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Author-Character Conflict in *Mist*

Miguel de Unamuno's tragicomic novel *Mist* is a brilliant work whose quixotic nature epitomizes the theme of metafiction. A mystical atmosphere is established in the novel through the numerous conflicts between Unamuno and his characters, which enable Unamuno to reflect on the roles of the author and his creations in the writing process. Through this interaction, Unamuno makes it clear that writing a novel is not the clean-cut process it is often thought to be and leaves a reader questioning the power of his own imagination.

The first glimpse of these conflicts comes in the Post-Prologue, where Unamuno declares his surprise at the disrespectful remarks made by his created prologist, Victor Goti. Unamuno is not alarmed by this insubordination, however, since he granted Goti the freedom to say whatever he wanted and thus deserved the shock of Goti's prologue. The story then develops in a typical fashion until Unamuno makes another interjection at the end of Chapter 25 where he inserts an aside comparing himself to God and mocking his characters whom he is using to "justify his methods of procedure" (252). With these metafictional excerpts, Unamuno establishes his role as the author and places himself in control of the text. He introduces the characters he has created as his tools who are free only when he allows them to be, thus defining the roles that an author and his characters are expected to play.

This orthodox role-playing is called into question, however, when Victor tries to console Augusto after Eugenia's flight. Until this point in the novel, Augusto has doubted his existence and wondered about the ephemeral nature of life. It is not until he is betrayed and subjected to tremendous sorrow that he becomes more than merely a fictional being, exclaiming, "Now I no

longer doubt that I am real!” (288). In this statement, Augusto launches his rebellion against the slavery Unamuno has subjected him to and foreshadows the further mutiny that is sure to come.

This promise of insurrection comes to fruition in Augusto’s confrontation with Unamuno. In this quintessence of metafiction, the conflict between author and character quickly becomes clear. After Unamuno’s initial comments that hint at his power over Augusto, Augusto strikes back, leaving Unamuno “rather alarmed” by his character’s actions. The idea that an author can be caught off guard by his character’s actions is rather surprising, and symbolizes the way a story can take on a life of its own once an author starts writing. Unamuno then reasserts his power, claiming that he can subject Augusto to his slightest whim, but Augusto counters by revealing the indomitable force of the novel’s inertia, which ensures that further action in the novel must conform to the “inwrought logic” of its characters or readers will ignore it as unbelievable. In this way, the characters’ power over the author is revealed, unlocking a whole new dimension in the author-character interplay. His momentum now high, Augusto dominates the conversation for the rest of the chapter until Unamuno is forced to cast a death sentence upon Augusto, dooming his messenger of humility.

This curse spawns the novel’s climax, where Augusto dies the unusual death of overconsumption, which signifies Unamuno’s recovered control over the novel. In Augusto’s demise, not only does Unamuno accomplish his concrete goal of eliminating the threat of Augusto, he also breaks free of the chains that Augusto tried to impose upon him. By killing off his protagonist in such an unbelievable manner, Unamuno proves his power to subject his creations to any whim whatsoever, even if it lies outside the realm of reasonability. It might be contested that Augusto killed himself in such a fantastic way to discredit Unamuno’s novel, but this assertion is nullified by the novel’s epilogue, which is narrated by Augusto’s dog, Orfeo.

Augusto is now dead and unable to influence the novel so Unamuno implants one final deviation from normality to prove that his whims are the source of these unbelievable occurrences, not Augusto's rebellion. In this way, Unamuno regains control over his novel and shows that, despite the characters' undeniable influence on the plot, it is the author who has the final say on what is written.

Despite his death, Augusto has not yet conceded defeat, for he visits Unamuno in a dream to show that, despite his power, Unamuno is still a slave to his creations. It is the premonition of the character that truly begins the novel, motivating the author to take up his pen, and after the author's inevitable demise, it is the character who lives on, an immortal relic of the author's intellect. In this way, the character uses the author to spread himself across the world and attain fame.

In *Mist*, Unamuno creates an intricate labyrinth of metafiction whose tenebrous pathways reveal the truly dynamic relationship of give and take that exists between an author and his creations. This book on the writing of books is a brilliant novel whose ingenuity is simply marvelous.

Sources

Unamuno, Miguel de. *Mist*. Trans. Warner Fite. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.