergas de Hroswith” before it is too late to do so. This suggestion, that there may be little time left to view the tapestries, lends an almost ephemeral quality, not unlike the garland woven by the Dama in the unicorn tapestries that quickly withers and loses its beauty.

The tale relates the voyage “del valeroso caballero Hroswith” with his two hundred forty faithful volunteers, also known as the Peregrinos Errantes. As in the *El rapto del Santo Grial*, a parodic tone embellishes the *chanson de geste* genre that is underpinned by an Odyssean theme. However, unlike the equally inept knights that sally forth in the novel in search of the Holy Grail, the participants in this story have no definite motive for their travels. Eventually they visit La Ciudad Procelosa, although their original destination and reason for sallying forth is not specified. Reminiscent of the bumbling activities of the
knights in *El rapto del Santo Grial*, Hroswith sets out with his forces in four ships that are captained by El Mal Navegante, so-called “verdaderamente con justicia” (32) and against whom “unos claman” because “los ha perdido por tierra y por mar” (39). To add to the bad fortune of the travelers they must rely on the magician Urrestar, who lacks more magical powers than he possesses, and a malevolent dwarf Isbel, who accompanies them. Echoing Odysseus’s triumph over the obstacles that he confronts during his mythical voyage, Hroswith and his troops confront a sea monster that “es peor que Scila y Caribdis” near the “abismo insondable del Confin del Mundo,” escape from El Camino Laberintico and, when camped out without shelter, endure a long night of physical abuse by the Hijas de la Escarcha (32-43).

As in previous stories, color description focuses on period appropriate names and jewel tones that serve as a standard along with organic color names, such as the earth tones terracotta and indigo (31). In “Las sergas de Hrowith” this trend continues in the following passage,

> destacan mejor los esmeraldinos tonos verdes, el hiriente púrpura y profundo cobalto; el sable, el gualdo, el azul y el sinople ondean en las enseñas de los caballeros; hay oro de color topacio, miradas de amatista y noches estrelladas de plata y azabache . . . un sol azafranado se eleva sobre el horizonte aguamarina. (“Las sergas de Hroswith 30)

Whereas in the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestry flora and fauna of the era depicted are described, the focus in “Las sergas de Hroswith” centers on animals stitched on the band. Most are credible, “corzos, ovejas, cabritillas, el noble perro, gallo orgulloso y el venerable toro” and the mythical unicorn, iconic of the era, appears as well (36-37).

Lexical portrayal of the five senses is limited in comparison to the examples in “La Dama del Unicorno.” Nevertheless, in one instance, Díaz-Mas ingeniously fuses
three of the senses, tactile, auditory, and visual, into one ekphrastic description. At one point during the voyage, Hroswith endeavors to contact the magician Urrestar, and the lexical text describes the process in the following manner:

tocará tres veces el cuerno de marfil que siempre pende de su cintura, con la esperanza de que el mago Urrestar, que tanto le aconsejó antes de emprender viaje, pueda ahora ayudarle. Ved cómo se hinchan las mejillas del héroe y el sonido sale del cuerno en forma de ondulados hilos grises y llega con aspecto de cabeza alada hasta los oídos del mago Urrestar... Las letras latinas bordadas sobre su cabeza claramente os declaran el consejo del mago (33).

Díaz-Mas utilizes a unique narrative strategy when she implores the reader to see the sound, an unlikely combination that lies somewhere between an oxymoron and synaesthesia. The sound begins as the antithesis of silence, and as Stewart opines, “following sounds, we trace a path for it; we hear and feel sounds emerge, discerning its form. Even as it surrounds us, sounds pulls our attention to its source as, simultaneously, we wait for its ending” (Poetry and the Fate of the Senses 145). The reader can locate the source of the sound, Hroswith’s horn as he touches it with his hand and mouth to generate the sound. The sound waves then travel across time and through space and the sounds waves’ movement is indicated by the embroidered gray threads that trace their path to the intended recipient, Urrestar. The Latin words stitched on the band relaying Urrestar’s advice indicate that Hroswith’s plea was received, that the transmission was completed. The magician’s reply also acknowledges the connection between hearing and speech, the latter stitched lexically in Latin.

As the Peregrinos arrive at the Palacio del Banquete, their olfactory and visual faculties encounter an extraordinary feast to which El Rey Anfitríon directs them. In spite of the strange colors of the edible items, which may be the result of fading of the thread colors as a result of aging, the Peregrinos find appetizing the “anaranjadas aves, verdas
carnes, pescados de malva y granas blancas y azuladas frutas y dulces de oro, de plata y de topacio... vino es rojo como sangre y pajizo como trigo y el agua nacarada y fría” (44). Even though the description of the food and drink offers a myriad of colors that are, according to the text, “tan agradables a la vista como al olfato y al gusto,” the depiction falls short of enticing the visual, olfactory, and gustatory senses of the reader (44). The text does not succeed in calling forth sensations of pleasant aroma and tantalizing flavor, perhaps due to the unlikely and unappetizing pairing of some items and their color, such as green meat that normally indicates putrefaction. With this example, the text capitalizes on multi-sensory reception that utilizes human visual, gustatory, and olfactory capabilities. By describing the banquet foods in a manner at odds with traditional characteristics of delectable foods, the frame of normalcy is broken for the reader. Perhaps the soldiers find the foods pleasing due to some sort of spell that has been cast upon them by the incantations of Isbel, who ultimately bestows to the food the ability to move away from the men’s grasp and transform itself into inedible form (44-45). Dissimilar to the visual depiction of the sound of Hroswith’s horn, the hunger and sleepiness that plague the troops pose a challenge to graphic representation, due to the lack of sound or gesture. A verbal utterance or a growling stomach can convey hunger in an aural way, as can the gesture of rubbing one’s stomach or mimicking raising an eating utensil to one’s mouth. However, representation of the men’s hunger depends on the verbal text in this story, “a los caballeros empiezan a vencerles el hambre y el sueño” (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 36). Sleepiness is conveyed in a subtle, yet effective manner, by referring to shutting eyelids, “ha descendido el Sueño en forma de angel oscuro sobre los párpados de los Peregrinos – ahí lo tenéis, cerrando con una caricia de plata negra los...
ojos de los fatigados viajeros” (40). This description conjures up an image of the female
embroiderers tenderly closing the eyes of the Peregrinos by stitching them with black
thread.

Pictorial expression of emotions and corporal sensations poses a challenge.
Results of the assault by the Hijas de la Escarcha are best portrayed in this story by
combining visual and verbal metaphors. While the weapons that the Hijas utilize appear
clearly embroidered on the band, the needlework strives to visually depict the trembling
and pain that the men endure. Díaz-Mas cleverly chose the unpleasant sensation to depict
the visualization, as who among us cannot identify with shivering from cold and the
tingling and pain of frostbite? After the Hijas de la Escarcha besiege the men for an entire
night, each wielding “una espada de fuego helado en su mano derecha, y en la izquierda .
. . un látigo de siete colas de hielo,” the Peregrinos “despiertan en un temblor de escarcha
y tremen bajo el castigo invisible y doloroso” (41). The narrator implores the reader to
observe the graphic effects of the shivering and frostbite, “ved sus rostros glaucos y sus
manos amoratadas por el frío” (41).

It is highly likely that the women who describe, both the embroiderers of the
visual text and the author of the verbal text, are more equipped than men as artists to
visually and verbally depict pain and feeling. This viewpoint harks to ideas of female
hardwiring, that women are more attuned to their bodies and emotions in general. The
reader’s perception of the physical attack and its aftermath is maximized by the mixture
of visual and verbal depiction, whereas each medium stands weakly on its own.
Similarly, the discord that grows among the men is more than satisfactorily represented
by a fusion of lexical and verbal description. Growing discord that the evil dwarf sows is
verbally portrayed in comprehensible, sequential terms as a mixture of images and words as a:

semilla de esa cizaña que llaman discordia. Pronto florece en el corazón de los caballeros de Hroswith: ahí tenéis cómo surgen sus negras flores en los varoniles pechos y se abren sobre las cotas de malla las fúnebres corollas. El pecho de los caballeros se encuentra súbitamente cubierto de las oscuras enredaderas del descontento y quien no tiene sobre el corazón una flor negra abierta es porque tiene dos. Las flores de esta cizaña mala tienen como particularidad que sus estambres se convierten en viperinas lenguas que hablan con la misma voz de caballero ... por eso veis que de las corolas abiertas surgen bifidos estambres que, desprendiendo oscuro polen, escriben sobre el lino letras de sangre. (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 38)

Metaphorically the growing black flowers portray the animosity that flourishes over the hours of the night and the bifurcated yarn represents viper-like tongues that combine the negativity of snakes with those who gossip maliciously and speak dishonestly, or more colloquially, with forked tongues. The growing discord causes events that can be traced sequentially through the night on the embroidered story band and include verbal and physical attacks that continue until morning.

As the new day begins, the discord is replaced with “la dorada hiedra de la amistad en los pechos de los caballeros” that was brought by Urrestar (39). The black of the flowers of the night, symbolic of death, are replaced with the warm and precious gold colored thread. Other emotions are similarly problematic to portray graphically. Hroswith’s sadness, for example, is visually manifested with limited impact as a “rostro azulado más pálido que nunca” (33). The text employs the color yellow to indicate the dwarf Isbel’s malevolence, “[n]o menos amarillo que su rostro es su alma, siempre teñida por la envidia” (37). These visual depictions of emotion underscore the inherent difficulty of visually representing emotions in the woven medium that function best when
combined with verbal cues. The continuous frames of “Las sergas de Hroswith” afford
easier graphic representation of emotion than the concise frames of the tapestry panels
with respect to conveying emotion.

Similar to “La Dama del Unicornio,” this second visual text seeks to connote
scorn, flirtatiousness, boredom, nostalgia, and distraction. This endeavor is challenging at
the least, and echoes Lessing’s theory of the shortfall of painting as compared to poetry:
“each variation, which would cost the artist a separate work, costs the poet but a single
pen stroke” (Laocoön 24). In addition, as compared with painting, the woven medium of
tapestry, with limited reflective properties, has greater limits for the expression of
emotion. A tear, for example, would be more clearly discernible in a painting than a
tapestry as painting could bestow a reflective quality to the tear. The woven medium
lacks the depth of field that creates luminosity that brushstrokes on a canvas can create.
Certainly the age of the tapestry may have compromised some of its elements, for
example if silver thread had been used it would have tarnished and lost its mirror like
quality. Moreover, tapestry’s initial utilitarian purpose in castles dictated that the majority
of their surface be hung above eye height, thus placing the more subtle details of the
weaving out of readily accessible line of sight. The original frame of the panels would be
too large for the viewer to observe minute details.

These two stories have many common factors, such as the era during the
tapestries were made and the desire to bring to life an otherwise static art object. In
addition, the narration is replete with chivalric icons and practices, extratextual allusions,
narrative strategies employed to yield vivid description, particularly with regard to color
that is time period appropriate, and the interplay of verbal and visual representation, all of
which coalesce to bring these two texts into visual form. The foremost difference between the two tales lies in the underpinning of “La Dama del Unicornio” by actual plastic art, but Díaz-Mas employs ekphrastic narrative strategies so successfully that the contrast between lexical text based on real or fictional art becomes a moot point. The author has mastered ekphrastic prose based on fictional art just as facilely as the story based on real art.

Both of the stories, through Díaz-Mas’s creation of a plot, respond to Mitchell’s theories about what pictures want, namely animism and vitalism. Employment of specific verb tenses, jewel tone and organic based color names, the senses and emotional responses of the people portrayed in the weavings help serve to bring the artwork to life. While “La Dama del Unicornio” questions artistic perspective in an obvious manner, “Las sergas de Hroswith” touches on these topics in a more subtle way. The former story more clearly presents questions relating to temporal framing and viewer-reader point of view through the use of the unicorn’s reflection in the mirror, self-conscious metafictive commentary and anachronisms, all of which emphasize the frailty of temporal framing and the border between subjects in the artwork and the viewer. Despite that fact that both works of art were produced in and deal thematically with the Middle Ages, the reader is drawn into the frame of the story, blurring the line between past and present, reality and fiction. In “La Dama del Unicornio,” the depiction of the five senses, metafictive commentary, the absence of the Dama’s beloved that dovetails with the enigmatic panel “A mon seul Désir,” all serve to enrich the ekphrasis. In “Las sergas de Hroswith,” some of the same narrative issues are manifested by the repeated use of the vosotros and the explanation of how certain sensations, such as the sound emanating from Hroswith’s
horn, and physical-emotional states, such as sleepiness and hunger, are represented by needlework, as well the mysterious area of the band devoid of embroidery.

The contrast between the two tales, based on bona fide versus fictional artwork, both derived from needlework, raises the questions of the perceived veracity of the narration. Certainly the reader of “La Dama del Unicornio” begins to read the story with more expectations than one beginning “Las sergas de Hroswith.” The writer has more poetic license with an imaginary visual text, given that the reader lacks a standard for comparison. In spite of the fact that a known work of art requires less verbal description to orient the reader, it carries an inherent risk, a vulnerability that the reader will judge the verbal depiction too harshly or will be disappointed by it. On the other hand, the burden of bringing a text to life without aid from a graphic version presents an equally daunting challenge. Cunningham’s assumption that there is no difference between ekphrastic narration based on known versus unknown artwork is faulty, as each situation poses unique obstacles. Heffernan’s evocative coining of the term “a museum of words” and his acknowledgment of the difference between real and fictional artwork as background for a story facilitates a more contemplative evaluation of the two possibilities, of assessing how well each scenario functions. In either case, the more challenging aspects of ekphrasis lie in depicting the five senses, and the even more problematical representation of emotion, particularly in the medium of tapestry.
Chapter Notes

1. The *Thames Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms* defines tapestry as a “hand woven fabric, usually of silk or wool or a mixture of the two, with a non-repetitive design, usually figurative, which is woven as it is made.” Among the numerous places associated with its manufacture from the fourteenth century onward are Arras, Tournai and Brussels in the Low Countries, Aubusson, Beauvais and the Gobelins (Paris) in France, and Fulham and Mortlake in England (184). Technically, because the artwork in “Las sergas de Hroswith” is embroidered it is not a true tapestry, although Diaz-Mas repeatedly refers to the embroidered band as tapestry during the story. I alternate between her classification of the work as a tapestry and referring to the artwork as embroidery.

2. In his history of the tapestries, Erlande-Brandenburg notes that restorations repaired damage from the damp walls of the château. Equal damage was done to the panels when three were removed from the walls of the dining room, rolled up, and subjected to the ravages of dampness and vermin.

3. As previously noted in Chapter Two of this study, Wendy Steiner refers to the same chronological framing that “reveals the aesthetic norms of the period” (*The Colors of Rhetoric* 18). Additionally, in *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger also comments on meaning relative to historical and literary time periods (8).

