I would like to begin on a personal note. The first time I saw Madrid was in the summer of 1970, during the Franco dictatorship. I did not return until 1978. Franco had been dead for nearly three years, and the country was transitioning into democratic governance. The outward changes, I remember, were startling. Pornographic magazines openly on display at newspaper stands, x-rated movie theaters, widespread drug use, street crime, yes, but also a renewed vitality and energy that eventually coalesced into something called the Movida in the 1980s. This was very much a local happening at first, which then spread to other Spanish cities. Literally “the action” or a “commotion,” the Movida was a somewhat frenetic, cultural underground movement, largely centered on Spanish youth and an anarchically inclined artistic world, which the early films of Pedro Almodóvar depicted with splash and gusto.

After that, I went back every summer. But on one occasion, armed with a year-long research fellowship, I arrived in the dead of winter, on a day I would never forget, January 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1986. At Barajas Airport I dropped exhausted into a taxi. The radio was on, and from the announcer’s solemn voice I could tell that something big had happened. “What’s going on?” I asked. “The mayor died,” the taxi driver told me. This was Enrique Tierno Galván, the most popular mayor Madrid had ever seen, though an odd choice for such a role: an academic and intellectual, he had founded the clandestine Socialist Party of the Interior in 1967, which eventually merged in 1976 with the more powerful Socialist Workers Party (PSOE, one of the two major parties of Spain today) of Felipe González.\footnote{I knew Tierno Galván. He had been a visiting professor at Bryn Mawr College in 1969, when he gave a seminar on the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset. In those days he was a wandering scholar since the Franco regime had expelled him from the University of Salamanca for supporting student protests. I was a second-year graduate student, too full of myself to be properly awed by Tierno’s presence. The political atmosphere on American campuses was very tense in the late 1960s; I remember heated exchanges about Nixon and the Chicago Democratic Convention in my class on...}
Spanish poetry. The ideological clash I experienced in Tierno’s seminar, in our complete disagreement over Ortega y Gasset’s relationship to fascism, was no less intense if more cerebral. Tierno, or the Old Professor as he was affectionately called, never gave an inch in his belief that Ortega had fascist tendencies. Tierno was low-keyed, almost priestly in demeanor, but like steel in his convictions and in his arguments, always finely honed and subtle.

Years later, in 1985, we were in contact again, and on much friendlier terms. I wrote asking him if he would be interested in speaking at a symposium I was organizing. Amazingly, he said he would. But he never did. He was by then dying, only I didn’t know that. There was something strange in arriving on the day of his funeral. He had always been admirable in his opposition to the Franco regime, but now I felt that my respect for him, which had grown over the years, had taken on a poignancy I couldn’t altogether explain to myself.

I dumped my bags in the pensión and rushed back into the streets, joining the hundreds of thousands gathered to pay homage to Tierno. The winding funeral procession, which by some accounts approached half a million, was ten kilometers long, the silence of that immense crowd almost total. As we came to the Calle Mayor, the funeral coach slowly passed into view. Tierno was going in style. The carriage, of a late nineteenth-century French design, was pulled by six black horses, which I later learned had been borrowed from the Spanish film industry. The coach itself came from a Museum of Funerary Carriages in Barcelona. It was resplendently rococo, gorgeously fake-looking, and with an outrance that produced an odd sensation of the sentimentally incongruous and the obsolete. The horse-drawn funeral coach is traditional for royalty and figures of state, but Tierno Galván, as a socialist-Marxist (with libertarian leanings!), was unimpressed with rank. The elaborate funeral carriage is a sign of distinction, yet of an obsolete sort. Still, I suspect Tierno, who appreciated and even exploited on occasion the sense of the theatrical, would have enjoyed the faint whiff of absurdity in this scene, which seemed like something out of a movie. Tierno himself held a highly ambivalent position toward tradition. As mayor, he issued edicts, written in elegant, if ironic, seventeenth-century Castilian. Even as he modernized transport and reduced pollution, he also revived popular street festivals and courtyard theater in working-class neighborhoods.

