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Crossing Power Borders in a Tight Silk Suit: Loci of Power in *A troche y moche* by Gustavo Sainz

This study considers how the fluidity of power loci, in terms of text ownership, replaces the static nature of hegemonic relationships between the protagonist and the characters in Gustavo Sainz's novel A troche y moche *(2002). The key aspect of this study of power loci and power border crossing is the analysis of the complexity of the dominance/subordination dichotomy. Using the theories of hegemonic masculinity and posthegemony, the essay examines the fluid nature of borders between the power loci of the writer-protagonist, his associates, and his kidnappers.*

Keywords: *hegemonic masculinity, posthegemony, affect, kidnapping, Gustavo Sainz*

Este ensayo estudia cómo el carácter inestable de las localidades de poder (en cuanto a la propiedad textual) reemplaza las relaciones hegemónicas estáticas entre el protagonista y los personajes secundarios en la novela A troche y moche *(2002) de Gustavo Sainz. El enfoque principal de este análisis de los lugares de poder y cómo se cruzan sus fronteras se basa en la dicotomía compleja de dominancia/subordinación. El ensayo aplica las teorías de la masculinidad hegemónica y de la poshegemonía para interrogar lo inestable que son las fronteras de los lugares de poder del escritor-protagonista, sus colegas y secuestradores.*

Palabras clave: *masculinidad hegemónica, poshegemonía, afecto, secuestro, Gustavo Sainz*

In the mid-1960s, Mexico saw the publication of the first works of the Onda movement – a short-lived cultural phenomenon which "challenged traditional narrative forms by attempting to create a transcultural narrative amalgam of literary and non-literary influences from a variety of contemporary popular culture" (Carpenter, "'Me cae'" 200; see also Glantz 30).[1] José Agustín's short story "La tumba" (1964) and Gustavo Sainz's novel *Gazapo* (1965) quickly made an impression on the contemporary Mexican

literary scene and led the way for other writers who embraced the new style. The three writers who defined the Onda[2] were José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, and Parménides García Saldaña. Although García Saldaña's contribution was limited to two volumes (a novel, *Pasto verde* [1967], and a collection of short stories *El rey criollo* [1971]), Agustín and Sainz continued writing after the Onda gave way to the Narrativa Joven of the 1970s and the Crack Generation of the 1990s-2000s (see Redondo-Olmedilla).

Following the release of his first novel, *Gazapo,* in 1965, Sainz published an autobiography, *Gustavo Sainz, etc.,* in 1966, which Inke Gunia sees as an attempt to enter Mexican mainstream literature. However, Gunia argues that both Sainz's and José Agustín's autobiographies (published at the same time) "se delimitan de la tradición poetológica [y] defienden su propia poética con una intención claramente contracultural" ("Las autobiografías" 29). The combination of autobiographical nature and complex narrative relationships often encompassing rather weak and sometimes almost non-existent plots characterises most of Sainz's works, such as *Compadre Lobo* (1977), *La princesa del Palacio de Hierro* (1974), *Muchacho en llamas* (1988), *Quiero escribir pero me sale espuma* (1997), and others (Ruffinelli; Gunia, *¿Cuál es la onda?* and "Las autobiografías"; Fernández, *Gustavo Sainz*).

The complex narrative structures of Sainz's earlier work (including *Gazapo, Obsesivos días circulares, Compadre Lobo*, and other novels written in the 1960s-1970s) tend to be seen either as a somewhat contrived exercise in the application of postmodern ideals (Swanson 114-28; Fernández, "Reading" 105-06; and *Gustavo Sainz*), or as a sign of the narrator's madness (Decker, R. Williams, and Morrow) and the resulting lack of distinction between the roles of the writer and reader to the extent that creation of the text becomes everyone's effort (R. Williams; see also Fernández, "Reading Gustavo Sainz"). Some consider this complexity as interfering with the flow of the story (Sefamí), preferring texts structured more simply, like *La princesa del Palacio de Hierro*, to what they see as the unnecessary complexity of *Gazapo* (see, for example, Durán). Few of Sainz's writings reflect contemporary events in Mexican history. The key exceptions are *Fantasmas aztecas* (1982), written after the ruins of an Aztec pyramid were discovered in Mexico City in 1978 (Filer), and A *la salud de la serpiente* (1991), which rejected the official version of the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 as an outright fabrication (Castillo 21-22).

It is therefore hardly surprising that there are no academic studies of his final novel, *A troche y moche* (2002), with the exception of a cursory examination of the way citations and quotations are presented by the narrator (Sorókina 498-99). However, this does not indicate that the novel

passed unnoticed or was not received well – it received the Colima National Literary Prize and the First Prize Mexique-Québec in 2003. The novel is an example of Gustavo Sainz's use of the "novela de lenguaje"[3] technique, which he first adopted in 1969, when he released what can be considered his most convoluted work, *Obsesivos días circulares*.

