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**Reading the Feminine Voice in
Latin American Women's Fiction:
From Teresa De La Parra to Elena Poniatowska
And Luisa Valenzuela**

by

Maria Teresa Lichem

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Languages, Literatures, and Comparative Literary Studies:
Comparative Literary Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
4 January, 1999

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

READING THE FEMININE VOICE IN LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S FICTION :
FROM TERESA DE LA PARRA TO ELENA PONLATOWSKA AND LUISA
VALENZUELA

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Degree: PhD

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This dissertation explores the evolution of Latin American women writers' participation in discourse from a comparative perspective within the frameworks of feminist criticism and of Bakhtin's dialogical approach to language. Defining voice as a trans-individual expression of the cultural, social, and political circumstances, this study interprets the feminine voice as the result of a dialogical interaction between the forces of patriarchy, the monological voice that has dominated literature, and the submerged and silenced voices of the Other—of women or the marginalized—of those previously excluded from the territory of discourse.

To survey the theoretical and the fictional aspects of the feminine voice in Latin America, Chapter One reviews the leading trends of the Latin American Feminist literary debate and Chapter Two is a comparative study tracing the evolution of the voice in language strategies in the prose of seven representative writers beginning with Teresa de la Parra in Venezuela in the 1920s and continuing through the 1990s with Maria Luisa Bombal and Mercedes Valdivieso in Chile, Marta Lynch in Argentina, Clarice Lispector in Brazil, and Rosario Castellanos and Angeles Mastretta in Mexico. The works analyzed are: Parra's *Ifigenia*, Bombal's *La última niebla*, Valdivieso's *La brecha*, Lynch's *La señora Ordoñez*, Lispector's *A Paixão segundo G.H.*, Castellanos's *Bahín Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas*, Mastretta's *Mal de amores*, Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* and *Tinísima*, and Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas*. Chapters Three and Four each concentrates on an author considered to have made the most significant contribution in the process of writing by women in Latin America: Elena Poniatowska in Mexico and Luisa Valenzuela in Argentina. These two chapters propose a model of analysis based also in part on the theoretical writings and public pronouncements of these authors, and their fiction demonstrates how their writings reflect their ideology and social convictions. The fiction of Poniatowska is read as "the voice of the oppressed" and the inclusion of a plurality of 'social languages' in the text. The analysis of Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas* shows how her language results from the confrontation between the mechanisms of repressive power and the voice of the author as a liberating agent.

This study demonstrates that the feminine voice in Latin America is represented through a community of writers who have explored the multiple layers of feminine experiences and who have gradually developed a means of challenging patriarchy in their social surroundings of the home and later of the public space. It further shows that women's fiction has often been a space to inscribe unrecorded events from a social and political reality marked by fear and oppression.

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Introduction

La literatura de las mujeres en América Latina es parte de la voz de los oprimidos. Lo creo tan profundamente que estoy dispuesta a convertirlo en leit-motif, en un ritornello, en ideología.¹

Elena Poniatowska: "Mujer y Literatura en América Latina"

Y no hablamos de los silencios, de los que de todos modos es imposible hablar. Lo no-dicho, lo tácito y lo omitido y lo censurado y lo sugerido cobran la importancia de un grito.²
Luisa Valenzuela: "Peligrosas palabras"

¹ (1983, 462). "The voice of the oppressed in Latin America includes literature by women. I believe this so deeply that I'm willing to make it a leitmotif, a ritornello, an ideology. "Literature and Women in Latin America." Trans. Nicolás Wey. *Women's Writing in Latin America. An Anthology*. Ed. Sara Castro-Klarén et al. 81. In this dissertation I use published translations of the Spanish quotations whenever available. Otherwise, all translations from Spanish are mine.

²Published under "Pequeño manifiesto," (1986, 82). "And let us not speak about the silences, which are impossible to speak about anyway. What goes unsaid, that which is implied and omitted and censored and suggested, acquires the importance of a scream." "Dangerous Words." Trans. Cynthia Ventura. *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction* 6.3 (Fall 1986): 9-10.

In the past decade, Latin American women writers have produced a significant body of fictional writing which can be paralleled, because of its aesthetic and social maturity, to the Latin American (masculine-only) boom of the 1960s. My reading of texts by Latin American women authors examines the resonance of the social and the political predicament portrayed by female characters and told in a submerged but eloquent voice. Elena Poniatowska, in Mexico, and Luisa Valenzuela in Argentina, are only two examples in a long list of authors who are bringing to light unheard aspects of the vast complex of the social and political reality from women's perspective in a language that reveals unique feminine characteristics.