4. In his book, *Tapestry*, Barty Phillips refers to the “popularity of designs in the later middle ages of seigneurial life or allegorical scenes, often done in the *mille-fleurs* style, which remained popular throughout the fifteenth century until a more realistic landscape gained ground near the turn of the sixteenth century.” He defines the *mille-fleurs* design as one “typified by the hundreds of tiny flowers that make up their backgrounds. These were sometimes depicted as planted tufts and less often with branches, as though torn from a tree, and may have been inspired by the cut flowers strewn on the ground on fête days” (96).

5. Even though Erlande-Brandenburg makes an assumption about the concise number of tapestry panels, Lyall has found evidence to the contrary that “it is not certain that there were originally six of them, for as late as in 1847 Georges Sand described eight tapestries hanging in the Château Boussac in an article in *L’Illustration*. It is even possible that the correct total number was actually seven . . . However many there were originally, it was six tapestries that the then Inspector of Historic Monuments, Prosper Merimée, in 1842 endeavoured to persuade the French national authorities to buy from the local parish council that had bought up the Boussac château and its contents from the previous aristocratic owners in 1835. Merimée commissioned an architectural survey of the property, from which we now know that six tapestries were at that time formally on display . . . Agonizingly, local stories tell of old tapestries being used as tarpaulins on the château farm. Forty years later, in 1882, following protracted negotiations with the parish council owners, the nation bought the six tapestries and moved them to the Cluny where, after the Second World War, the present circular room was specially built to house them” (*The Lady and the Unicorn* 43-45).
6. By examining tax records and other historical data, Weisner traced the growing guild limitations on women’s participation beginning in the fifteenth century, for example, the widespread restrictions on widows, the lack of capital available to women to commence setting up a workshop, and higher guild entrance fees for girls than for boys (Rewriting the Renaissance 196-201). Weisner maintains that unskilled and low-paying occupations which involved a significant number of women became devalued, and that “this vicious cycle has been traced into the twentieth century with librarians, secretaries, and telephone operators,” whose work was deemed low-status, unskilled, and accordingly, badly paid (204). In the subsequent chapter of Rewriting the Renaissance, “A Woman’s Place Was in the Home: Women’s Work in Renaissance Tuscany,” Judith Brown examined census and tax documents and found similar conclusions with respect to women’s roles in the textile industry in Florence and some rural areas of Italy (206-24). The long apprenticeship for weavers, four to ten years, was a significant deterrent for female participation in the trade, according to Mary Schoeser. In her analysis of dates from Flemish and British master-weaver workshops, all of the names were of men (World Textiles: A Concise History 90-109).

7. With respect to Spanish embroidery, Schoeser points out one notable exception to the general practice of women stitching embroidery. Bullion, the ornamental braid or trimming made by twists of gold or silver thread that embellished bullfighters’ costumes was done only by men (World Textiles: A Concise History 107).

8. This narrative strategy is similar to the author’s rewriting of chivalric discourse in El rapto del Santo Grial.

9. Modern zoology disproves the possibility of a cloven-hoofed animal with a horn in the center of its forehead, as such animals always have skulls with a seam down the center, making it impossible to accommodate a horn in that location (The Lady and the Unicorn 134).

10. An antique French book, Book of Simple Medicines, housed at the National Library in Saint Petersburg, Russia, illustrates a unicorn simultaneously drinking from and purifying a stream, while other creatures wait to drink (The Lady and the Unicorn 169).

11. Symbolic use of unicorns was, according to Lyall, “effectively banned by the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century as part of the Catholic Church’s general prohibition on ‘immodest’ and innovative subjects in art” (The Lady and the Unicorn 113).

12. According to Phillips, the color contrast of “this tapestry set was woven in bright colours on a red background . . . is typical of the pleasingly bold effects achieved by medieval armorial tapestry” (Tapestry 48). As the popularity of the unicorn lessened during the sixteenth century, so did that of the mille fleurs style as the preference for more realistic landscape increased (96).

13. Nevertheless, myriad animals were woven into the tapestries, including lions, monkeys, stoats, goats, dogs, rabbits, lambs, foxes and a number of birds. Botanical elements include
oak, orange and holly trees, as well as flowers such as daisies, poppies, foxgloves, and other species. Margaret Freeman, Curator Emeritus of the Cloisters Museum, offers both religious and folkloric symbolism related to the flora and fauna in the panels (The Unicorn Tapestries). For a detailed study of flowers depicted, one may consult Celia Fisher’s The Medieval Flower Book.

14. In his study of the tapestries, Lyall includes a work from the British Museum that was engraved in Florence, Italy c. 1465-80. Titled “The Unicorn’s Beloved, Marietta,” it depicts a woman about to place a chain about a unicorn resting docilely in her lap. Her motive for restraining the animal is not specified (The Lady and the Unicorn 105).

15. Canines are highly macrosomatic and possess 220 million olfactory receptors in their noses as compared with 5 million in humans. They also have vomeronasal, or Jacobsen’s organs in their mouth and noses that further enhance olfactory perception (www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/u/UNP-0066). Monkeys have a sense of smell superior to humans, albeit inferior to canines (www.mapoflife.org/topics_308_Loss-of-olfactory-capacity-in-primates-and-cetaceans). Although it was previously believed that birds had relatively poor olfactory acuity, recent studies offer evidence that some species have considerable olfactory capability, particularly nocturnal birds, such as the New Zealand kiwi (www.science daily.com/releases/2008/07/08071/6111421.htm).

16. Symbolism of the mythical unicorn varies and we should heed the advice of Lyall and Diaz-Mas that we should not apply narrow iconic meaning to a medieval symbol. Lyall notes, in The Lady and the Unicorn, that as early as the fourth century A.D. theologians associated unicorns with Christ (181). In addition, the unicorn symbolizes purity and chastity, related to the Virgin whose purity alone could stop it in its tracks (147). In some images the Virgin placates the unicorn in her lap for its killing. Lyall theorizes that the unicorn’s singularity in nature parallels that of Christ, and that its artistic portrayal as prey equals the public display of Christ before his crucifixion (181). Similarly, in his book A Dictionary of Symbols, J.C. Cirlot confirms the unicorn’s symbolism of chastity and comments on its purported ability to be tirelessly pursued until confronted by a young virgin, whereupon it meekly falls to the ground. Cirlot also cites its religious connotation as the word or sword of God and offers Jungian interpretation of the unicorn’s symbolism (357-358).

17. The inclusion of antique paint colors will resurface later in this study with respect to El sueño de Venecia.

18. In Como un libro cerrado, Díaz-Mas reveals that the name “tiene ecos literarios, ya que la tomé de la monja escritora medieval Hroswitha” (114).

19. The inclusion of two of these Biblical quotations offers other ekphrastic connections with visual works of master artists. Among the most famous who have created a hagiographic painting of the Resurrection of Saint Lazarus are Caravaggio, Van Gogh, and Giotto de Bondone, while Gustave Moreau rendered his version of Saint Michael’s slaying of the dragon in the same medium.
20. This ambiguity will relate later in this study, in *El sueño de Venecia*, to Pablo’s disbelief of his master’s description of Venice. Part of the damaged portion of the band that is taken as illusion may actually depict Venice, “la ciudad parece tener calles de agua y puentes de encaje para cruzarlas” (“Las sergas de Hroswith” 46).
Chapter 5 - *El sueño de Venecia*

The author’s 1992 award-winning novel, *El sueño de Venecia*, consists of five different sections of prose narration that trace a fictional portrait of Doña Gracia de Mendoza through five centuries. Each section of this polyphonic novel reflects a popular Spanish literary style of the century during which the action takes place, told through the voice of a narrator who recounts the visual qualities of the painting around which the novel centers. During an interview, the author acknowledged that the multi-voiced quality of the narration makes the novel her favorite amongst her own works “porque creo que logré contar una historia a varias voces, que era una cosa que me había planteado como un reto, y me gusta también la reflexión sobre la historia y los peligros de historiar y sobre las tentaciones de autosuficiencia del historiador que plantea el último capítulo” (Cornejo-Parriego 482).

Ekphrastic scholarship has readily adapted itself during the last half-century to encompass the novel and Spanish literature has not been an exception to this trend. One of the canonical peninsular novels, also written by a female author, is Carmen Laforet’s 1945 *Nada*. In her study of Laforet, Roberta Johnson points out that “art and memory in *Nothing* establish a symbiotic relationship” (*Carmen Laforet* 63). Johnson cites the particular instance of the protagonist Andrea’s introduction to her “old wizened grandmother,” whom she then views the next day as a beautiful young bride – in a portrait hanging on the wall in the home. The notion of two versions of the same grandmother is similar to the narrator’s search for a portrait that would do justice to her *abuela adoptiva* in Diaz-Mas’s story “En busca de un retrato.” In addition, in his ekphrastic study of *Nada*, Jeffrey Bruner links the novel to works of Goya and Picasso.
(“Visual Arts as Narrative Discourse” 252-55). More recent Spanish ekphrastic novels include works by best selling author Arturo Pérez-Reverte such as *La tabla de Flandes*.

As noted in reference to previous texts in this analysis, Díaz-Mas’s works are directed to an erudite reader and frequently invoke that reader’s complicity. The author confirms that this “juego de complicidades entre el escritor y el lector y la complicidad funciona en la medida en que el lector también conozca esas obras (extratextuales)” (Cornejo-Parriego 481). Clearly, Margaret Jones maintains, *El sueño de Venecia* lends itself facilely to an involved reader as “este terreno resbaldizo entre dos mundos – entre la realidad y la ficción, entre periodos temporales; entre códigos y signos; entre técnica jocosa y mensaje serio – crea un lector ‘activo’ que tiene la tarea de descifrar un texto polifónico” (“Paloma Díaz-Mas” 85). Indeed, Díaz-Mas acknowledges that her texts give rise to multiple reading as evidenced by her statement that “claro las visiones de una obra literaria varían con el tiempo, con el lector, con el ámbito geográfico y cultural del lector” (Cornejo-Parriego 481). This remark applies not only to the reader’s vision of *El sueño de Venecia*, but in a parallel manner to that of the narrators, who also vary in time period and cultural background. Each narrative voice generates a unique view, yielding multiple verbal representations of the graphic text. Complicity on the part of the reader is of particular importance for maximum benefit from the narration. This interaction between text and reader fosters the incorporation of the artistic allusions that help formulate the reader’s visualization of the portrait. This aggregation, in turn, aids the reader to ultimately judge the validity of the art historian’s conclusions about the painting.
Moreover, in *The Colors of Rhetoric*, Steiner emphasizes the importance the complicity of a reader of an ekphrastic text, theorizing that “neither visual nor auditory art should be approached as by an enthralled gazer, but instead by an impassioned participant” (90). The metafictive aspects of a novel engage the reader even more, as Patricia Waugh proposes that “[m]etafictitional novels allow the reader not only to observe the textual and linguistic constructions of literary fiction, but also to enjoy and engage the world within the fiction” (*Metafiction* 104). The novel’s exploration of the relationship between visual and verbal texts extends to examine the interplay between fiction and the world-at-large.

Through a series of clues, Díaz-Mas cleverly orients the reader of *El sueño de Venecia* to the studio, style, and time period of the master Spanish painter Diego Velázquez and, more specifically, to his mulatto assistant, Juan de Pareja. The first such key for orienting the reader is the book cover that includes a color fragment of Velázquez’s *Mariana de Austria*. The inclusion of a fragment of a royal portrait ironically contrasts with the portrait of Doña Gracia, whose profession as a courtesan is revealed in the first section of the novel. In time, the reader will appreciate the inclusion of only a portion of the painting.

In a fashion similar to that in *El sueño de Venecia*, Susan Vreeland’s ekphrastic novel, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, features a portion of a painting, part of a room and a silhouette of the upper three quarters of a girl’s body on the right hand edge of the dust jacket, but not her face. The colors and attire have an antique look, and the framing that edges the book cover creates the enticement that if you open the cover you will see the girl’s face and, in turn, what she is seeing from her vantage point. At the other end of the
spectrum, the dust jacket of Tracy Chevalier’s *Girl With a Pearl Earring* is blatant in its visual enticement, as it places Johannes Vermeer’s famed portrait with the same name as the title of the book on the dust jacket in a way that the girl starest out directly at the prospective reader, summoning him or her with the iconic large eyes and enigmatic expression, that have often led to the portrait being dubbed the “Dutch Mona Lisa.”

The bottom third of the cover of *Girl With a Pearl Earring* is somewhat disconcerting as it depicts a view the waterfront district of an old city, which the reader will later recognize is Delft. In his article “Frames and Boundaries,” Theo D’haen notes that lexical “[k]eying conventions include fictional spatial and temporal brackets . . . opening and closing cues, titles and subtitles, episode conventions, segment headings and breaks, and material factors such as the covers and dust jackets of books . . . epilogues and prologues, parenthetical and editorial comment, epigraphs and footnotes.” Directional graphic conventions include the artist’s signature, perspective and other representational devices, and painterly signs such as contour lines. To ensure as unambiguous as possible a reception of a novel, painting or other work of art, the strictest possible implementation of the appropriate framing convention is to be preferred” (“Frames and Boundaries” 430-31). Díaz-Mas avails herself of a number of the conventions that D’Haen identifies, beginning with an enigmatic allegory that appears to be an epigraph. Other conventions include spatial and temporal framing, without the designation of chapters, of each century coinciding with a specific portion of the text and narrator, as well as an eye-catching fragment of a famous work of art on the novel’s cover.
Aside from the commercial value of a visually enticing book cover, Henseler cites taken out of context and transformed, overlapped, or fragmented forces readers and viewers to question its origins” (Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative and the Publishing Industry 24). The visual image, Christine Henseler points out, “is an inherent part of the promotional appeal of a book and author,” and serves a dual purpose, as “[t]he well-known paintings serve to attribute authority to each product and seduce a certain audience into wanting to consume the product and know its enigma . . . a classical painting is recontextualized and reduced to a cutout that intends to emphasize and give value to the product being sold” (Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative 21-3).

Moreover, although the purchaser of Díaz-Mas’s novel will not realize it until well into reading the novel, the inclusion of a portion of the portrait of the royal Mariana on the novel’s cover reflects the mutilation of the fictional portrait of Doña Gracia that occurs later in the verbal text.

The visual appeal of the cover of the novel holds deeper significance. According to Henseler,

[t]he viewers are a source of a playful interchange of bordering realities in which the large, bold-faced title of the novel complements the black skirt in the reproduced detail of the painting. The cover joins the textual and the visual; it connects the present of the readers’ positions with the past of their learned experiences and hurstles them into new dimensions, as the topic of the dream – Venice – takes them into exotic, modernist scenes or personal psychoanalytic explorations . . . The cover is one in which the restlessness of fragmented and juxtaposed discourses is complemented by the readers’ own visual and textual interpretations. (Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative 25-6)
The term that Catherine Davis assigns to the appearance of a book cover is “metavisual,” and she notes that “on a textual and promotional level” the appeal of the front of the book responds to the “changing demands of the book market and the making of the literary canon” (Spanish Women’s Writing 18). The attractive visual content of the novel’s book cover serves multiple purposes, among them textual framing and marketing. In addition to the cover’s intent to boost sales of the book, its inclusion of a fragment of world-class art from times past serves to pique the attention of a cultured reader, the very reader to whom Díaz-Mas directs her text. A prevalent trend in recent decades in postmodern fiction is historiographic narration that often features a self-conscious tone with respect to the craft of writing. The author herself refers to a “juego metaliterario en que hay en toda mi escritura,” that for Díaz-Mas is largely the result of “un juego con la literatura de otras épocas.” She embraces the self-referential aspect of writing and affirms that “mi profesión me obliga pues, a unos ejercicios de reflexión continua sobre la literatura” (Cornejo-Parriego 481).