Many of Sainz's works present an intriguing web of power distribution between the protagonist (who can also be the first-person narrator) and the secondary characters (male and female). The protagonist's power locus[4] is challenged by the secondary characters and can either become diffused among them or completely appropriated by one of the characters whose initial status was forcibly subordinate (the matrix of subordination is presented later in this essay; see also Carpenter, "Power" 672-73). The protagonist's power locus is often dependent on his intellectual prowess. However, when challenged by something more primal such as physical strength or great (or exaggerated) sexual potency, this locus collapses, and the power is diffused between the initially dominant protagonist and the initially subordinate secondary character. This process suggests that hegemonic order no longer underpins the relationship between the protagonist and secondary characters in the narrative. Thus, a perspective different from – or complementary to – the hegemonic order needs to be adopted to explore this relationship.

In the present essay, I will consider how the fluidity of power loci and their borders, in terms of text ownership,[5] replaces the static nature of the hegemonic relationships between the characters in the novel. The key aspect of this study of power loci and power border crossing is the analysis of the complexity of the dominance/subordination dichotomy which builds upon an earlier interrogation of the changing power locus relationship between the protagonist and secondary characters and develops the matrix of dominance informed by the matrix of subordination (Carpenter, "Under" 672-73). I will combine the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt) and the theory of posthegemony (Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony*) to examine the power loci set up by the protagonist and other characters in the novel. Specifically, I will concentrate on the interaction between the power loci of the writer, his associates, and his kidnappers, focusing on the fluid nature of borders between these.

In *A troche y moche*, the third person narrative is perceived as an internal monologue; the text lacks punctuation to guide the reader through the maze of narrative threads. The novel tells the story of an eminent writer being kidnapped and held (apparently for ransom) by some invisible thugs. The writer comes to Mexico from the United States (where he currently

lives) to receive an award. He also meets with the director of a Spanish publishing house and a young female editor; both appear very interested in his new novel. While travelling from the award ceremony to the hotel, the writer's car is stopped by several vehicles, and the writer and, apparently, the editor too are kidnapped; however, there is no further indication in the novel that the editor is held hostage by the kidnappers. The writer is blindfolded and taken to a secluded house, where he is kept in a dark room tied to a chair. Alone and unable to move, he thinks of his predicament, his novel, and his wife. He mentally reviews interesting facts from the lives of famous artists and scientists. He also tries to understand why he was kidnapped. He has nothing of monetary value on him – before the ceremony he changed into a skin-tight white silk suit, which makes it impossible not only to conceal anything in his pockets but also to move freely. But the writer is not completely alone: when he is hungry, someone comes and feeds him; later, two women come into the room. They untie him, let him go to the bathroom, and then lay him down on the bed and give him a sponge bath, after which they apparently try to rape him. Finally, police storms the house, kills the kidnappers, and the writer is taken to the hospital by two nurses, who tell him about his escape. The novel ends with the writer confined to a hospital bed, unable to reconnect with the reality around him.

The main subject of *A troche y moche* is kidnapping, which is hardly surprising considering that kidnapping is a widespread crime in Mexico, still on the rise (Partlow, Pasquali). Academic studies of kidnapping in Mexico tend to focus on socio-political or economic reasons for kidnappings (see, for example, Ochoa, "Not Just the Rich" and *Out of Harm's Way*). But neither politics nor the economy enters Sainz's novel, leaving the reader to wonder why these more burning issues are apparently ignored in favour of creating what appears to be an elaborate mixture of amusing vignettes and heart-wrenching internal monologues. It would seem that the novel focuses on kidnapping as a means of creating, transferring, and restoring power loci – but instead of considering power as a social or political construct, the novel explores the changing nature of power within the narrative, thus addressing power loci in interrelational dynamics within the text. I shall start by examining the nature of the power loci in the novel from the point of view of the theory of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity offers a salient theoretical underpinning for the analysis of complex intratextual relationships and the battles between protagonists and secondary characters for the ownership of the text they inhabit, as well as the nature of text ownership in the first-person narratives with multiple protagonists. This theory proposes "a model of multiple

masculinities and power relations" (Connell and Messerschmidt 830). Furthermore, the relationship between the protagonist and secondary characters (Carpenter, "Under" and "Power") signifies multiple degrees of text ownership: rather than all of text ownership being in the hands, so to speak, of one (male) protagonist, it is distributed (albeit unevenly) among multiple primary and secondary protagonists or secondary characters. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely used in gender studies, sociological research, and education studies, and also widely criticised for being both too prescriptive and too inclusive to serve as a lasting theoretical foundation. Some critics concede that the model is a useful theoretical framing of the question of masculinity, but it does not allow for variations of masculinities; in other words, either men are "hegemonically masculine" or they are not masculine at all (Moller 265-66).

