

Intimacy, Extimacy and Subjectivation in *Living l'Havana*, by Ferran Torrent

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Living l'Havana (1999) is one of Ferran Torrent's lesser-known works. In terms of its genre, the length of the narrative makes it into a short novel or a very long short story; its style is descriptive and conversational, and its location is mainly limited to the seats of an intercontinental flight from Valencia to Havana, with a short final section in the city of Havana itself. For these reasons, the book has been variously labelled as "un libro inusual en su trayectoria" (Obiols, 1999) and "un ensayo" (Casa del Libro, 1999b). It has also been classified as an example of travel literature and, within that category, as "un manual habanero para 'el turista que lleva dólares'" (Obiols, 1999). Its use of frank and colourful language and its exposure of intimate feelings and details with no apparent filters links it to the anti-literary, anti-normative and anti-rhetorical style of Guillermo Cabrera Infante's 1967 ground-breaking novel *Tres tristes tigres* (1964) — a work about three men who spend the night exploring what Havana has to offer.

In this respect, *Living l'Havana* has been seen as

un divertit i il·lustratiu recorregut per un dels indrets que més han alimentat l'imaginari col·lectiu i que més han fascinat aquells que hi han anat... o que hi voldrien anar: l'Havana, a Cuba. Des dels hotels i restaurants més emblemàtics als locals més concorreguts, des dels costums sexuals més habituals a la realitat social més punyent, des dels petits plaers com els havans a la gastronomia més exquisida, Ferran Torrent es posa en la pell d'un turista que viatja per primera vegada a l'illa per desfer alguns dels tòpics que circulen sobre Cuba i donar-ne a conèixer els aspectes més rellevants. (Bromera, 1999)

And, beyond that and focusing on the descriptions of the two main speakers, it has also been read as "la historia de un amor frustrado" (Obiols, 1999).

Nonetheless, what I will argue is that, by analysing it as an exploration of intimacy, extimacy and subjectivation, one can offer a different and perhaps more nuanced reading of the volume.

1. Theoretical framework

The current analysis takes as a starting point the research conducted by Samuel Mateus, according to whom we can establish that "in the 18th and 19th centuries: the public domain was identified with mundane experience, while the private domain was a synonym to spiritual life" (Mateus 2010, 59). In this respect, it is true that the approach to the expression of personal feelings and intimate details in Mediterranean countries has often been appraised from the perspective that, while the Catalan intellectual and upper classes (as represented by the journalist in *Living l'Havana*) tended to follow the European, Anglo-Saxon and Nordic pattern outlined by Mateus, the working classes and the peasantry, (Tano and Vicent T, in our case), would pertain to a social grouping that thrived in the telling of tall tales at local bars, taverns and public spaces usually visited by the men only. In this respect, my discussion will look at the interaction of these two vital trends (or, simplifying it, at the

Nordic/Mediterranean dichotomy) in order to explore the complexities that such a coexistence produces in the mind of the relatively well-educated contemporary reader of *Living l'Havana*. That is, going back to the value judgements that Mateus' perspective offered, we will assess whether mundane experience can genuinely be regarded as unsophisticated and whether spiritual experience is the only one that can be regarded as transcendental — a view which seems to have been widely held until as recently as the secular 1990s, when it was still believed that

Modernity established a strong focus on the individual, making intimacy a central dimension of privacy. Intimacy was the place where an inner self was formed and where singularity was obtained apart from the public and from society. Interior meant an inward and isolated space of self-definition and personality development. [...] [And,] without intimacy, secrecy and closure, man could not have a chance to fulfil himself. (Mateus 2010, 62)