In El sueño de Venecia, as in other postmodern works, irony plays a vital role. Replete with ambiguity and the questioning of historical authority, the last segment of the novel, “Memoria,” is underpinned by what Linda Hutcheon terms the “postmodern tendency to de-center” as it splinters, rather than fuses the novel’s conclusion (Splitting Images viii). As stated by Hutcheon, this uncertainty is a hallmark of postmodern irony that “in all its many motivations and modes, recognizes that, in practice, all communicational modes, especially language, are ambiguous, doubled, even duplicitous” (Splitting Images 10). Historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon comments, strives to create such multiplicity when it “both install(s) and then blur(s) the line between fiction and fact
... and plays upon the truth and lies of the record” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 80-1). In her often-cited work, *Metafiction*, Patricia Waugh places the concept of metaliterature in a larger context. She declares that metafiction expresses a “more general cultural interest in the problems of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world,” and further posits that

> [m]etafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text – it examines the conventions of realism in order to discover – through its own self-reflection. (*Metafiction* 40)

There are obvious parallels between metafictive and ekphrastic study, in that both concern that act of framing of visual and verbal art. And both raise similar issues with respect to the construction and the blurring of the relationship between reality and its artistic representation. Metafiction, Waugh continues, encourages us to examine how “narrative codes whether ‘literary’ or ‘social’ artificially construct apparently real and imaginary worlds” and we can readily equate artistic codes with those associated with literature or society (*Metafiction* 2). Indeed, Waugh speaks of breaking down the distinction between the novel and the external world; and the status of artefact to which Waugh refers applies doubly to *El sueño de Venecia*, as the painting can be construed as a metaartefact, that is plastic art within the novel itself. Furthermore Waugh’s assumption that everything is framed, “whether in life or in novels” relates directly to the question of perspective in ekphrastic narration (*Metafiction* 39). Also noteworthy is Waugh’s assertion that contemporary metafiction foregrounds framing as a problem by questioning what separates reality from fiction, and she questions what constitutes framing, ‘the front
and back covers of a book … the title and THE END’ [sic]?” (Metafiction 28). Her comments emphasize the idea that framing occurs not only as print on the pages of a book, but also the other attributes of the physical artefact – the book itself.

In addition, Waugh validates the cultural relevance and comprehensibility of metafiction for contemporary readers by noting that “in showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary world, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly written” (53). Similarly in A Museum of Words, Heffeman addresses the link between Classic and contemporary ekphrastic study as he notes that

[w]hen we understand that ekphrasis uses one medium of representation to represent another, we can begin to see what makes ekphrasis a distinguishable mode and what binds together all ekphrastic literature from the age of Homer to our own. Comparing such apparently disparate phenomena as a classic and postmodern ekphrasis, some critics see only differences between the two. While classic ekphrasis, they say, salutes the skill of the artist and the miraculous verisimilitude of the forms that he – it is always he – creates, postmodern ekphrasis undermines the concept of verisimilitude itself.” (A Museum of Words 4)

The novel El sueño de Venecia provides fertile ground for exploring the interartistic time-space continuum. Typographical division of the physical text, the changing size of the painting due to its mutilation, and geographical information with respect to the setting of the novel and where the painting is located provide spatial parameters. What is distinctive about this novel among most ekphrastic texts is the incorporation of physical changes to the plastic artwork, some occurring via natural changes and others wrought by the human hand. From a chronological perspective the five sections of the novel progress in a linear temporal fashion, albeit with some pauses,
that assign time frames to the painting and document the sequence of its provenance and evolution.

Other literary devices add spatiality to the text, such as those that David Mickelsen details. In his critical chapter, “Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative,” David Mickelsen points out that “[a] degree of spatiality may be achieved though leitmotifs or extended webs in interrelated images, “like flashbacks, recurring images that arrest the reader’s forward progress, and also direct attention to other, earlier section of the work” (68). During an interview Díaz-Mas stated that “[c]laro nosotros interpretamos, y podemos interpretar erróneamente . . . cuando investigamos, por ejemplo, la historia, logramos llegar a una visión veraz de esa época o nos estamos equivocando absolutamente al interpretar el pasado. Éste es el tema fundamental de El sueño de Venecia” (Ferran 328). Beginning with the second segment of the novel the reader of El sueño de Venecia will often mentally, if not physically, glance backward at the verbal text of previous sections of the novel. This retrospective process is accompanied by the ongoing fine-tuning of the reader’s personal visual image engendered by ekphrastic narration. The equivocalness of the last segment of the novel, “Memoria,” provokes questions common to both ekphrasis and postmodernism, truth and reality versus fiction and illusion. Expert testimony offered does not serve to identify and clarify history, but rather to obfuscate borders between truth and fiction. There will be no single, absolute ending to the novel.

Although many of Díaz-Mas’s writings appear to have an underlying feminist agenda, the author disavows writing from a feminist perspective. However, she does not show restraint in incorporating a feminist viewpoint in her literary texts. Regardless of
the author’s own stance on her feminist viewpoint, Zatlin observes that a feminist literary posture can often be linked to metafiction as “the subversive potential of metafiction has a special attraction for feminist writers, who may use it to defamiliarize cultural conventions” (“Women Novelists in Democratic Spain” 37). This theory is extended by María Rodríguez, who views the phenomenon as particularly applicable to the Spanish quest for the revitalization of Spanish national identity:

[en] la década de los noventa surge un nuevo discurso historiográfico en ciertas escritoras españolas que desean indagar en el presente y pasado de la nación para propiciar el rescate de espacios alternativos borrados por discursos previos y la revisión de versiones incompletas de la historia. (“Disidencias históricas” 77)

Thus, for some critics of the novel, the inclusion of feminist literary elements, whether by design or by coincidence, combined with metafictional historiography yield readings that are not only ekphrastic but also trace for Spanish national identity.

The allegorical passage that begins the novel foreshadows judgments about truth and error. The parable supposedly contained in the work “República del Desengaño” was allegedly written in Seville by Esteban Villegas in the year 1651.3 In the opening pages of the novel, a passage similar to an epigraph tells of a beautiful, blind Doncella who personifies la Verdad. She is guided to the river de la Historia by el Viejo, who signifies Error and “en su mano izquierda portaba un cedazo”, with which they pan the river for gold. The guide, el Desengaño, explains that the sieve represents “la humana Memoria . . . como criba que es, retiene lo grueso y deja escapar lo sutil.” In addition to the gods cruelly blinding la Doncella, “diéronla otra grave pena, y es la de no ser nunca creída.” The allegory alludes to the mythical figure Cassandra, whom no one believed when she foretold the fall of Troy (El sueño de Venecia 11-2). For Mercedes Mazquiarán de
Rodríguez, the epigraph to the novel signals a subtext whose objective is Díaz-Mas’s “intention to show the unreliability of truth in history, and the danger in interpreting literary fiction as a mirror of the world it purports to reflect” (“Parody and the Truth of History” 7). Through this epigraph, Díaz-Mas has managed to plant seeds of doubt in the reader’s mind before the actual tale has begun.

The initial section of the novel, labeled “Carta mensajera,” holds a threefold function as a missive to the reader as it first provides background information about the painting, its artist and subjects. Second, it establishes socio-historical framing of the work of art, and third, it explains the first details of what will be a long history of provenance. The narration begins by recounting the picaresque youth of Pablo de Corredera and his good fortune in meeting and ultimately marrying the beautiful, wealthy courtesan, Doña Gracia de Mendoza. The portrait that commemorates the wedding day of Doña Gracia and Pablo is the narrative thread that sews together the stylistically and chronologically different divisions of the novel. In addition to the leitmotif that the portrait establishes, other elements provide similar continuity. These constants include the Mendoza family, the theme of incest that repeatedly surfaces in the novel, the Madrid barrio where the majority of the action in the novel takes place, a particular house on the calle Pez, as well as the issue of the family’s pureza de sangre. These elements yield a sense of reassuring authentication for the alert complicit reader. With map in hand, I was able to walk some of the same streets named in the novel in present-day Madrid.

Situated in the seventeenth century, this opening portion of the novel echoes the picaresque style of the anonymous novel Lazarillo de Tormes. Through first-person narration Pablo de Corredera, whose surname reflects the name of the street where he
was born, recounts his difficult youth as a child of the streets. Intermittently, the street urchin was afforded the protection of a series of guardians, one of whom was a minor painter from Italy who traveled to Spain to restore church frescoes. This Italian artist serves two purposes in the text: he explains the title of the novel and he also reiterates the warning of the epigraph to Pablo and, indirectly, to the reader. Pablo recounts his recurring dream founded on the painter’s predilection “de contarme maravillas de su tierra . . . con tantas patrañas y fábulas como no caben en romances . . . inventóse toda una ciudad para mi deleite” (*El sueño de Venecia* 18). With “la boca abierta como papamoscas,” Pablo raptly listened as his master vividly described the faraway city,

> en vez de calles había ríos y en vez de plazas lagos y como callejones, canales . . . para cruzar de un lado a otro de la calle . . . las calles servíanse de puentes y no unas puentes cualesquiera, sino de mármoles labrados y que sobre sus balastradas encaramábanse leones y unicornios todos de oro . . . los ricos en vez de coches usaban unas barcas engalanadas, muy ricas, con pabellón cubierto con cortinas . . . y los más pobres, de simples barquillas o de pequeños esquifés se servían y en ellos transportaban las personas y mercaderías. (*El sueño de Venecia* 18-9)

While for the contemporary reader the city described is obviously Venice, for Pablo, whose knowledge consisted more of how to survive on the street than of culture and geography, the Italian city was for him always a dream. Pablo mistook the reality of Venice for an illusion, truth for a dream. The painter, whose chief skill was mixing colors, advises Pablo to exercise caution when viewing the world and art,

> [g]uarda cómo la belleza es borrón, la carne polvo de la tierra disoluta, el bello gesto y las delicadas manos trazos sin forma, el blando cabello polvo amarillo, la grana, tierra de labrar. De esta guisa es el mundo, que lo que lontano sembla bello y grande es de cerca bruto y ruin. (18)

This advice also warns the reader of what is yet to come in the novel.
Good fortune befalls Pablo one day during his tenth year while he is begging on
the streets of Madrid and draws the attention of a lady alighting from a carriage. Pablo’s
rich verbal description of meeting Doña Gracia, who he declares is “la dama más bella
que habían visto mis ojos” (*El sueño de Venecia* 32). Pablos’s diction appeals more to
the visual sense, and he uses the jewel tones and natural color names that were employed
in both of the tapestry stories, as discussed in Chapter Three. He remembers the door of
the coach opening and as if a lady were being slowly poured from the carriage,
apareció un guante de gamuza, tras el guante en la puerta, posóse en la
escalerillla un chapín con clavos virillas de plata, y tras guante y chapín
descendió una basquiña tan labrada que ni la mar tiene más perlas ni el
cielo más brillantes ni todos los ríos del mundo . . . en aquella falda que
era a un tiempo río, mar y cielos, dejóse caer un manto de seda tan sutil
que a la verdad no encubría, sino tamizaba la belleza de su dueña . . . era
el cabello un escuza de oro brillando bajo la noche del manto, en la cual
noche se adivinaban jazmines tan blancos como olorosos, rosas tan
abiertas como encendidas . . . tropezaron conmigo dos ojos de color
aguamarina . . . una aroma de ámbar de guantes y agua de olor. (31-2)

This description recalls Françoise Meltzer’s comments with respect to the ekphrastic
rendering of the Dance of Salome. Meltzer reports that “[t]he words describing the jewels
and the attire of Salome are given life, too, by the use of a vocabulary describing the play
of light upon them: glitter, fiery, sparks, spangled, ablaze, dazzling, speckled” (*Salome
and the Dance of Writing* 20). As in the tapestry stories, artistic description roots itself in
organic compounds and jewel tones. Similarly, Susan Vreeland, in her novel *Girl in
Hyacinth Blue*, uses the familiar tone of a well-known spring flower to evoke color in the
reader’s mind and further establishes the connection between the bloom and a girl’s
garment by describing that it was of “that luscious deep blue of the early hyacinths when
their blooms are just beginning to open” (85). In addition, Vreeland goes into greater
detail about color mixing than Díaz-Mas. Similarly, in *Girl With a Pearl Earring,*
Chevalier includes many details about the components of paint, where they can be obtained, their natural origins, how they are mixed, as well as several examples of how, for instance, the artist includes several colors in his rendering of a white cap.⁵ The inclusion of details related to color mixing invites the reader to break the cohesive frame of the artwork, to view the image as an amalgamation of compounds that were applied before the canvas was framed, which then gives the narration a metaartistic focus. This double perspective bestows upon the reader a modicum of ubiquitousness, the ability to comprehend the framed artwork as the synthesis of the finished product as well as the physical components or the paints, which were created and applied from outside the frame. Succinctly stated, the viewer can simultaneously see the canvas within the frame as a sum of its parts, while being a spectator of its totality, and reflect on both of these phases of the artwork’s creation at the same time. Both Vreeland’s and Chevalier’s novels focus more on the genesis and technique of the artwork incorporated into the narration, rather than the reception, as in the case of *El sueño de Venecia*.

Not only does Doña Gracia instruct her servant to give the ragged, filthy boy some coins, she inquires if Pablo would like to be a servant in her house.⁶ Pablo replies affirmatively, noting himself that “lo hice tan apasionado que más pareció declaración de amante que oferta de criado” (*El sueño de Venecia* 33). Pablo spends three years as a page at Doña Gracia’s mansion, where he learns to read, enjoys her erudite library, and falls in love with her. However, his idyllic state is shattered when Pablo considers the arrival and departure of gentlemen from his benefactress’s boudoir at all hours of the night and he realizes that, “[e]ra en una palabra, mi ama, puta” (37). To compound his reaction to his realization of Doña Gracia’s profession he hears rumors that she does not
consume *tocino* and is a Jewess, and she quells his reaction by declaring that “cada quien tiene su alma en su almario” (41). With this information, it becomes clear that Doña Gracia is triply marginalized, first as a woman in a patriarchal society, second as a prostitute, and finally as a Jewess in Christian Spain. Shortly thereafter, Pablo confesses his love to Doña Gracia and the physical consummation of their affections occurs. Pablo relates that he often replays that day in his mind, “tejía y destejía en fin, el telar de los sucesos del día... como nueva Penélope” (44).