However, the stability of hegemonic masculinity may not necessarily be its downfall. Instead, this stability becomes a starting point for exploring multiple variants of masculinity and power associated with it, using the degree of power (or power-feeling) as the key characteristic of these variants (see, for example, Harris). The dynamic nature and potential fluidity of hegemonic masculinity has been noted before (Lengersdorf) but not interrogated from the point of view of the changing nature of the dominant power locus. Considering the dynamic nature of the concept, the dominant power locus is expected to shift between various male participants in the text (Carpenter, "Power"). Under the condition of hegemonic masculinity, the protagonist and secondary characters may or may not have the same degree of power; neither does this degree remain unchanged throughout the narrative. This metaphorical crossing of power borders will be interrogated further in the analysis of the interaction between the protagonist and secondary characters (the representatives of a Spanish publishing house and the kidnappers) in the novel, with the focus on the change in the nature of power from hegemonic to posthegemonic conditions.

The flexibility and ambiguity of power relations between men, and between men and women, are noted by many researchers (see, for example, Anderson, Messerschmidt, Lengersdorf, and Johansson and Ottemo), who see the conflict between the fluid "masculinity" and the static "hegemony" as an internal contradiction of the concept which ultimately renders it all but unsuitable for gender studies. However, these critics' view of the hegemonic aspect of hegemonic masculinity as static is too restrictive and can be challenged by analysing more complex power distribution dynamics between male narrators and protagonists, and between male protagonists

and secondary characters (see, for example, Carpenter, "Under" and "Power").

Rather than seeing hegemony as a static hierarchical arrangement beyond the influence of changing social and political relations, some critics consider it a fluid construct. Roseberry, for example, posits that hegemony "establishes not consent but prescribed forms for expressing both acceptance and discontent, [and therefore] a common discursive framework" (364). This framework functions as long as there is participation in it from both the dominant and subordinate sides. But, as has been stated in many studies, hegemony does not run its full course to a complete hierarchical discipline-based social order – there is always something stopping it. Different population groups express discontent, create opposition to the existing order, or just simply do not abide by hegemonic rules: "the tensions inherent in the concept of hegemony are also inherent in every political practice and, strictly speaking, every social practice" (Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony* 88). It is also noted that hegemony is an imperfect system, prone to collapsing before it achieves its full state of unidirectional power distribution from a single locus of power (Larsen 90-94; Yúdice 4; Franco 270; G. Williams 149). In short, there is nothing purely hegemonically dominant, just as there is nothing purely subordinate (Vahabzadeh 107-09). Both hegemonic and posthegemonic relations are based on varying degrees of power distribution: under hegemonic conditions, a central power locus elicits consent from its subordinates in a top-down hierarchical relationship, whereas under posthegemonic conditions power is distributed more evenly, being diffused across a shared emotional sphere.

When hegemony fails to achieve full dominance under the conditions of heightened affect to which the populace reacts with strong emotions, posthegemony arises in response to the change of habit and subsequent creation of a shared emotional sphere (Beasley-Murray, "On Posthegemony" and *Posthegemony*; see also Vahabzadeh). However, there is no stability to this division. Hegemonic and posthegemonic power distribution mechanisms are challenged and modified; power loci shift and disappear, dissolve, and re-cohere elsewhere. This process is dependent on the degree of the power of affect: "Affect overpowers cognition when the existing routine is challenged or threatened by accidental or planned events outside its control. By ignoring affect, hegemony fails to meet the needs of this process; posthegemony arises in its place" (Carpenter, *Tlatelolco* 53). A shift from the hegemonic to posthegemonic forms of control challenges the unidirectional hierarchical structure of hegemonic masculinity. From the

posthegemonic standpoint, there is no single locus of control and, therefore, the hierarchy of power is not necessarily unidirectional. But is this form of text ownership fixed? Or do the protagonist and secondary characters migrate across the power borders? If so, what is the mechanism of the power border crossing?

In the texts written by the representatives of the Onda movement (including Gustavo Sainz), power struggle is evident between the (dominant) male protagonist and the (subordinate) secondary characters who make a contribution to the narrative line. The male protagonist (who is often a first-person narrator) forces the secondary characters into different degrees of subordination depending on the nature of his interaction with them. Three types of character subordination have been identified:

> 1. Overtly subordinate – mainly female characters with whom the protagonist has sexual relationships (real, imaginary or potential). …
> 2. Latently subordinate – male characters who … are perceived as submissive or weak by the protagonist.
> 3. Forcibly subordinate – [male characters] who would otherwise dominate the narrative and are therefore rendered physically incapacitated … or otherwise unable to participate in the creation of the main text. (Carpenter, "Under" 672-73)

Sometimes a subordinate takes on a more active role and starts producing his or her own text. This is the case in José Agustín's story "La tumba" (1964), where Gabriel the narrator creates Gabriel the protagonist of his story and the protagonist takes over the plot line, ultimately forcing the original narrator into a standoff which ends up with the narrator either committing suicide or writing a new version of the story presumably with a different, less problematic protagonist (see Carpenter, "Brave New Text"). When the change of text ownership happens, the dominant protagonist goes one step up the power ladder, thus controlling the subordinate's participation in the text s/he populates or his/her visibility in the protagonist-controlled narrative. An example of this form of control is the interaction between Terencio (the narrator in Gustavo Sainz's novel *Obsesivos días circulares*) and Sarro (one of the novel's secondary characters – a hitman who ends up having a stroke and either dying or being paralysed and confined to a hospital bed). Sarro is depicted as a massive bald man of great physical and sexual strength, whose rather sordid occupation makes him both terrifying and attractive to women and men alike. Terencio is much less capable of

establishing long-lasting successful relationships and therefore deeply jealous of Sarro. As Sarro's presence in the text grows, Terencio fights back by first telling the story of Sarro being hospitalised after a stroke, then narrating his visit to the hospital to see Sarro bedridden and unable to move or speak, and finally delivering the news to Donají (Terencio's second wife) and Sarro's girlfriend Yin that Sarro is dead. By taking away Sarro's abilities bit by bit, Terencio writes him out of the novel, ultimately replacing Sarro with himself when Terencio himself becomes a hitman. The relationship between Terencio and Sarro can be seen as a juxtaposition of sexual power and narrative control won by Terencio the narrator, whose power locus (control over the text and its components) is greater than Sarro's physical or sexual strength, which are assigned to him by Terencio in the first place.

Following the matrix of subordination of characters by the protagonist, I propose a matrix of the protagonist's dominance, based on the fluidity of the hegemonic aspect of hegemonic masculinity and the change to power distribution under the posthegemonic condition of affect:

1. Overtly dominant – this form of dominance does not need to be re-stated or enforced because it is an intrinsic part of the protagonist's nature;
2. Hierarchically dominant – this form of dominance needs to be enforced by the protagonist reminding the characters that he is above them on the hierarchical ladder. The protagonist exerts his dominance by making the characters see themselves as weaker or less powerful;
3. Forcibly dominant – this form of dominance requires the protagonist to assert his power over the characters repeatedly, openly and forcefully, to make sure everyone knows and feels that he is in charge.

The first form of dominance (overt) is the most stable one as far as its power locus is concerned. It is fully hegemonic in its unidirectional hierarchical power distribution where the main power locus is not diffused and the characters' secondary power loci owe their existence to the benevolence of the protagonist. The second stage (hierarchical dominance) becomes less stable as a threat to its power locus starts to emerge from secondary characters who might be rebelling against the protagonist's dominance over the narrative line that they populate.[6] Finally, forcible dominance is mostly unstable, as it has to be enforced a lot and often. This happens when the protagonist who originally owned the text (often the first-person narrator)

faces the threat of losing it to a more powerful secondary character (usually a physically stronger or bigger male with a greater degree of sexual prowess).

The ensuing power struggle undermines the protagonist narrator's authority and splits the locus of text ownership between multiple narrators. This is no longer a hegemonic centralisation of power but a posthegemonic diffusion of power within a less structured unity brought together by the same emotional response to an external highly affective change (Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony* 226-30). At this point, the two social bodies involved in creation of the text (the protagonist and the secondary characters) clash and the hegemonic order defining structured power relations collapses, giving way to a posthegemonic diffusion of power. Much like hegemonic masculinity characterises the behaviour of individuals belonging to a collective carrying its traits (see Connell; Connell and Messerschmidt), hegemonic and posthegemonic power distribution can be attributed to interactions of individuals belonging to particular social bodies bearing the same qualities.

So, what happens to the protagonist when his power locus is challenged and diffused? Does he cross a border between the dominant and the subordinate aspect of his character? Who forces this crossing? In the case of *A troche y moche*, those involved in this power struggle are the writer-protagonist,[7] the representatives of a Spanish publishing house, and the kidnappers. Their interactions are characterised either by an open conflict or by a covert challenge to the writer's power locus. We will consider these in the order of increasing degree of threat that these interactions pose to the writer's dominance over the protagonists.

The relationship between the writer and the publishers is less prone to an open conflict; here, the overt challenge originates from the female editor when she makes him change the order of chapters in his novel: "Ella le sugería el cambio del capítulo tres por el nueve, la trasposición del capítulo uno al final y lo innecesario de aumentar páginas u otro capítulo / Él quedó de acuerdo" (Sainz 111).[8] The writer tries to regain his (masculine) control of the interaction with a young woman by telling her about a monument in Karnak, where King Meremptah displays severed penises of his enemies, and inviting her to go there with him. She ponders the offer and quickly changes the subject back to the novel: "le precisó que no debería hacer nada, que ella haría todos los cambios, y cubrió con la mano un pequeño bostezo / Perdón, balbuceó" (111). The writer's masculinity comes under attack as the editor shows her boredom with the predictable outcome of the writer's supposedly erotic story. His masculine power is neither a threat nor an

attraction, but a boring distraction from the editor's own feeling of power as she takes control of the writer's novel.

Another challenge (this time, less evident) to the writer's power locus comes from the head of the publishing house when he tries to bribe the writer with gold coins: "el director de la empresa venía de Madrid y al saludarlo le dejó una moneda de oro en la palma de la mano" (Sainz 29); "era un hombre enorme, muy alto y gordo, y al saludarlo de mano le dejó en la palma una moneda de oro" (38); "el director, al darle la mano, volvió a dejarle en la palma otra moneda de oro" (61). Since both the writer and the director appear to be rather corpulent - the writer mentions weighing 97 kilos (83) -, but the director's height is also mentioned, we can conclude that the writer is shorter than the director and this unnerves him. The director's figure would be perceived as dominating the scene, thus suggesting that he takes over the power locus in this scene. The writer fights back by dominating the director with intellectual superiority. At first, it is achieved with the quality of his new novel - "hojeaban su manuscrito con satisfacción, con deslumbramiento" (29), and later, the writer flaunts his intimate knowledge of Marcel Proust's life: "desde que vivía en Rouen nunca comía ni bebía nada que no estuviera citado en la obra de Proust" (38); "Había quedado de llevarlos a Illiers-Combray … Y es que había sido allí adonde Proust pasó los veranos desde que tuvo seis años hasta que tuvo nueve, y otra vez a los quince, en casa de la hermana de su padre, Elisabeth Amiot" (61).[9] However, this does not lead to the director getting shorter or not bribing the writer, nor does the editor change her mind about joining the writer on a trip to Karnak. In short, the director's and the editor's exertion of power over the writer by controlling the structure of his new novel leads to the writer becoming latently subordinate. This makes the two publishing house representatives hierarchically dominant, as they point out the novel's deficiencies (and, by association, the writer's shortcomings), ignore the writer's attempts at dominating them through the displays of sexual prowess, or dominate him by the fact of their sheer size. However, there is little affective force in the interaction between the writer, the editor, and the director; it remains hegemonic in its reliance on a hierarchical order. The kidnapping of the writer disrupts this hegemonic arrangement and forces the writer into a posthegemonic relationship with the kidnappers.

I will now consider the process of kidnapping as the most powerful challenge to the writer's dominant position and explore its relationship with the writer's power locus. Kidnapping, or an act of "depriv[ing] someone [of] freedom of movement or communication against that person's will" (Bailey 100), is a common crime in modern Mexico affecting all social classes (see

Scherer García; Partlow). The majority of studies of kidnapping link it to drug trafficking (see Kellner and Pipitone; Locks) and the country's long history of violence, especially against women and children (see Juárez Rodríguez; Sosenski, "Infancia y violencia"; and Blazquez), and migrants (see Carrasco González; Izcara Palacios; Yates and Leutert). Kidnapping appears in a number of Mexican novels, including Martín Solares's *No manden flores* (2015) and Jorge Volpi's *Una novela criminal* (2018). The subject of kidnapping has also been addressed in Mexican films since the 1940s, when Ismael Rodríguez's film *¡Ya tengo a mi hijo!* told a harrowing story of a kidnapping of two-year-old Fernandito Bohigas (Wilt; Sosenski, "El caso Bohigas"), and continues to be a popular theme to present day, with Teodora Mihai's *La Civil* (2021) being one of the most recent examples. Surprisingly, however, there are few academic studies of this phenomenon which examine kidnapping from the socio-cultural perspective (Campos Azuara; Ochoa, "Not Just the Rich" and *Out of Harm's Way*; Bailey), and almost none concerning the depiction of kidnapping in literature (Nelli is a notable exception).

Large and small gangs practise different types of kidnapping, from abducting family members for a small ransom to large heists in which prominent politicians or businesspeople are kidnapped in broad daylight. This brazen practice is seen as a demonstration of power (see Ochoa, "Not Just the Rich"; Villamil Uriarte). Since kidnappers tend to be men, we conclude that this demonstration of power reveals the key trait of hegemonic masculinity – the need to feel powerful (Harris 129). Political kidnapping is one type, which may or may not be aimed at a politician, because its target is of "symbolic or substantive value" (Bailey 101). In the case of the writer in *A troche y moche*, the substantive value of kidnapping a prominent author at a public event is self-evident (see also Rojek). It would appear that the reason for the kidnapping in the novel is to obtain the cheque given to the writer at the ceremony. However, the cheque could have been stolen from the awarding body before the ceremony with no further need for the writer to be locked up for days. It is possible that this kidnapping is a case of power demonstration on the part of the kidnappers. Some of the kidnappers are presumably boxers (one is strong enough to pick up the rather rotund writer); others are young women – at least, that is who the writer has contact with throughout his ordeal; they are the ones who try to rape him while cleaning him and are killed later when he is freed by the police: "debía tener como dieciocho años y … estaba desnuda y … tenía un cuerno de chivo cerca … Y junto al baño había otra chica desnuda" (Sainz 196) And although this presents a rather self-evident gender power

redistribution, we shall focus on the power locus of the character of the writer in the novel, and what happens to it as a result of kidnapping and being held hostage.

The writer's power locus is very weak from the start. He is supposed to be the narrator of the novel so it would be logical to assume that the novel should be narrated in the first person. Instead, it is narrated in the third person while retaining the main characteristic of an internal monologue: immediate delivery of the writer's thoughts, often at the expense of conventional language structures (Frieden 169-88). This disconnects the writer from his own experiences and prevents him from controlling the narrative he inhabits. Although apparently very famous, he is faceless and unnamed throughout the novel; at times, he is referred to as "el autor" or "el desdichado"[10] but most of the time he appears in the third person singular verb forms. The opening lines of the novel depict "el desdichado" who finds himself "amarrado y ciego después de horas o días o semanas, sucio y desconcertado, asustado, iracundo, impotente" (Sainz 15). It is unclear who this wretch is, but the reader is invited to sympathise with him from the onset. Six pages later, the reader is informed about the wretch's occupation, albeit indirectly: "recordó el viaje de avión" (20) and how he was chatting with his friends "hasta llegar a la Editorial, se hacía tarde para una mesa de prensa" (21), indicate that the hostage is a writer who travelled to Mexico by plane for a press conference, perhaps preceding an award ceremony of some kind. The only description of him is of the skin-tight white silk suit he wears to the ceremony:"se puso un traje de seda tan ajustado que no podía cargar llaves ni cartera ni pluma" (24); "se quitó la ropa de viaje y se metió en un traje de seda blanca, equilibrándose difícilmente" (46); and the fact that he is significantly overweight: "recordó [...] el extrañamiento que le produjo ser levantado en vilo y sin esfuerza pese a los 97 kilos que pesaba" (83).

The kidnappers' dominance over the writer is forcible, often disproportionately so, since the writer offers very little resistance. The writer is physically incapacitated (tied up, bound to a chair, and blindfolded) and looked after rather sporadically by his kidnappers: "comida ocasional, a veces demasiado frecuente, a veces tras largos periodos de hambre y desesperación, o sus gritos porque necesitaba defecar u orinar" (Sainz 16), who control when and what he eats, and do not respond to his complaints about being uncomfortable.

The writer is powerless to do anything to relieve his discomfort; all he can do is call out to the kidnappers when he needs to use the toilet and hope they get to him in time. Since he cannot engage in any other interaction or

conversation with the kidnappers, he passes the time thinking of the trivia he knows from history, politics or literature. The writer associates these facts with his own experience; since his experience is highly unpleasant and potentially life-threatening, the facts he recalls are about sickness, suffering and death. For example, when the writer is particularly worried about being blindfolded and therefore unable to see, he cites facts about Amedeo Modigliani dying of tuberculosis in a "un hospital miserable" (Sainz 19) and Giordano Bruno being burnt at the stake "*en medio de un terrible silencio*" (104); he also recalls that Pascal was a hypochondriac (27), although this fact cannot be verified (see Adamson). We should also note that the writer's mouth is taped shut, so, like Bruno, who was gagged (Aquilecchia), he is unable to voice his agony. This makes the writer forcibly subordinate and the kidnappers forcibly dominant because they make sure the writer realises that he is fully dependent on them for basic survival (satisfaction of hunger, thirst and excretion needs). When the writer tries to resist his condition he is punished: "trató de quitarse la venda de los ojos y recibió una golpiza espantosa" (22); when he needs to use the bathroom his hands are untied just enough to let him relieve himself: "Cuando pedía ir al baño y tenía la suerte de que lo oyeran, le desataban las piernas de la silla y de las manos pero no entre sí, y las manos semiliberadas le permitían cierta capacidad de maniobra como para desabrochar el pantalón y sujetar el pene" (22). The kidnappers tend to the writer's needs on their own terms, ensuring that he remains their subordinate throughout the process. They allow him enough freedom to undo the belt on his trousers and relieve himself, but the degree of his freedom is limited to a bare minimum needed not to wet himself. Even when the writer takes out what should be seen as an object of his masculine power (his penis), it is on the conditions imposed upon him by the kidnappers. This process of forcible subordination (Carpenter, "Under" 673) would appear to be fully successful; nevertheless, the kidnappers do not become overtly dominant because the writer crosses back into the dominance sphere by asserting his intellectual superiority over his kidnappers, however implicit and unvoiced this superiority is.

Surprisingly, the process of physical domination over the writer is not reversed when he is rescued. Although he is supposed to be free, the writer is once again held (metaphorically) captive by two nurses in an ambulance, incapacitated and physically dependent on them for his survival and physical health: "las enfermeras que lo aseaban [lo habían hecho soñar] en las secuestradoras que lo limpiaban" (Sainz 193). In the ambulance, he is told that he has a bad eye infection and anaemia, so he would have to stay in hospital: "¿Adónde me llevan? / Al hospital de la Cruz Roja / ¿Qué voy a

hacer allí? / Para empezar estás anémico y necesitas recuperarte, para no hablar de esta infección que tienes en el ojo" (193). Later, as he is given an injection, he once again finds himself incapacitated: "Trató de mover los dedos y apenas lo pudo conseguir con gran dificultad / Le aplicaron una inyección" (194).

From the posthegemonic perspective, the writer's habit is completely destroyed by the affect of being kidnapped and held prisoner under the kidnappers' full control; as a result, he releases a variety of emotions – from fear to anger and confusion: "Miedo, temblores, confusión, consternación, emborronamiento … Su vida era complicada, difícil, imprevista, sinuosa" (Sainz 92-93). However, once the writer is taken to the house where he is kept during his ordeal, a new habit sets in – he attempts to make sense of what is happening to him and create order out of the affective chaos of the kidnapping and sensory deprivation of being held hostage: "La luz implicaba el apogeo del sentido y él vivía en oscuridad absoluta / A veces creía no sentir dolor, como si estuviera anestesiado, todos sus goces suspendidos" (99). The new habit is coloured by all-pervading fear: "el espanto nacía en él al sentirse como absorbido por esa existencia sin contornos" (79); "en el silencio nocturno lo que lo horrorizaba no era la muerte sino el ser" (79).

Another example of this process found in Chapter Five, "Multiplicidad de voces y la actriz que se sabía muchas obras" (Sainz 97-117). Here, the writer is thinking about his wife – an archaeologist who is barely ever around (104-06); then he is talking at length about Giordano Bruno's prosecution and death (103-04) and relating his meeting with the young female editor (110-13). There is also an intrusion from another text – the content of the TV talk show "Cristina", where the host is talking to a number of guests about angels and divine intervention (101-03). On the one hand, the writer's present condition determines his choice of references; on the other, the choice of references could influence the writer's perception of his situation. At the beginning of the chapter, the writer finds himself "en la frontera entre la vida y la muerte" (99), in limbo and unable to do anything about it. He cannot cross the border either way because he is physically incapacitated and emotionally and mentally drained. He is particularly bothered by the monotony of his experience, his inability to speak, and the prospect of dying before he is rescued. The peak of his anguish is reached when he realises that "se sentía embotado, casi petrificado, y ya casi incapaz … de volver a tomar parte en la vida de allá afuera" (101). Emotions are rife and they need a release after the affective wave of kidnapping has crested causing the writer's power locus to dissolve. Existence without form is once again filled with references to famous people (artists, writers, philosophers)

who went insane and committed murder or suicide, or died in accidents (e.g., Louis Althusser, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Jorge Ibargüengotia, Ángel Rama, and others), thus establishing a new habit with the view to recover some of the original power locus or to create a new one, this time fully committed to demonstrate the writer's intellectual superiority.

In this essay, we have considered the fluidity of power loci held by the writer, the publishers, and the kidnappers by examining the nature of power distribution in hegemonic and posthegemonic terms. The writer starts out as an overtly dominant entity; his power comes from his gender, physical characteristics, occupation, and intellectual capacity. This power locus is hegemonically static. In the interaction with the publishing house representatives, the writer crosses into the subordinate realm as his gender, physical characteristics, and occupation come under attack from the secondary characters. In turn, they cross the power border into the dominant realm, becoming hierarchically dominant. This forces the writer to assert his dominance through his intellectual capacity by showing off his knowledge of trivia from different disciplines. However, this has no effect on this newly established power structure. This process takes place under hegemonic conditions which are affectively neutral, that is, the clash between the social bodies is not powerful enough to warrant crossing into the posthegemonic realm. On the other hand, the clash between the writer and the kidnappers is so powerful that the writer's habit is destroyed and the hegemonic order no longer functions, being replaced with the posthegemonic domain. Here, the writer's power locus is obliterated, and he is fully dominated by the kidnappers, thus crossing into the forcibly subordinate state.