We will therefore argue that things have changed considerably in recent times and that in contemporary societies, including those of the Catalan-speaking lands, we now encounter quite the opposite, that is, a deliberate disclosure of intimacy which has become almost acceptable to the general public. In this respect, we find that the concept of intimacy has been totally transfigured through “the mediatisation of publicness, the personal invasion of public discourse, the change of media programs in order to reflect individual problems, the inflection of private discourses to a more confessional tone,[and] the mounting technologies of privacy-sharing” (Mateus 2010, 62). This is how, since the 1990s, as the public and private domains merged, interior and exterior became mixed. According to Mateus, extimacy is now a space where “intimate and exterior become simultaneous” and where “unlike in modern times, intimacy seems only to be complete when it is exhibited in the public domain” (2010, 57); or, as Jacques Lacan put it, extimacy is a concept which can be translated as ‘public intimacy’ or ‘exposed intimacy’ (as quoted in Elizande, 2003).

The main distinction between modern and contemporary intimacy would therefore be that, while the former was physical (in that people valued their private lives at home behind closed doors, in a self-contained space unreachable by intruding others), the latter has turned both emotional and relational and it relies on the establishment of the intersubjective involvements that would, in earlier times, been expected only from the unsophisticated classes. That is to say that, from today's more cultured individual's point of view, “what used to be an absolute secret may today be a topic of public discussion in the media”; “what used to proudly pertain to the intimate realm is nowadays placidly flaunted” and “people's private life is being, at the present, purposely or unwillingly, exhibited” (Mateus 2010, 62-63). What is curious, nonetheless, is that in our text, rather than following this transformation in the social development of either a single individual or of a group representative of the whole society, what we are presented with is a triple act in which our two peasants are just being themselves in the traditional, male, popular way and we, the reporter and ourselves as modern readers, are responding with fascination and a tinge of morbidity to what we perceive as vaguely embarrassing and totally politically incorrect. What I would like to suggest is that, it is precisely the contradiction between the traditional Mediterranean peasant's model, the educated Mediterranean mixed readership and the Nordic model presented by Mateus, that makes *Living l'Havana* such a gripping read.

The concept of extimacy has been further defined by David Pavón Cuéllar in terms of its debunking of physical oppositions. For him,

Extimacy indicates the non-distinction and essential identity between the dual terms of the outside and the deepest inside, the exterior and the most interior of the psyche, the outer world

and the inner world of the subject, culture and the core of personality, the social and the mental, surface and depth, behaviour and thoughts or feelings. (Pavón Cuéllar 2014, 661)

And that feeds into the current outward-facing belief explained by Hannah Arendt that “beings and animals are themselves beings of appearance predestined to being able to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, to touch and be touched” (1999, 30). From that perspective, “living beings are simultaneously subjects and objects” because they can watch and be watched. Not only that, but for her, a key element of being alive is that it “denotes an impulse to self-display corresponding to apparent dimension” (1999, 31). From this it follows that extimacy is a movement towards exteriority, towards the public gaze, towards the look of others. Unlike intimacy, extimacy is characterised by the exposure of individual’s inner, most subjective core and is sustained by the genuine desire the individual feels to communicate his or her interior and psychological state (Tisseron 2005, 52).

2. *Living l’Havana* and extimacy

Bearing in mind the ideas outlined above, it seems relevant that Ferran Torrent wrote this particular book in the late nineteen nineties when intimacy went public, reality TV blossomed, and the social media boom was just about to happen. *Living l’Havana* can, in this context, be seen as a clear example of public disclosure and can therefore be analysed in the light of the critical scholarship that has been recently developed around the study of the impact exerted by reality programmes upon TV audiences. That is, we can view it as a case of extimacy where “the interior’s public revelation is part of the process where the self-accomplishment of the individual relies on other’s opinion to succeed” (Mateus 2010, 63); and where the influence of the media, especially television, plays a major role by offering a wide range of opportunities for both the transmission of public confessions and for the creation of a public and shareable intimacy.