This idea of a visual text of weaving within another text calls to mind the *Fable of Arachne* in the background of Velázquez’s *Las hilanderas*. These connections between visual and verbal texts epitomize ekphrasis as they establish direct links between lexical and graphical representation. Curiously, Pablo selects a female archetype to represent his thought pattern and his waiting for the return of his love, thus inverting the archetype of Penelope weaving, by indicating a male doing needlework. By doing needlecraft he bestows upon himself an androgynous quality. However, on the next page Pablo experiences a sexual coming-of-age, when Doña Gracia becomes sexually submissive and he achieves “estatura de varón,” thus inverting the dominance paradigm for both the male and female characters to the traditional paradigm of male-centered power in the relationship (45-6). Doña Gracia agrees to leave her profession after two years when she will reach thirty years of age, and shortly thereafter she and Pablo, who is one-half her age, quietly marry in an out-of-the-way church and return to the house on Pez Street to celebrate their nuptials with their servants.

One of the household servants, Zaide, a mulatto ex-slave whom Doña Gracia freed, offers to paint the couple’s wedding portrait as a gift. The parallels between Zaide
and Juan de Pareja are unmistakable. The narration informs us that “[e]n tiempos fue su amo un afamado pintor de la Corte, de quien él en secreto había aprendido el arte de la pintura; habiéle prohibido su amo tomar los pinceles, por ser oficio de hombres libres y no querer infamarlo poniéndolo en manos de un esclavo” (47). Nevertheless, by candlelight at night Zaide would use discarded brushes and perfected his technique by imitating the skills of his master. According to the novel, one day while the King was visiting Zaide’s master’s studio he admired one of the slave’s works that was mistakenly shown to the monarch. The slave threw himself “a los pies del monarca, suplicándole perdón y gracia por lo que había hecho” (48). The King, struck by Zaide’s humility, declared “[l]evantaos, mozo. Que quien tal hizo no merece el castigo, sino ser hombre libre” (48). However, Zaide’s freedom left him on the street “tan desnudo y sin amparo que no se podía valer,” and his most viable option was to re-sell himself into slavery, whereupon he ended up in the household of Doña Gracia (48).9

Zaide decides to paint the couple in the garb of their wedding day and thus authors the portrait’s narrative thread that spins the yarn for rest of the novel that portrays Doña Gracia “vestida con aquel traje de raso azul bordado de perlas, con el manto de humo que más incitaba que velaba su hermosura” (49). While the former courtesan sits posed in a chair, Pablo stands beside his wife dressed in finery, “con mi ropilla y mis calzas de lo más fino, y mi capa aforrada de martas, y hasta mi espada pendiente de un tahalí damasquinado . . . tan honrado caballero” (50). This portrait forms the icon of the novel and will be interpreted and misinterpreted many times throughout the various segments of the text.
In direct contrast to the stiff, sepia, lifeless wedding portrait of the grandmother and her spouse that anchors “En busca de un retrato,” Pablo reports that the skillful Zaide pintado y aun ahora me espanto de comprobar cuán propios y exactos salieron nuestros rostros, cuán acorde el gesto con la verdad, cuán a lo vivo la ligereza de las randas y los brillos de los rasos y perlas . . . no semeja retrato, sino espejo verdadero y de él no nos diferenciamos sino en el hablar, que en todo los demás estamos tan propios e igualmente como fantasmas de nosotros mismos. (50)

Reasonable skepticism dictates that the reader question whether Doña Gracia is as extraordinarily beautiful as Pablo describes, or if he sees her through lenses clouded by infatuation. In subsequent sections of the story, we will see that the young groom’s descriptions are remarkably accurate.

Pablo’s verbal rendering of the portrait raises this issue of gender of gaze that is inherent in the novel. While the gender of the gazes that behold Doña Gracia and Pablo vary over the centuries, only two are female. This pattern concurs with Berger’s comments on the social presence of men versus women in his study Ways of Seeing, and generalizes that “men act and women appear” (45-7). In fact, although Pablo has the narrative voice in the initial section through which he reports his and Doña Gracia’s actions, she never speaks for herself, making her a mute art object rather than a subject. Furthermore, Margaret Persin maintains that ekphrastic literature itself “must confront the issue of gender, because the I/eye of the text, whether verbal or visual, traditionally has been male; the so-called male gaze defines the sensory as well as philosophical point of view of the art piece and decides the erotic value as well. A male viewer looks upon a passive and mute object of beauty, very often represented by a female body (“Reading Goya’s Gaze with Concha Zardoya and María Victoria Atencia” 77). Pablo’s viewing of
the painting is colored by his maleness, his sensory description is shaded by his sensual infatuation with his bride, and he readily overlooks the reasons for Doña Gracia’s marginalization. The woman is portrayed through the eyes and the “I” or first-person narration of this first portion of the text. Thus far the text affords details salient to the subjects, authorship, ownership, and quality of the painting as well as specifies the occasion that it is meant to commemorate. The following segment, albeit penned in a different genre, draws the reader into the next century through a similarly admiring male narrative voice. This signals the commencement of the novel’s inclusion of the shifting role of artist and spectator.

The second part of the novel, “El Viaje de Lord Aston Howard,” consists of sixteen letters written over a one-year period beginning in November 1807. During the nineteenth century, after the seas became well charted land-based, exploration evoked greater interest and was often recounted in the epistolary genre. For example, Charles Darwin wrote of his landmark observations from the Galápagos Islands, and Alexander Van Humboldt chronicled his journeys on the Latin American continental landmass. Linda Hutcheon points out the similarity of history and fiction, in that they “have always been notoriously porous genres” and that they exhibit traits of historiographic metafiction that “at times has included in their elastic boundaries such forms as the travel tale” (A Poetics of Postmodernism 73). A popular, fictitious work of Spanish travel literature of the 1800s is José Cadalso’s Cartas marruecas.

On the surface, “El Viaje de Lord Aston-Howard” is a similar chronological travelogue, peppered with descriptive, cultural, and anecdotal tidbits, written mostly while Lord Aston-Howard is a guest in the house, on the Calle Pez, of don Pedro de
Sotomayor y Mendoza and his wife Josefa.\textsuperscript{10} Familiar background details include the previously mentioned Madrid neighborhood and landmarks, and the Mendoza family.\textsuperscript{11} However, this section of \textit{El sueño de Venecia} contains a subtext rife with criticism, chicanery, and hypocrisy. In addition to detailing the activities of the English nobleman, his reactions to the portrait serve an important function as they corroborate details from the previous section of the book. The common information forms strands interwoven to substantiate the lexical and graphic narrative thread of the tale that centers around the portrait of Doña Gracia de Mendoza. Conversely, the second segment affords the reader the first opportunity to compare and contrast the verbal representation of the portrait and assimilate any changes that have occurred. This retrospective reading generates a visualization process, in which the reader begins to refer back to the “Carta mensajera” to confirm or contradict words or images from that section of the novel. By commencing this digressive reading process the reader engages in, for the first time, the activity that Joseph Frank terms “reflective reference.” Spatiality is inserted into the lexical text as the forward progression of the chronological narration is halted, while reader ruminates on the image of Doña Gracia and Pablo as described in the first two sections.

In keeping with the style of travel literature, Aston-Howard incorporates many \textit{costumbrista} elements of the prevailing Spanish culture of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{12} However, his preference for all things French readily becomes apparent and the majority of Aston-Howard’s observations of Spanish culture are unfavorable, ranging from criticism of architecture to the color of his hostess’s dress. Aston-Howard prefers Paris to Madrid, condemns the use of \textit{braseros} to warm the rooms, and mocks the badly executed affectations of \textit{afrancesamiento} many \textit{madrileños} of the era adopted. The English
aristocrat’s exaggerated fixation on the superiority of French customs generates a parody of the Spanish affinity of the time to incorporate elements of the culture of The Sun King, Louis XIV.

At opening glance, Lord Aston-Howard appears to be a typical English nobleman who is touring the continent and lodging in the household of a Mendoza descendent. However, after a close reading of the chapter’s letters, the reader learns that this outward appearance is deceiving. Aston-Howard, who prides himself on being an aristocrat and dilettante, is nothing more than a common thief of doubtful moral character, who uses his title and social connections to gain access to valuable objects in order to steal them. One of the Spanish customs that he criticizes is the wearing of a cape, which was in vogue for men during the era. The English lord’s hypocrisy abounds as on the other hand he criticizes the garment, writing of “el sospechoso aspecto de los españoles, lo cual les confiere apariencia de maleantes e impide a las gentes civiles verles el rostro” (59-60). The English aristocrat’s belief echoes a similar edict that forbade the wearing of long capes in Spain that formed the basis for Francisco de Goya’s painting *El motín de Esquilache*, which graphically depicts the demonstrations.

Initially, Aston-Howard deems his servant James’s purchase of such an article of clothing as capricious, yet he changes his opinion when it becomes apparent that his servant’s outer garment will be of great utility for stealing valuables declaring that “una buena capa, todo lo tapa” (60). A superficial acquaintance with Aston-Howard would not have revealed his thievery, but the letters reveal that aspect and more about his character and echo the epigraph’s warning that appearances can be deceiving. Of the sixteen letters, nine are written to the French Marquesa de Clervés, Madame Solange de Vingdor, with
whom Aston-Howard apparently had an affair, and this supposition adds adultery to his list of transgressions. Aston-Howard has a wife and teenage daughter Eleonor, back in Bicester, England, to whom he sends three letters, which differ from those sent to his French mistress. These more formal missives are shorter, packed with lies, and lack the tone of familiarity that was apparent is his letter to the Marquesa. Three of the remaining letters are addressed to a Mr. Henry Ivory and a Mr. John Adams, both of London, who ostensibly are Aston-Howard’s fences and sell whatever stolen goods he is able to send back to England.

The item that Aston-Howard covets the most in the Mendoza mansion is a family portrait hung in Doña Josefa’s rooms, “una auténtica joya” (78). He regrets that he cannot remove the oil painting, “de medida de cuatro por seis pies . . . tanto por el tamaño de la obra como por estar expuesto en lugar muy visible, que haría evidente su falta” (78-9). There are a number of consistencies with Pablo’s description of the painting, “vestimenta española del siglo XVII,” “[l]a expresividad de los retratos, y muy especialmente la viveza de la mirada” (78). So lifelike is the graphic depiction of the couple that Aston-Howard expects that at any moment Doña Gracia will break free of the painting’s visual frame and “ponerse en pie, saltar del cuadro y emprender una graciosa conversación” (82). In this second segment of the novel, a repeated allusion to Pareja is made as “[l]a factura, el estilo, el dominio del color . . . me inclinan a pensar que su autor pudo ser el gran Velázquez, o en el peor de los casos uno de sus discípulos más diestros y aventajados” (78).

Certain details of the portrait that Pablo mentioned are re-emphasized by Aston-Howard, “los brillos del vestido azul de la dama, bordado con menudas perlas y del
cuello del joven” (78), as well as his praise of Doña Gracia’s “ojos de color aguamarina, un cabello dorado como la miel enmarcando el óvalo del rostro más hermoso que he visto jamás” (82). In particular, the epistolary description notes the Mona-Lisaesque quality of the portrait, the female subject’s enigmatic gaze that seems to follow the beholder, “una mirada como nunca he visto en un cuadro: unos ojos que parecen seguir al espectador con una mezcla de desafío y burla, de afabilidad e ironía” (82). This well-established ability of pictures that W.J.T. Mitchell describes as “the uncanny ability of pictured faces to ‘look back’ and in the technique of omnivoyance to seem to follow us with their eyes” parallels Aston-Howard’s reporting of this quality of Doña Gracia’s eyes (What Do Pictures Want? 53). Although Aston-Howard correctly estimates Pablo’s age in the portrait at fifteen or sixteen years, he mistakes Doña Gracia’s husband for her son, noting “de sorprendente parecido con su madre” (82). In “Parody and the Truth of History,” Mercedes Rodríguez comments on Aston-Howard’s assumption that the younger man must be Doña Gracia’s son and not her husband: “[t]he insistence upon this aspect mocks and undermines society’s dictum that a marriage between a child-bride and a mature man is acceptable, but the opposite is quite inconceivable” (16). The Mendoza home’s library that dates back to the previous century impresses Aston-Howard and he chauvinistically assumes that it was the domain of Pablo, “un auténtico letrado” (87). Later, Aston-Howard is astounded to learn that the books belonged to Doña Gracia, whom he had assumed was ignorant and illiterate. Unlike the reader, Aston-Howard is ignorant of Doña Gracia’s significant business acumen in one of the world’s oldest female professions, that of being a successful courtesan.
Shortly after his first viewing of the portrait, "Lord Aston-Howard's overwhelming desire is to possess this painting. But the canvas, an inheritance of the family with whom he stays in Spain, begins to possess him" (Henseler 188). The Englishman’s burgeoning infatuation relates to Mitchell’s commentary in What Do Pictures Want?: “[w]hen a picture wants love, or more imperiously, when it demands love, but does not need or return it, but looms in silence, it becomes an idol” (74). Furthermore, “when an object becomes sublime, it is the all, the totality, the incomprehensible . . . When the object is beautiful, we must have it, take possession of it, master it, and of course it inevitably enslaves us. In short, it becomes a fetish” (121).

Until this point in this segment of the story, the epistolary narration has been minimally ekphrastic. However, as the segment of the novel progresses ekphrastic commentary resurfaces and reverts back to the nuptial portrait. Aston-Howard becomes increasingly fixated with Doña Gracia, and laments that “habrá robado mi espíritu una dama que vivió y murió hace más de un siglo” (83). In a billet-doux to his French mistress Astor-Howard confesses that “[c]asi no he dormido esta noche, agitándome en mi lecho poseído” by his obsession (83). His fixation on Doña Gracia spills over into his letters to his French mistress, who takes on an indignant, almost jealous tone, although Aston-Howard assures her that Doña Gracia, “una mujer – no es de carne y hueso, sino pintada,” poses no threat to the charlatan’s relationship with the French woman (80).

When the English lord meets the Mendoza’s seventeen year-old daughter, Pepita, he projects his infatuation with Doña Gracia onto Pepita, her descendent. Seeing Pepita as a younger version of her ancestor, Aston-Howard writes,

[e]ran los mismos ojos de aguamarina del cuadro, los mismos cabellos pajizos en marcando un óvalo dulce y rozando suavemente la seda de un
vestido de color semejante al del retrato. Únicamente de rostro era más joven y su cutis más fresco, como si hubiese rejuvenecido... más es idéntica a la adorable criatura del cuadro, a su antepasada Doña Gracia, que vivió hace más de un siglo. (94)

Pepita’s comportment so impressed Aston-Howard that he pens his hopes that his own daughter can strive for such ladylike conduct as Doña Gracia undoubtedly had and Pepita exhibits.