As the writer feels his power locus shifting away from him, he re-appropriates it by selecting someone else's fate (the examples of suffering and deaths of famous artists, writers, and philosophers) to juxtapose with his own and thus to re-assert that he is not going to suffer a similar outcome. But, as his condition is governed by high affect and not reasoning, instead of establishing a cognition-based hegemonic power locus, the writer gets drawn into a posthegemonic affective sphere, where his power locus is diffused among its many participants. Although he retains control over what he thinks, he does not control what emotions he experiences as the result of the affect of his predicament. The only area of control the writer retains is outside the emotional sphere, in the realm of intellectual pursuits – his knowledge of trivia related to famous writers and artists. However, even that area is tinged with the emotions released as a result of affect, so the

writer thinks more of the artists' physical and mental problems rather than the significance of their legacy.

The emotions produced by the affect of the kidnapping are much stronger than the writer's cognitive functions during the ordeal. Thus, the hegemonic power the writer held (however tentatively) before the kidnapping is eroded by the affect of the kidnapping. The border he crosses is between dominance and subordination in an attempt to retain the dominant aspect of hegemonic masculinity. As the writer is bound, blindfolded and rendered physically helpless, he talks about those even more helpless, physically or mentally (killing themselves, going mad, dying painfully), which helps him cross back into dominance. But this dominance is no longer hegemonic. Coloured by the affect of its origin, it is posthegemonic and therefore dependent on affect and the subsequent change of habit.

After the kidnapping is over and the writer's habit seemingly returns to normal, the power locus he appears to have regained is not the same as it was before. By now, the writer has crossed several power borders: from overtly dominant to latently subordinate and forcibly subordinate, finally returning to attempting to become hierarchically dominant over the nurses. However, by the end of the novel the writer is still unsuccessful as the nurses forcibly dominate him and he cannot assert his position above them on the hierarchical ladder because he is too physically dependent on them to make his attempts at asserting power fruitful. But the writer still finds a way to establish a power locus that nobody would challenge: he withdraws completely from the world around him: "¿Qué podía hacer ahora el pensamiento? / Ocultarse, murmuró / Y cerró los ojos" (Sainz 199). While this may indicate that the writer is unable to change his situation and therefore he resigns himself to his fate, this time he is the one choosing to isolate himself from reality, creating a cocoon of a new power locus – this time, an internal one, inaccessible by those around him. In short, he returns to the starting point of his ordeal – sensory deprivation – but this time, it is by choice. He has crossed the final power border – between his internal world and the reality around him – where he is alone, both the dominant and the dominated entity.

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NOTES

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2 For more information on the *Onda* literature, see Gunia, *¿Cuál es la onda?*; for an analysis of the nature of the *Onda* texts, see Carpenter, "Transitory Literature."

3 The term "novela de lenguaje" is used to describe a novel which explores intricacies of the language vis-à-vis banality of the plot: as Gustavo Sainz put it, the plots of contemporary novels "son básicamente las mismas y … los conflictos son siempre los mismos … hay muy pocas novelas que inauguren una visión distinta del mundo" (Dwyer 87, cited in Sáinz de Medrano Arce 237). Sainz's second novel, *Obsesivos días circulares* (1969), is the best example of a "novela de lenguaje," considering the complexity of its narrative structure (see Carpenter, "Strings" 141-44).

4 The term "power locus" refers to the concentration of power held by a single text entity (the narrator, a protagonist, etc.), and is associated with the locus of text control, or this entity's ability to alter the text or protect it from being altered by other text entities. The degree of this ability is termed power distribution. For more on the nature of text control, see Carpenter, "Under" and "Power."

5 The term "text ownership" refers to the process whereby the protagonist-narrator creates the narrative line and its characters and manages the two to ensure that the former is not destroyed by the latter (Carpenter, "Power" 33).

6 See Carpenter, "Under" 681-82 for a detailed analysis of such rebellion in José Agustín's short story "La tumba."

7 To simplify matters, I will refer to the writer-protagonist as "the writer" throughout the course of this essay.

8 There are no full stops in the novel; individual sentences are presented on separate lines. I will use "/" to indicate the start of a new sentence.

9 A similar dominant position appears in Sainz's novel *Obsesivos días circulares*, in the relationship between the first-person narrator Terencio and a physically imposing secondary character Sarro (Carpenter, "Power" 47-49).

10 Given Sainz's propensity to literary allusions as a form of metafiction, the "desdichado" protagonist echoes Gérard de Nerval's famous poem "El Desdichado," inspired in turn by a character of the same name from Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. Like Nerval's poem being 'the closed book of his spiritual autobiography' (Kneller 403), Sainz's novel tells of one's resignation to fate:

although the protagonist is rescued in the end, the last line of the novel "y cerró los ojos" (Sainz 199) echoes the sentiment of Nerval's work. Sainz's many literary allusions across the corpus of his writings are a subject of Herz 72-75 and Durán 13-14. This particular allusion merits a dedicated analysis outside of the scope of this study.

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