The 1990s appearance of TV reality shows participates in the phenomenon of extimacy giving the masses the opportunity to make a statement and express themselves differently. As Dominique Mehl has said, television’s image gives an additional impetus to the extimacy tendency of promoting an emotional publicness in which affection has the same value as reason (cited by Mateus 2010, 68). By moving away from the knowledge imparted by the specialists and giving the word to the average man, we obtain an enlightened perspective of our own life from which there simultaneously emerges a collective and social project based on personal experience and not on rational knowledge. According to Mehl, “[r]eality shows, confession shows, documentaries on the personal experience of anonymous people, ‘forum’ television, ‘truth’ television, ‘town meeting’ television — all these types of programme that mushroomed at the start of the 1990s, are based on what ordinary people have to say” (1996, 75).

The use of television techniques in the narrative introduces the society’s gaze directly into the emotion’s core giving a face to a formal sentiment. The tears one drops in front of an audience make the deepest and most private emotions visible and “it is this transparency, this intimacy’s capacity to be seen by anyone, that strikes us most” (Mateus 2010, 64). According to Mehl, reality TV breaks habits and taboos by showing what was previously thought unfit to be seen, and yet it provides an opportunity to air genuine distress, real problems, and honest expressions of need (1996, 75). This is something that we see very clearly in the tripartite chat between *Living l’Havana*’s nameless protagonist, Vicent T. and Tano, where we find a clear

desire to share secrets (specific tips and warnings on how to deal with the emotions created by the intense affective and sexual relationships that Vicent T. and Tano reveal, and their desire to give voice to old emotional traumas that, in the mind of the characters, explain and to some extent justify their touristic habits).

My contention is that *Living l'Havana* displays some characteristics of each one of the 4 types of reality shows identified by Mehl (the personal message, the therapeutic unburdening, the confession on camera and the public message), but with the highest prominence of the latter, the public message:

In this case the reason for giving public testimony is to issue warnings to the community, to give advice or precepts that others may follow, and suggest lessons that can be applied in other contexts. These lessons do not however derive from established wisdom but from individual experience. Exemplary accounts or emblematic characters provide the transition between the individual and the general. [...] On questions concerning morals, private lives, certain special interests and, more generally, cultural differences, the television of intimacy acts as a sounding board for or even // replaces local associations and identity groups. (Mehl 1996, 75-76)

What is interesting is the way in which this type of programmes work on the basis of subversion of intellectual authority. That is, the television of intimacy, “poses the question of the status of expertise and the value of personal testimony in the public space” (Mehl 1996, 77) because, while

the rationally-based public space relies on knowledge, expertise, opinions and beliefs, buttressed by learning or references to systems of thought [...] the public space based on experience accords validity to emotions, promotes expression by non-experts, and fosters individuality. It offers individual examples, evocative cases and emblematic figures. It gives a platform to users, consumers and ordinary members of society. [...] It swings towards initiation and learning through experience; it bathes in light and shade. (Mehl 1996, 77)

Indeed, Alain Ehrenberg announced that “subjectivity has become a collective matter” but on the other side of the coin, “public rules, norms and laws have been privatised, rewritten and reformulated in individual private lives: for instance, the matrimonial bond, divorce (or demarriage), sexual roles, educational convictions and mourning” (quoted in Mehl 1996, 79). Neither religion, norms, nor shared beliefs are now available to signpost the terrain and lay down what should be kept to oneself and what can be said to others. Everyone defines their own limits and boundaries in their own way (80).

In this respect, the idea of becoming a minor celebrity capable of influencing an audience is indeed a trigger for further disclosure. In our case, for instance, it is amusing to see how, after the account of his experiences as a sexual tourist in Havana is already underway, Vicent T. finds out that the narrator of our story is in fact a journalist, his attitude becomes even more enthusiastic:

— Un moment —el vaig tallar en sec. Estava interessat en el seu relat i pretenia evitar que alterara l'ordre cronològic encetat—. Ens havíem quedat en el conflicte entre el món que nosaltres representem i les cubanes.

—Cony, sembles un periodista.

—Ho sóc.