However, all is not what it seems. After finding Pepita and his servant James “en la actitud más indecente que imaginarse pueda” he scorns James, upon whom he formerly heaped praise, and tells the Mendozas of their daughter’s disgraceful act. Pepita is quickly shipped off to a convent and Aston-Howard returns to England, after retracting his words that he hoped that his daughter would imitate Doña Gracia and Pepita. The reader can appreciate the irony that the English nobleman wished that his offspring would emulate a former prostitute or a member of her less than pure family lineage. Pepita’s likeness to her ancestor has deeper meaning for Robert Spires, who comments that

[for him (Aston-Howard), the piece (portrait) takes on a new function, that of an erotic stimulant. The representation of Gracia inspires him to turn his attention to Pepita. If at first glance this seems an example of how he embodies Gracia, in fact it is the opposite. Pepita in his mind is not a real person but a ghost, an animated rendition of a plastic image. He attempts to dematerialize and disembodify the real person, but in yet another ironic twist he fails, thanks to the superior virility of his socially and economically inferior servant. (‘Information, Communication, and Spanish Fiction of the 1990s” 143-44)

Ironically, the servant James, rather than the blueblood Aston-Howard, finds sexual surcease with Pepita. James’s liaison with the young woman of a higher societal ranking than his breaks the frame of the social class hierarchy and usurps the English lord’s social superiority. This inversion of social ranking duplicates the relationship between Pablo and Doña Gracia wherein she, of higher social esteem, albeit a courtesan, takes in and
eventually marries a former illegitimate child of the streets, whose background is unknown.

Thus, the second section of the novel provides a confirmation of Pablo’s assessment of Doña Gracia’s beauty, admittedly by another male narrative voice. In addition, the portrait’s exceptional lifelike quality affirms the geographical references, the continuance of the Mendoza family and their residence in the house on the Calle Pez. After two segments the cumulative effect of the sequence of reception begins to set in, and as Berger notes “[t]he meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it. Such authority as it retains, is distributed over the whole context in which it appears” (Ways of Seeing 29). For the painting in this novel there are two contexts, the frame of the artwork and the historical frame, both of which will be broken and questioned over the course of the narration. In addition, Aston Howard’s assumptions about the subjects on the canvas begin a series of misidentifications of Pablo, and establish for the first time dimensions of the canvas of the portrait, which will later be an important detail.

The title of the third section of the text is derived from a bronze statue with a plumed headdress, “El Indio,” that can be found outside the Madrid chocolate shop whose owner’s family comprises the central characters of this portion of the novel. The author’s youth again provides the backdrop for this third segment, written a la galdosiana. The neighborhood, now familiar to the reader, is described in minute detail, including copious particulars about the shops, the showcases, movement on the streets, even the various types of chocolate sold in the shop of Leonor and Federico Zapata. These reappearing elements segue well with Patricia Waugh’s assertion that realism itself
is a metafictional element, as it “lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them” (*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* 53).

The financially comfortable Zapatas represent the emerging class in nineteenth-century Europe, the *petite bourgeoisie*, although after fifteen years their marriage remains childless. As is wont for their class, in the warmer months and accompanied by their maid Paquita, they retire to their rustic country retreat where they entertain houseguests. In particular, the maternally inclined Isabel and her attentive maid Paquita shower widower Alvaro Mendoza and his young son with affection. After they learned of the young man’s hasty departure, both women are distressed when they learn that after the death of his father, the younger Mendoza departed for Cuba in search of fortune and some distant relatives. One of the few possessions that Alvarito took with him was

> un cuadro muy feo ... (de) una señora antigua, vestida a la manera que aparece en los lienzos del famoso Velázquez 
> ... tenía el cuadro la oscuridad propia del estilo de la época, que algunos llaman tenebrista, de modo que apenas se distingüían los rasgos de la dama retratada ni los detalles de su atuendo, de un color verdoso indefinido. (141)

In addition to the ravages of time on the oil painting such as the dulling of the vibrant blue to a shade of green, substantial physical changes were wrought by the hand of Alvaro. The narrator’s description of the darkened portrait is the first negative verbal representation of the artwork. To accommodate packing the painting for his trip, Alvaro removed the canvas from the frame, had it varnished to preserve the paint, and rolled it for traveling. Most significantly, Alvaro reduced the size of the painting by cutting out Pablo, but leaving his hand eerily resting on Doña Gracia’s shoulder, so that “con la mutilación del lienzo quedó la dama sola, pero con esa mano posada como un ave sobre la articulación” (142).
This breaking of the physical frame of the portrait by its mutilation raises a perplexing question. Did Alvarito choose to cut the canvas vertically, rather than horizontally in order to accomplish a transfiguration? Does his action reflect his yearning for a maternal figure or was his choice driven by male desire, akin to that of Aston-Howard, to possess the beauteous lady for himself alone, without Pablo in the picture, literally and metaphorically? Evidence presented in the last section of the novel indicates that the canvas edge was cleanly sliced, denoting that a sharp edge was used. Alvarito must have used the equivalent of a small sword, a tool with phallic undertones, to obliterate Pablo from the canvas. In doing so he erased the patriarchal ancestry from the painting and elevated the matrilineal aspect of the artwork. From this point in the story on, the story focuses only on the woman in the text, all that is left of Pablo is his hand on the Doña Gracia’s, which will subsequently be misidentified. Another possibility is that Alvaro has some preternatural sense of the possible incestuous link between Doña Gracia and her young husband. By excising Pablo from the picture, Alvarito has removed the visual evidence of incest. These questions posed by Alvarito’s action are left unanswered by the text and the absence of explanation constitutes a deliberate strategy by the author, who otherwise carefully includes salient details throughout the rest of the text. The suggested motive for Alvarito’s reduction of the size of the canvas, the facilitation of its shipment to Cuba, is credible. However, his motive for the manner in which he diminished the artwork’s size and removed the male subject is not only unclear, but raises a number of conceivable motives and fascinating interpretative paths.

Following Alvaro’s departure to Cuba, Paquita and doña Leonor retire to the rustic retreat alone for a curiously long time. With the exception of her husband Federico,
the normally social Leonor does not entertain any visitors. Several months later Leonor and Federico become the proud parents of a daughter, Isabel. The family returns to Madrid, accompanied by Paquita, who the narrator notes is, “más rellena y amujerada que meses atrás, mantecosa y pechugona como un nodriza gallega” (128). It is improbable that the reader will put confidence in this social illusion of the true identity of the baby’s biological mother and may recall the allegory at the beginning of the text that warns of the frequent incompatibility of appearances and truth.

Years later the mature and now wealthy Alvaro Mendoza returns from the Indies and purchases a house that his late father fancied – on the Calle Pez. After a brief courtship he and Isabel marry despite his frisson brought on by his confession that his interest in the young woman was “algo perverso” (136). Nevertheless, their union follows the dictates of a the more socially acceptable form of marriage between partners of considerable age difference, as the husband is about fifteen years older than the wife – the opposite of Pablo and Gracia. Isabel is happy, but perturbed by the eerie painting that Alvaro hung in their bedroom, with the strange white hand on the woman’s shoulder, “aquella mano que desde el primer día la había parecido como un mal agüero” (157). For Robert Spires. Isabel’s commentary alters the force of the painting as “[t]he work of art now privileges imagination over documentation because it has been reconfigured from a mimetic representation to a surreal image” (“Information, Communication, and the Spanish Fiction of the 1990s” 145).

Subsequently, Alvaro’s turns melancholy, particularly after a visit from Paquita, whom Isabel does not know. Isabel is puzzled when she jubilantly announces to her husband that she is with child and “su marido no la había mirado ni una sola vez a los
ojos" (156). Shortly thereafter, Alvaro fatally shoots himself and Isabel cleverly attributes his death to the gunfire from a political insurrection occurring on the street outside. Isabel reads Alvaro’s suicide note that reveals her husband’s unwitting “pecado más nefando, el crimen más horrorroso ... relación monstruosa y contra natura” – incest. Unknowingly, Alvaro married his own daughter and chose suicide as he believed it better that Isabel “no conozca a su padre” (159). This confession creates a possible mirror image of Doña Gracia and Pablo’s marriage, in which the wife may also be the mother of her husband. In the case of Isabel and Alvaro the gender roles are changed as the older male spouse has unknowingly, but undoubtedly married his daughter, whereas in the case of Doña Gracia incest is only suggested. Just as Alvaro cut Pablo out of the picture, thereby removing possible visual evidence of incest, he concluded that after his verbal confession in his suicide note, he must literally remove the evidence of his own crime by his death. Isabel, pregnant with a son and in financial ruin, leaves her matrimonial home to reside with her parents. Ironically, the one possession that she takes with her is “aquel cuadro que en su primera visita la había parecido tan feo, el de la dama antiqua vestida de verde oscura, con una siniestra mano sin dueño posada en su hombro” (161).

Several times during this section, metafictive breaks in the confines of the narrative frame insert space into the verbal text and urge the reader to pay close attention to certain details via such comments as, “[p]erdóñenos el lector esta larga digresión ... imprescindible para seguir el hilo de nuestra historia” (131), and “[t]e preguntarás, curioso lector” (161). As predicted in the epigraph and section one, all is not what it seems to be in either the visual or verbal text. For example, the eerie hand in the painting, the portrait’s curious green tone, the cause of Alvaro’s death and the parentage of both
Isabel and her son present puzzling inconsistencies in contrast with earlier verbal renderings of the painting.

The penultimate segment of the novel, set in postwar urban franquist Spain, is narrated from a female juvenile perspective, albeit in third person. The familiarity of the Madrid neighborhood is casually mentioned with references to the street named Corredera Baja (165), the chocolate shop “El Indio” (196-97), and the charitable institution “la Hermandad del Refugio y la Piedad” where Pablo was cared for as an infant in “Carta mensajera” (180). Though centuries have passed, neighborhoods, streets, and building remain the same, bestowing historical continuity to the novel. Much like Carmen Martín-Gaite’s novel El cuarto de atrás, “en esta Madrid de posguerra, el lector sigue a la niña en sus actividades cotidianas: la visita a las tiendas, las conversaciones, las canciones populares del día” (Jones 82). However, while Martín-Gaite’s recollections arise from a grown woman looking back in time, Mazquirán Rodríguez proposes that Díaz-Mas “uses a child-protagonist as a ‘recorder’ of her reality to recreate a microcosm of Madrid in the late 1950s” (“Parody and the Truth of History” 20). This ingenuous, nostalgic point of view enhances authenticity while the narration envelops the reader in a myriad of the sights, sounds, scents, and popular culture that, in turn, foster recollections from our own childhoods that draw us further into the narrative perspective of the young girl. This vivid description centers around sensory perception that draws us individually back in time and imbues a personal connection for each reader. The narrative strategy effectively provides the social and historical framing for the changed format of the painting. The lexical representation of four of the five senses in this novel, particularly with respect to this section, contrasts with the graphic depiction of the sensual aspects of
the tapestry stories. The girl’s detailed description of her barrio provides a plethora of visual, aural, and olfactory stimuli.

From a familiar description of a rainbow to the myriad colors of thread in the local shop dedicated to sewing notions - “ejércitos e hilos de colores y escuadrones de botones de nácar” (199) - to a distasteful verbal rendering of the itinerant rag picker as “sucio y renegrido, de tez cetrina y boina mugrienta” (202), to the admiring gaze of the “urnas de cristal” and “lágrimas de vidrio” in the Iglesia de San Martín (185-186), to the defamiliarized description of bacalao hanging in the shop “como camisas recién planchadas” (196), Díaz-Mas offers the reader an insider’s glimpse of shops and markets of middle-class postwar Madrid. Scents reported in the text include the girl’s awareness of her mother’s presence by lavender cologne, and after a thunderstorm “el patio . . . había empezado a oler de humedad y a ozono” (176). Although the text does not include gustatory references, given that olfactory cues tie in closely with taste reception in humans, descriptions of odors could well incite gustatory sensation in the reader, for example, the girl’s listing of food items in the market, from cheese to sausages, onions to chocolate. I digress to the previous segment, “El Indio” to refer to the narrator’s description of the shop of the same name, that includes an olfactory stimulus that is capable of inciting gustatory anticipation, “la más aromática . . . la tienda invadida de un alegre olorcillo a cacao caliente” (112-13). One foul odor included in “Los Ojos Malos” refers to the fish market with its “olor rancio a amoníaco . . . un aire de morgue de peces” (199). Such negative smells contrast with those wafting out of a church’s open doors as the girl passes by, “una aroma mezcla de incienso quemado . . . agua bendita aceitada . . . palmas olorosas a paja fresca . . . romero y oliva, humillo de velas” (185). Limited tactile
sensations contain a reference to “un suelo resbaloso de escamas perdidas” at the fish market (199). Auditory description often focuses on advertising jingles, “Cola- Caooo” (164-65), the rolling of the letter “r” in some songs on the record player such as brindarrrrrrr, ard morrrrr (190), and the hawking cry of the knife sharpener, “Alfiladoooooooodooooor” (200), and that of the ragman “traaaaaaaaapus vieeeeeeelllllllllllllll” (202). Since prose cannot utilize the rhythm of poetry, Díaz-Mas exaggerates the “r” in some words, and extends the vowels in others to approximate the sounds of the barrio. Onomatopoeia is utilized to render the sound that footsteps make in “el largo pasillo cuyas baldosas mal encargadas y flojas tintineaban como las teclas de un xilófono – clin, clan, clin, clan, clan, clin” (168). With respect to Lessing’s theory that the verbal realm is superior to the visual medium, I agree wherein his ideas apply to representation of the senses. Visual portrayal of sensory stimuli and reception is much more limited in the graphic medium. These descriptions offered above, as well as others in El sueño de Venecia evoke a much stronger stimulus for the reader than say, the dog cocking its ear to hear the organ in the panel from The Lady and the Unicorn tapestries that denotes hearing. The inclusion of sensory description enhances ekphrastic narration by adding a dimension, whether visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or gustatory. Texts that include focus on the five senses deepen the reader’s experience as their sensory nexus appeals to the reader on a primordial and universal scale. The visual quality of the verbal text is amplified in cases where other senses are interwoven.

The young girl’s fanciful imagination allows her to enjoy a story within a story, the radio serial of “Capitán Trueno” and his accomplices. The inclusion of the radio serial infuses auditory description into the verbal text. The girl’s imaginative faculty also
allows her to engage in whimsical interpretations of the household items. The narrative
description of visual imaginings put yet another capability of ekphrasis to the test. Visual
musings are credibly reported in both “Los Ojos Malos” and the short story studied in
Chapter Two, “La obra maestra.”

Reminiscent of the play of sunlight and shadow on the painting with dual
interpretations in “La obra maestra,” the protagonist of “Los ojos malos” begins the
section with a description of the changing images generated by the morning sun’s
reflection through the window shutters, “[a] veces dudaban de si veía realmente esas
imágenes animadas o sólo las imaginaban” (El sueño de Venecia 163). As circadian light
changes, the protagonist indulges in a sort of imaginary chiaroscuro. One such memoir
details the effects of light and darkness on an ordinary household furnishing, a mahogany
chest of drawers:

[1]as cosas recobraban su volumen habitual, o sea la forma dimensional
que solían tener durante el día. Porque por la noche – la sabía bien – y en
esas primeras horas de penumbra las cosas no era tridimensionales, sino
planas, y no tenían calor, sino que se limitaban a recortarse como una
sombra negra, el fondo más claro y las paredes . . . al llegar la hora de
dormir y apagarse la luz, la cómoda adquiriría una elegante silueta a una
pagoda china (166).