Tierno was a thorough modern, yet strongly tied in his affections to tradition. Just as he had incarnated the opposition to Franco in an earlier period, as mayor of Madrid in the 1980s he symbolized the odd marriage of modernity and tradition that seemed to characterize the years of the transition toward democracy. He also understood Spain’s conflicted relationship with the past, clinging in particular to the provincial, traditional roots that have characterized the histories of so many Spaniards. Madrid, I would argue,
can equally be seen as both cosmopolitan and provincial. When Tierno was asked what it took “to be a successful mayor of a big city,” he replied, “you have to act like the mayor of a small town” (Darnton A2). To be modern in 1980s Spain, he seems to suggest, means to assume the hybrid role of provincial cosmopolitan. Certainly Tierno seems to have reinvented himself. The Madrid mayorship was widely regarded as a consolation prize for a man with high political ambitions, but Tierno turned it into something else. One observer put his finger on it when he spoke of “a veritable […] transmutation of personality, the assumption of a different and new personality” [verdadera (...) transmutación de personalidad, asunción de una personalidad distinta y nueva] (López Aranguren 26). In constructing a new persona as mayor of Madrid, Tierno in some ways was a living enactment of Spanish postmodernity, of living life as a perpetual performance. For many he became identified with the Movida, representing the revitalization of the capital and democratization of culture and urban life.

It could be argued that from the very beginning Madrid was ill-defined, even equivocally defined, continually creating an identity out of “nothing,” a constantly evolving identity in perpetual contradiction. The Movida spectacle of 1980s Madrid, under Tierno Galván’s mayorship, can also be seen, in some ways, as coming full circle back to the city as performance, recalling the spectacle of Monarchy that defined the capital as above all the royal Court. (Tierno’s funeral coach also reminds us of this earlier period.) But the beginnings of the city go back even farther. Madrid did not become the official Spanish Court until 1561. Before that, it was a nondescript, relatively unimportant place whose origin would ultimately become suspect. For ninth-century Madrid was Islamic, serving as a military post against Christian incursion and as a gateway to the Christian north. Its early name was Magerit or Mayrit, with a possible association to mayrat, meaning a water conduit. Eventually the Christians won the town, in their centuries-long Reconquest against the Moors, following the Arab invasion of 711. By the sixteenth century this earlier history was seen as undesirable, given the push to unify Spain as a Catholic country and the religious tensions of the period. Madrid’s Islamic past was either forgotten or erased, only to be rediscovered by archaeology. Thus, for example, the Royal Palace was built over the remains of a medieval alcázar, or Arab fortress.

In 1086, now Christian, the town had a population of approximately 12,000, mostly composed of non-noble social classes (artisans, merchants, peasants, and more marginal persons). By the fourteenth century, it had become a favorite residence of kings, though it was still neither capital nor court. The monarchy tended to be nomadic, moving from one city to another, from one palace to another. Philip II chose Madrid in 1561 as a permanent Court in part precisely because it was the geographical center of the country,
signaling the start of the modern era with the phrase: “Sólo Madrid es Corte,” that is, “Only Madrid is the Court.” Its first meaning is plain. City and Court are one: Madrid was “Villa y Corte.” There is only one Court, which is both royal and imperial. But the phrase also suggests that the Court alone was of importance, that Madrid was uniquely a royal Court and nothing more, as David Ringrose has observed (Juliá et al 164). This meant that the city, which grew to 80,000 by the end of the sixteenth century, led a political existence, depending entirely on the power of royal politics. Other European cities were similarly constructed, lacking their own autonomy. In a sixteenth-century treatise, Giovanni Botero wrote: “Wheresoever liveth the king [...] elevates all questions of import to such heights” (qtd. Ringrose, Juliá et al 165). Situating the Court at the geographical heart of Spain is both a symbolic and real act. In this period, for example, the king did not lead a procession but, rather, occupied the center. Those who were placed nearer to that center enjoyed more prestige and status (Ringrose, in Juliá et al 174). This center formed part of a symbolic map superimposed onto the real geography of Madrid.