This thesis explores the problematic of the feminine voice in literature, its validity as a subject of discourse, and it elucidates the feminine specificity in the works of nine innovative women writers in Latin America, starting in the 1920s with Teresa de la Parra in Venezuela and continuing through the 1990s. With the purpose of tracing Latin American women's participation in discourse, I have selected writers from different decades and countries who have been conscious of their writing as women. Their fiction has developed from the intimate sphere of home and family into the public space that includes uncharted female experiences. In a comparative context using the theoretical framework of feminist criticism and the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, I consider the particular visions of Elena Poniatowska and Luisa Valenzuela as the culmination of a literary trajectory that reflects the cultural input of the feminine Subject in Latin American fiction.

The new generations of women writers in Latin America share with the feminist theoretical discourse the preoccupation with women's condition of disadvantage in the patriarchal order and are likewise engaged in creating a language that would challenge and open spaces for the feminine voice in the Symbolic³ discourse. Their foremost objective as writers is, however, to record the silenced events of a social and political reality of oppression, to speak from the feminine perspective of pain, fear, astonishment and resistance. The importance of language as a destabilizer of the patriarchal logos, is for them not as much a question of gender or political power and social affirmation, but above all an urge to speak the unspeakable, to articulate the unsayable and to overcome the "self-censorship" that prevents women from seeing beyond the socially constructed reality.

The women authors I have chosen continue this legacy of intercultural agency as their fiction is closely related to the social context. In addition, their feminine perspective encompasses the multiple potentialities of gender. For this reason, I propose the use of the notion of voice in the fiction of Latin American women writers as a reflection of the cultural, social and political circumstances that surround them. By focusing on the 'relational' aspects of the narrative written by women, I discard the concept of voice as

³This term derives from Lacan's psychoanalytical concept of the existence of a symbolic phallogentric order of language and culture from which women are excluded. French Feminism expands this concept to elaborate a theory on women's discourse or *écriture féminine* based on the challenging of the patriarchal pattern of thought. See Belsey and Moore's "Introduction: The Story So Far" in *The Feminist Reader*, 13-14. See also Note 33, Chapter 4. From here on I capitalize Symbolic to refer to the Lacanian concept.

representative of an omniscient conscience. The feminine voice in my corpus is not monological but results from a double strategy of listening to and reconstructing the voices of the silenced, of resistance, of domestic or political violence, of women's experience in the private and public space. It is my intention to read the feminine voice as the dialogic interaction that results from listening to the "other," and from listening to the voices of women writers as the echo of multiple utterances in a polyphonic text.

The narrative voice in women's writing

As a category of discourse, the term voice can be traced back to the Greek notion of *diegesis* to indicate the voice of the narrator as opposed to *mimesis* or the representation of reality through the words and actions of the characters. Contemporary narratology associates voice with the *narrating instance*, with the one *who speaks*, and is not to be confused with *point of view* that refers to the one *who sees*.⁴ Gérard Genette understands voice as the relationship between the narrating subject(s) and the narrative. His concept of voice reaches beyond simple verbalization to the analysis of the *generating instance* (or *enunciating*) in relation to all narrative factors, such as time of

⁴Gerald Prince in *A Dictionary of Narratology* defines voice as "The set of signs characterizing the *narrator* and, more generally, the *narrating instance*, and governing the relations between *narrating* and narrative text as well as between *narrating* and *narrated*."

narration, first or third person narrators, and levels of discourse.⁵ The inclusion of *all people* in the *narrating activity* is important in this context because it allows us to read into the voices behind the feminine articulation in fiction.⁶

In the discursive tradition of Latin America the literary “voice” has always been associated with the male poet, with the one who has the power of the word to transmit ancestral stories, to awaken submerged desires, and to speak for those dispossessed of speech. This concept of voice is closer to the ancient Greek *diegesis* that attributes discourse to the authority of the bard than to the contemporary deconstructive reduction of the speaker to a language game of *différance*. Poets and writers in the Latin American

⁵See chapter on “Voice” in *Narrative Discourse. An essay in Method*, 212-262. Genette expands Vendryès definition of voice as “the mode of action of the verb considered for its relations to the subject,” and adds: “The subject here being not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it, and if need be, all those people who participate, even though passively, in the narrating activity” (213).

⁶Further discussions on the structuralist and post-structuralist notions of *voice* have focused on the question of voice as origin or source of meaning. For Roland Barthes, a text is a *network* where voices “whose origin is “lost” in the vast perspective of the *already-written*” interweave in “a stereographic space where the five codes, the five voices intersect: the Voice of Empirics (the proairetics), the Voice of the Person (the *sermes*) the Voice of Science (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutisms), the Voice of Symbol (*S/Z*, 1974, 21). Jacques Derrida also questions the metaphysical notion of Voice as originator of meaning, “as a value of presence, presence of the object, presence of meaning to consciousness” and rejects the notion of a *privileged* voice (*Positions*, 1981, 5). Stewart Garrett in *Reading Voices. Literature and the Phonotext* summarizes the current discussion when he writes: “The question is no longer the presence (or index) of voice in text but instead, the presence to evocalization of any text when read. No longer a metonymy of voice as *origin*, the idea of an “embodied” voice emerges as just the opposite: signaling the very *destination* of the text in the reading act, the medium of its silent voicing, sounding board rather than source” (1990, 3). What is relevant in the concept of Voice is its *evocative* power and its resonance in the reader.

literary canon have often acted as a vehicle of communication that trespassed social and institutional barriers. Pablo Neruda and other internationally well known writers, such as César Vallejo, Miguel Angel Asturias or García Márquez, attempt to reproduce the voices of their afflicted communities, as in these verses of Neruda's Canto XII in *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*:

Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza.
Dadme la lucha, el hierro, los volcanes.
Apegadme los cuerpos como imanes.
Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca.
Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre.⁷

Neruda transforms the silence, the hopes, and the struggles of the dispossessed into his own words and creation. Women writers, when speaking from the margins, are identifying their voices with those of the oppressed, as Poniatowska states in the opening epigraph. They are vocalizing what had been silenced, or in the words of Valenzuela "what goes unsaid, that which is implied, and omitted and censured and suggested." These women writers are formulating a text that elaborates on the unheard areas of women's consciousness, a voice that integrates multiple layers of the languages of a heterogeneous cultural network.

⁷(1968, 38-39). "Give me the silence, water, hope. /Give me struggle, iron, volcanos./ Fasten your bodies to me like magnets./ Hasten to my veins to my mouth./ Speak through my words and my blood." *Translating Neruda. The Way to Macchu Picchu*. Trans. John Felstiner, 239.

The narrative voice in women's writing has been central to feminist criticism. In the 1980s the question of the feminine voice and of the specificity of women's writing has led to an unresolved debate. The first volume of the series *Women and Literature* gathered divergent views on the issue of a *distinctive female style, tone and content*.⁸ Joyce Carol Oates believes that art surpasses the categories of gender, as *women's very special adventures* can be the raw material of the text, but its significance lies in *the uniqueness of vision*. She argues that "the serious artistic voice is one of individual *style*, and it is sexless."⁹

Critics have gone through painstaking work to detect *distinctive* elements in women's writing or grouping texts by themes, recurrent images or by difference in tone. Aiming at a delineation of women's writing, Mary Eagleton (1986) compiled excerpts from French and English sources that searched for the difference in language. The essays reveal concepts of women as "Other,"¹⁰ the association of the feminine with "the semiotic" as fluid and multiple,¹¹ or the reading of the female body as a *symbol* of

⁸Edited by Janet Todd (1980) under the title *Gender and Literary Voice*.

⁹"Is there a female voice? Joyce Carol Oates Replies:" 11.

¹⁰In feminist criticism the notion of woman being "the Other," an object in relation to a Legitimizing Subject, was first articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in her Introduction to *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) where she writes: "[P]our lui, elle est sexe, donc elle l'est absolument. Elle se détermine et se différencie par rapport à l'homme et non celui-ci par rapport à elle; elle est inessentiel en face de l'essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre" (15). I expand this notion of the (capitalized) Other in reference to woman into the concept of *alterity* or being excluded from the mainstream, to refer to the socially and politically marginalized in Chapter 2.

¹¹In *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Julia Kristeva develops her concept of the "speaking subject" as a subject "split" or divided between conscious and unconscious

femininity. Stephen Heath in “The Sexual Fix” contrasts Virginia Woolf’s phrase “It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex” with Cixous’ predication of writing the body, and asserts that “the appeal to difference can be a powerful and necessary mode of struggle and action” but it can also turn against itself if feminine is understood as the negation of form (223).¹²

A significant landmark in the theoretical level of North-American feminist literary criticism was Elaine Showalter’s “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” first published by *Critical Inquiry* in 1981.¹³ Showalter calls for a “feminist criticism that is genuinely women centered, independent, and intellectually coherent.” She asks for a feminine

drives that interact in a dialectical process. Systems of meaning have privileged the conscious or “symbolic” process, the law of the father and the univocal authority of the sign. Kristeva posits that in the production of meaning there is also a “semiotic” process, which is associated with the unconscious, with the pre-language stage of development, with the rhythms and the multiple energies of the feminine. The production of a “poetic language” results from the oscillation between both practices and the “speaking subject” emerges from their interaction. These notions have been essential in poststructuralist theories that aim at deconstructing “the law of the father” and inscribing women’s subjectivity in the symbolic contract. The term “semiotic” is also associated with Freud’s pre-oedipal phase and Lacan’s concept of the “imaginary” realm. See Leon S. Roudiez’s Introduction to Julia Kristeva’s *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*.

¹²Under the subtitles “Towards Definitions of Feminist Writing” and “Do Women Write Differently” Mary Eagleton’s *Feminist Literary Theory* (1986) assembles extracts from critics central to the discussion, such as Annette Kolodny, Joyce Carol Oates, Stephen Heath, Mary Jacobus, Hélène Cixous, Ann Rosalind Jones, and Toril Moi, from whom I have drawn this information.

¹³Reprinted in *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. 243-270.

criticism with “firm theoretical grounds” based on questions that come “from our experience” (247). She could have added from our experience in the Symbolic.

According to Showalter, there are two modes of feminist criticism: Women as readers, and women as writers. The former questions the accepted standards of critical approach to texts containing images of women and propose a feminist interpretation that would throw a new light on old misconceptions about women. The latter mode, labeled *Gynocritics* by Showalter, claims that its *subject* is to be found in “the history, style, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women, the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (248).

A relevant contribution of Showalter to the development of feminist criticism is her concept of the *wild zone* or the locus of the feminine imaginary and consciousness. She was inspired by the ideas of the cultural anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener on the *dominant-and-muted* model, by which women are the *muted group*, who can articulate their perceptions only through the language and structures of the *dominant (male) group*. Women’s idiosyncrasies are then channeled through ritual and art, that create a “female space” or *wild zone*, as Showalter explains:

[It] must be the address of a genuinely women-centered criticism, theory and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak. (262-263)

Transposed to French Feminism, this *wild zone* is comparable to Hélène Cixous's *white ink*, the locus to spell out women's repressed feelings, the "theoretical base for women's difference" (Showalter 263).¹⁴ Although Showalter considers the French model of Cixous and other utopian writings as an idyllic "playful abstraction" (263), I find a common basis between the two. Cixous's powerful metaphor for women's writing also refers to the "invisible" character of writing white on white, of writing women's difference with mother's milk. The *wild zone* where Showalter wants women "to make the silent speak" parallels Cixous's primordial song:

The first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink. ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 251)

Both images for the locus of women's writing, the *wild zone* and the *white ink* associate the feminine voice with the absence of women from the Symbolic order. But Showalter's theory reaches beyond sexual politics as for her women's writing is a *double voiced discourse* "that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant" (263).

In their effort to find new avenues of expression to articulate this *difference*, the women authors cannot break away from the male-centered discourse nor should they aim

¹⁴Showalter makes the link between the two when she writes: "French Feminist critics would like to make the wild zone the theoretical base of women's difference. In their texts, the wild zone becomes the place for the revolutionary women's language, the language of everything that is repressed, and for the revolutionary women's writing in 'white ink' " (263).

at simple opposition. Woman's cultural model, based not only on gender determinants, but also on factors of *class, race, nationality, and history*, is a valuable conduit to express difference in a balanced statement that sees feminist endeavors as a vehicle to project the distinctive experiences in a feminine tradition. In a later essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics"¹⁵ Elaine Showalter speaks of the "divided consciousness" in women critics and writers who have inherited the "rational" tradition but also want to be part of the new awareness and changes in feminist outlook. She writes:

The task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision. This enterprise should not be confined to women One thing is certain: feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay, and we must make it a permanent home. (141-142)

Focusing on another angle, Mary Jacobus's essay "The Difference of View" discusses the basic problem of women's writing and its relationship to culture and discourse. Can women verbalize their experience of oppression and desire in the language of patriarchy? How can women inscribe their difference and subjectivity in a text? For French feminism, influenced by psychoanalysis where the feminine represents 'the other,' woman's language is to be found in the expression of repressed desires, in *jouissance* or even in incoherence. But this form of discourse entails a subjection to the Symbolic order. How can women then articulate their *difference* in writing? Jacobus

¹⁵In *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter 125-143.

proposes a “*difference of view* as a matter of rewriting” (61). While writing within the paradigms of patriarchy, women’s writing can work from within to ‘deconstruct’ it.

Feminine writing is to be found in the “transgression of literary boundaries” described as

—moments when structures are shaken, when language refuses to lie down meekly, or the marginal is brought into sudden focus, or intelligibility itself refused. (56)

Different in approach and content, a recurrent motivation in many feminist critics is to articulate a feminine voice, a discourse that spells out the unique experiences, a vision, and the power of the female writer.¹⁶ From my critical perspective, the new awareness of the specificity of women’s writing and the endeavor of the critics to trace *difference* challenges the reader to respond to the political implications of a text. By “political” I refer to the feminist position that aims at correcting women’s condition of oppression and effacement from the central, social, historical and literary discourse. A fundamental preoccupation with *gender*, as different from biological *sex* orients

¹⁶In her article “Feminist, Female, Feminine” Toril Moi explains the connotations of these terms in literary criticism. She writes: “I will suggest that we distinguish between ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’ as a matter of biology and ‘femininity’ as a set of culturally defined characteristics” (Belsey and Moore 117). I use *feminine* as an adjective for women’s or females’ activity. In Spanish the word “femenina” has a similar meaning as the French adjective “féminine.” In this sense, *voz femenina* or “feminine voice” means the voice of women. Under this criterion, my use of the term “feminine writing” refers to *narrative by women writers*, and is not to be equated with the coined label *écriture féminine* of French Feminism. I also differentiate this term from Toril Moi’s *femininity* that alludes to a “set of culturally defined characteristics”(117).

feminisms toward the social significance of male/female relations.¹⁷ Gender is *constructed* by a society that assigns roles and modes of behavior and determines meaning. If gender is not naturally given, then it is the task of feminist scholars to unsettle the established norms and reconstruct the image of woman free from binarisms and stereotypes. To conceive gender as the product of our cultural circumstances is an important factor for the constitution of the feminine *subject*, which implies the awareness of the institutional forces in its formation and the consequent engagement in modes of resistance. My reading intends to be a *gendered reading*¹⁸ that will focus on female experiences and the feminine imaginary, the Voice of women, in a *relational* cultural space. In the field of the Latin American women's fiction this *feminine reading* is still in the making.¹⁹

¹⁷For Jane Flax the understanding of *gender* as a 'relation' is essential. In "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory" she writes: "Gender, both as an analytical category and social process, is relational" (1990, 44). To study gender as a *relation* feminists need first 'deconstruct' the attached 'biological' meaning, and be aware of the asymmetrical distribution of human activity that makes gender a "relation of domination" (51).

¹⁸Maggie Humm in *Feminist Criticism. Women as Contemporary Critics* (1986) explains gendered reading as a *concept* that implies three *transactions*. She writes: "We simultaneously read with the experiences of our biological sex (whether from menstruation or reproduction). We read with a gender identity—with our self-created condition of femaleness (from mother-identity or childhood). And we read with a gender role—with a consciousness of the social construction of femininity" (1986, 13). These three elements present in a *feminist* reading are *different* from an ungendered approach.

¹⁹ Latin American feminist critics such as Debra A. Castillo (1992), Lucía Guerra-Cunningham, Francine Massiello, Sara Castro-Klarén, among others, are building a feminist tradition of reading women's texts, as I survey in Chapter One. A more specifically *gendered* strategy is formulated in Amy Kaminsky's essay "Residual Authority and Gendered Resistance" (1993) where she questions the *authoritative discourse of male domination* and of other forms of power *in the production and reception of texts*.

Feminist criticism in the 1990s is more concerned with women's voice as invested with power and authority. Critics speak of "the New Woman as a speaking subject" (Kahane), or a feminine voice that "emerges as a signifier" (Miller-Frank), and Susan S. Lanser attempts to build a theory of feminist poetics of the narrative voice by bridging narratology with feminist criticism.²⁰ Lanser combines the formal and aesthetic reading of a text with the social and political projection entailed in a feminist reading. The *discursive authority* of a text is produced by the intertwining of both components in relation to *specific receiving communities* (1992, 6). Textual authority,²¹ however, has been identified with the dominant white male discourse. A peripheral narrative, such as women's fiction, can then acquire authority by an act of blurring boundaries, by altering the established *textual strategies*. Lanser's hypothesis reads:

²⁰Claire Kahane in *Passions of the Voice. Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850-1915* refers to the nineteenth-century figure of the woman who emerged with a voice no longer charged with anxiety and incoherence, but with a *powerful voice* capable of upsetting the Victorian gendered structures. Felicia Miller Frank's *The Mechanical Song. Women, Voice, and the Artificial in the Nineteenth Century French Narrative* traces the women's voice that had been traditionally curtailed and regarded as *artificial* in Modernity, but that can also be read as a trope for the *construction of subjectivity* (39). The works by Susan Sniader Lanser I refer to are: *The Narrative Act. Point of View in Prose Fiction* (1981); "Toward a Feminist Narratology," (1986); "Shifting the Paradigm: Feminism and Narratology" (1988); and *Fictions of Authority. Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992).

²¹In *Fictions of Authority*, Lanser points out three kinds of authority that women have had to elaborate in order to enter Western literary history: "The authority to establish alternative "worlds" and the "maxims" by which they will operate, to construct and publicly represent female subjectivity and redefine the "feminine," and to constitute as a discursive subject a female body politic" (22).

[G]endered conventions of public voice and of narrative self-reference serve important roles in regulating women's access to discursive authority. (1992, 15)²²

In Lanser's point of view, the feminine voice can gain discursive authority by incorporating the reading audience in the process. Lanser's project to focus Voice as a *trope of identity and power* (1992, 3) and to read the feminine *voice* in a social and ideological context, is an attractive vehicle to approach the fiction of Latin American women writers. The authors I have chosen reproduce the introspective and the collective discourse in a language of transgression. I intend to demonstrate how these texts attain *discursive authority* in the interaction of multiple private and public fictional voices with the reading audiences and to examine the "narrative voice as a critical locus to ideology" (Lanser, 1992, 15).

Lanser's model of reading the feminine voice as an exploration of ideological positions recalls Bakhtin's polyphonic view of fictional authority as the representation of multiple consciousnesses. A contextual approximation to the problematic of the voice that records social participation in discourse expands the critical possibilities towards a different cultural perspective in reading the texts of women writers. Even though Bakhtin was not specific on the politics of gender, his dialogical approach to language that contests the voice of the dominant and his concept of *speech genres* as linked to *spheres*

²²With this approach Lanser distinguishes between the 'private voice' or the narration within the fictional text, and 'public voice' or the narrative level directed towards the reader. By *narrative self-reference* she means the 'act of narration itself.'

of speech communication open new avenues of understanding a text with inherent feminine discourse.

This exposition of the narrative voice in women's writing shows that in the Anglo-American and French predominant feminist currents, certain central preoccupations emerge: The awareness of the "invisible" character of women's writing, the relevance of language as a destabilizer of phallogocentrism and as a means of inscribing "difference" in the symbolic contract, and the importance of the feminine voice as a "speaking subject" invested with power and authority in allegiance with the reading audience. Even when the centrality of language is recognized in all the previous discussions, I would like to go one step further. Therefore, the objective of my research is to reach beyond the feminist gynocritical approach. Most criticism on Latin American women's fiction to date has been informed by Poststructuralist parameters. Without disregarding these views, my purpose is to expand my critique into a dialogic perspective, using Bakhtin's approach to language as the theoretical framework in order to incorporate the social, cultural, and ideological context of the works discussed. The links between Bakhtin and feminist criticism are established mainly through their view of language and its relation with a societal attitude and power. I will make this relationship more explicit later in this introduction.

The feminine voice in Latin American critique

The problematic of the specificity of feminine writing has also been a central concern in the Latin American feminist debate. The upheaval of conventional models of writing, the search for a discourse that expresses women's difference, and the association with the marginal are also vital elements in the Latin American feminist criticism.

Starting in 1975, international symposia have gathered writers and critics to discuss feminist issues relating to Latin America.²³ In 1985 at the Symposium in the University of Costa Rica, Lucía Guerra presented a *Manifiesto estético* that voices the strategies of feminine writing: to rebel against feminine subordination and the image of the angel in the house, to write *the body* or replace decorum "por las sensaciones culturalmente silenciadas de nuestro cuerpo,"²⁴ to denounce the system that has kept women in marginality through false images of Mother Earth, and to play the inverted game of creating masculine archetypes from the "sombra oscura del inconsciente colectivo femenino" (37).²⁵ Her reflections echo Julia Kristeva's envisioning *women's time* as cyclical, her denunciation of the unequal place allotted to women in the Symbolic

²³In May 1975, the Latin American Literary Review sponsored a Conference on Women Writers from Latin America in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In the section "A preliminary survey of symposia and critical essays" in Chapter One I review the key issues of the feminist debate discussed in several conferences.

²⁴"By the culturally silenced sensations of our body." In "Hacia una estética femenina." Arancibia, *Evaluación*, 36.

²⁵"Dark shadow of the feminine collective unconscious."

order and the affirmation of difference as a basis for feminine subjectivity. In “Women’s Time” Kristeva encourages writing as a tool of affirmation:

Maintenant beaucoup de femmes imaginent: Flaubert c’est moi. Cette identification à la puissance de l’imaginaire témoigne aussi du désir des femmes de soulever le poids sacrificiel du contrat social, et de nourrir nos sociétés d’un discours plus souple, plus libre, sachant nommer ce qui n’a pas encore été objet de circulation communautaire: les énigmes du corps, de rêves, les joies secrètes, les hontes, les haines du deuxième sexe ... (“Le temps des femmes” 16)

Lucía Guerra-Cunningham’s “Las sombras de la escritura: Hacia una teoría de la producción literaria de la mujer latinoamericana” (1989) is an essential document in feminist criticism that focuses on poststructuralist theories in a Latin American context. Guerra explores the “silenced spaces” located on the margins of the shadow of the Signifier. She posits that in a binary system of exclusion where Woman is identified with the Non-being, a dialogic relationship can develop in which the centripetal forces of the dominant discourse are opposed by the ‘silenced dialogue’ of the feminine, thus reproducing the patriarchal asymmetry. Women find themselves in an ambiguous position ‘between two waters’: the ‘clear’ of the rational phallogocentric discourse and the ‘troubled’ of a “feminine discourse marked by subordination, diffusion and fragmentation” (136). Echoing Bakhtin, she writes:

[C]omo un eficiente ventrílocuo, la mujer asume las voces de un lenguaje ajeno permitiéndose en los intermedios el

carnaval polifónico de su féminolecto marginalizado. (136-137)²⁶

A conscious inclusion of the problematics of class, race and gender gives the current Latin American feminist literature a political dimension, as Guerra concludes: “Trascendiendo los esquemas del desconstruccionismo, la anulación de la oposición binaria entre lo masculino y lo femenino no constituye simplemente un gesto filosófico sino la desestructuración de categorías sociales y económicas” (158).²⁷

Lucía Guerra’s analysis of the specificity of women’s writing and her concept of *counter-discourse* echo Showalter’s *wild zone* but add the new dimension of subordination and repression as cultural components in the Latin American field. She recommends a deconstructive approach to mirror the post-colonial discourse. In Chapter One I analyze in detail the relevance of Guerra’s theories in the development of a Latin American critical voice and point out other critical trends such as those of Sara Castro-Klarén, Jean Franco, Francine Massiello, and Debra Castillo.

More than a decade before the feminist debate was set in motion, Rosario Castellanos, a forerunner of feminist criticism in Latin America in the 1950s,

²⁶“Like an efficient ventriloquist, woman assumes the voices of a foreign language allowing herself, in between, the polyphonic carnival of her marginalized feminolect.”

²⁷“By transcending the schemes of deconstruction, the abrogation of the binary opposition between the masculine and the feminine does not only constitute a philosophical gesture but also the de-structuration of social and economic categories.”

problematized the relationship of language with power. Her article “Notas al margen: el lenguaje como instrumento de dominio” posits the theory that, in the context of Mexican culture, Spanish was the language used by the dominant class to communicate in a relation of power.²⁸ Spanish was used as a means to command or to evangelize the Indian. The Spaniards and criollos spoke it to communicate among their equals, their voice had the trademark of exclusion, and in Baroque New Spain, language became a decoration, a ‘fermosa cobertura’ to display verbal skills.²⁹ The language of the marginalized—the Indians, mestizos³⁰—was left outside the dominant discourse. Castellanos advocates the

²⁸Castellanos applied her theories on language to her fiction, as I will demonstrate in my analysis of *Balún Canán*.

²⁹Regina Harrison MacDonald’s in a detailed study of this phenomenon in “Rosario Castellanos On Language” writes: “Language soon became a distinguishing sign designating who controlled the means of oral expression; sign purposely were wielded to connote the most subtle distinctions of class and their denotative quality was ignored, lost under a morass of decorative figures and a monologue empty of decorum” 42.