The young girl’s fantastical imaginings lead to her interpretation of the piece of furniture
evoked in the segment’s title, “Los ojos malos.” One stormy day, while lying playing
on her back in the Habitación Grande of the family’s home, she is terrified by what she
sees on the underside of a table, “el horror: los ojos se pasaron en otros ojos, unos ojos
que miraban con fuerza y decisión, que no quitaban la vista de encima por mucho que
uno quisiese mirar para otro lado” (177).
The girl imagines that her pseudo-mythical hero Capitán Trueno will protect her from the apparition, and when she tells her mother of the terrifying apparition, in a calm maternal voice she is assured that “[n]o son ojos, hija mía, son los nudos de la madera “ (178). Curiously, as Christine Henseler notes,

[i]n the fourth chapter the painting does not occupy much narrative space; it is not described until the end of the chapter, and the image is seen only through the eye of a little girl who has converted the back side of a wooden coffee table with all of its markings into a site of fantastic adventures for herself and her hero, Capitán Trueno a cartoon figure. (“The Sixth Chapter of El sueño de Venecia” 185)

Nevertheless, the young protagonist is drawn to the image under the table, and “la visita a los Ojos Malos se convirtió en un ritual doloroso” (179). Her impressions raise the possibility that changes to the portrait have not only been literal, but that they may also encompass the imagined.

Before the abrupt, puzzling end of the section, when this girl’s limited attention span draws her interest to other things and the evil eyes “no volvieron a aparecerse nunca más en la vida,” she describes the mutation of what she sees (205). This description constitutes a comic, ironic mutation of the painting for the reader because

Los Ojos Malos no estaban allí. En su lugar estaba la Virgen María, vestida de azul de la Purisima algo sucio – el traje bordado de perlas o de estrellas parecía brillar en la oscuridad –, nimba de tinieblas que apenas permitían distinguir el halo de santidad sobre el cabello rubio: un Niño Jesús rígido y chapetón como un muñeco de china y una paloma blanca se le posaba en el hombro. Los ojos de la Virgen eran azules y dulcísimos, transparentes como el agua del mar (204).

The consonant features of the portrait, the blonde tresses, the blue dress embroidered with pearls and the arresting blue eyes, are familiar to the reader. However, the Virgin Mary, the halo, the Baby Jesus, and the white dove that supplants Pablo’s hand make the image described bewildering, comic, and ironic. Although an exegesis of this
bizarre metamorphosis of the portrait is not explained until the next, and last, segment, Jeffrey Bruner sums it up very succinctly: "In other words, the seventeenth-century Jewish courtesan has been transformed into the highest example of Christian womanhood" ("Figurative Fiction: Verbal and Visual Intertextuality" 354). Bruner's comment about the portrait is paradoxical as it is underpinned by the accuracy and inaccuracy of the description of the portrait of Doña Gracia as the Virgin Mary. The woman in the portrait truly was a Jewish courtesan from centuries ago, however any resemblance to the Virgin Mary is ludicrous and patently ironic. This contrast plays into the whore-Madonna dichotomy. This startling ekphrastic revelation at the end of "Los ojos malos" sets the stage for the questions, and answers, both correct and erroneous that form the basis of the final portion of the novel. The erroneous perception of the subject of the portrait as the Virgin Mary accelerates the unraveling of the carefully narrated preceding chapters that cleverly wove a consistent visual text and acts as a counterpoint. In contrast to the changes of the portrait generated by the cutting of the canvas in "El Indio," in this section of the novel the portrait is distorted by the layering on of new elements that indicate that the woman is the Virgin Mary and child. The instrument of application of the altering layers is not the pen, not a sharp edge, but, rather, the paintbrush. Although a human hand wrought both modifications to the painting, amending the portrait by painting new layers with additional elements serves as a counterpoint to the reduction that occurred as a result of Alvaro's actions. The portrait of Doña Gracia has not only been altered by the bastardization of Zaide's masterwork through the application of more paint, but is has been removed from its frame, reminiscent of the actions of Alvaro. More dramatically, the painting is not shipped and
re-framed, Doña Gracia is not re-framed, but rather placed in an almost insulting, undignified location, the underside of a tabletop in a tavern. Díaz-Mas utilizes this contrast of method to explore the possibilities of human generated changes to artwork, as well to ponder on how they are textually reported. The science-based investigations of the last chapter will endeavor to illuminate what is reality versus illusion, as well as the impact of those changes with respect to the portrait as viewed at the conclusion of the section “Los Ojos Malos.”

The supposedly irrefutable findings of an art historian researching the painting provide the literary foundation for the final portion of El sueño de Venecia. The male scientific discourse situated in the late twentieth century sets the stage for the possible ambiguity of history of the portrait and facilitates a final, ironic conclusion for the complicit reader that is underpinned by the fragility of the relationship between truth, history, and fiction. This scientific study of the portrait is akin to a bittersweet dissection of its qualities. The last section of the novel creates an abyss between the institutionalized literary genre of art history, the report or memoria, and personal memories of Doña Gracia, who is taken out of her frame and examined like a butterfly pinned to a laboratory table. The quest of the art historians to find the sterile truth contradicts the rich ekphrasis that underlays the first four sections of the novel. Lamentably, the painting, which fits Mitchell’s characterization of artwork “that is waiting for someone to pay attention to it,” suffers a common fate of “family photos when all their relatives are gone and no one recognizes them anymore.” Even sadder, since Pablo was eradicated from the canvas, he was not afforded the opportunity to be considered for approximately three hundred years. Providentially, interest in Doña Gracia endures, albeit in the form that corresponds to the
notion of the portrait as one of many “average portraits - that is, the conventional, official
images of forgotten personages by forgotten painters - are the most forlorn figure of
longing for recognition. No one cares about them except art historians and specialists”
(What Do Pictures Want? 73). Moreover, art history’s nature as a restrictive discipline
that imposes sanctions on the visual text is, as Mitchell notes, “mainly devoted to
inserting objects into explanatory and interpretative discourses” (Picture Theory 210). In
“Memoria” truth is the subtext that lurks in the reader’s mind while assessing the revered
testimony of the supposed expert, the art historian. In her interview with Ofelia Ferrán,
Díaz-Mas underscores the clash of discourses, of truth and lies, in the final segment of
the novel when she comments,

la Memoria de El sueño de Venecia es perfectamente coherente, verosímil,
creíble y parece científicamente fundamentada, pero es mentira. Y el
lector sabe que es mentira, porque ha seguido la trayectoria de los
personajes y del cuadro a lo largo de toda la historia. El lector digamos
que ha tenido el privilegio de estar presente en la historia, cosa que el
investigador que escribe esa última Memoria no ha podido hacer. (Ferrán
330)

In spite of Díaz-Mas’s definite assessment of the two versions of truth offered in

“Memoria,” Drinkwater and Macklin characterize the two art historians’ theories as
dialogic, and therefore more postmodern, by pointing out that

[t]he interrelationship between the two accounts calls attention to
narratives as a system of ordering and understanding, and stresses our
need for plots while at the same times suggesting reasons for being
suspicious of them. On one reading the anonymous author of the
‘Memoria’ appears as a figure of ridicule with his or her pseudo-erudite
tones and the deadness of style which appears at odds with the vital
history of the painting and, more seriously, appears completely wrong-
headed in its claims to scientific accuracy. It is an indictment of the
distortions of the professional historian, the maker of truths out of
history’s traces. On another reading, for the matter is ultimately
undecipherable, the ‘Memoria’ could be the true version of the portrait’s
history, but at the same time a marvelous pretext for another history of
those who stand outside the official versions of history. *El Sueño de Venecia,* on this reading is a celebration of narrative-making, a paean to the emancipated imagination which liberates those who are locked in the prison house of history. ("Keep It in the Family: Secret Histories in *El sueño de Venecia*" 331).

Even though Díaz-Mas declared to Ferrán that "Memoria" is essentially a lie, postmodern inquiry leads to question the author's comments and open the possibility of an alternate meaning. Not only does the last section have to pass through the confines of history, but also, as Persin points out,

> if the representation of the visual work of art is deferred or re-presented in a work . . . the issue of self-referentiality becomes all the more vexing, since the self-referentiality of the visual work of art must pass through the prism of the prison house of language. ("Reading Goya's Gaze with Concha Zardoya and María Victoria Atencia" 75)

Certainly this novel provides examples of deferment and re-presentation via the analysis of the portrait, which also serves as an artefact of history. This process is drawn out over centuries and it is presented in various literal and metaphorical frames, reflecting the physically altered form of the artwork. Paradoxically, both the confines and the elasticity of history and language make it nearly impossible to define the best version of what is supposedly the truth in "Memoria," as the painting's history needs to be filtered, to pass through something akin to the sieve in the epigraph. The title of the novel itself is ripe with ambiguity, as it is imprecise if Pablo's master's dream of Venice is reality, or if Pablo's incredulity of the water-based city is more reasonable. The sub-title of "Memoria" is in itself ambiguous and questions whose memory the information refers to, leaves undefined to whom the memories apply, and questions the veracity of any recollections. The other layer of memory in the novel is that of the reader, who ultimately possesses the great amount of information available about the painting. The incongruities
of "Memoria" emphasize the conflict between verbal interpretation based on institutional standards in contrast with the visual recollections that brought the lady in the portrait to life. The memoria, or written report, is often at odds with the visual recollection of Doña Gracia. The visual and verbal interaction is further complicated by the reader's memory. This interplay, which occurs when lexical and graphic texts approach, distance, and overlap each other, epitomizes postmodern ekphrasis. From this perspective Maryann Caws notes that "[t]his was exactly what the ekphrastic moment was meant to do: to focus the attention on the moment held, and to elevate the entire text to a meditative height, deepening and reinforcing the lyric or the narrative around it" (The Art of Interference 248). Indeed, in the novel's final analysis it reaches beyond one particular painting, the portrait of Doña Gracia and Pablo, to create a dialogic examination of art, value, and art history. The last section of the story yields a diversity of possible meanings that typify the postmodern perspective in the style of historiographic metafiction, which interfaces with postmodernism that Hutcheon claims "deprives history of its pretension of absolute truth" (A Poetics of Postmodernism 96). The absolute truth of the art historian in "Memoria" is not dissembled by the text, but rather by the retrospective reader.

This final installment of the novel that traces the past yields the cumulative effects of Joseph Frank's reflective reference. In his ground-breaking essay "The Idea of Spatial Form," Frank writes that "the reader's perception of the identity of the past and present of the same character" occurs in a moment of "pure-time." Frank relates this to Marcel Proust's ability to experience the passing of time, "to rise above it, and to grasp both past and present simultaneously ... brought about by the discontinuous presentation of character" that, like Proust's narrative, "forces the reader to juxtapose disparate images of
his characters spatially" (27). This phenomenon occurs when the reader of the novel contemplates the various past physical and visual forms of the portrait of Doña Gracia over a five hundred year time frame and considers them in the present, in a moment of pure time that is a synthesis of all the temporal frames through which the verbal and visual texts can be assimilated into a unique personal version of art, truth and history for the reader. Thus, the present is an amalgamation of past and present.

After the enigmatic conclusion of the preceding segment, it becomes clear that what the young girl saw on the underside of the table was the significantly altered, five-century old version of the portrait of Doña Gracia. The alleged provenance of the painting is traced back to the century of its creation, and the text explains how what was left of the painting morphed its way to the table during the Spanish Civil War, when the owner’s grandmother hid it in her bar and forgot about it. An art historian reports his findings in this section, employs language and methodology that intend to impart conclusions about the artwork based on scientific methodology. The portrait is subject to chemical analysis of the paint colors, and “pruebas radiográficas,” which are among the techniques that led the expert to deem his findings “sin duda,” “casi con total certeza,” and quote his authoritarian assessment of another hypothesis as “no puede tener absolutamente nada que ver con . . .” (209-221). This male discourse, which will ultimately undermine Doña Gracia’s identity, is not unlike the chivalric code that leads to the untimely death of the female knight in El rapto del Santo Grial. Both Doña Gracia and the female knight, respectively, are compromised by the boundaries of male authoritarian discourse, and the visual appearance of the caballera and the courtesan,
before clothing, armor, or additional layers of paint are applied, aligned themselves more consistently with each woman’s true identity.

The art historian’s examination of the painting correctly assumes that the artwork was originally framed, “se observó que el cuadro parecía haber sido cortado . . . hubo de ser de dimensiones mucho mayores” (208-9). On one occasion the canvas had been rolled up. Other correct assumptions are that; the hairstyle and garments worn are typical of the period of the reign of Felipe IV and the retouching of the painting was done at the end of the nineteenth century (210). The expert notes that “un pintor carente del más mínimo arte” applied the retouching, added the Christ child, and turned the woman portrayed into the Virgin “por el sencillo procedimiento de añadir una aureola dorada en torno a su cabeza” (208). This retouching, Guadalupe Martí-Peña maintains, engenders diversity of interpretation since “el cuadro de Zaide es un recinto traspasado por otros pinceles, que alteran la fisonomía del lienzo, dando lugar a las lecturas más dispares y disparatadas” (“Los avatares de un cuadro” 108). On a similar note, Rodríguez theorizes that the retouchings have broader implications, that they are “nunca inocentes, ya que a través de ellos presenta la autora una burla punzante de la preocupación histórica excesiva por los orígenes, a la par que revindica los elementos más marginales del cuerpo político y social de la nación española” (“Disidencias históricas” 80). This commentary establishes a parallel between paintbrush and pen, as both instruments yield increased polyphony in the novel, the paintbrush via the original portrait and its retouching, and the pen through its recording of erroneous information. In addition, the report concludes that the painting’s history is entwined with a family of *conversos falsos*, and that the dove on the woman’s shoulder was originally a hand. The art historian erroneously concludes that the
hand on the lady’s shoulder was “blanca, sin duda feminina por su tamaño y color,” and cannot account for the infestation of the canvas “por un tipo de insecto tropical autóctono del Caribe e inexistente en la península” (207-9). Of course, the readers realize that insects had access to the canvas when Alvaro took it to Cuba and cannot help but experience a sense of smug satisfaction based on their superior knowledge, albeit that of a laymen in the art history field, of the history of the portrait.