—¿De veritat?

—De fet, potser faré un reportatge sobre l'Havana.

—Home, haver-m'ho dit! Si ho haguera sabut t'hauria detallat més les coses. (Torrent 1999, 175)

This interest in the gory detail is a clear characteristic of the reality discourse. It links with the power attributed to the telling of a good anecdote and at the same time it gives justification to the disclosure of fascinating information too exciting to withhold before a keen audience. This is what prompts Vicent T. to swiftly asks Tano:

Tano, explica-li ací al company el numeret de la “lavadora” que et fa la Mercedes. En veu baixa, Tano, que jo li pregue. La “lavadora” ...ui, la “lavadora”, repetí somiador com aquell que evoca moments inoblidables de la seua vida... (Torrent 1999, 294)

As we can see, even though Vicent T. asks Tano to keep his voice low, he immediately surrenders to the account and its disclosure, as something which will be inevitably shared with all other passengers on the plane. We can therefore see how

Intimacy is no longer determined by ‘morality’ or the representation of modesty, it has become a subject to individual definitions formulated in interaction with the encouragements or condemnations of the social fabric, which are themselves formed in a purely empirical way. As our societies entered the era of cultural liberalism, they also entered the era of cultural relativism. Modesty, decency, reserve and intimacy are caught up in this twofold movement which results in the subjectivization of value systems. (Mehl 1996, 80)

However, while private space, private life and now intimacy have become visible, the innermost being is for the moment still kept out of the spotlight. Matters of conscience, introspection, pondering motives and indecision are resolved away from the public gaze, and (for the time being?) in the shadows. That is, the personal stories behind Vicent T. and Tano’s revelations are not fully accounted for. Instead, they make quite an attempt at keeping them secret and it is their inability to handle themselves in the disciplined way that a philosopher or academic would, what allows the audience (or the reader in this case) to piece together a rough version of what lays within their armour.

Those who appear on the television of intimacy bear witness to this; even while revealing themselves, they redraw the borders of their ‘secret garden’. While unburdening themselves, they retain their singularity [and] their personal reserve survives the ordeal intact. (Mehl 1996, 80)

To compound the effect of this technique, a further element of comedy introduced by Ferran Torrent in our novel, is precisely the handling of timing. That is, Vicent T. talks to the protagonist about his love, Maite, when Tano goes to the toilet and abruptly changes the topic of conversation when he comes back, and Tano also talks about Mercedes when Vicent T.’s turn to use the facilities comes but abruptly changes the topic of conversation on his return. Therefore, even though there are parts of their individual revelations that they will not disclose in front of each other, we (the readers turned audience) tend to trust what we see, and as spectators of one another we seem to witness what we identify as “individual authenticity” (Mateus 2012, 209) and that satisfies us.

3. Sex tourism in Cuba

In both Patricia Tomé and Teresa Marrero’s analyses of the development of modern sex tourism in Cuba in the *periodo especial* of the 1980s and 90s¹ it is evident that the

¹ Relevant when bearing in mind that Torrent’s book was written in 1999.

collapse of the Soviet Union and the continued U.S. embargo on the island lead to the identification of tourism as the only immediate source of foreign income for the country. From that point on, sex tourism was openly advertised in Spain, Italy, Canada, Germany and Mexico and the thirst for sexual services became the main driver for many of the tourists visiting Cuba (Tomé 2009, 58; Marrero 2003, 235). What is more, according to Tomé, the profile of the customers amongst which this type of holiday flourished is exactly that of Vicent T. and Tano:

En España, uno de los países con mayor número de turistas que visitan la isla anualmente, inclusive se conoce el nombre de *turipepes* a aquellos hombres de negocios de mediana edad, solos y ávidos de sexo fácil y exótico, que viajan frecuentemente a Cuba para encontrar a su *jinetera especial*. (Tomé 2009, 68)²

