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Turkish Delight: Antonio Gala's *La pasión turca* as a Vision of Spain's Contested Islamic Heritage¹

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The exact nature of the role played by Spain's Islamic/Moorish heritage in the development of its national identity has long been polemic amongst Spanish writers, cultural historians, sociologists, and philosophers.² Whether viewed as a toxic influence on Spanish culture, an essential part of a unique national identity or an irrelevant historical parenthesis of no lasting impact, the Moorish/*morisco* presence and its perceived contribution to contemporary Spanish identity is curiously versatile. Its apparently endless capacity for reinterpretation by generation after generation of writers and commentators for purposes more relevant to the present than to the past has been noted by Miguel Ángel de Blunes in his introduction to Mercedes García Arenal's study *Los moriscos*:

[E]ste colectivo humano ha sido moneda de trueque para reflexiones que se alejan de los planteamientos y de las conclusiones propias de un historiador para vindicar colonialismos, supremacías o problemas propios del siglo presente y no del quinientos y del seiscientos.³ (x)

Although he is referring specifically to the *moriscos*, I would argue that the same can be said for the Islamic presence in Spain in general.

Interest in the Muslims of Spain, past and present, has increased dramatically over the last twenty-five years due to the confluence of many factors, both domestic and international, which have raised the stakes considerably, making this area of study one of greater urgency in recent times than the purely historical debate of the past.⁴ Serafin Fanjul,

in *Al-Andalus contra España*, cites statistics which suggest an exponential increase in publications in the field: between 1970 and 1990 some 822 books were published on the topic, 35% of them in the last five years of the period in question, and he goes on to predict a continuation of this trend (86).⁵ This trend has been further encouraged since 1990 by recent world events related to Islam in general, as well as events specific to Spain's history, such as the commemorations of 1492 and the increase in Muslim immigration into Spain with the preoccupations that this generates. An additional stimulus appears to be a growing interest in exploring Spain's past and its impact on the present. Not surprisingly, this interest has filtered through into the world of literature, both in more literary works as well as in middle-brow and popular fiction. As Eduardo Subirats notes in "Moros y judíos, y el problema de España," "la literatura española contemporánea se ha planteado de nuevo la pregunta por los significados de las culturas árabe y judía en España" (201).⁶

In this article, I will examine the ambivalence of Spain's relationship to its Islamic past through the analysis of Antonio Gala's *La pasión turca*, which participates in a prevalent fetishizing discourse with respect to that element of Spain's history. While the novel, published in 1993, predates by over a decade some of the dramatic events that have contributed to the latest upsurge in interest in Spain's connection with Islam, it is an early fictional manifestation of this interest, whose publication can be linked to the debate surrounding the commemorations of 1492 and Spain's political positioning as a European nation within the European Union. I argue that this narrative constitutes an example of the way in which Orientalist fantasies about Turkey, standing in for the

Moorish elements in Spain's history, are deployed to express anxiety about Spain's present. The narrator's sexual obsession with the figure of Yamam in *La pasión turca*, I will argue, can also be read as an example of the way in which fantasies about the past can re-surface in popular contemporary literature, reflecting in this instance a dissenting but ultimately flawed vision of Spain's current construction of its national identity as a thoroughly Europeanized nation.⁷

Gala (1936-), poet, dramatist, essayist and novelist, is one of the authors most associated with a particular interest in Spain's Islamic past.⁸ As their titles indicate, his first two prose works, *El manuscrito carmesí* (Premio Planeta 1990), and *Granada de los nazaries* (1992), centre specifically on the culture of al-Andalus.⁹ With *La pasión turca*, his third work in prose, Gala's focus ostensibly shifts from Arabic Spain to the sentimental and existential problems of middle-class life in modern Spain. However, as we shall see, Spain's Moorish heritage continues to play an important role in respect to this novel.

While arguably not an important novel in terms of its literary significance,¹⁰ *La pasión turca* was an extremely successful one, reaching twenty-eight editions in its first few years of publication, a popularity which reflects the novel's tapping into a particular vein of public interest. It recounts the tragic passion of a Spanish woman, Desideria Oliván. On a package holiday in Turkey, she falls tempestuously and obsessively in love with her Turkish tour guide, Yamam, with whom she discovers an overwhelming sexual fulfillment. Seeking happiness with Yamam, Desideria abandons her husband, family, friends and country, and travels to Turkey. However, Yamam is not all he seems and, enslaved by her passion, Desideria is forced

to undergo two back-street abortions, suffers abuse of various kinds and is prostituted by Yamam to further his illegal business interests (drug-trafficking), before finally committing suicide when he abandons her for another woman. The text is presented as Desideria's diary written during her time in Turkey. This diary, a series of notebooks symbolically contained in an empty box of Turkish Delight sweets, passes through various hands, until reaching an "editor" who publishes it.

By virtue of the novel's title, one might expect *La pasión turca* to abound in sizzling sexual encounters in exotic locations. However there are relatively few of either in the novel. Instead, the reader is confronted with page after page of intense emotional self-analysis and abstract philosophizing on the subject of love and obsession, as Desideria writes of her emotions. Underscoring the novel's overt theme of feminine desire run rampant is the protagonist's unusual name. Derived from the Latin word *desiderium*, Desideria is grammatically neuter and in the plural, translated explicitly in the text as longings, yearnings, or desires (256); a plurality which hints at the presence of levels of desire in the text other than the overwhelming sexual desire of the protagonist.

One of those levels of desire, I will argue, is a desire for Spain's lost "difference" from the rest of Europe, its Islamic heritage, a difference that is associated in the novel with virility and embodied in the figure of Yamam. It is my contention that the presentation of Yamam as representing the lost potency of Spain's Islamic heritage has its echo outside the novel in political and media discourses produced around the same time in relation to Islamic Spain, in both the past and present. Examining these discourses in conjunction with the novel will prove fruitful in revealing some of the problems

inherent in the prevalent use of the image of al-Andalus in this way, as "una moneda de trueque" (x) as Blunes puts it.

In addition to the international events of obvious importance, the growth in the interest of the Spanish public in matters pertaining to Islam has a more historical and nationally specific component. Debate centres on what modern Spain might owe to the Muslim inhabitants of al-Andalus and what that heritage (if it exists)¹¹ might mean in a Spain whose identity and sights have long been firmly fixed on a full participation in the European Union.¹² One factor which stimulated this renewed interest was the official commemorative focus on 1992, the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the Americas. 1992 also saw Spain host a number of significant cultural events which were read by Helen Graham and Antonio Sánchez as a celebration of "Spain's coming of age as a modern, democratic European nation-state" (406).¹³ One consequence of such an intense focus on 1492 was a recognition on the part of some that 1992 also marked the 500th anniversary of what Juan Goytisolo refers to in *Crónicas sarracinas* as "la amputación del legado musulmán y judío hispano" (185): the conquest of the last Islamic kingdom in Spain and the end of al-Andalus, as well as the expulsion of the Jews from the newly united Catholic Spain. The predominant official concentration on Columbus's voyage and the subsequent colonization of America, it was argued, indicated an insufficient recognition of the "other cultures" of the Iberian peninsular and of the impact of Christian Spain's actions on these minorities.¹⁴

The question, which continues to be hotly debated, becomes one of exactly what Spain should be commemorating and how Spaniards should feel about this. On the one hand, Subirats, in "La península multicultural," argues that:

[d]esde su fundación histórica en 1492, hasta el día de hoy, la identidad nacional se ha configurado a fuerza de desechar, muchas veces con virulenta violencia, cualquier forma de reflexión sobre la destrucción de las lenguas históricas, y los cultos y culturas que poblaron la Península ibérica. Se ha configurado también a fuerza de desechar sus memorias. (39)

Viewing the matter in this way, some kind of recognition and understanding of the wrongs of the past is essential to creating a Spanish identity that is not based on empty imperialist rhetoric.

Others, like Fanjul, would argue that Américo Castro (and those who support his arguments) suffer from an obsessive political correctness:

un enfermizo y obsesivo complejo de culpabilidad, de interiorización colectiva de *nuestro* pecado original frente a moros y judíos, con el ineludible corolario de la expiación de *nuestras* culpas. (*Al-Andalus contra España* 106)

For Fanjul, all talk of an Arab heritage is mythologizing, a product of a desire to justify “una nacionalidad recientemente inventada” (*Al-Andalus* xxi).¹⁵ As far as he is concerned, modern Spaniards did not participate in those decisions and therefore have no need to feel guilty about them or to revisit them. For Fanjul and others, modern Spain owes little or nothing to those historical minorities expelled in the past.

One final twist is given to Spain’s problematic relationship with its Islamic past by the upsurge of *magrebi* immigration into Spain in recent years. The influx of these and other immigrants into Spain has led to a continuing media focus on

issues of racism, xenophobia, tolerance, assimilation versus integration, as well as the role of the government in regard to these immigrants and the challenges presented by their presence in Spanish society.¹⁶ Although there may or may not be any unsettled accounts with the historical Islamic presence in Spain, there are certainly matters pending in relation to a current one, with the same vocabulary being used to talk about it. The frequent use of the word *convivencia* in such a context inevitably calls to mind the hotly debated period when three religions coexisted in the Iberian peninsula, whether it is perceived as a golden age of tolerance or a period of more problematic coexistence.

Links are drawn between the presence of this particular group of immigrants and a threat to Spain’s national integrity, which in turn lend themselves to further parallels being established with the situation of the Moors/*moriscos* in Spain over five hundred years ago. In newspaper articles related to issues of immigration, there is a notable tendency to draw a connection between these immigrants and the inhabitants of Al-Andalus. References are made to the “reconquest of al-Andalus,”¹⁷ with the increased immigration (legal or otherwise, although particularly the latter) even being adduced as “evidence” of a supposed conspiracy on the part of Morocco to re-establish al-Andalus or as part of a larger plan on the part of Osama bin Laden to “izar la bandera del islam tanto en la infiel Londres como en Sicilia o en al-Andalus” (Canales and Montánchez 163).¹⁸ References in the press to the Islamic affection and nostalgia for al-Andalus, their own version of Paradise lost, feed into the fear that Spain is in danger of being invaded by their historical enemy. As Leopoldo García García emphasizes, Spanish hostility towards Arabs is directly related to the internalization on a national level

of the past experiences of Spain: “La Edad Media ha dejado en el consciente colectivo de los españoles la imagen del musulmán como el ‘enemigo’ por excelencia” (13).¹⁹ Thus, Spain’s relationship with the Islamic immigrant in the twenty-first century is inevitably linked to the presence of those “others” who were so brutally dealt with in 1492 and later in 1614 with the final expulsion of the *moriscos*. Perceptions relating to Spain’s past, then, are being used to justify or demand changes in the approaches taken in the present, despite the very different historical contexts.²⁰

The way in which Spain perceives its historical links with the Islamic world tinges even its modern international relations feeding into the debate as to the role modern Spain should play with regard to both Europe and the Arab world. In 1990, Miguel Ángel Moratinos (now Minister for Foreign Affairs in President Zapatero’s government) advocated a role for Spain in relation to the Southern Mediterranean based on “nuestro común pasado histórico cultural,” asserting that “España, sin caer en falsas retóricas, es quizá el país que mejor comprende al mundo árabe” (“Política española” 61). In a different speech around that time, Moratinos further stated:

Nuestro país no puede ni debe renunciar a su vocación mediterránea. Su europeidad—cada día más consolidada—debería permitirle prestar un mayor interés a un área vecina con la que mantiene estrechos lazos de historia y cuya evolución afectará muy directamente a su propio futuro. (“El Mediterráneo” 46)²¹

These speeches appear to present the notion that Spain can gain prominence within the EU by acting as a bridge between the Islamic

Orient and European Occident because of its unique Islamic heritage (however vaguely or euphemistically that may be defined), glossing over the issue of the forced conversions and subsequent expulsion of the *moriscos*. This sense that Spain is unique in its Islamic connection is reflected in a different way in Gala’s *La pasión turca* which is published around the same time as the events of 1992 and at the same time as Spain commits itself fully to the European Union (1992). However, a close study of the way in which such issues are played out within the novel reveals the problematic and ambivalent nature of the assumptions upon which such statements are based. *La pasión turca*, I will argue, responds to these two realities, past and present, in a very ambivalent way, fetishizing the protagonist of the novel, Yamam (the Turk/*el moro*) as a response to the threatening homogeneity of Europe.

One of the layers underpinning this best-selling tale of sexual obsession is a representation of Spain caught up in a crisis of identity and differentiation as it is incorporated into the larger body of the European Union. The relationship of the protagonists in the novel can be read as an attempt to construct a Spanish national identity via what is ultimately a fetishistic, Orientalist fantasy.²² Such a fantasy is linked to perceptions of Spain’s lost Moorish heritage and the adoption of popular myths of al-Andalus and what Spain owes to it, or wants to find in it. The novel also highlights the ambivalence and violence attached to this relationship of desire. In order to clarify my reading the text in this way, it is necessary to outline briefly the nature of the crisis suffered by the protagonist, Desideria, and relate it to my assertion that the novel fetishizes the figure of Yamam. Taking her as

representing Spain, I propose to show how the story of her sexual enslavement can also be viewed as a cultural fantasy deployed as a response to contemporary events. Finally, I will tie these observations into the ongoing debate surrounding the significance of Spain's Islamic past and present.

As I will show, Desideria's narrative reflects parallel perversions:²³ her obsession with Yamam on the level of plot appears to present a textbook case of the perversion of sexual enslavement, as described by Louise Kaplan in *Female Perversions* (1993), while on another level the representation of Yamam read as a symbolic figure presents strong indications of functioning as a fetish object in the narrative. It is essential to my argument to state that I am viewing fetishism as a narcissistic mechanism that creates a split in the subject who both denies what he perceives as the castration of his mother and, at the same time, highlights it by the symbolic nature of his fetishistic fixation. For the fetishist, the fetish object (in this instance, Yamam) both is and is not what it appears to be. The unconscious aim of fetishism is disavowal of loss (or castration) and the fetishist is seen to be oscillating between two poles, holding two opposing views at the same time, that of identity and difference.²⁴

Desideria is driven by a crisis specifically radicated in the area of desire and physical passion. A bored, middle-class housewife, trapped in a sexually unfulfilling relationship with her husband Ramiro, she imagines love and fulfillment awaiting her "somewhere else" in an unknown location (85-86). From the outside, Desideria and Ramiro's marriage seems fairly typical: a bourgeois union not dissimilar to their friends' relationships. However, the lack of sexual contact between the couple, due to

Ramiro's impotence, reduces their relationship to one of shared economic interests alone. Ramiro's sexual coldness, it is implied, is due to his immersion in an emasculating social environment which restricts and stifles the expression of desire.

This is not just a personal affliction specific to one character; all Spanish men in the novel are shown to be lacking in one way or another.²⁵ This lack of virility is also present in European men in general and seems to be attributed to a loss of sexual difference or contact with the sexed, and therefore sexual, body. Because sexuality is repeatedly constructed within the narrative in opposition to civilization, the inhibited, provincial, middle-class community of Huesca is presented as a place where sexual difference, and therefore virility/potency, is reduced. This lack of difference extends to all aspects of life, resulting in the bland mediocrity of a Spain (and a Europe) where everyone is the same. This can be seen, for example, in Desideria's description of one of Yamam's business associates, portrayed as embodying a rather unattractive series of half measures: "Era un francés típico: medio rubio, medio calvo, medio gordo; engreído y completamente seguro de su *charme* y su *glamour*" (226).

Desideria's boredom and her desire for something or someone "different" has its echo on the national level, for social analysts in the 1990s frequently conceptualize modern Spain's post-Franco, post-transition development as a movement towards homogeneity, or loss of difference. Francesc Mercadé describes Spain as being in a process of homogenization:

España sigue siendo una mezcla apasionante de tradición y modernidad. Las nuevas tecnologías conviven con los bueyes y el arado,

las grandes ciudades sumidas en el individualismo y el anonimato se sitúan frente a pueblos recónditos en los que persisten las tradiciones más antiguas. Tal como veremos, los cambios culturales y los medios de comunicación acabarán—en algún momento no lejano—con estas diferencias [...]. (572)

He also characterizes modern Spanish society, in terms not dissimilar from those in *La pasión turca*, as being dominated by “el desencanto, la atonía y quizá el aburrimiento” (579). Similarly, in regard to literary trends, Paul Ilie refers to the period from 1975-1990 as “la época amorfa” (38), a formlessness perceived as a crisis of identity, imagination and creativity at a national and cultural level (Mercadé 579).

What, then, is the solution proposed in the novel for Desideria’s dissatisfaction and Spain’s crisis of sameness and difference? Within the narrative, Western European civilization is placed in direct opposition to the animal forces of the body, sexual potency and fertility. In one telling quotation the narrator explicitly associates sexuality (and the sexual body) with non-European cultures, and specifically with Africa:

Yo conozco mejor que otras mujeres la incompatibilidad de una vida regulada, modelo, o al menos razonable, con la violencia del reclamo del sexo, con *su vorágine africana, irracional y sudorosa*. (emphasis added 131)

Exotic lands, perceived as less civilized and therefore closer to animal nature and the body, provide a space to rediscover sexual desire. Hence, when Desideria and her friends travel first to Egypt, then to Syria and finally to Turkey, they discover that these “Eastern” lands serve as aphrodisiacs.

On all three occasions these countries are presented as older, wiser, more sensual and embodied than the provincial Spain with which the couples are familiar.

In her visits to these countries, Desideria feels a racial or genetic affinity with their peoples, accompanied by an increasing consciousness of her own body. It is almost as if contact with the Orient and, more specifically, the Islamic Orient, causes her body to materialize.²⁶ The fact that this bond is linked to Spain’s Moorish heritage is stated explicitly in the text:

Yo notaba algo decisivamente fraterno en aquel viaje. Como si los árabes andaluces murmuraran dentro de mis venas incomprensibles oraciones. Nada muere del todo; el olvido no existe. Creí entonces, y hoy, lo sigo creyendo, que *estamos hechos de lo que en apariencia olvidamos* [...]. (emphasis added 77)

Through her travels in these countries, Desideria reestablishes a connection with a lost, forgotten or repressed part of herself: her “Moorish”/sexual body.

On a symbolic level, Spain too connects with that lost or apparently forgotten part of itself. Just as Desideria sees the “family resemblance” between herself and the peoples of the Middle East, so too is the Spanish nation mirrored at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, as is made evident in the following comment regarding Syria:

Desde un extremo del Mediterráneo volábamos al otro extremo. Desde una tierra que es el rabo sin desollar de Europa y que tiene tanto de África, volábamos [...] a otra tierra, también al borde de Europa y en el dintel de Asia. De nuestras mezquitas transformadas en catedrales

volábamos a sus catedrales transformadas en mezquitas. De nuestro amontonamiento de culturas, al suyo. (75)

In this passage, emphasis is explicitly placed on the geographical, historical, and cultural similarities between Spain and Syria: both in liminal positions between continents, both with a history of religious conversion (albeit in mirror image) and cultural layering. Spain is also described as “el rabo sin desollar de Europa,” implying that, despite its connection with Europe, Spain is not yet skinned for consumption by that continent due to its continued strong links with Africa.²⁷ This passage hints in a veiled fashion at Spain’s difference from Europe, to suggest that Spain too has, or has had, the capacity to access the power of the body, just as Desideria does. This residual potency is explicitly attributed in the text to the repressed traces of its Arab past.

However, it is neither Egypt nor Syria that provides Desideria’s definitive contact with the sexual body of the Other, Yamam, but rather Turkey. Also on the border between Europe and Asia,²⁸ Turkey is constructed as a place where Western European sensual and sexual fantasies are fulfilled, fantasies explicitly fostered by Yamam, the tour guide:

El café, el sorbete, la otomana, el diván y las pasas son inventos turcos. ¿Y quién no ha oído nombrar, o no ha probado, las delicias turcas? Nuestros baños, señores, son famosos en el mundo entero [...]. Cuando ustedes aún estaban en la oscuridad de la Edad Media, nosotros vivíamos en un mundo de placeres y voluptuosidades [...]. (97-98)

Yamam will not only lead the tourists through the exotic landscapes of Turkey but will also guide Desideria to the discovery of the exalted sexual capacity of her own body, given that he is an expert in the arts of erotic pleasure. In this way the meeting of the two characters and two countries or cultures becomes a union of mind and body, of self and other, a fantasy of total completion for the Western partner.²⁹

Desideria falls in love with Yamam, as the very incarnation of virility who magically endows her new-found body with meaning:

Hay un valle cerca de Cavusin en que lo obligado es ver *chimeneas de las hadas*, y yo sólo vi falos [...]. Avanzaba por un mundo en estado de gracia, que era bello, recién estrenado y mágico porque surgía bajo la vara de prestidigitador de Yamam [...]. (110)

Yamam’s phallic power—his “magic wand”—is such that he, unlike Ramiro, can impregnate Desideria, although he will not allow her to carry a pregnancy to full term.³⁰ A fetishized figure of masculine potency, he is uniquely virile and irreplaceable in her eyes. In fact, it is emphasized that his very name, Yamam, means “el único.”

Such an obsession is in line with Louise Kaplan’s description of the woman afflicted with *Horigkeit* (sexual bondage) who lives only for her moments of ecstatic sexual union in which the man’s mighty phallus confirms the outlines of her feminine self. The woman can only find pleasure in a fantasy of being part of a more powerful personality, that is, when she is encircled by her lover’s phallic aura (Kaplan 215-16). The idea of being completely penetrated

by her lover is clearly present in Desideria's narrative, as for example in the following quotation:

Y de arriba abajo mi cuerpo está
traspasado por él; mis orejas, mis ro-
dillas, mis párpados, mis muslos, mis
nalgas, mis poros, todos los orificios,
por pequeños que sean, lo reciben y
lo acogen. (313)³¹

Examples of such dramatic assertions abound throughout the novel, reflecting the degree of obsession that the narrator feels.

Having shown how Desideria's narrative reflects the perverse scenario of sexual bondage, I now wish to turn to examine in what way the figure of Yamam can be considered to be a fetish and by what process of displacement he (and Turkey) comes to stand for this lost part of Spanish culture. The fact that Turkey itself is so physically absent from the narrative suggests, perhaps, that Turkey is a symbolic narrative space, a placeholder representing something else.³² The symbolic choice of Yamam and Turkey as the fetish object can be attributed to a number of factors. As Goytisolo states, from 1453 on—around the same time the Moors of Spain are eliminated as a threat to Christian culture—the Turks, Istanbul and the Ottoman empire become particular sources of fascination for Europe, replacing the Moors as the embodiment of the Islamic Other in European eyes (*Estambul* 9).³³ Turkey's historical development runs in parallel to that of Spain, constituting the centre of an Islamic empire at the other end of the Mediterranean, mirroring imperial Spain and also the lost Arab kingdom in Spain. The evidence for reading modern Turkey as a placeholder for Moorish Spain in the novel is underscored by the fact that Yamam's name is not Turkish but Arab. As fetish object, Yamam both is and is not what he seems.

In short, then, the power of masculine sexual difference that the Europeanized Desideria perceives as lost but desires so ardently is associated specifically with the Islamic culture of Turkey and her ability to connect with it and become powerful comes, as has been shown, from her hidden Arab/Moorish heritage. Thus, by extension, the text seems to suggest that the "masculine" (African) vigor and difference or uniqueness that modern Spain lacks may hinge upon the recuperation of that part of Spain's cultural identity repudiated in 1492. On this level, then, *La pasión turca* acts out a disavowal of that repudiation. In addition, in the context of the imagery deployed in the novel, it attempts to reinforce the connection between Spain and its Islamic past to maintain its difference and stave off the threat of "skinning" by Europe referred to earlier.

However, as the novel progresses, it is clear that there is no happy ending and that the relationship between the protagonists is driven by a dynamic of conquest and power, of desire and hostility on both sides. For Desideria, now fully connected with the body, Yamam is a fleshly terrain to explore and conquer. She observes that her efforts to dominate and absorb him through sexual union threaten Yamam's virile difference, feminizing him:³⁴

Comprendo que Yamam haya lle-
gado a sentir por mí [...] cierta
antipatía, en el sentido liberal de la
palabra. Él ha de verse, por turco y
por machista, como si fuese la mujer
de la pareja. (249)

This leads him to push her away. As a result, Desideria fights harder to recover her lost territory, a struggle narrated in terms of a violent reconquest:

Tengo que reconquistar a sangre y fuego; emplear la máquina de placer que es el cuerpo de Yamam hasta sus últimos engranajes. [...]. Yo era la agente, la invasora, la mantis religiosa, es decir, la devoradora. (334)

While such language has a strong cultural resonance in the context, recalling Catholic Spain's *reconquista*, here it is played out in terms of the interplay of dominance and submission of sexual bondage.

That Desideria's desire to dominate Yamam is linked to the convergence of modern Europe can be seen in Yamam's comment with regard to a Europe that both attracts and threatens:

Europa es una advenediza que engulle todo lo que se le acerca: una boa constrictor. Ya verás tú dónde acaba la esencia de lo español dentro de nada. Cuando todos allí seáis iguales, te juro que todos seréis mucho peores. (174-75)

In *La pasión turca*, then, both Europe and Desideria are cast as desirable but insatiable women, wanting to absorb the virile East into their sameness.

However, while Europe threatens that part of Spain which is different (its Eastern component), the Orient too threatens the West. Turkey's vision of the West is described to Desideria in a manner that emphasizes the threat and hostility of the Other:

Sentimos fascinación por Occidente, pero no te fíes, porque es mayor nuestra aversión hacia él [...]. De ambigüedades estamos hechos, no lo olvidas. (145-46)

As can be seen in his abusive behavior towards her, Yamam does indeed consti-

tute a threat to Desideria's physical and emotional integrity. Desiring each other's difference, the protagonists's relationship also threatens them and the novel offers no sense of a possible peaceful coexistence between the two.

The dynamic of the relationship between Desideria and Yamam—one of “feminine” insatiability pitted against masculine phallic independence in a struggle for dominance—has its parallel in the relationship between Europe and Spain, between Occident and Orient, with Spain in a sense occupying both sides on different occasions.³⁵ In relation to Yamam, Desideria is the West, representing the threat of Christian Spain to Islamic Spain in historical terms, and also the engulfing threat of a homogeneous Europe. As Spain in relation to an increasingly homogeneous Europe, however, she represents a connection with that Eastern element, “the uniqueness” of Spain which is in its turn threatened by absorption into Europe. This struggle is played out in the novel as one of life and death, of historical and economic presence and absence, of sameness and difference.³⁶

The narrative conflict between the protagonists is resolved by the arrival of the Authorities, in the figure of Pablo Acosta, an Interpol agent and childhood friend of Desideria. As a member of the pan-European police force, Acosta confronts Desideria with evidence of Yamam's criminal activity and offers to take her back to Spain with him. She postpones her response for one day and there her narrative ends. The epilogue of the novel, based on Acosta's testimony, informs us that Desideria has committed suicide for reasons that he assumes to be related to Yamam's rejection of her. Desideria is relegated to a feminized position of silence, losing her narrative voice to the point

where even her last words in her suicide note are illegible. The only way of restoring order within the narrative is to give Desideria what she desired: loss of self, which equals death. What Desideria sought in love—a complete fusion of self and other—is revealed as only feasible in annihilation of the self. Thus, the novel ends in a permanent separation between the figures representing East and West, the conservatism of the ending implying that the forces unleashed with the contact between Orient and Occident have proved too dangerous for Europeans. Despite being presented so unappetizingly at the beginning of the novel, the work ethic and economic convenience of middle-class marriage and the bland sameness of Europe now seem to serve as a safeguard, protecting Western civilization from the threatening allure of the “different” Eastern other.

At first, *La pasión turca* seems to offer a dissenting view to that which endorses Spain's entry into Europe, suggesting that “real” wholeness for Spain may not lie in the arms of an emasculating, insatiable Europe where economic power comes at the price of national individuality. Running throughout the text there is a discernable anxiety articulated about the price being paid for Spain's modernity: the elimination of its “residual” difference, as symbolized by Spain's Moorish past. Such a difference, Goytisolo (and others) have suggested, is key to Spanish identity,³⁷ giving it a supposedly unique role in the modern world and in Europe, as seen in the passages previously cited from Spain's foreign policy reports. At the same time, a determinedly European focus on the part of the government threatens to cut Spain off from those Eastern/African roots, emasculating it even further. Through the figure of Desideria, Spain can be read as fantasizing about rediscovering its identity in the fe-

tishized East, the repository of lost national difference, enacting a fantasy of disavowal of what is implied to be a national castration.³⁸ As *La pasión turca* moves towards its conclusion, however, it is clear that union with the Eastern other is a very ambivalent and ultimately unsustainable fantasy. It is not possible to recuperate this always-already lost element of national identity in any other form than a fetish image (which both covers and marks the original loss). By killing off the protagonist, resolving the extreme confusion of gender boundaries in the only way possible, the ending of *La pasión turca*, I suggest, unconsciously highlights the fundamentally conservative and destructive nature of such perverse scenarios.

In addition to being a best-selling novel of erotic obsession, *La pasión turca* also clearly taps into concerns with the issue of how Spain's modern identity is constituted. Is Spain part of the East through its Moorish heritage or of the West through its connection with Europe? More to the point, what is the nature of Spain's Moorish heritage, presented in the novel as a fantasy of sexual difference and empowerment? Is the Islamic past (whatever it be) a threat to Spanish identity or an advantage to be used as a springboard to a new position of world importance? *La pasión turca* reflects an ambivalence readily visible in contemporary Spanish discourse related to the Islamic world, both past and present, embodying many issues that are still being debated over a decade later, with even greater reason.

Spain's relationship to al-Andalus, then, is not merely historical nor simply a fascination with the exotic. There seems to be a general sense that Spain's current relationship with the Islamic world, both inside and outside its borders, cannot be separated from its past relationship with

the Islamic world in the form of the Moors of al-Andalus, whether they be perceived as purveyors of culture and brilliance or as brutal aggressors who destroyed the most glorious culture in medieval Europe.³⁹ It is no coincidence that such a focus on Spain's Moorish past is coming to the fore at the same time as the increasing integration into Europe and constitutes, I argue, at least a partial contestation of this vision of Spain's identity.

The Spanish government, by reclaiming the nation's supposed Islamic heritage and, thus, a cultural commonality with Islamic nations because of this shared past, justifies Spain's assumption of a greater role in the Southern Mediterranean, presenting itself as a bridge between the other European nations and the Islamic nations of the region. Thus politicians would seem to be asserting political agency via a particular vision of Spain's past. Where Desideria acquires sexual power through her obsession with Yamam, Spain, as a nation, seeks to acquire new protagonism and agency through recognition of these historical links with Islam. Represented within the text by Eastern/North African countries, Spain's Moorish heritage is posited, at least initially, as providing the answer to this crisis of desire and identity, both for Desideria and the nation. Media and political discourses deploy a similar concept of Oriental "difference" to that which gives Desideria access to sexual difference and the body in Gala's novel. However, as my analysis of the novel has revealed, this "difference" is based on a highly dubious Orientalist fantasy of domination and power. Nevertheless, these questions and the tensions they raise unconsciously subtend Gala's *La pasión turca*, making it a fascinating example of the ways in which best-selling fiction can tune into and reflect broader socio-historical issues.

Notes

¹ I wish to thank the *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores* of Spain and the *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional* for awarding me a Beca para Hispanistas MAE-AECI in 2004. This scholarship was instrumental in permitting me to carry out much of the research for this article and for my on-going project. I am also grateful for the assistance of Dr. Christine Arkinstall of the University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand for her invaluable advice and encouragement.

² Opinions have ranged from those espoused by Américo Castro, the Generation of '98, Claudio Sánchez Albornoz (a poisoning of the essence of Spain's true nature), Juan Goytisolo (an essential part of Spain's identity), and Serafín Fanjul (a cataclysmic social and political event), to cite but a few. Equally vigorously debated is the role of the Hispanic Jewish Community.

³ Examples of how the *moriscos* are seen to be relevant to present-day political issues include the way in which Juan Goytisolo, in the prologue to Francisco Márquez Villanueva's *El problema morisco (desde otras laderas)* (1998) creates a direct link between the expulsion of the *moriscos* in the early Seventeenth century and the first Gulf War with its "mecanismos exculpatorios del recurso a la violencia" (xv-xvi, xvii). Seven years later, José Miranda in his 1998 introduction to *La expulsión de los moriscos* states that "el planteamiento del problema morisco no es un simple ejercicio de nostalgia: ofrece, al revés, una candente actualidad," relating it to "[l]a ola de xenofobia que recorre Europa" (9).

⁴ The most recent events of international impact are the first Gulf War in 1991, the *coup d'état* in Algeria in 1992 (fending off the possibility of a Islamic fundamentalist victory in the polls), the world-wide rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, with the subsequent discovery of the Spanish Al-Qaeda connection. Spain's subsequent participation in the Bush administration's "war on terror," the Aznar government's political and military support for the invasion of Iraq, subject of massive public protests throughout Spain, and, of course, the

more recent bomb attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004 have all contributed to raising the profile of Islam-related issues, both past and present, in the public domain.

⁵ Fanjul stresses that this figure does not include professional academic studies. The figures he cites come from María J. Viguera's "Arabismo y valoración de al-Andalus," *Actas I Simposio de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Árabes* (Salamanca 1994), Madrid 1995. Fanjul himself has contributed two books to this trend in the last four years: the first is *Al-Andalus contra España. La forja de un mito*, first published in 2000 and into its fifth edition by 2004 (an indication of the topicality of its subject matter), and the second is *La quimera de Al-Andalus*, published in 2004.

⁶ Subirats refers specifically to the more literary works of Juan Goytisolo and Carme Riera. However my own investigations have uncovered a long list of historical novels which deal specifically with issues of the place and role of these cultures in Spanish history. These include works by Pedro Jesús Fernández, José Luis Corral Lafuente, Jesús Sánchez Adalid, Matilde Asensi and Magdalena Lasala, amongst others.

⁷ I first came to study *La pasión turca* in the context of research into what I call transvestite narratives, that is to say narratives written from perspective of a first-person narrator of the opposite sex to the author. For reasons of space, it is impossible to detail my thesis here; however, in brief, I argue that such narratives represent a transvestite-like dressing up in the words of the opposite sex and as such often embody a similar oscillation between sameness and difference as that observed in the psychological perversion of fetishism. Additionally such narratives frequently feature depictions of psychosexual perversions, as is the case with *La pasión turca*. For more on this link between fetishistic transvestism and narrative, see my article on Cristina Peri Rossi's masculine first-person narration: "Mothers, Muses and Male Narrators: Narrative Transvestism and Metafiction in Cristina Peri Rossi's *Solitario de amor*."

⁸ Such is Gala's public association with *andalusí* culture that he is singled out by Fanjul

(along with Juan Goytisolo) for especially virulent criticism for being "andaluz de profesión" (*Al-Andalus* 108).

⁹ Although *Granada de los Nazaríes* is a non-fiction description of the city in question under the rule of the Nazarí dynasty, I include it as it reflects an obvious interest in things "andaluz."

¹⁰ Miguel García Posada, in a critical review in 1993, refers to the novel rather scathingly as "un best-seller culto" (8) and suggests that the novel is deliberately positioned in such a way. In fact, *La pasión turca* constitutes an interesting example of what Bridget Fowler calls the "middle brow" romance. Such texts, while featuring representations of an unsubordinated female sexuality and thus serving to rupture the patriarchal order, are placed within wider controlling narratives that normalise their deviance (97). As such, she argues, they can present a more complex and ambiguous vision of the reality they describe than is usually thought (89).

¹¹ In his prologue to *La quimera de al-Andalus*, Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada commends Fanjul for debunking what he calls:

los tópicos, falsedades y supercherías de diverso género con que hoy se nos pretende convencer sobre las herencias islámicas de España y la antigua 'convivencia' entre musulmanes y cristianos en suelo peninsular. (xi)

¹² According to some observers, "[t]he aspiration to identify with Europe and the EC became a central element of the political culture and discourse of democratization" and they refer to EU membership as being "the Spanish national project" (Closa and Heywood 15, 245).

¹³ I refer, of course, to Barcelona's hosting of the Games of the XXV Olympiad, the Expo 92 in Seville and Madrid being named the European City of Culture.

¹⁴ Graham and Sánchez view this lack of recognition as a failure to confront the realities of genocide and racism, both then and now (416).

¹⁵ The "nacionalismo" Fanjul refers to here is that of Andalucía. It can thus be seen that in fact Fanjul is using his work on the Islamic heritage of Spain as a means of attacking the growing autonomy of Spain's autonomous regions.

¹⁶ Javier Jordán Enamorado states that, [l]a correcta integración de las comunidades e individuos en nuestra sociedad, que respete al mismo tiempo su especificidad propia, constituye un decisivo ejercicio de multiculturalidad y de convivencia" and is "un desafío todavía no resuelto. (137)

The failure to address issues related to immigration satisfactorily has been perceived as having catastrophic consequences. According to Pedro Canales and Enrique Montánchez, writing even before the Madrid bombing of March 11, 2004,

la inmigración magrebí en toda Europa se ha convertido en el caldo de cultivo ideal para el reclutamiento de combatientes islámicos. España no escapa a esta regla, con el agravante de la precariedad de estructuras de acogida y de inexperiencia por parte de la integración cultural de los inmigrantes. (64)

¹⁷ For example, an article published in *El País* in September 1992 reporting the election of an Arab mayor in a town in Seville apparently warranted the headline "La reconquista de Al-Andalus" (Carrasco). Marco Kunz also critiques in his survey of representations of immigration and immigrants in contemporary Spanish literature, "[el] anacronismo inherente a las comparaciones de la inmigración Africana actual con la 'invasión' árabe de 711" (127) and shows that even works sympathetic to the plight of the immigrant, such as Andrés Sorel's *Las voces del Estrecho* (2000) can fall into that trap (117).

¹⁸ Canales and Montánchez refer to a theory that:

Marruecos acosa a España, por ejemplo en el caso de las ciudades de Ceuta y Melilla en una primera fase, del Levante español y el antiguo territorio de al-Andalus en una segunda, con intención deliberada. Este acoso está destinado a reconquistar las ciudades españolas

situadas en el norte de Marruecos, a reislamizar España y Europa, a enriquecer los clanes que dominan el poder marroquí por medio del control y la perennidad del tráfico de hachís. (64)

¹⁹ This aversion is well documented: Juan Goytisolo refers to the "[r]echazo atávico al moro" ("Américo Castro" 30), while Irene Andrés-Suárez also presents the view that it is the *magrebí* immigrants, and particularly the Moroccans, who "suscita[n] mayor rechazo entre los españoles" (15).

²⁰ César Vidal, for example, presents Islam as a threat to "nuestra supervivencia como cultura" (17). His text seems to be aimed at justifying a hostile attitude towards the Islamic world of the twenty-first century and he makes repeated comments to the effect that:

la mezcla de debilidad y apaciguamiento frente al islam se ha traducido siempre en feroces ofensivas musulmanas de trágicas, y no pocas veces irreversibles, consecuencias para la civilización occidental. El gobierno de Almazor sólo iba a ser una manifestación más de tan dramático aserto. (140)

Indeed, the whole of Vidal's book seemed designed to justify the policies of the Aznar government towards the Islamic world.

²¹ Closa and Heywood confirm this focus of Spanish foreign policy: "Spain has been Europe's most committed proponent of an EU policy of political, social and economic cooperation with the Mediterranean" (225).

²² In this analysis I am primarily dealing with fetishism as a purely psychosexual phenomenon. However, as Anne McClintock stresses in *Imperial Leather*, this definition has been superimposed upon other definitions of the fetish as a religious term and as an economic one (commodity fetishism) (Ch. 4). For discussions of these aspects of fetishism, see Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen's *Female Fetishism* or Emily Apter and William Pietz's *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*.

²³ In psychoanalytic theory a “perversion” is clinically defined as the deferral or deviance of the sexual instinct, either in its object or its aim, from the norm of reproductive sexuality (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 392). Teresa de Lauretis states that:

Freud’s theory contains or implies, if by negation and ambiguity, a notion of perverse desire, where perverse means not pathological but rather non-heterosexual or non-normatively heterosexual. (xiii)

Thus, perversions also include homosexuality, exhibitionism, voyeurism, narcissism, sadism, masochism and paedophilia (Rycroft 116). Other texts specifically on the issue of female perversions also include in the list kleptomania, self-mutilation, sexual bondage (Kaplan) as well as the several kinds of food fetishism (Gamman and Makinen).

²⁴ A full elaboration of the way in which I have developed my view of the theory of fetishism is not feasible in this context, however for more on this topic see Freud’s essay “Fetishism,” (1927), Jacques Lacan’s further development of the concept of primary castration (Ragland-Sullivan “Primary Castration”), Luce Irigaray’s expansion on Lacan’s work (Bronfen 34), Teresa de Lauretis’s work on lesbian fetishism in *The Practice of Love. Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, and Kaplan’s *Female Perversions*, amongst many other works. For a fuller treatment of fetishism in relation to narrative see my forthcoming book to be published with Edwin Mellen.

²⁵ Desideria’s father is represented to be an ineffectual man in the dying profession of candlemaking (40); her former history teacher is a broken man who did not have the nerve to follow his heart when he had the opportunity (60); Pablo Acosta, the bold Interpol agent, fails to save the woman he loves (344); Arturo, a paediatrician, fails to save Desideria’s dying baby (162); even Ivan, Desideria’s one-night stand in Madrid, turns a casual sexual encounter into hard work (232-33). Nor is Desideria’s French lover, Denis, especially virile.

²⁶ The close link between this bond with the Arab world and the body is made explicit when

Desideria looks in the mirror and ponders the origin of her facial features, as if seeing them for the first time:

Antes de acostarme me miraba en el espejo del baño en los hoteles, y me interrogaba: ¿de dónde vienen estos ojos oscuros, este pliegue tan singular de los párpados, esta boca tan voraz, este pelo negrísimo, este furor por seguir viva a pesar de todos los pesares? (77)

²⁷ The image of skinning graphically conveys a sense of the formlessness resulting from the removal of the boundaries which separate the body and the world, self and other. Loss of borders (skin) equates to vulnerability and the loss of difference that entry into Europe would entail. However, Spain is not yet completely skinned. The phallic nature of the image is also worthy of note.

²⁸ The positioning of Turkey as a threshold is emphasized in the text when Desideria, finding herself on the harbour facing the city of Istanbul, cites the well-known verses from José de Espronceda’s “Canción del pirata”: “Y ve el capitán pirata,/ cantando alegre en la popa,/Asia a un lado, al otro Europa/y allá a su frente Estambul” (283).

²⁹ There is, of course, little new in this representation of Turkey (or any other Eastern country) as Europe’s exotic other. As Edward Said maintains, the East is, to European eyes, “the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). The Orient, he argues, also suggests sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire and deep regenerative energies (188), and is conceived of as a source of sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. While Said is here referring to the attitudes of past centuries, it is clear from Gala’s text that such images are still powerful ones in the European sexual and socio-cultural imaginary. Such views are also expressed repeatedly in the historical novels set in the period of the Arab presence in Spain. These novels feature almost obligatory descriptions of sumptuous banquets, sensual luxury, and hedonistic delights. See, for example, the novels

of Magdalena Lasala, José Corral Lafuente, and others. Fanjul, in *La quimera de al-Andalus* dedicates a chapter to the historical novel set in al-Andalus, arguing that they are:

un pastiche donde se mezclan sistemas de valores, ideologías y hasta formas de expresión lingüística de nuestra contemporaneidad con una superestructura de nombres exóticos y un cauce argumental que sigue, más o menos, el hilo de los sucesos históricos. (119)

³⁰ There can be no real offspring from this relationship for it is ultimately sterile and a dead end.

³¹ In Kaplan's view, it is not the sexual pleasure that binds such a woman to her lover but the lover's ingenuity in creating a situation of submission and dominance (216). The feminine submissiveness covers up for other hidden powerful drives and ambitions perceived as property of the masculine and, at the same time, serves to appease the punishing Other for those ambitions. Indeed, as Kaplan argues, the woman's pride in her enslavement to her lover makes everyone else impotent and in this way the woman attains a castrating power over others (231).

³² With the exception of two passages, related almost as snapshot images (138), Turkey itself fades into the background. The principal setting of the text is the interior of Yamam's flat in Istanbul, where Desideria writes in harem-like seclusion.

³³ Indeed, the contact between the *moriscos* of Spain and the Ottoman authorities is one of the principal reasons given by commentators for the final expulsion of the *moriscos* from Spain in 1614.

³⁴ It is characteristic of the dynamics of fetishism that gender boundaries (markers of difference) are blurred, as they are continually throughout the novel. Desideria, although corresponding in some of her characteristics to misogynist stereotypes of woman (her sexual insatiability, her vanity and her passive acquiescence in the face of male abuse), is also para-

doxically positioned in the traditional place of the masculine. Active in her desiring—if not in her own self-interest—she symbolises Western European civilization, possessing the analytical skills, education and narrative rationality the novel presents as being characteristic of the masculine. The same blurring of gender roles and characteristics is evident in the portrayal of Yamam. Although represented as the hyper-masculine phallus of the East, Yamam is consistently placed in a hierarchically inferior position and “feminized” according to the patriarchal logic that dominates the text. As a European, Desideria sees herself as being of higher social and racial status and, therefore, in a position of dominance in terms of class and education, as is evident in the way she delights in tripping Yamam up in his arguments (173).

³⁵ Again, Spain/Desideria is placed in alternately masculine and feminine roles.

³⁶ Appropriately, the vehemence and violence of the struggle between the protagonists in the novel has a parallel in the increasingly heated debate around the issue of Spain's Moorish and *morisco* past. It also reflects the tensions of the debate as to where Spain belongs and the nature of its identity.

³⁷ “[L]a originalidad de la cultura española estriba precisamente en el hecho de ser producto de un vasto crisol de aportaciones e influencias romano-visigóticas y semitas” (“Américo Castro” 33). This is also contested territory however, as others argue that Spain is not in fact unique in this respect and that the same mix of cultures and religions has been documented in other places and at other times. These critics perceive the desire for uniqueness as obsessive navel-gazing on the part of Spanish cultural commentators (Fanjul, *Quimera* 3).

³⁸ It is debatable as to whether this symbolic use of Turkey could be continued past Turkey's own entry into the European Union, which, in the logic of the narrative, would constitute its own emasculation.

³⁹ For José Vicente Niclós Albarracín, los árabes se perciben hoy como gentes que dotan a sus ciudades de

España de una existencia brillantes e intensa, aúna el modo de vida del guerrero con la mentalidad del filósofo. (16)

Conversely, for Vidal, they were the destroyers of: una cultura floreciente, pujante y fecunda que se sustentaba en un sistema educativo ya en vigor desde el siglo V y que, a la sazón, carecía de paralelos en el Occidente que antaños había sido romano. (73)

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