Many of the remarkable features of the portrait, reiterated by characters viewing it over the centuries, are repeated in the text of “Memoria.” The woman portrayed is described as “una dama ataviada con vestido de un hermoso color azul celeste... en la falda se encuentran bordados con pequeñas perlas o aljófares” (209). The report praises the technique: “el pintor ha logrado una impresión de naturalidad y armonía,” and notes as well the continuing arresting quality of the subject’s eyes created by painting a small white line in the center of her pupils (210). The major errors begin with the assertion that research and art catalogs have allowed the art historian to determine “no sólo el autor, sino la temática del cuadro y la identidad de la retratada” (210). Based on the letter “Z,” remaining on the corner of the painting where the canvas was cut, the portrait is inaccurately attributed to a supposedly famous Seville retratista, Bartolomé Zabala, who was a close friend of Velázquez (213). Ironically, considering Zaide status as a freed slave, the expert establishes the original value of the artwork at “ciento veinte ducados... precio de un buen esclavo” (212). Curiously, the third segment of the novel has the only measurement of the canvas, which leaves ambiguous the matter of how much remains after the cut was made.
Where the report of the expert diverges most from the portrait’s history relates to
the subjects, both of whom are assumed to be female on the original uncut, unmutilated
canvas. Allegedly two sisters, Doña Rufina de Alfärche and Doña Ana de Alfarache de
Osorio, were the subjects and descended from a wealthy merchant family, although one
with “oscuros orígenes” that had been “penitenciados por la Inquisición” (215). As in The
Lady and the Unicorn tapestries and the fictitious portrait of Doña Gracia, neither the real
nor fictitious art historians can positively identify the lady portrayed in the artwork in
spite of the resources at their command. The exemplary daughter identified by the
fictitious historian, Doña Rufina, acted within the framework of acceptable social
decorum, married, and had a daughter. On the other hand the behavior of the younger
Doña Ana contributed to a scandal that rocked not only the girl’s family, but also the
court of Felipe IV. Ostensibly, during the King’s extended visit to Seville 1650, there
occurred “ocasión que produjo la desgracia de una de las muchachas, y posiblemente la
mutilación del cuadro” (218). Doña Ana engaged in an affair with the married Conde de
Villamayor who conducted his assignations with Doña Ana indiscreetly and impregnated
her. Subsequently, the following year the Count was killed in a duel and Doña Ana was
left unprotected with a bastard child. Doña Rufina entered a convent allegedly because
the scandal that her sister caused “para siempre había hundido la honra de la familia”
(219). The historian concludes that Doña Ana’s story ends there, “aunque es de suponer
que fuese descéchado,” and hopes that one day the fate of Doña Ana will be discovered
perhaps, “con los medios científicos a nuestra disposición” (220-21). The mutilation of
the canvas is attributed to the father of the girls who, enraged by the conduct of his
youngest daughter, cut her out of the painting and chose to leave Doña Ana’s hand
resting on her sister’s shoulder rather than further damage the canvas by removing it. Erroneous details about Doña Ana’s hand emphasize the potential to misrepresent a visual element in a verbal text.

Paradoxically, the more plausible thesis, reached by another art historian, Raimund Volk, is rejected out of hand, categorized as “completamente descabellada” (220). Even typographically within “Memoria,” Volk’s theories are given minimal consideration by allotting his theories limited verbal space on the pages. While the other historian’s theories are given several pages in the fourteen-page section, mirroring the other critic’s assessment of its value, Volk’s receive two paragraphs on the last two pages, in effect ridiculing his thesis. According to Volk’s alternate explanation, there is a direct connection between Doña Ana de Alfarache and “la famosa cortesana Gracia de Mendoza, que fue amante del mismo Felipe IV y protegida de la mejor nobleza madrileña” (220). This theory is rejected by the assertion that the only tie between the two women is that “las dos eran sevillanas y que debieron de nacer en torno a 1635” (220-21). Furthermore, this alleged connection is rejected on the grounds that the young Ana de Alfarache could not have seduced the monarch, nor could she have done the unthinkable “se habría asentado prósperamente en la Corte y habría adoptado el nombre de Gracia de Mendoza: ¡el de su antepasada condenada por la Inquisición casi un siglo antes!” (221). This viewpoint reiterates the belief that Doña Ana was powerless and not in control of her destiny, her sexuality, nor her cultural erudition. For a young woman to assume the identity of another, a Jewish courtesan, would be to have done the unthinkable, and would flout the social customs established by the patriarchal, Catholic conventions of the era. Drinkwater and Macklin concur with this viewpoint, positing that
“the interpretation of the art history of ‘Memoria’ seeks to impose a social conformity
and assert a vision of orthodoxy in the face of a more complex, and potentially richer
history” ("Keeping It in the Family: Secret Histories in El sueño de Venecia” 327).

Some critics espouse the importance of the novel in a larger context, Spain’s quest
for national identity. History reflects the metamorphosis of the nation that frames the
verbal and visual time and space of the novel, centering around the social assessment of
those associated with the painting. In writing sociological commentary about the
characters in the novel, Reyes Coll-Tellechia traces the owners of the portrait over time,

pasarán a ser y a ser vistos, moderno primero como nobles hidalgos
(capítulo dos), después como pequeños burgueses adinerados por ciertas
aventuras económicas en ultramar (capítulo tres) y, finalmente, en la
gloriosa modestia cotidiana de la posguerra española (capítulo cuatro).
("España a examen” 64)

The irony of the 1992 publication of El sueño de Venecia and its correlation with
the five hundred year anniversary of the discovery of the New World does not escape
Reyes Coll-Tellechia. She notes that since 1492 “España ha sufrido tantas rupturas,
integraciones, exclusiones y reintegraciones,” a process that exemplify postmodernism
(67). These processes are in accordance with Hutcheon’s assessment that “postmodern
fiction suggests that to rewrite or to re-present the past in fiction and history is, in both
cases, to open it up to the present and to prevent it from being conclusive and
teleological” (A Poetics of Postmodernism 77). The complicit reader experiences the
richness of the postmodern aspects of the novel, and through careful reading is endowed
with knowledge that affords him or her with a unique perspective from which to explore
textual multiplicity of meaning in the novel. Ironically, rather than illuminate the history
of the portrait, most of the historian’s expert testimony has obscured the truth and
distorted the memory of Doña Gracia, who overcame the restrictions of her marginalized position in Spanish society as a prosperous, erudite woman of Jewish ancestry who thrived in the era of male-dominated, Christian Spain.

*El sueño de Venecia* affords the reader with an intricate text that epitomizes the versatility of the genre of the novel as an instrument of ekphrasis. Beginning with the visually seductive book cover, the author leads the complicit reader through a multi-century historical journey that traces the portrait of Doña Gracia, which initially includes her husband Pablo. The allegory offered before the novel begins encapsulates a thinly veiled warning about reality and illusion that dovetails with basic tenets of historiographic metafiction, among them, ambiguity, the questioning of authority, breaks in narrational chronology such as reflexive reference, and a tendency to examine the constructs not only of fiction, art, and history, but apply those concerns to contemporary mediation of the world-at-large. Indeed, four of the five sections of the novel present an example of a deceiving appearance. In “El viaje de Lord Aston-Howard,” Pablo is misidentified as Doña Gracia’s son instead of her husband, Pepita is misconstrued as a paragon of chastity, in “El Indio,” the error of Isabel’s paternity leads to Alvaro’s suicide that is consequently disguised as a collateral casualty of a political uprising. Doña Gracia’s conversion to the Virgin Mary is patently erroneous in “Los Ojos Malos” and the abundant errors in “Memoria” center around the misidentification of two sisters.

The uniqueness of this novel among similar ekphrastic texts lies in Díaz-Mas’s inclusion of the changes to the portrait, whether naturally occurring ones, like the darkening of the colors on the canvas, or deliberate ones, such as the mutilation of the canvas by Alvaro and the person who converted the painting into the underside of a
tabletop. These modifications engender reformulation of both the textual representation and the reader’s distinctive personal image of the artwork. Throughout the novel, Díaz-Mas uses varied narrative strategies to give life to the mute portrait. Color names and jewel tones employed are familiar to readers and reflect antique time periods, multiple stylistic references point to Zaide’s similarity to Juan de Pareja, and each section of the novel represents the style of literary prism through which the painting is viewed during each historical era. The diverse textual reporting of multiple beholders’ reception of the painting yields a diversity that catalyzes the reader to engage in reflective reference that mirrors the metamorphosis of the portrait. The result of this continued reformation, which parallels the repeated breaking and reconstruction of the artwork’s framing, produces a version of the history of the painting that differs substantially from that proposed by the revered art historian, while the readers know that the discarded art history theory is closer to the truth. Thus, the novel goes full circle, back to the epigraph whereby the reader becomes the sieve trough which information flows, and that confirms the reader’s role is to separate the gold, or the truth, from the sand, or the errors of history.

In a greater context, El sueño de Venecia transcends its frame as the history of a painting. The novel’s intricate twists, the physical alterations to the portrait, its receptions by a series of spectators of both genders and varying perspectives, the fate that artwork enjoys or suffers after it leaves the hands of its creator, and the correct and erroneous assumptions by the art historians all serve integral functions in the novel’s profound mediation on the dynamic relationship of any given work of art with reality and history.
Chapter Notes

1. Diaz-Mas does not label the five sections of the novel as chapters; rather, each section has an individual heading that begins with a Roman numeral and can stand independently as a short story.

2. In the opinion of Henseler, reading the novel starting with the last segment and reading the sections in reverse order yields the most postmodern effect. According to Henseler, “when El sueño de Venecia is read from the fifth chapter to the first, its characteristically postmodern, metanarrative irony highlights the deceiving power of the visual and the textual and points to the awareness of an always incomplete artificiality” (Contemporary Women’s Narrative 39).

3. Although the first words of the book are not labeled as an epigraph, they function as such and, for ease of reference, I refer to them as such. Ironically the author wrote the epigraph of the novel last and invented the information contained in the citation. She later learned that, in fact, there was a seventeenth-century poet by the name of Esteban Villegas from Rioja (Ferrán 333).

4. Some readers and critics see a possible thinly veiled inference that Pablo may actually be Doña Gracia’s son. The first hint may be Pablo’s belief that despite his picareseque life as a beggar, he may be “hijo de reyes,” which suggests that his birth and abandonment were the result of a tryst between Doña Gracia and the King (El sueño de Venecia 13-14). There are other instances that note the striking resemblance between the appearance of the boy and the woman. For example, Pablo guilelessly notes “lo dorado de mis cabellos, lo blanco de mi color,” marking the resemblance between himself and Doña Gracia (35). In addition, the age difference between Doña Gracia and Pablo allows that she could be his mother and Pablo once remarked, “yo niño de trece años, los ojos de una mujer me doblaban la edad y casi bien podría ser mi madre” (43). This incestuous possibility is not clearly resolved in the novel and echoes other examples of incest in the book.

5. Passages in Vreeland’s novel detail techniques and chemical compounds used to mix and enrich colors. For example, the artist was “[p]ulverizing a small brick of ultramarine with a mortar and pestle one day, loving the intensity of blue as rich as powdered lapis lazuli” (Girl in Hyacinth Blue 220). To achieve the luminous quality of the female subject’s cheeks in the painting the artist blended in “the dust of crushed pearls” (221). Minutiae is afforded as to the materials and process used to produce certain colors, “[f]ather mixed lead white with the smallest dot of lead-tin yellow for the goose quill in a painting,” and “she studied how much linseed oil he used to thin the ultramarine, and watched him apply it over a glassy layer of reddish-brown. By magic, it made the dress he painted warmer than the blue on the palette” (228-229). In Girl With a Pearl Earring, Chevalier offers similar commentary by describing colors that a reader of the era would be familiar with; a girl’s blue eyes “as if she had caught the sky in them” (16), or “like two shiny grey coins” (21), and likens the girl’s hair tone to “the dry brick wall behind her” (14). The female protagonist lists color names that were unfamiliar to her, “ultramarine, vermilion, and massicot” (98). In addition, the reader learns that linseed oil would have been procured at the apothecary (97), the considerable expense of grinding
lapis lazuli for making blue paint (63), and how a piece of ivory, once charred in fire, could yield black paint (102).

6. Such uncertainty about Doña Gracia de Mendoza’s background leads not only Pablo but also the reader to question how the author came up with her character. One scholar, María Pilar de Rodríguez, mistakenly identifies the inspiration for the courtesan as the protagonist of Francisco Delicado’s La Lozana Andaluza (“Disidencias históricas” 81). In her study of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Sephardic Jews, Díaz-Mas focuses on the matriarch of the illustrious Beneviste family, named Doña Gracia Mendes (Méndez or Mendezía). After marrying into a wealthy banking family and being widowed at age twenty-two, Doña Gracia left Portugal, once traveled to Venice, and eventually settled in Turkey where she lived until her death. In her non-fiction work, Los sefardies, Díaz-Mas provides narrative from the work Viaje de Turquia that details Doña Gracia’s opulent arrival in Constantinople and her acceptance, due to her wealth, by Suleiman the Magnificent (Los sefardies 60-1). In her interview with Ofelia Ferrán, Díaz-Mas confirms the parallel between the Jewess in her essay and the Doña Gracia of El sueño de Venecia. She explains that although the lives of the two women differed greatly some common traits include “el hecho de ser una mujer independiente, culta, rica, de origen converso” (337).

7. María Solino notes the irony that the novel, with its converso theme, was published in 1992, five hundred years after the Jewish expulsion (“Revealing Beauty / Revealing History” 3). For the reader, the use of the word almario may seem peculiar. In older Spanish usage the word was interchangeable with the word armario. Within the context of the proverb offered in this section of the novel and, from a contemporary viewpoint, the wording of this phrase could be interpreted as wordplay between alma and almario (Diccionario Enciclopédico Hispano-Americano 1018 vol.1).

8. In her article about the novel, Kathleen Glenn points out that Zaide’s name reflects the incestuous theme in the novel, as Zaide is also the name of the lover of Lazarillo’s mother (“Reading and Rewriting El sueño de Venecia” 484).

9. Velázquez’s 1649 portrait of Juan de Pareja garnered international fame for his mulatto assistant when it sold for a record $5,544,000 in New York in 1970. That sum was considerably higher price than its 1801 price tag of thirty-nine guineas, equivalent to about two hundred dollars in 1970. The oil on canvas was sold in 1970 by the Earl of Radnor, bought by the art dealer Alex Wildenstein, and was eventually sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City where it is currently on display. (“Rembrandt, Move Over!” Life 69:39 (11 Dec. 1970): 4). There are some minimal differences between the historical account of how Pareja and Zaide were freed, mainly that Pareja was freed in Rome by his master – not in Spain by the king (Velázquez 201). However, this slight discrepancy does not distort the parallel between the men to a significant degree.

10. In her research of El sueño de Venecia, Henseler discovered that the character Lord Aston-Howard has a historical counterpart in history. He was a High Admiral of the
Royal Navy who attacked Cádiz and visited Valladolid in the sixteenth century (Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative 41).

11. Aston-Howard accompanies his hosts to the Madrid church Hermandad del Refugio y la Piedad, mentioned in “Carta mensajera,” and admires the frescoes of the miracles of San Antonio, thus revisiting the same house of worship and commenting on the same artwork from the first segment of the book. During an interview, Díaz-Mas revealed that her postwar childhood memories were the seed for the novel and that “sobre eso surgió la idea de por qué no recrear no solo mi historia, sino la historia del barrio en el que yo había vivido durante treinta años, que es el barrio de la calle Corredera Baja” (Ferrán 332).

12. Aston-Howard comments on many popular Spanish cultural customs of the era including clothing, the tertulias, the majas and majos, the fandango dances and the castañuelas, the toreros, cortejos, and more (El sueño de Venecia 53-104).