As a royal Court, the city can be conceived in a ritualized manner, as a series of spectacles and scenarios befitting (and befitting) the royal presence. The city is used as a setting for the monarchy, and in this sense becomes almost magical, imaginary, although it is important to remember that there also existed a very real Madrid, the entire underclass of persons who served the monarchy. But everyone depended economically on the Crown. The artisans, servants (which were a third of the population, largely invisible), the troops, all were there because of the king. The monarchy generated a host of daily requirements, artisanal products, the consumption of things and the building of palaces, gates, and gardens. The capital existed by virtue of the Court, which thus sustained it.

Seventeenth-century Madrid was the scenario of absolutism and empire, an entire imaginary of social and ideological implications and a continual enactment of kingly authority, both real and imagined. The Old Regime everywhere, not simply in Spain, made use of imagery, adornment, and symbols as a kind of visual language, which created in Madrid’s case another city more fantastic than the real one, as Ringrose argues (Juliá et al 202, 233). By contrast, a visitor to Madrid in 1569 wrote:

I hold this city to be the filthiest and foulest of all Spanish cities, considering that the streets are nothing but huge urinals [...] immense urinals of shit, dumped into the streets, which produces an unbelievable, villainous stench [...] After ten o’clock, it is not pleasant to walk in the city, so much so, that from ten on, all you hear is the emptying of urinals and the hurling of garbage everywhere.

(qt. in Ringrose, Juliá et al 218).
The houses were squat wretched affairs, which were badly constructed; the narrow streets an open sewer. The typical diet for Madrid residents consisted of 500 to 600 grams of bread, a handful of chick peas or beans, two ounces of olive oil, and very little meat. The Baroque poet Quevedo wrote of Madrid:

Vi de pobres tal enjambre,
y una hambre tan cruel,
que la propia sarna en él
se está muriendo de hambre

[I saw such a swarm of the poor
and such cruel hunger
that even disease
is dying of hunger] (729).

Something of this dynamic between the real and the symbolic is played out in Velázquez’s celebrated painting, “Las Meninas,” or “The Ladies-in-Waiting.” The artist gives us a portrait of the Court, not of the city proper, but at the same time he suggests something of the phantasmatic quality of the monarchy by representing the king and queen as a reflection in a mirror, while apparently situating himself in the center of the painting, seeming to usurp the centrality of the royal couple. I say “seeming to usurp” since there is more than one focal point and the perspective is arguably that of the king and queen, viewing the painting from beyond the frame. Moreover, the scene’s theatricality shows the Court as a kind of performance, a daily spectacle, sharply aware of its public or, here, viewers. And finally, Velázquez includes in the painting members of society who were normally invisible (though not to the Court itself): the dwarfs. The play of illusion and reality in the work reinforces the impression of spectacle as the product of artistic self-reflection and thereby challenges the notion of a single source of power (monarchy) through the artist’s own creative power, while at the same time underlining the inescapable, if shadowy, nature of kingly power itself.

By contrast, in the early nineteenth century, two paintings by Goya, “The 2nd of May” and “The 3rd of May,” no longer paint the Court (though he also has paintings focused on this theme, notably “The Royal Family” and individual royal portraits) but the people themselves, ordinary people. Like Velázquez, Goya was a Court painter, but here he provides us with another reality: the capital as a political and historical fact, struggling against the French invader, Napoleon’s troops, in 1808. Here is the capital imagined as a national polis incarnated in its people, an idea that will continue evolving throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reaching its apex with the
II Republic and the Republican defense of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the presence of an aggressive foreign power (Napoleon’s forces) helped to shape what it meant to be a modern citizen of both Madrid and Spain.

This political concept of Madrid as the heart of the nation was tirelessly promoted by the writer Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, who wrote not only sketches of contemporary customs largely focused on Madrid but also tour guides and manuals of the capital. Madrid remained small and provincial until the mid-nineteenth century, when an uneven process of modernization, coupled with significant demographic changes, began to transform its urban landscape, as more and more people from the countryside flocked to cities in search of work. Madrid, Mesonero Romanos said, “es para mí un libro inmenso, un teatro animado, en que cada día encuentro nuevas páginas que leer, nuevas y curiosas escenas que observar” [is for me an immense book, a lively theater, in which each day I find new pages to read, new and curious scenes to observe] (315). Here are two images of key significance: the idea of the capital as something readable, like a book, and the idea of a spectacle, of something visible and arguably performative, like an animated theater. A third element found in his observation focuses on newness (new pages, new and curious scenes to observe), in itself a sign of the incipient modernity that would eventually accelerate and turn into the disturbed dreams of relentless change.