Like the prototypical *turipepes*, Vicent T. and Tano are drawn to Havana because what sells in Cuba is right on the dance floor: rum, cigars and the *mulattas* (Marrero 2003, 245). More specifically, we see how, simultaneously with the easy pleasures of music, alcohol and quality smoking, sexual tourism creates powerful images, fantasies and desires that are inextricably tied up with race and gender (Brennan 2004, 709). That is so because, according Marrero, from a historical perspective:

As a household slave, the mulatta's body was held as an accessible / penetrable object of male pleasure. Rights of ownership were involved, refusal by the mulatta woman, impossible. Her subjectivity violated, she became an object of desire. She became Other. (Marrero 2003, 245)

Therefore, "certain European, Canadian and American consumers" showed a clear preference for "the exoticism of the Cuban, hot mulatta" (Marrero 2003, 245). More specifically, and as seen in our novel, this category of women became the focus of attention of those men who had been rejected by their local women and whom, as our narrative shows, blindly believe in their assured servitude and, consequently see then as a warrant of their absolute immunity to being rejected again. This makes the topic of "the fling with the mulatta" a most successful fantasy, especially when we see it in the context of a big success for the anti-hero — a topic which Torrent will certainly explore:

— ¿Hi vas molt?

[Vicent T.] va somriure, com si haguera estat esperant just la pregunta que a ell li donava l'envit oportú per exhibir el seu parloteig obsequiós amb mi. Des del 90, quatre o cinc vegades cada any. Però mai un estiu. [...] Què saps de Cuba?

— Doncs que tenen un bon rom, excel·lents puros, les mulates..., en fi, el que tothom coneix.

— Et contaré algunes coses sobre les mulates, o millor, sobre les cubanes. (Torrent 1999, 82)

In the descriptions that follow, we see how Havana becomes a paradise for losers, that is, for men who have proven unable to keep up with female emancipation and acquisition of individual rights. These men, as explained by Mehl, are perfectly happy to rewrite their set of morals and to proudly share their non-intellectual, escape route with other people like them. As Vicent T. explains:

Vinc a l'Havana per elles, però no per una en concret. Hi vinc també motivat per la nostàlgia. A l'Havana, a Cuba, el temps s'ha parat. És com si tornares als anys seixanta. Els cotxes, les formes de vida, els costums... gairebé tot et remet, per a la gent de la nostra generació, al passat. (Torrent 1999, 100)

² It has been said that Torrent had an uncle who had the habit of disappearing for countless Caribbean solo holidays but who never told anyone what exactly he was up to, causing much intrigue in the family.

The problem is that, as Brennan explains when talking about her research in the Dominican Republic:

The proliferation of sex-tourist destinations/sexscapes throughout the developing world reflects global capital's destabilising effects on less industrialised countries' economies where globalisation of capital not only shapes women's work options in the developing world, but also often forces them into dangerous and insecure work. (2004, 709)

When that is the case, this economic pressure often results in the women moving to Western countries to earn money for the family. However, in Cuba women cannot easily be sent abroad and therefore they await the tourists in their own country and, if they can, get them to pay for a better home for them. This unfolds a most interesting game of mirrors, because in Western European cultural norms, "there exists an implicit, socially marked distinction between sexual promiscuity, which does not involve an economic exchange and prostitution, which does" (Marrero 2003, 247), but when going to Cuba "the men claim to be looking at a relationship that offers sexual pleasure, but not to be casual prostitute users and regard themselves as "decent" (238). This we can see in our novel, as "Ferran Torrent presents a gallery of characters who are perfectly moral in their apparent immorality" (Pons 1989, 6). Then, again, Cuba offers an interesting variant to other countries in that:

The women involved in *jineterismo* do not identify themselves as prostitutes because they see themselves performing actions that are a means to an end (relations with tourists are promoted by the need for acquiring dollars as cash currency). [...] *Jineteras* refer to themselves as being "en la lucha", which has historically been associated with the Cuban Communist resistance stance against US political and economic imperialism. (Marrero 2003, 238)³