13. The Motín riots that occurred in Madrid during the Enlightenment were, in part, a response to the edict that forbade the wearing of long capes and broad brimmed hats. The demonstrations also protested against higher commodity prices and the resultant spike in the price of bread and other staples. Leopoldo de Gregorio, the Marques of Esquiloche sponsored the legislation that attempted to regulate what garments madrileños could wear, with the full support of King Charles III. Billed as an effort to increase public safety, the long capes were denounced due to their capability to conceal weapons and the hats because of their brims that could hide a person’s face and identity. In addition to those reasons, shorter, French-style capes and tri-cornered hats were favored not only for affording less concealment, but also due to the fact that Esquiloche viewed their usage as a way to Europeanize and modernize Spain. Similarly, in 1698 Peter the Great of Russia had ordered his courtiers to cut off their long beards and wear European-style clothing. In a more contemporary vein, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair decreed the wearing of hoodies as he claimed that they, too, could conceal the identity of a criminal’s face. The Motín riots became increasingly violent in March of 1766 and, ultimately, the King rescinded the edict and Esquipoche was exiled (www.wiki/Mot%C3%anDn_de_Esquiloche#Elhambre.2C_la_verdadera_causa).

14. The French noblewoman is addressed by Aston-Howard as “[m]i encantadora amiga” or “[m]i muy querida amiga.” In one missive Aston-Howard asks Solange “prodigue Vd. sus gracias como suele, pero guarde algunas de las más sabrosas para mi regreso” (El sueño de Venecia 53-8).

15. Once again, the neighborhood of Díaz-Mas’s youth resurfaces, this time as a source of her descriptions for this section of the novel. In Como un libro cerrado, the author acknowledges the stylistic influence of Benito Pérez Galdos and Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, noting that “[a]quellos escitores describían con minuciosidad propia de la narrativa” and cites numerous examples of such realistic narrational features (178-79). In addition, the segment “El Indio” has headings spread throughout, giving it the appearance
of a serialized novel. Such novelas de entregas were popular in Spain at the end of the nineteenth century and were distributed sequentially.

16. Isabel tries to eavesdrop on the conversation behind closed doors between her husband and Paquita, whom she does not know. Isabel guesses that Alvaro fathered a child out of wedlock before he met her, and like Jacinta in Galdos’s Fortunata y Jacinta, considers offering to raise the child as their own. Isabel’s intentions parallel the barren Jacinta’s quest for motherhood. Shortly after Paquita’s visit, Isabel will learn that “aquel fruto prohibido era ella misma” (El sueño de Venecia 159).

17. During the period of unrest after the Carlist War in Spain, there were a number of political uprisings. Díaz-Mas adroitly coordinates the date of Alvaro Mendoza’s suicide, June 22, 1866, to coincide with the insurrection in Madrid led by general Leopoldo O’Donnell, a leader in the opposition movement against Isabel II.

18. A myriad of cultural observations are offered in this section. They include; the character and duties of the building’s portera, identifying which neighbor had the technological luxury of a television, the family’s radio and record player, the scent of a church and the visual richness of its paintings, the protagonist’s nascent sexual curiosity, advertising jingles, the hawking songs of the fishmonger, knife sharpener, and evil-eyed ragman, who according to urban legend would kidnap children (El sueño de Venecia 164-201). In Como un libro cerrado, Díaz-Mas confirms that she has drawn heavily upon her own childhood experiences as a source for this segment (52-76).

19. The inclusion of “Los ojos malos” is another autobiographical anecdote from Díaz-Mas’s childhood that is altered and included in the novel. The author explains that after the Spanish Civil War all public establishments, including a bar that belonged to her grandmother, were required to display a wooden portrait of Franco. Later, after the mandate was retracted, a bar employee converted the portrait into a table. The author explains that when she was young, her parents had an ugly table in the living room: “[y]o me tumbaba en el suelo, miraba la parte de abajo de la mesa y veía unos ojos que me miraban y me daban auténtico pánico . . . En efecto, era una cara, ¡y la cara de Franco!” Just as the mother in the novel, Díaz-Mas’s mother tried to assuage her daughter’s fears by saying that the eyes were only knots in the wood. While Díaz-Mas first endeavored to write a novel situated in her native barrio of Madrid she decided to pair the idea of a family history with an object that could be “un hilo conductor.” One requisite feature was that the item could physically show the effects of time, and Díaz-Mas recounts that “[s]e me ocurrió la idea del cuadro porque se presta muy bien a que se deteriore con el paso del tiempo, se oscurezca, se motile, se interprete, etc.” (Ferran 332-33).
Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Through her masterful authorship, Díaz-Mas’s ekphrastic stories and her novel *El sueño de Venecia* give voice to visual art though verbal depiction. These short stories and a novel encompass a variety of tones: ironic, parodic, sensual, and profound, and include various media of plastic art, painting, sculpture, needlecraft and photography. This corpus of Díaz-Mas’s writings examines the dynamic author- reader- text paradigm and serves as metanarrative commentary. In self-conscious fashion these writings examine and, at times validate, while at others undermine that paradigm and function as metaekphrastic texts that explore what Heffernan so concisely and eloquently refers to in his book *Museum of Words* as “a gallery of art constructed by language alone” (8).

Ekphrasis’s poetics can be traced back to Classical times offer commentary from Simonides, Aristotle, Horace and others, often focused on the mimetic correspondence between painting and poetry. In general, poetry’s status was elevated over visual art and the intermedial relationship judged how well verse made the art “real,” how well one medium was a proxy for the other. Somewhat conflicting views exist as to whether ekphrasis stagnated or flourished during medieval times, but it is generally accepted that painting and sculpture were shied away from due to their capacity for sensual and sensuous depiction. Beginning in the Renaissance, ekphrasis’s chief function as a mimetic tool began to diminish. Although the era seemingly viewed the Classic Antiquity in a positive light, focus moved to the individual and how he or she mediated his or her way through the world-at-large. The increased valuation of science in the Enlightenment saw the rise of the middle class and its accessibility to works of art as the role of the church diminished. The secular nature of literature and art grew during the Baroque
period and emblematic or iconic poetry was valued. Although Gotthold Lessing’s controversial essay *Laocoon* viewed pictorial art as inferior to verbal representation, it generated considerable ekphrastic dialogue for centuries to come. The Neoclassic and Romantic periods saw appreciable interchange of ideas between authors and artists, however the outcome of that exchange was minimized by Romanticism’s preoccupation with other perspectives, such as the relationship between humans and nature.

From the late nineteenth century, during twentieth century, and into our twenty-first century the frequency of intermedial exchange has reached levels comparable to those of the Classical era. Joseph Frank’s essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” made *Laocoon*’s commentary seem passé, and advances in cinematography as well as heightened use of narrative techniques such as flashbacks, digression, and other breaks in narrational progression lend an air of spatiality to verbal texts. During the twentieth century, many attempts were made, with limited success, to apply scientific methodology pertaining to semiotics and linguistic theory to ekphrasis. Assigning precise scientific parameters to ekphrasis proved difficult, as a one-size fits all, formulaic outlook diminished the validity of the art/human experience variable and could not encompass the variations of the human capability to join together verbal and visual artefacts. Scientific based disciplines could not explain the wonderful moments when graphic and lexical texts mesh together in a seamless form that illuminates both realms of representation. The paradox of that connection lies in its very nature, that it can be experienced, but not pinned down or dissected in a consistent manner. The border between lexical and graphic representation cannot be readily defined due to its blurry nature. As postmodern influence grew in the past century, its tendency to de-center
merged with metafiction and historiography that innately question history, fiction and truth. Patricia Waugh pointed out that metafiction examines not only how framing affects literary or artistic artefacts, but also how the same principles apply to how we, as human beings, see and mediate our way through the world around us. During this same time frame, ekphrasis’s formerly exclusive focus on the interrelationship between poetry and painting evolved to include prose and the novel and other art media, such as sculpture and photography. W.J.T. Mitchell notes this influence in *What Do Pictures Want?*, commenting that

> [i]mages are active players in the game of establishing and changing values. They are capable of introducing new values into the world, and thus of threatening old ones. For better or worse, human beings establish their collective, historical identity by creating around them a second nature composed of images which do not merely reflect the values consciously intended by their makers, but radiate new forms of value (105).

Furthermore, Mitchell maintains that “language can stand in for depiction and description, exposition, and other so-called ‘speech acts’ are not medium specific, and not ‘proper’ to some medium or other” (“Ekphrasis and the Other” 701). Thus, ekphrastic study began to search for connections and enriching elements between lexical and graphic media rather than to separate them and establish a hierarchy of relative worth.

In a fashion parallel to that of the evolution of ekphrasis, a graduate course in Spanish poetry initiated my interest in ekphrasis. The novel *El sueño de Venecia*, studied in a peninsular novel course, further piqued my interest and I became aware that various short stories penned by Díaz-Mas provided more examples of ekphrastic texts. Since that time I have become fascinated with the narration that Díaz-Mas and other authors use to
bring the artwork in their verbal texts to life in the mind’s eye of the reader. What I found particularly intriguing about this group of the author’s works is the facile manner in which they cross the boundaries of genre, theme, and time period.

The stories in this study illustrate the rich interface that results from a type of symbiosis between lexical and pictorial description. Grounded in the social ritual of exchange and familial history that John Tagg assigns to portrait photographs, “En busca de un retrato” details the narrator’s fruitless search for a photo that suitably portrays her abuela adoptiva. Neither of the two photos found, the formal wedding portrait nor the candid snapshot, can capture the essence of the octogenarian Maria. Díaz-Mas appeals to the reader’s five senses to depict all that Maria is: her splendid home, her inviting kitchen, and her signs of physical aging that are cast in a positive light. A cinematographic version of Maria would best serve to portray her, as she is a sum of her age and experiences and, short of that medium the ekphrastic text that weaves an amalgamation of verbal and visual metaphors is superior to the lexical or graphic text alone.

In “La obra maestra” the verbal text fulfills an integral function in the story, as only it can bridge the gap between the multiple versions of the same painting, that are governed by the light in which the canvas is viewed. Duality plays an important role in this story for example, the mutable reception of the Muslim artist’s creation, which sometimes contradicts his religious beliefs, is, at times, ironically hidden in plain view and depends on the lexical text to reveal it. Of the three short stories in this study, “La obra maestra” has the most varied reception and, therefore, bears a stronger similarity to El sueño de Venecia. This story, like the novel, also examines the role of spectator and
how changes can affect what he or she beholds, changes for example, such as those based on lighting in the story, and those caused by physical changes to the canvas in the novel.

A sepulcher, an unlikely piece of plastic art, serves as the graphic text in “El tercer lugar.” A series of triumvirates, of religion, of location, and narrative voice serve as the backdrop for the narration that, like “La obra maestra,” the tapestry stories, and portions of the novel, centers around sensory description. The story includes references to sound and light, but lacks verbal description of tactile sensation, a key element in sensory reception of sculpture. The narration is deliberately vague in some respects, as this conveys the uncertainty and confusion of the soul of the woman whose remains lie in the burial receptacle, “ella” who currently dwells in purgatory. Thus, in this tale the mode of representation seen as superior is not consistently verbal or visual, rather the interplay between the two modes creates an interconnectivity that eschews a paradigm that minimizes the value of one of the media.

In spite of the fact that one of the tapestry stories is based on a bona fide work of art, “La Dama del Unicornio,” and the other on fictional needlework, “Las sergas de Hroswith,” Diaz-Mas’s vivid description and creation of a plot for each tapestry succeed in bringing the panels to life. These two stories also emphasize the author’s talent for writing about medieval topics in such a manner that they are interesting to contemporary readers. To this end, the texts often employ language that centers around timeless references directed toward her erudite intended reader, such as jewel tones, as well as mythological and Biblical allusions. Given that the La Dame à la licorne tapestries deal with the five senses, the author capitalizes on that opportunity to describe what appears in the five panels depicting sensory perception ekphrastically. Diaz-Mas extends this
ekphrasis to “Las sergas de Hroswith” by including stimuli and sensation such as touch, bodily reaction to extreme cold, and gustatory cues. Emotion, however, is problematic to describe pictorially, and depends more heavily on the lexical text. As in the shorter stories, the fusion of lexical and pictorial description yields a richer reading experience.

By far, *El sueño de Venecia* is Paloma Díaz-Mas’s richest ekphrastic work. She has taken many of the attributes of ekphrastic narration from her short stories and enhanced them in the longer format of the novel. This in turn, has engendered many philosophical questions about ekphrastic narration in general that relate to the relationship between art, text, and reader, which the novel makes more intricate by the changes wrought to the painting during its life of five centuries in the story. The novel is also enriched by its consideration of the gender of the spectator and its effect on the description of the artwork, specific narrative devices that bring the canvas to life, such as color description, and the employment of narration that calls up the five senses. What sets *El sueño de Venecia* apart from Díaz-Mas’s other ekphrastic texts and from other ekphrastic works as a whole is the number and kind of changes that occur to the painting over time. These mutations, in turn, have a profound effect on the reception of the framed artwork within the text, and outside the confines of the written text, as the reader must continually reformulate his or her own mental image of the painting to reflect each change.

The works of Díaz-Mas studied here and other works casually referred to in this study are based on art that is Classic in style. Although one of the reported receptions of the portrait in “La obra maestra” describes non-figurative art that contrasts with the nude version of the same canvas, the former is grounded in Classic style, that of Kufic art.
Perhaps in the future ekphrasis will encompass more abstract art, that of modern and postmodern artists and style. This would be a departure from the majority of ekphrastic texts and would reflect a more contemporary artistic perspective.

Given the proliferation of intermedial representation and communication in our quotidian lives that grow exponentially with the passing of each decade, I envision that graphic art will soon accompany verbal texts in digitized form, creating a modern multimedia version of illuminated manuscripts. It is not outside the realm of possibility that a CD-ROM could accompany any one of Díaz-Mas’s works in this study, or that in the future, digital reading devices such as the Kindle® will include artwork along with the lexical text. While on one hand the inclusion of visual art could enhance the reading of ekphrastic texts, I fear that such advances might inhibit the imagination of the reader who now formulates a personal visualization of the artwork. Nevertheless, the power of visual annotation would modify ekphrastic texts as we currently know them, and would add another dimension to the ekphrastic reading paradigm, thus further enriching both modes of representation. The possibility of graphic art to accompany the lexical text would be of particular interest to a reader of “La obra maestra” and El sueño de Venecia, as visual images could trace the varying reception of the painting based on different lighting of the former, and the changes to the portrait, both naturally occurring and deliberate in the latter.

In this corpus of texts, Díaz-Mas has embraced a more contemporary ekphrastic perspective, one that eschews past attempts to impose a hierarchy between the two realms of representation and searches for intermedial exchange. By virtue of its allowance for multiplicity of meaning, this point of view reflects a more contemporary, postmodern
stance that will serve us well as scholars of ekphrasis, as visual and verbal media become more intertwined in our quotidian lives and the world-at-large at an increasingly rapid rate.
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Education

1996 – Present
Ph.D. Graduate Program in Spanish

1981-1986
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey
Master of Arts, Department of Spanish

1975-1979
Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania
Bachelor of Arts Degree
Major: Spanish
Frank Kline Baker Prize in Spanish

Teaching Experience

2005 – Present
Assistant Instructor. Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

1991-2005
Part-Time or Full-Time Visiting Instructor.
Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania