ITINERANT IDENTITIES:
GALICIAN DIASPORA AND GENRE
SUBVERSION IN MANUEL RIVAS'S
A MAN DOS PAÍÑOS

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In the summer and autumn of 2005 there was an exhibit in A Coruña titled Diáspora. 10 artistas gallegos en el exilio latinoamericano, held to call attention to the historic dispersion of the Galician people since the middle of the nineteenth century. For the past century and a half, Galician emigrants have strived to preserve a sense of cohesive identity despite their geographic displacement. A Galician artist born in Argentina of emigrant parents, Luis Seoane, describes the land left behind as peculiarly bound to emigrant identity: “El emigrante, se sabe, no vive en la tierra, la tiene incorporada a su ser” (Estévez). This quote captures the topic of the exhibit in A Coruña as well as the theme of this article, that is, the complexity of defining identity in relation to space. Indeed, in this period of expanding globalization, migration becomes an increasingly pertinent factor in defining the self, one which distorts the old equation of nation, land, and identity. As Seoane observes, emigration undercuts the traditional concept of identity as a stable ground: instead of indicating the place from whence one comes, identity now implies carrying that place within oneself wherever one goes. That is, the land—and identity—become objects of mobility.

In his analysis of diaspora as a special condition that results from emigration, Fernando Pérez-Barreiro Nolla argues
that the Galician diaspora should be included in the overall concept of Galician identity "como factor da naturaleza e o futuro do país galego." The definition of diaspora that Pérez-Barreiro Nolla employs coincides with the basic definition proposed by William Safran in the inaugural volume of the journal *Diaspora*, founded in 1991. Essentially, a diaspora refers to communities of expatriate minorities whose members display some combination of the following characteristics: 1) they or their forebears have been dispersed from their center of origin to two or more foreign regions; 2) they maintain a vision or collective memory of their country of origin; 3) they are not completely accepted by the adopted country, which creates in them a sense of alienation; 4) they see their country of origin as the true, ideal homeland, as the place where they or their descendants desire to return; 5) they believe that they must be committed to the survival or the restoration of their native land, as well as to its prosperity; 6) in some way, the native land plays an important role in defining their identity (Safran 83-84). If the word "Diaspora" originally referred to the plight of the Jews in particular, now the term is applied more generally to many dispersed groups that, due to historical and political circumstances, share a combination of some of the factors described above. In any case, the concept of diaspora foregrounds and destabilizes themes of location, displacement, loss, recovery, self, other, and home as a determinate place.

A fundamental element of diasporic identity is the act of putting down roots elsewhere, which involves the act of traveling. In his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, anthropologist James Clifford notes that the traditional concept of culture presupposes the act of dwelling as the basis of cultural life, whereas the act of travel has been seen as superfluous. Nonetheless, Clifford plays with the homonyms *roots* and *routes* to denote that travel—displacement—is as important to identity as home is: "Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always preceded routes. But what would happen, I began to ask, if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experi-
ences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension” (3). For Clifford, the symbiosis between traveling and dwelling distinguishes the concept of diaspora from the notion of a mere trip. Whereas a trip is a temporary act, diaspora is an undertaking that lasts and that presupposes putting down roots:

Diaspora ... involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this it is different from exile, with its frequently individualist focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots and routes to construct... alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. (251)

In general Clifford agrees with Safran on the fundamental qualities that make up a diaspora, but he emphasizes that it is impossible to describe all cases of diaspora in completely equal terms. Moreover, Clifford views diasporic identity as one that is inherently dynamic in nature, a combination of roots and routes, rather than an identity that is suspended in the static opposition between dwelling at home versus dwelling elsewhere. In fact, for Clifford, places themselves take on their identities through the process of interaction between self and other: “Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things” (3). In light of this, then, any location becomes an itinerary, a series of encounters and adaptations, instead of simply a static site. Hence it is possible and even essential to examine how different diasporic communities seek ways of dwelling with loss in the midst of displacement.

Author Manuel Rivas foregrounds the relationship between home and away in his exploration of contemporary Galician identity in A man dos paños (2000). As Galician
scholar Dolores Vilavedra affirms, Rivas’s ethnic vocation distinguishes him as one of the leading Galician writers who strive to recover old myths and meld them into the present and future of Galician identity: “se esforzan por recuperar e reelaborar vellos mitos cos que contribuír a devolver a fe en si mesma, e a ilusión no seu futuro como colectividade, á sociedade galega” (23-24). Rivas re-examines the notion of the land as the foundation of Galician identity by exploring the complexities of dwelling, departure, and displacement. In his prologue to the Castilian version of La mano del emigrante, Rivas asserts that “La vida humana transita entre el Apego y la Pérdida” (8). This image of transit evokes the idea of travel, of crossing the frontier between what is known and unknown. While numerous Rivas works explore how this issue affects the construction of identity in general, A man dos paños is unique, for Rivas metaphorically imbues his vision of dynamic, diasporic identity into the tripartite structure of the book so that the technique accentuates and elucidates the theme. This text is a combination of a long story that lends its title to the entire work, a section of photographs that proposes to tell visually the story of an emigrant gaze and, finally, a newspaper story about shipwreck victims, which poetically repeats the focus of the rest of the book in its themes of loss, the struggle for survival, and the desire to find a new life in another realm. Each section reflects back upon the others and yet also refracts off them to provide different angles of vision on how subjectivity and power influence the construction of identity. By crossing and questioning genres in this way, A man dos paños metaphorically highlights the overlapping boundaries in Galician identity. Ultimately, Rivas’s work foregrounds the concept of dynamic, diasporic identity in order to undermine the notion of homeland as the sole, static center in the spatial configuration of Galician identity.
Attachment and Loss: The Traveling Narrative of “A man dos paños”

In the story “A man dos paños,” the Galician narrator recounts his friendship with Castro, a Galician emigrant who works with him as a stretcher-bearer at a hospital in London. When Castro speaks or tells a story, he always gestures evocatively in the air with his hand, which bears an intriguing tattoo of a paño, a small European marine bird. One day, on the way to the airport to return to Galicia for the Christmas holiday, the two men are in a car accident in which the narrator loses his hand and Castro is killed. Later, under the illusion that the doctors grafted his friend’s hand onto him when they operated, the narrator completely changes his personality, becoming happier and more outgoing. Then he is devastated and confused to discover that the newly attached hand is merely his own, not his friend’s. When he finally returns to Galicia to bring Castro’s ashes to his mother, the grieving woman tells him that Castro had gotten the tattoo to brand the hand that had not been able to hold on to his baby sister when she slipped off a cliff into the sea and drowned. So the friend whom the narrator had come to know abroad turns out to have a very different history than what he imagined. Whereas, in London, the narrator was attracted by what he perceived as Castro’s difference from him, Castro’s cohesive sense of self, in Galicia he is drawn to Castro’s similarity to him as one who grieves the loss of an essential part of himself.

“A man dos paños” examines a diasporic community of Galicians who, like so many others, have moved to London for economic reasons and who strive to find their identity in the foreign city. Much of the action takes place in the bar the Old Crow, a hang-out for expatriate Galicians. As one would expect, many of them feel nostalgia for the land they have left and, inspired by the mellifluous singing of their Galician friend, Ruán, they can visualize the Galician landscape taking shape atop the green felt of the bar’s pool table: “Cando el lle cantaba no Old Crow á verde, verde herba da terra natal, o tapete aveludado agrandábase como un prado no luar. Escorría, cadencioso, un rego nos corazóns. Daban
ganas de bicar aquela pastoriza” (16). Nonetheless, despite his expatriate identity, the narrator’s friend, Castro, rejects the notion of an idealized homeland that might one day embrace his permanent return: “¿Sabes unha cosa? Quérolle á miña nai, que é o que me queda alá, quero os meus mortos... quero as lembranzas, boas ou malas, pero non me pidas que ame o meu país... ¡A miña patria é un hospital!” (16). His loss of a homeland, of loved ones, is manifested in Castro’s way of walking, which a friend classifies as “o andar de quen perdeu algo” (20). Castro considers himself beholden and belonging to no nation state, but rather to the human race, to the place of pain where he works to alleviate suffering. His homeland is a hospital, a site of solidarity with the poor and less fortunate who congregate in the society where he now dwells, for home and community may be created and felt anywhere. Here Rivas distances himself from Safran’s early definition of diaspora, which hinged on the rather rigid opposition between home and away, to ally himself with Clifford’s more dynamic concept of identity as a lived itinerary that embraces one’s roots, routes, and destinations. Far from resenting his host country, Castro pragmatically recognizes the value of the land that has taken them in and given them an escape from their previous life: “Nas despedidas todos choramos, si. Pero, lembra, ¿quen eran os que máis choraban? Os que ficaban en terra. Eles si que tiñan morriña, morriña de non poderen marchar” (15). If morriña conventionally refers to what one has had and lost—“el apego y la pérdida,” in Rivas’s terms—here the author redefines the greatest morriña as mourning for what has not yet been possessed except in the form of an unrealized desire. For Rivas, the most haunting morriña aches in the anticipation of loss, in the inability to leave, in immobility rather than mobility.

The classic symbol of emigration as an essential part of Galician identity in the story is Hercules Lighthouse on the coast of A Coruña. The tower is described as “A primeira e a derradeira luz. A luz da arribada e a do adeus” (19). A marker of going and coming and the interaction with travelers, the tower is emblazoned on the landscape of memory for those who depart, as their last glimpse of the homeland. For
those who stay behind, it marks the horizon as a reminder of
the border they have not traversed. For the Galician
children, emigration constitutes one of the few possibilities
open to them in life: “O campo de xogo da infancia definiou
un triángulo. No vértice da esquerda, a prisión provincial; no
da dereita, o cemiterio de San Amaro. De fronte, o faro, a
Torre de Hércules... Por iso, cando de nenos nos preguntaban
quê queríamos ser de maiores, os ollos ían fuxidos do
cárcere ao camposanto. Por fin, atopaban a salvación no faro.
E unha voz interior berraba: ¡Emigrante!” (19). As a monu-
ment to Roman civilization, which founded the peninsula as a
gateway of travel, Hercules Tower marks Galicia as a contact
zone of multiple cultures and thus represents Galician iden-
tity as inherently itinerant. Moreover, in the narrator’s ac-
count, this lighthouse simultaneously signals the route home
and away, merging the two oppositions into one dynamic
symbol of the places and paths by which one constructs one’s
identity as itinerant.

As the title of the work indicates, the hand of the emi-
grant, Castro, with its tattoo of paíños, constitutes the quin-
tessential symbol of diasporic identity in the story. The paíño
is a small ocean bird that thrives around the waters between
England and the European continent, as well as some parts
of the Mediterranean. For the narrator, it is “A derradeira
companía do mariñeiro” (14). In fact, the bird itself is a
creature of travel: it accompanies the voyager on his ocean
crossing. Moreover, in the winter the paíño embarks on his
own journey of migration to the coast of southern Africa. As
the epigraph denotes, these birds “... voan a rentes da auga e
parecen camiñar sobre ela” (9). Blurring the division between
flying and walking, between sea and land, these birds defy
the notion of static identity and embody a traveling identity.
The paíños tattooed on the web of skin between Castro’s
thumb and index finger are liminal beings that appear and
disappear with the movements of the hand. As such, they
imply a sense of shelter—not only from the solitude of the
sea, but also from the anguish of wavering on the frontier be-
tween different terrains. Rivas adds another level of meaning
to this bird by having it also bestow comfort and company on
the journey between the “terrains” of life and death. The paños on Castro’s hand represent a sort of shelter for patients in the hospital, a flying, floating anchor amid the tumult of travel from life to near-death and back again:

Cando o camilleiro leva un paciente polo corredor encerado, os paxaros do mar asubían nas rodas. Revoan na órbita do rostro do enfermo cando o silencioso camilleiro ... dobra o embozo da saba sobre o seu peito, ese último aceno de amparo. Nos primeiros intres da anestesia, os paños xa pasaron a ras de la cresta enrizada del sueño y se posaron sobre las pestañas. Así, el sueño es profundo pero no abismal. En la inmensidad clínica ... el enfermo recompone la existencia a partir del tatuaje del camillero. (18-19)

Hence the paños are the ultimate companion and the final haven for everyone: the sailor, the patient, any sort of traveler. In this sense they represent human existence as, fundamentally, a roving existence.

For the narrator, the tattooed hand—as a synecdoche of Castro—represents the restoration of a cohesive, originary identity, one that is superior to his perception of his old self as fragmented and uncertain. He considers the hand to be “unha obra de arte chea de vida” (38) with a magical ability to express itself: It is the pulse of Castro’s entire identity. After the operation in which the narrator believes that the doctors have transplanted his friend’s hand onto his arm, he discovers a new sense of self: “Es como un cangrexo ermitán, metido na caracola, dixérame unha vez Castro. Tes que abrir-te ao mundo. E niso estaba. Os paños subían brazo arriba, polos nervos, e pairaban na cabeza. As enfermeiras, que me tiñan por un tûzaro, sorprendéronse co meu cambio de humor” (37). The narrator accepts the transplant of Castro’s hand and what he idealizes as Castro’s cohesive identity as if they could fuse his dismembered self together again.

Yet the notion of taking on a unified identity that can heal the narrator’s sense of self turns out to be an eternally deferred illusion, for the idealized hand turns out to be merely
a reattached fragment of his own body. When the narrator discovers that the new hand is, in reality, his own hand, he is submerged in an abyss of physical and psychological disconnect. He does not identify with his own hand, despite the fact that the operation was a physiological success. So long as Castro's identity and strength seemed to pulsate in his hand, the narrator could maintain the illusion that his friend was still alive, and harbor the hope of regaining life for himself through the transplant. Without the hand of the pañenos, everything seems disconnected, unreal and useless. Curiously, his own hand becomes personified, taking on its own identity and an attitude of resentment for being rejected by its owner. On one occasion, when the narrator denies that he has hurt himself in a fall, despite blood dripping from his hand, he observes that "Mirei a man e a man devolveume unha mirada infectada e desavida" (42). The detachment from the original hand suggests the inability to relate to his own identity as a Galician emigrant.

Upon returning to Galicia to bring Castro's mother his ashes, however, the narrator discovers that in fact the identity of his friend was not the admired, integrated identity of a well-adjusted emigrant, but rather a conflicted identity that was founded in loss. As a child, Castro had lost his father, who had also suffered a sort of exile—not the exterior exile of emigration, but an exile that was literally interior: he had to live underground in a grotto in order to evade the Nationalist soldiers who searched for him during the Civil War. To carry out her plan of hiding her husband in the earth and pretending that he had died in order to protect him, Castro's mother had to get rid of the boy's beloved dog so that its excited barking would not reveal where the father was hidden. As the mother tells it, all of this imposed a series of losses on the child: "Débía pensar que eu me adicaba a facer desaparecer as cousas que el quería" (48). As a consequence of the father's secret visits on the coldest winter nights, the mother became pregnant and had to impose another great loss on the boy, lying to him that his beloved father, whom he thought was living in exile in America, had died. In this way, the mother could feign that the baby came from her relations
with one of her relatives and not put her husband’s life at further risk. The new baby girl became a source of love for everyone, replacing all that had been lost during the war: the father, their family life, security, and happiness. When the young Castro was unable to continue gripping his little sister’s hand when she fell into the sea, it was as if he lost part of himself: “O rapaz ouveou como se lle arrancaran a man en vivo. Todo o lugar escoitou aquel berro” (54). Castro’s hand, then, becomes a reminder that the loss of emigration is just one more link in a chain of losses already experienced in the native land.

What distinguishes the narrator from Castro is that, for the latter, the hand with the paños represents the reconciliation between attachment and loss in his identity. What the narrator idealized as Castro’s fixed, grounded identity turns out to be a complex identity marked by conflict and displacement as well as by cohesion and a sense of home. According to his mother, the young Castro spent years trying to drown his pain in alcohol on many sailing voyages, until the day when he returned from one very long trip with his new tattoo: “Pero dunha vez volveu cambiado... Preguntelle para qué fixera aquilo, que lle ña a quedar a man marcada por toda a vida. E díxome: Nalgún sitio tiñan que pousar os paños” (57-58). In alighting on the body, the transitory bird becomes settled, albeit temporarily, for both motion and stasis are essential to its being. If the paño is the ultimate friend of the sailor, then the sailor becomes the ultimate refuge for the paño when he harbors it in the web of his hand. When the narrator listens to this story of Castro’s past, for the first time his re-attached hand responds physically of its own accord: “Pareceume notar que a man reaxía, punzada pola verdade” (55). It is as though the narrator’s hand recognizes a truth in Castro’s story: in a metaphor of diasporic identity, the part that was amputated and affixed anew now fuses with the rest of the body in acceptance of its identity as altered, yet newly whole.

In accepting the reattachment of his hand, the narrator recognizes that his identity harbors two facets, the one founded in Galicia as well as the one forged abroad. From
that point forward, his affixed hand takes on new life: “Ao andar, a man faciasse notar, reanimada, a unha cuarta da perna. Pero eu no lle facía caso. Deixaba que de vez en cando adornara no ar o meu falar de solitario” (58). Now, as this emigrant walks through the streets—an act evocative of his itinerant identity—his hand imitates Castro’s in “o andar de quen perdeu algo” (20) and in his manner of gesturing in self-expression when speaking, even if he speaks “de solitario.” Yet in the narrator this is no longer merely the gesture of one who has lost something, but rather of one who has revived and evolved by discovering what he retains. In this way, Rivas’s text ultimately transcends the notion of identity as fixed and originary, to posit it as an itinerant process that is shaped by the places it traverses and the people it encounters. At the end of the story, the narrator gets his own tattoo of paíños on his operated hand and feels united, more than ever, with his friend. Thus the one becomes part of the other, both identities fused in the attachment to what was lost, in simultaneously living in and leaving Galicia.

The Telling Gaze of “O álbom furtivo”

Following the story “A man dos paíños” is what Rivas calls “quizás la parte más extraña del libro” (La mano del emigrante 10), a section titled “O álbom furtivo.” It is a photo album, an array of pictures that depict the scenes that the emigrant (from the previous story, presumably) would view during his departure from home, his daily wanderings through the city of London, and his return to Galicia. Most of these images are overtly referenced in the “A man dos paíños;” others are easily presumed to be scenes that would have been viewed by the emigrant’s eye on his daily wanderings throughout the city. By each photograph is a brief caption that denotes the site or object that is portrayed, just as in a regular album. With its sequence of images, this album re-travels the route between home and away just traversed in the preceding narrative, this time following the eye, not the words, of the beholder. With the juxtaposition and confrontation of seemingly competing forms of representa-
tion, *A man dos paños* as a whole reveals the overlapping functions of the oppositional modes of image and text: the visual tells a story and the verbal paints a picture. Enveloped between the two textual sections of the book, "O álbum furtivo" constitutes a visual borderland that calls into question the nature of genres as fixed constructions with clearly demarcated boundaries. In this way, the photo album explores the issues of definition and displacement, settling and shifting that characterize Rivas's view of any identity, whether textual or social.

Although the title of this section, "O álbum furtivo," sets up the expectation that this part of the book will adhere to the norms of a photo album, certain factors distinguish it from a traditional album. First, the album is formalized by a title, one that calls attention to its genre—the rules of which Rivas intends to alter in his rendition. The pictures in the album are then preceded by a dedication, as in a conventional novel, suggesting that this is not merely a personal documentation of memories, but a compilation of memories to be shared, to be viewed and understood by others. This maneuver underscores that the album is a text constructed to communicate a message for interpretation. After the dedication Rivas injects another novelistic convention, an epigraph, in this case one by Henri Cartier-Bresson: "Nada se perde; todo o que un viu fica con el" (63). This epigraph asserts that departure does not necessarily mean loss, for the gaze and memory intertwine to make what is past present, to make what is distant immediate, or—to paraphrase Luis Seoane—to "llevar la tierra" within oneself wherever one goes. In "O álbum furtivo" Rivas calls attention to the boundaries of genre in order to cross over them, in a questioning of the value of their definitions and exclusions.

As a type of genre, the photo album highlights the subjective power relations that are played out in scenarios of cultural dominance and marginalization. For Rivas, the goal of this album is to portray the perspective of a Galician emigrant: "Las fotos están hechas con máquinas de usar y tirar y con una vieja cámara rota, a la que tengo estima. También quieren contar una historia. La de una mirada" (*La mano del
emigrante 10). Instead of portraying himself as a privileged photographer who makes use of the advanced technological toys afforded by a relatively high economic status, Rivas candidly admits his lowly tools of documentation, situating himself as not-so-different from any immigrant with a little bit of money in regard to his ability to acquire and use economic goods. Indeed, Rivas’s two cameras imply a shared cultural perspective with the emigrant: an attitude of disposability toward the new, the easily accessible, and the inexpensive, on the one hand, and a treasuring of the old for reasons beyond functional value, on the other hand. Here the author effectively pulls off a sort of photographic double voicing—perhaps better described as double vision: as in a first-person narration, the vision/voice of the character who sees/speaks is overlaid by the vision/voice of the implied author/photographer. The album itself, by nature of its genre, extends the visual duplication out one more level, inviting the spectator/reader to see what the other saw in the photographs. Hence “O álbum furtivo” entices viewers/readers not simply to observe the emigrant as an object, in an implied relation of control, but to share the emigrant’s perspective as a seeing subject. As the title suggests, beneath the dominant gaze is a furtive gaze, and the album seeks to elide the difference between the two in an effort to foster greater understanding between them.

What the photographic eye of this album documents are spaces that are largely empty and dehumanized, depicting a veritable “no man’s land.” Instead of focusing on people, the pictures typically capture landscapes, buildings, streets, and advertisements where the emigrant gaze falls. Indeed, the true “subject” of these photographs is not the spaces they depict, but rather the person who views them; the images merely highlight the function of space as a place to exercise the gaze. As Rivas asserts, the protagonist of this part of the book is the gaze itself:

Las fotos... (t)ambién quieren contar una historia. La de una mirada. La mirada es el personaje... Me pregunté: ¿Cómo emigra una mirada? ¿Dónde deposita su
afecto, su melancolía? Imaginé una mirada que estam-
para sus propias postales, un paisaje íntimo en la gran
exposición de la metrópoli. Y esa mirada imaginada fue
llevándome por su propio camino, por una segunda
naturaleza callejera... (L)a mirada camina con los pasos
del apego y la pérdida.... (La mano del emigrante 10)

In capturing the sights and sites occupied by a roving eye, the images suggest that identity itself is a construct based on roving, on one’s passage through a succession of spaces. The trope of turning these images into postcards suggests a personalization wherein the emigrant documents his travel through generic sites and transmits his unique perspective and experience to others. These pictures, selected out of a myriad of images in “la gran exposición de la metrópoli,” become intimate, then, because they have been seen and transmitted by the individual. They are where the emigrant gaze deposits its “afecto” and “melancolía,” its conflicting feelings of attachment and loss toward the old and the new. This act of viewing and communicating humanizes the no man’s land, carving out an identity for the viewer that shifts as it crosses the frontiers of the land.

The opening picture sets the stage for the album’s visual foray into the topic of border-crossing and its influence on identity. Titled “Beiramar en Visma (A Coruña),” the photograph depicts the coastal encounter between land and water, as well as the distant horizon where sea meets sky. These literal borders point, in turn, to more abstract frontiers, such as those of image/text, emigration/homecoming and life/death. The opening image and its textual caption send us to the preceding narrative section in search of a connection between the visual and the verbal. In “A man dos paíños” the cliffs of Visma are mentioned as the place in Castro’s village where, as a boy, Castro threw the first bread of the New Year to appease the sea and save the life of a sailor, as well as where, once he has died, Castro’s ashes are returned to the sea by his mother and the narrator (42). By visually foregrounding the site of these two key moments in Castro’s existence, the photograph points to the frontier of life and
death, for it recalls the metaphorical pairing of bread and ashes, the provision of life and the remnant of death, both hurled into the ever-present sea. The scene in the image is thus also a scene from the text, the site of life is also the space of death, and the point of departure for the emigrant is correspondingly the place of return. Hence the photograph itself enacts a dialogue between binary poles, blending their borders and showing how each side informs and permeates the other.

In a similar way, many of the other photographs directly repeat references in the preceding narrative text. There are pictures of the provincial prison, the cemetery, and the Tower of Hercules, which the narrator of “A man dos paños” cites as the three points of the triangle of destiny available to Galician children—which spurs them to desire emigration as the identity they will embrace (19). Other photographs document the sites that become familiar landmarks in the emigrant’s daily roaming once he arrives in London: the hospital where he works, the streets he traverses each day, the news stand, the barber shop, the funeral home, the travel agency of “Portugalicia” where the Galician emigrants get their flights to go home, advertisement images from the tattoo shop where the narrator gets his own bird tattoo at the end of the story. It is worth noting that, in the photograph of many tattoos available at the tattoo shop, there is no image of the bird tattoo that is the primary trope of the preceding narrative and of the book as a whole. The first part of the book is dominated by extensive, evocative descriptions of the tattoo, which make the reader visualize the poetic power of that gesturing hand and also (at least for this reader) pragmatically wish to see exactly what that tattoo looked like, nestled in the web of skin between thumb and forefinger. Yet the figure of the bird is depicted only in the written word and in the imagination. This is emblematic of the way Rivas highlights the interplay of image and text in A man dos paños. The narrative first dominates and elides the images, but then cedes to them and depends on them for its supplementation and visual realization. In turn, the photographs are placed in a separate section from the narrative, with a
distinct title, conceivably telling their own story. Yet, even as
the pictures illustrate and expound on the visual imagery de-
scribed in the preceding narrative, they in turn garner mean-
ing from the textual explanation provided in the prologue to
the work and in the accompanying captions in the album.
This creates a relation of interdependence: neither medium
replaces the other, but rather each infiltrates and enhances
the other.

Moving beyond the theme of image/text infiltration, cer-
tain photographs in the album do not directly reference
spaces mentioned in the preceding narrative, but instead cap-
ture the sense of otherness that is the hallmark of the emi-
grant experience. For instance, two photographs in partic-
ular, taken through blurry train windows, show the emi-
grant’s perception of his new realm. The first, “Camiño de
Victoria Station,” depicts the industrial, barren outline of
Victoria Station spewing smoke against the already gray sky,
in stark contrast to the appealing landscape of the Galician
coast left behind in the preceding picture (73). The second
photograph taken from a train, titled “Tren de Epsom,” is
equally bleak and startlingly incongruous (75). Looking out
the train window once the train is in the station, the viewing
eye sees an advertisement portraying a zebra head. The
exotic animal appears to be looking into the train window,
while the vertical lines of the grab bar and of the framed
windows and doors of the train car give the impression that
the viewer himself is the one behind bars, the truly exotic
creature on display in this other land. Equally incongruous
and poignant is a third photograph, titled “Praia do Under-
ground,” which shows a massive poster plastered on the wall
of the Underground (103). The poster depicts a woman and a
girl crouching on the sand at the water’s edge, loading some
indistinguishable treasure into a pail while the waning sun
casts its soft light over the sea, the sand, and the people. This
idyllic scene contrasts sharply with the mechanical rails and
the dark interior space of the subway, visible beneath the
poster. This paper reproduction is the only “beach” to be
found in London, the image implies. Presumably intended to
lure those in London away to the ocean, the poster provides a
counterpoint to the Galician emigrant, who has abandoned the alluring coast in order to live in the stark city. All these photographs thematize mobility and sites of transportation as factors that inevitably alter one’s perspective and self-concept.

Mobility transports one from the familiar to the foreign, and sometimes back again; in either direction, the journey wreaks changes that impose a sense of otherness, making the emigrant keenly aware that identity is not stasis, but rather a process of transit. The title of “O álbum furtivo” suggests that the album is in some way surreptitious, and indeed it is. The array of scenes that it projects could easily be seen by any viewing subject, by any center of power, yet that presumed, predominant vision overlaps and conceals another, less visible point of view: the perspective of the emigrant who looks at these scenes from a position of marginality. In merging the reader/spectator’s view of these scenes with that of the emigrant, “O álbum furtivo” underscores that identity is influenced by the space one occupies and the perspective one takes. The album is equally surreptitious in its technique of undermining the boundaries of genre, revealing “genre” to be a text as questionable and deconstructible as the text of identity itself. Finally, as we shall see, the visual story of “O álbum furtivo” acts as a hinge between the media of narrative “fiction” and narrative “truth,” repeating again—albeit with a difference—the interplay between image and text.

The Literary Truth of “Os naufragos”

In “Os naufragos,” the final installment of his exploration of traveling Galician identity, Rivas presents a newspaper story—which is in fact many stories—about Galician shipwreck survivors. Here Rivas returns to the mode of prose, repeating themes and imagery from the fictive tale of “A man dos pañós” in order to question the divisions of truth and fiction typically imposed upon narrative. In more than half a dozen anecdotes, Rivas undulates in oscillation between the trauma of those on land and the trauma of those at sea, trac-
ing out the remarkable tales of victims who survive and suggesting the “real-life” origins of the fiction that begins the book. In the prologue to the Castilian version of La mano del emigrante, Rivas asserts his intention to subvert divisions among genres, this time in the realm of prose: “En este libro hay un ‘cuerpo a cuerpo,’ buscado de forma intencionada, entre el relato de ficción y el relato periodístico. Me apasiona el contrabando de géneros, iotra vez la frontera!, y este encuentro es la mejor respuesta que se me ocurre a la cuestión recurrente sobre el lugar de lo real y de la ‘verdad’ en el periodismo y la literatura” (9). Although conventionally conceived as opposites, for Rivas truth and fiction reflect one another and are even blended together. The frontier between journalism and literature, the borderland that both have in common, is precisely the place of reality and truth. Trafficking in contraband, Rivas smuggles qualities of each genre back and forth across the frontier that divides them, in illicit violation of once-intact identities and borders. Indeed, “Os naufragos” reveals true life to be as poetic, improbable, heroic, tragic and surprising as any fiction shaped by narrative design. In closing the book with this section, the author underscores the fantastic elements of the truth of these characters and the truthful essence of the folklore that undergirds their daily lives.

As with “O álbum furtivo,” Rivas begins blurring genre markers in the final section by providing a dedication and two epigraphs for the journalistic story. Once again, the dedication transgresses the customs of the designated genre, here a newspaper story, and points to the mode of fiction, with its status as a construction often dedicated to a particular individual. Similarly, the epigraphs infuse the journalistic story with a literary quality. The first epigraph is “Para o ser humano, o destino é como o vento para o veleiro,” by Amin Maalouf (115). This quotation sets forth identity as a journey charted by an irresistible force: identity is a passage, a condition of mobility. There is no repressing identity into a state of stasis, for even if the wind does not blow, the waves ensure constant travel. In the Castilian version, Rivas adds a second epigraph to this final section: “Hay vivos, muertos y...
marineros,” by Joseba Beobide (La mano del emigrante 123). This quote underscores identity as defined by realms of oppositional difference, distinguishing the sailor as a special, liminal figure ever floating on the frontier between life and death. Much like the Galician emigrants who find themselves straddling two worlds that destabilize identity into ever-shifting markers, the shipwreck survivors are never able to embrace solely any single realm, be it land or sea, life or death: “O naufrago supervivente séntese para sempre unido aos que se foron. É un sentimento especial, fronteirizo, que non se pode compartir” (138). In both their technique of crossing genres and their theme of traversing identities, Rivas sets up the epigraphs of this section to tarry in the borderland where two states of difference meet and merge.

In a further blurring of borders, Rivas underscores the interwoven nature of the truth of shipping tales with the fiction of his own writing by repeating motifs, sayings, and folkloric tales between the two written narratives in this book. In this way his technique in the final section parallels the intertextual reiteration of “O álbum furtivo” and “A man dos paños,” with their recurrence of images depicted first with words and then with pictures. In perhaps the most symbolic instance of repetition in “Os naufragos,” Rivas begins the section by re-telling a story that Castro’s mother had told the narrator in the first part of the book, a folkloric tale that each fisherman’s wife should take her son and the first bread baked in the New Year, climb to the highest cliff, and have the boy hurl the bread out to sea, in the belief that this offering would pacify the rage of the ocean: “Dicía que se tirabas o primeiro pan do ano ao mar, salvabas a vida dun mariñeiro. E que o molete tiña que ceibalo a man dun neno” (45). In “A man dos paños” the young Castro was confused and frightened when his mother roused him to do this one year, and his hand kept gripping the bread until she urged him to release it, saying that it was to save his father. The boy never knew, she later confides in the narrator, that the bread worked, for his father was rescued from an early death through the stratagem of hiding in the ground during the Civil War. Even in this minor detail, embedded in the two narrative parts of the
book, as well as in the album photograph of the ocean taken from high, rocky cliffs on the coast (65), Rivas highlights the hand as the symbol that imparts both loss—the loss of the bread, the loss of a sister, the loss of a fellow shipwreck victim who is wrested away by the waves—and salvation. This hand stretches out to bridge the loss caused by many factors, whether economic hardship, political turmoil, or individual yearning to experience otherness.

Throughout “Os náufragos” the elements of transcending time and space, life and death, truth and fiction, emerge as key poetic tropes in the experience of being lost and found. This repetition of the literary essence of “A man dos paíños” is exemplified in the account of the shipwreck survivor Juan Jesús Piñeiro, who relates how he and four fellow survivors clung to a flimsy beam of wood that sustained them in the raging sea. Unmoored in this other realm, the sailor finds that time becomes a construction from home which must be discarded in order to survive in a realm where the memory of familiar customs only haunts and hinders: “¿Que hora é, Piñeiro?” Cada pouco, aquel pobre angustias. ‘¿Que hora é, Piñeiro?’ Como unha ladañña. ‘¿Que hora é?’ Piñeiro desprendé o reloxo e chímpao lonxe. Acábaron as horas” (121-22). One by one, his fellow survivors are swept off the beam, for they lack the strength, focus, and adaptability of Piñeiro, who is left alone, unsettled in space and in peril of death:

Chega un momento en que a morte é o que menos che preocupa. Eu estaba alí, só na noite, abrazado ao largueiro ... E entón, pasoume algo curioso. De repente, non estaba alí. A cabeza fóiseme para a casa. Tiña diante á mulir, aos fillos, e cavilaba como zafrarían na vida. Púxenme a solucionar problemas. Tapaba ocos, enchía e asinaba papeis, decidía sobre asuntos pendentes ... E cando todo estivo en orde, fiquei moi tranquilo. Calmadísimo no medio da tempestade. Tiña a cara toda rabuñada, pero naquel momento o madeiro pareceume unha almofada. Souben logo que iso que me pasou é o que chaman os pensamentos de ouro.... (117-18)
The thoughts of gold are a phenomenon that allows the shipwreck victim to transcend the separation of space and the threat of death, returning to his life at home through the power of the mind. This hallucination, a trick of memory and imaginative creation combined, fictionalizes the truth of his predicament as a way of enduring and allaying the anguish of untimely separation. When the sailor truly does return home, however, it does not seem real until he sees the story of his own survival in the paper: “abriu un xornal e viu a súa fotografía na páxina de sucesso. Foi xusto nese intre cando se convenceu de que era certo que estaba vivo” (123). Notably, it is the visual image ensconced in the verbal medium—a representational straddling of spheres—that convinces the shipwreck victim that he has survived displacement in time, space, life, and death, and that he now embodies an altered identity. In tales such as this, “Os náufragos” ultimately suggests that in reality, just as in narrative, binary oppositions of difference dissolve into re-routed concepts of identity as part of their strategy of survival.

If the emigrant and the shipwreck survivor are both torn from the realm they know and thrust into the tumult of the unknown, each finds that the only way to reconcile the two is to suture the different sides of themselves into a new identity and to accept the altered whole. This is the essence of Luis Seoane’s assertion that “El emigrante... no vive en la tierra, la tiene incorporada a su ser” (Estévez). In emigrant identity, the land that was home to the body is then “incorporated,” that is, integrated into the body and the self. This hybrid identity is an itinerant one, roaming back and forth between realms of attachment and loss, in a space that accommodates the struggle to detach from the old and survive the new, and that finally surrenders to a state of embrace between the two. As Rivas suggests with his narrative explorations, so it is with truth and fiction, each one sheltering the other within itself.

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In Manuel Rivas’s portrayal of contemporary Galician identity, Galicianness is an identity marker that transcends
space even as it is influenced by the sites it occupies. In contrast to the centuries-old correlation between land and identity, space now holds a different place in that relationship. The land is no longer the immovable site where one dwells and grounds one’s identity. Rather, the land now dwells in the emigrants themselves; they carry it with them, and their notion of it inevitably shapes their confrontations and negotiations with the places where they travel and dwell. As James Clifford asserts, in this way identity is more adequately perceived as an itinerary: it comes into existence not merely through grounding, but through the process of mobility, the crossing of borders, and encounters with other places and people, which shape that identity based on relations of similarity and difference. As a body of artistic work, *A man dos paños* incarnates its own crossing of borders and blending of genres to challenge static modes of perception and creative production. In this text Rivas creates a parallel between artistic creation and lived experience, both of which eschew static identifiers in favor of dynamic, itinerant identities. In the final analysis, all three sections of *A man dos paños* merge verbal and visual elements to represent alternative modes of narrative—supplementary ways of seeing and telling the story of the self. By undermining the inviolate natures of image and text, Rivas posits identity as a work of art in progress, in which foundational boundaries are blurred in a dynamic exploration of self that is yet unfinished.

NOTES

lengua de las mariposas (1999), which combines stories from ¿Qué me quieres, amor?, and Antón Reixa’s El lápiz del carpintero (2002). In testament to their vast appeal, Rivas’s works have been translated to many languages and have won critical acclaim with awards such as the Premio de la Crítica Española, the Premio de la Sección Belga de Amnistía Internacional, the Premio de la Crítica en Galicia, the Premio Nacional de Narrativa, the Premio Torrente Ballester, and the Premio Arcebisco Xoán de San Clemente.

2. After this article was written, Yeon-Soo Kim published a study that has important parallels with my analysis here. Kim examines the meaning of migrancy and the important role of memory for displaced Galician subjects, arguing that Rivas’s book renders memory “an ethical responsibility of those who survive the dead” (113). At press time, no other scholarship has been published specifically on Aman dos pañños. For scholarship on other works by Rivas and interviews with the author, readers may consult Bollo-Panadero and Picanço, Deveny, Folkart, González Arce, Griswold, Jünke, Kalenic Ramsak, Loureiro, Martínez, Miller, Mora, Mouré, Nichols, Rubio, Tásende, and Tejeda.

3. I would like to thank one of the anonymous readers for this observation.

4. On the issue of translating and re-writing this book, Rivas has observed,

Una versión de La mano del emigrante fue publicada como serie de seis capítulos en el diario El País, con el título La mano de los pañós, a partir del original en gallego. Confieso que la he reescrito y retraducido hasta quedar insatisfecho. La historia de Castro me sigue atrayendo como el temblor que provoca una gota de saliva en la superficie de un pozo artesano.

(La mano del emigrante 9)

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