Indeed, in her studies, Marrero notes that it is important to remember that "[t]he Revolution claimed to have eradicated prostitution since the 1960s" and that it was reputed to have also "removed the kind of international tourism that had made the island notoriously corrupt prior to 1959" (2003, 238). This explains why, even with its blatant similarities, what existed in Cuba in the 1990s could not possibly have been described with the same terms as it did before the Revolution. And this is exactly what tourists like Vicent T. and Tano use as a means of excusing their behaviour. Indeed, even amongst Cuban women, there is a perceived difference between doing the bars and having regular clients, as the latter offers more security to both parties (even though often both parties withhold sensitive information) (Brennan 2004, 711). In essence, Cuban sex workers not only pretend that they desire their clients and enjoy sex with them, but that they love them deeply, too⁴ (711). That way, sex tourists not only are not forced to see themselves as the type of men who have to pay for sex, but as men who could even be in love: "A Cuba la vida és difícil", says Vicent T., "tu estimes... bé, no saps si l'estimes a ella o el que ella t'ofereix, que són dues coses ben diferents" (Torrent 1999, 201), but to him, that is academic. However, while from the perspective of modern extimacy, popular *savoir faire* is often rated higher than old-fashioned common sense, intimate disclosures such as those in *Living l'Havana* can expose social complexities capable of plunging the unexpecting individual out of its simplistic depths. Here is where "the value of personal testimony in the public space" (Mehl 1996, 77) comes into its own:

³ Marrero wrote her articles after a long stay in Cuba doing fieldwork in 1997.

⁴ In fact "the men are all potential dupes, essentially walking visas, who can help the women leave the island" (Brennan 2004, 711).

In the contemporary situation, the mulatta, as a highly prized commodity, has an added dimension: she can manipulate not only men's desire but also its cost. This allows her a measure of control over the situation, which ultimately translates into control over how many American dollars she gets for her services. This space for negotiation, and the fact that *jineteras* are free agents without a pimp, allows them to redefine standard economic, capitalistic notions of (sex) consumerism. (Marrero 2003, 245)

And here is where Vicent T.'s street wisdom comes in handy, because, as he knows full well:

Si et diuen "tú no eres blanco, mi amor" estan suggerint que ets un bon amant. Són dones amables i en certa manera caritatives, no trobes? Ara tot això no és gratuït. Nosaltres representem un món a què elles volen accedir i procuren encisar-te amb la millor arma que saben usar i que tu, al capdavant, busques. I ací, sovint, es produeix el conflicte. (Torrent 1999, 134)

The exhibition of vulnerability will thus become central to the public revelation of intimacy, and, in turn, it will confirm the individual's testimony as real, useful, and more valuable than a professional, academic or establishment-empowered, patronising lesson on human values. As Vicent T. goes on to explain:

El conflicte, doncs, ve quan t'enconyes amb una cubana. T'ho dic per experiència pròpia. Les coses com siguen, no t'amagaré detalls privats. [...] Aleshores estàs venut, perquè es converteix en una obsessió. Seus al porxo de casa i somies en la pell suau, fina i lleugerament entresuada d'ella; somies les seues natges, tibants i brillants... (Torrent 1999, 181-187)

This type of revelation, so typical of reality TV, not only becomes uncomfortable for the audience, but also deeply moving and fascinating, as noted by our narrator/protagonist:

Vaig mirar a la meua esquerra, comprovant que cap dels passatgers no ens estiguera observant, perquè Vicent T. exhibia un to de veu melós i amb les mans dibuixava el cul pompós de la cubana. Era un espectacle bastant divertit, per cert —semblava que la tenia entre els braços. (Torrent 1999, 187)

This lack of self-reflexivity allows the men involved to maintain a self-image of a good guy, someone who is irresistibly charming. "He can also think of himself as generous for helping out this poor young woman" (Marrero 2003, 243-44), and therefore he feels comforted by adhering to a type of scripted behaviour of consumption (239), which is deeply in tune with the matter-of-fact attitude towards the acquisition of good and services so engrained in today's credit-card-indebted society. This self-(dis)identification seems to go both ways in our story as, on the one hand, the men do not admit to being sex tourists, but like the women, claim to be in love (or almost in love) with their lovers while not wanting commitment and, on the other, they tell us about Havana, warts and all, without filters and in a jocular, cynical but healthy way, while at the same time disclosing many gratuitous details on their own personal feelings, needs and limitations. In this respect, we can argue that, though talking to an audience, the characters of *Living l'Havana* expose the intimate details of the relationships that they try and fail to fathom and fully reveal what they had thus far relegated to the category of the unsaid.

4. Conclusions

In all, we can say that the historical and ideological backdrop on intimacy, extimacy and subjectivation is useful to us, because Torrent wrote his novel at a particular moment (the 1990s, before the boom of social media, but at the time of the explosion of reality TV) when these concepts were being shaped and, also because in the techniques that he uses as a writer, he leans on the wisdom derived from the random experiences of a couple of unsophisticated individuals, rather than on the words of the wise and the good that one could have easily acquired by purchasing a published guidebook.⁵ As Torrent states: “Mi obra siempre trata de vividores perdedores” (Obiols 1999), and *Living L’Havana* is no exception. That is, while in the introduction to the book Ramon Barnils says that Torrent went to Havana “a aclarir tot aquest embull de comunisme i llibertat [...] perquè els que no hi hem anat [...] en puguem finalment treure el trellat” (1999, 7), Torrent himself declares that his intention was not to comment on the social and political issues of the Cuban capital, because, “[c]on el tiempo que estuve allí, no tengo derecho a entrar en este tipo de análisis” (Obiols 1999). Therefore, I am happy to argue that it is more likely that the real intention of the piece was to talk about Havana and its lure and to investigate the magnetism it exerts upon the real, ordinary people who like it as a regular destination. As a topic that has been relevant to many ordinary people in Spain and which, according to modern values, had always been hushed, the position of this narrative would coincide with that of those who express the extimate “wish to divide intimacy equally between people and share what used to be a well-guarded secret” (Mateus 2010, 64). In that context, Vicent T. could represent an example of someone who had been forced to live with a traumatic and damaging love relationship which he could never talk about and who keeps his sanity through his regular visits to the city. Tano, who, being more pragmatic, could be seen as the quiet man who has sussed out the ins and outs of sexual encounters in Havana, and has settled for a regular lover, whom he keeps happy but distant. And the protagonist could be the receptor of the public message on inter-cultural (Valencian-Cuban) understanding that one would derive from watching a reality TV programme. In all cases, the public intimacy shapes an extimacy due to the individuals’ earlier prevention to communicate their interior feelings, ask the unmasked specific questions; receive the unfiltered, unhipocritical answers they long for and enjoy the opportunity of now expressing their deep or not so deep thoughts to an uncritical audience (to the rest of the people seating nearby in the plane and, by extension, to all the readers of the book).

In this respect, we have seen that Torrent’s account of the two Valencian peasants who travel regularly to Havana to fulfil their sexual and emotional needs has been proven to transcend the entertainingly anecdotal to become a study in the ways in which contemporary narrative can contribute to the commodification of intimacy. That is, by looking at the text from the perspective of extimacy and subjectivation, helped by many of the techniques that we often identify with the television of intimacy and a big dollop of humour, we can see how the relation of the intimate and the exterior ceases to be a duality and becomes a new reality that exploits the recent push towards public intimacy and foretells the developments that social media are staging for us today.

⁵ For instance, the description of Vicent T. and Tano’s appearance at the airport in their holiday attire and their explanations and mannerisms as the bottle of Cardhu empties, are nothing but carnivalesque.

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