Mesonero reminds us too that a city, especially a capital, is generally seen as a symbolic center, where the vitality of a nation, in all its political, cultural, social, and economic manifestations, is concentrated. Mesonero, with his progressive vision of Madrid, was probably the first modern writer to conceive the capital, still the royal Court at this time as well, as a national project. Before the nineteenth century it is hard to find this kind of idealizing and politically progressive vision of the city. In imagining the city as a series of texts, Mesonero suggests that the capital is a great screen or scenario of possibilities that we invent as we go along—in effect, that the beginnings of modern life come out of the city as an image and myth of that same modernity (see also Parsons). This view of the city is characteristic of the age of romanticism, full of vitality and confident of the creativity and resourcefulness of individuals and society alike. Such idealism was ultimately the dynamo behind both material progress and culture in the nineteenth century.

But it was not the only image of Madrid being disseminated in the 1830s. Mesonero’s compatriot, Mariano José de Larra, one of the great essayists of the period and a disillusioned liberal, saw the capital city in very different terms, with a far darker and more ironic vision of Madrid. It is helpful to remember that 1830s Spain was a tumultuous period of civil war and great
political instability. In one of his most powerful essays, “El día de difuntos de 1836” [The Day of the Dead, 1836], Larra contemplates the permanent state of melancholy into which liberals like himself had fallen. He says, if once I was perpetually astonished by the things I perceived around me, at this point nothing surprises me. Indeed, he writes, “Lo que sí me sucede es no comprender claramente todo lo que veo, y así es que al amanecer un día de difuntos no me asombra precisamente que haya tantas gentes que vivan; sucédeame, sí, que no lo comprendo” [what has really happened to me is that I do not understand clearly everything that I see, and so it was on All Souls’ Day, the day of the dead, for I awoke and was not exactly surprised to see so many people alive and well. I simply did not understand why in fact they were] (392-93).

As the citizens of Madrid customarily gather that day at the cemetery to remember the dead, Larra begins to imagine a different kind of city, a city populated not by the living but by the dead. “¿Dónde está el cementerio? [Where is the cemetery?],” he asks.

¿Fuera o dentro? Un vértigo espantoso se apoderó de mí, y comencé a ver claro. El cementerio está dentro de Madrid. Madrid es el cementerio. Pero vasto cementerio donde cada casa es el nicho de una familia, cada calle el sepulcro de un acontecimiento, cada corazón la urna cineraria de una esperanza o de un deseo.

[Outside or inside? A horrible vertigo took hold of me, and I began to see things clearly. The cemetery is inside Madrid. Madrid is the cemetery. A vast cemetery where every home is the burial niche of a family, every street the sepulcher of an event, every heart the funerary urn of a hope or a desire] (395).

And near the end, he surveys the enormous cemetery that Madrid has become and says,

Olia a muerte próxima. Los perros ladraban con aquel aullido prolongado, intérprete de su instinto agorero; el gran coloso, la inmensa capital, toda ella se movía como un moribundo que tantea la ropa; entonces no vi más que un gran sepulcro: una inmensa lápida se disponía a cubrirle como una ancha tumba.

[It smelled of death approaching. Dogs barked with that prolonged howl that speaks instinctively of death coming. The great colossus, the immense capital, all of it moved about like someone dying who’s desperately grasping at his bedclothes. I saw nothing but a great sepulcher; an immense tombstone in the process of covering it like a gaping grave] (399).

This image of the capital, which links Madrid’s illegible character to its
symbolic death, will come up repeatedly in later writers and contrasts strongly with Mesonero Romanos’ ability to read an ever-changing city.

Larra is not always so apocalyptic, though always critical. His talent for deflating pretension and incompetence through devastating irony also came in for its share of criticism. He was even accused of not being Spanish enough because of his French upbringing as a child and his perceived French-leaning tendencies (this at a time when anti-French feeling still ran high in Spain). In one of his best-known and characteristically biting essay-sketches, “Vuelva usted mañana” (1833) [Come Back Tomorrow], he creates a fictional Frenchman, Monsieur Sans-délai [Monsieur No Delay], who comes to Madrid on a business matter. Naively hoping to settle his affairs expeditiously, he wastes months in a tangled web of bureaucratic ineptitude and inertia. A frustrated appointment with one gentleman is the issue of this conversation:

—Vuelva usted mañana—nos respondió la criada—, porque el señor no se ha levantado todavía.
—Vuelva usted mañana—nos dijo al siguiente día—, porque el amo acaba de salir.
—Vuelva usted mañana—nos respondió al otro—, porque el amo está durmiendo la siesta.
—Vuelva usted mañana—nos respondió el lunes siguiente—, porque hoy ha ido a los toros.
—¿Qué día, a qué hora se ve a un español? (194) [“Come back tomorrow,” the maid answered, “because the gentleman has not gotten up yet.”
“Come back tomorrow,” she said the next day, “because the master has just left.”
“Come back tomorrow,” she told us the following day, “because he is taking a nap.”
“Come back tomorrow,” she told us the next Monday, “because the gentleman has gone to the bullfights.”
On what day and at what time can one get hold of a Spaniard?] (trans. in Ugarte 31-32, modified)

Like Montesquieu before him in The Persian Letters, Larra exploits the figure of the outsider, here, a Frenchman, in order to criticize the presumed idleness and incompetence of his fellow countrymen, but more specifically the notorious bureaucratic bungling of government. Madrid had a long history of administrative ineptitude, starting with Philip II’s obsession with record-keeping and worsening with Bourbon centralization.

In an analogous critique, the labyrinthine structure that government
and bureaucracy assumed during a period of decadence, the reign of the last Spanish Hapsburg, the feeble-minded, sickly Charles II the Bewitched (1661-1700), is imaginatively recreated in a twentieth-century story, “El Hechizado” (1949) by Francisco Ayala [The Bewitched]. The deeper we go into the story the more it turns into a maze, which is supposedly a seventeenth-century document relating a visit to the Hapsburg Court. As the manuscript metastasizes with pointless details and repetitions, it assumes “un informe crecimiento de tumor” (194) [the shapeless growth of a tumor] (100). The center of this tumorous excrescence which is the Spanish Court and bureaucracy turns out to be a slobbering, malformed idiot, Charles II. The narrative ends with these words:

Su Majestad quiso mostrarme benevolencia, y me dio a besar la mano; pero antes de que alcanzara a tomársela saltó a ella un curioso monito que alrededor andaba jugando, y distrajo su Real atención en demanda de caricias. Entonces entendi yo la oportunidad, y me retiré en respetuoso silencio (200).  
[As a token of his favor, His Majesty held out his hand to be kissed. But before I could take it a curious little monkey that had been playing nearby jumped upon it, and distracted His Highness’ attention by demanding to be petted. Then I understood that it was time, and in respectful silence I withdrew] (106-07).

Absolutely nothing happens in this story, and we never learn what the narrator’s mission was to the court. In truth, there is no “center,” only a vacuum of power. Yet it could be argued that the absence of a center, of power, imagined as a bewildering labyrinth, could be just as crushing as the abuse of power precisely because of its paralyzing stagnation, because you couldn’t get things done.

In Larra’s time, this is the underside of the capital as the symbolic center of the country, here as the administrative and political heart of centralization, ironically a model borrowed from the French. Even while most people resided in the provinces and provincial life largely defined Spanish society in the nineteenth century, Madrid was beginning to draw more and more people away from the life of small towns and the countryside. By the 1830s and 40s Madrid was also turning into a publishing Mecca for aspiring young writers from the provinces, although clearly the Court had always been a drawcard for courtiers, bureaucrats, merchants, and professionals, as well as writers. This is to say, much of Madrid’s population increasingly came from somewhere else.  

Most importantly, Larra’s humorous sketch also reveals that you could not avoid Madrid. If you wanted to get business done (to the extent you could), if you wanted to publish, if you wanted to get something done in your
hometown and it required government, you had to come to Madrid because everything that happened in the provinces was connected to what happened in the capital. The impact of Madrid on the provinces, however, was matched by an opposite movement: the provincialization of the capital itself, in part because of internal emigration, in part because of the intricate web of political and economic interests shared by the powerful and well-connected of both Madrid and the provinces. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, regionalist movements in Cataluña, Galicia, and elsewhere were also making new demands. It is one of the great ironies of Spanish constitutional practice that a parliament created to serve the needs of a centralized state ended up encouraging decentralizing, local movements, precisely because election results were arranged beforehand through local agents, or caciques. Under such a system of limited democracy controlled from above, that is from Madrid, the local notables found it much more advantageous to serve local interests rather than Madrid’s. The result was, as Ortega points out, the provincialization of Madrid, in which local politics from 1876 to 1900 came to act more and more independently of the central government. As Ortega observes, “Madrid se había olvidado de las provincias, y, como España era pura provincia, tenía por fuerza que resultar, en vez de una política ‘nacional,’ una política provinciana, localista y rural en el peor sentido de estos vocablos” [Madrid had forgotten the provinces, and as Spain was nothing but an immense province, what inevitably happened was not a ‘national’ policy, but a provincial one that was localist and rural in the worst sense of the word] (217).

Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century, Madrid, while still nominally a Court, had gone from being the center of empire and monarchy to being a capital city that concentrated administrative and political power yet struggled to represent effectively and symbolically the very nation it presumably led. Until mid-nineteenth century, Madrid remained small and provincial. For Larra, it was a vast cemetery of dashed hopes and buried dreams in the 1830s; for Mesonero Romanos, a place of new pages to read, new scenes to observe. In the early twentieth century, another vision of Madrid emerged, the Madrid that had been marginalized and made invisible, the grotesque bohemia and social netherworld of the lumpen-proletariat brought to life by writers like Valle-Inclán and Baroja. This was an updated, modernized version of the traditional Court of Miracles, the den of thieves, pickpockets, undesirables, and the poor that had always existed. Spectacle—the spectacle of the abject, the wretched of the earth—has turned ironic here.

Flash forward to the 1980s and the present, and we see that the same sense of Madrid as spectacle endures. The Movida of the 80s brought the wild insouciance and campiness of Almodóvar’s films, a brief mania of transvestism, and life led as a kind of continual performance.
amazement then at the flamboyant parades of prostitutes, a bordello theater of the streets, and this in some of the most respectable neighborhoods of the city. It was as though the periphery, historically marginal areas of poverty and social invisibility, had invaded the center of Madrid.

Since then, the process has only intensified, to the point where it has become harder to locate the “heart” of Madrid. It could be said that Madrid has always appeared as something less than a capital and something more than an illusion. Moreover, Madrid as a place of provincial cosmopolitanism, as Tierno Galván suggested, points to an uneasy mix of the local and the postmodern, in which the past is continually erased by a relentless present. Post-Movida, the capital has moved toward the status of megalopolis, prompting observers to see the city’s rapid growth and insatiable thirst for the new as a sign of its lack of centeredness, as the transformation of the historic Movida with a capital M into an implacable movida, with a small-letter m, an unceasing flow of persons, traffic, and images. For some, this unstoppable movida which is Madrid has ultimately become unreadable.

The well-known, popular writer, Antonio Muñoz Molina, for example, published a novel titled Los misterios de Madrid [The Mysteries of Madrid] in 1992, in which he notes that “Madrid era una ciudad incomprensible” [Madrid was an incomprehensible city] (47). The book is, in part, a parody of a nineteenth-century model, the mass-produced serialized novel, and of a subgenre that specialized in imagining the city as a mystery writ large. So, on the one hand, Muñoz Molina reconnects modern Madrid with an older, phantasmatic version of the capital, pointing to continuities with a smaller, much more provincial Madrid. And on the other, he suggests that the modern city is unreadable, at once linking it to the nineteenth-century past and to the present. What’s more, he also connects his vision of the capital to that of Larra’s in stressing the dark, irrational side of urban culture.

Larra situated the living dead of Madrid in the very heart of the capital, which is envisaged as a vast cemetery, that is also echoed in the very depths of the writer’s soul. (This is an image that the poet Dámaso Alonso adapted to talk about the civil war dead in 1940.) Muñoz Molina, however, places the living dead of his novel in the periphery, the outskirts of Madrid, reflecting an indisputable social and economic reality of poverty, crime, and drug addiction, but also suggesting that the city’s center is an illusion. He describes the occupants of this zombie zone as

aquellas siluetas de hombres o de mujeres que erraban entre los montones de tierra, de escombros, de basuras humeantes, siluetas flacas y extenuadas como las que veía la noche anterior por las calles del centro de Madrid, más desarboladas ahora, a la luz cruenta del día, menos amenazantes, con pantalones vaqueros, con viejas zapatillas de
deporte, con los brazos huesudos y pálidos, con las habituales bolsas de plástico llenas de desperdicios en las manos, con las cabezas bajas, arrastrando los pies, pasando a su lado sin verlo, con los ojos fijos y vidriosos, como en aquella película de los muertos vivientes (120).

[those simulacrums of men and women who wandered among the mounds of earth, slag heaps, and smoking garbage, scrawny, extenuated simulacrums like the ones seen the night before in the streets of the heart of Madrid, sheetless to the wind, in the harsh light of day, less threatening, in jeans, with worn-out tennis shoes, with pale, bony arms, with the habitual plastic bags filled with junk in their hands, with their heads lowered, dragging their feet, passing by, unseeing, with their fixed and glassy eyes, like in that movie about the living dead]

The main character, an anachronistic provincial from another era called Lorencito Quesada, finds himself at this point literally hurled out of a van, into a godforsaken place he likens to one of those spaghetti western “ghost towns,” miles from the center of Madrid, which appears in the distance, blurred by “las columnas de humo pestilente que venían de un muladar tan vasto como una cordillera” (118) [the columns of pestilent smoke coming from a garbage heap as vast as a mountain range]. This too is the capital. Madrid, in its enormity and extension, has today spread out into a shapeless, seemingly limitless space—like the tumorous formlessness found in “El Hechizado”—that no one, certainly no single writer, can capture.

Finally, in one of the latest attempts to envision Madrid, we see the city in José Ángel Mañas’s Historias del Kronen (1994) [The Kronen Stories] as that unceasing spectacle, or movida, that ultimately converts urban spaces into non-places; the nineteenth-century pedestrian, or flâneur like Mesonero or Larra, into a driver behind the wheel of a car, endlessly circling Madrid. Almodóvar makes a similar point in ¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto? (1984) [What Have I Done to Deserve This?] with fluid shots of the M-30 motorway ringing the capital city. Arguably, this image is the logical result of the Movida phenomenon, which stressed the present over the past and proclaimed the city a post-historic, even virtual, space, life lived as eternal spectacle. Yet even the Movida could not let go of the past, especially the recent Francoist past which often shows up in parodied form in this period (for example, in Muñoz Molina’s novel). Even more significantly, it could not abandon the idea of the capital city as the center, or heart, of a nation, for the Movida began in Madrid, it was Madrid, an ever more recycled Madrid that continues to beguile and bemuse, continually creating its identity out of its own contradictory, fascinating history.
WORKS CITED


NOTES

1 Tierno Galván’s Madrid mayorship is further explored in Valis, *The Culture of Cursilería*.


3 See Ringrose 170-76 for early modern Madrid as a ritualized space and 225-40 for the image of Madrid as both magical and real.

4 For more on the *Movida*, see Gallero; Valis; Larson.

5 Commenting on Baroja’s image of Madrid, Ugarte sees “the picture of Madrid [as] blurry and its truth [as] undecipherable” (68).