³⁰*Mestizo* or *mestiza* is a complex term that was constructed under colonialism. Mestizo refers to the racial crossing of the European colonizers and the American indigenous population. This term also conveys a long history of inter-racial relations of domination that has different meanings according to geography and place. In the context of the Mexican colonial society, the *mestizos* are linked to the concept of the children of Malinche, the Indian woman who became the lover and facilitator of the Spanish Conqueror Hernán Cortés. In this framework the mestizos are the descendants of a colonial encounter marked by violence and abuse embodied in the person of the conqueror. This situation created conditions of inequality and subordination for the native woman. In the post-colonial context there have been many other connotations to the category of “mestizo.” For a detailed explanation of this term see Gloria Anzaldúa “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” where she first associates the term with José Vasconcelos’s vision of the *raza cósmica* as the energizing “fifth race” derived from the mixture of races, and also speaks of the “alien consciousness” that results “from this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization” (270-271). In the setting of the national populist regimes in Latin America, mestizo is a term referring to all the people that belonged to the new concept of the nation and who were involved in

creation of a new language “porque la palabra es la encarnación de la verdad, porque el lenguaje tiene significado.”³¹ Within this framework language is problematic for her as a writer since Spanish mirrors a cultural system foreign to the Mexican mind. This conflict is reflected in the Mexican oral language that is often ambiguous and imprecise, as she describes it in “Divagación sobre el idioma”:

No muy seguros del significado de las palabras, suplimos
ese significado impreciso con ademanes, miradas
intencionadas, reticencias. (153)³²

Castellanos’s initial searching into the language of the Other Mexican was pursued in the fiction and journalism of Elena Poniatowska as she introduced plural social languages in her text. Her prose embodies the multiple languages of the cultures of the periphery, as the oral language of the marginalized, of the uneducated, the voices of the oppressed, of women, or of the dissidents who had been left unheard.

In the past two decades, the concern with the feminine voice and women’s writing in Latin America has further developed in new directions as many writers have lived a situation of political repression and unrest, and as radical changes have shaped the new

the construction of the new nation.

³¹“Because the word is the incarnation of truth, because language has meaning.” *Mujer que sabe latín*, 179.

³²“Not very sure of the meaning of the words, we furnish the imprecise meaning with gestures, intentional gazes, restraint.” In the collection of essays *El uso de la palabra*, 153.

social order. In “Yo escribo, yo me escribo ...” (1985) Helena Araujo speaks of her inner conflict between *poetizar* and *politizar* in a tradition of moral censorship and containment of sexual *pulsations*:

¿Cómo, dónde hallar ese lenguaje-cuerpo, lenguaje-deseo;
cómo poetizar sin dejar de politizar? (459)³³

The search for one’s own voice in Latin American feminine writing is associated with overcoming censorship, with the sense of trespassing limits, of overstepping the bounds of the assigned space, and often of a political commitment. Women have to surmount the boundaries of prescribed silence, of moral and political restraint, and search for their own codes beyond the ascribed passive role. Luisa Valenzuela’s “La mala palabra” (1985) insinuates that women have to *construct* their voice “transgrediendo las barreras de censura, rompiendo los cánones en busca de esa voz propia” (491).³⁴ For Julieta Campos to write is also a form of transgression of the role assigned to women by cultural conventions; it is the reproduction of personal phantoms. In “Algunas consideraciones sobre la mujer y la literatura,” the Argentinian playwright Griselda Gámbaro reads a clear *compromiso político*, a ‘political commitment’ in women’s texts, as writing embodies our cultural load and experience, our desires and ideologies. Women are beginning to venture into the fields of erotica, and to challenge established values, to

³³“How and where to find that language of the body, language of desire; how to create poetry without ceasing to be political?”

³⁴“By transgressing the barriers of censorship, breaking the canons in the search for that genuine voice.”

create a “literature of rupture and exploration” (472). This conscious quest for a vehicle of expression, to articulate women’s own metaphors and vision, is a conduit to emancipation from ties and restraints, a pursuit that reaches beyond the exploration of a *wild zone* or a *shadow* of a prescribed image. In the words of the playwright Griselda Gámbaro:

Quien busca su propia voz no puede ser objeto
metamorfizado ni metáfora “sin
metamorfosis”. [Deberíamos desear] Encontrar esa voz y
crear nuestras propias metáforas de lo que somos.³⁵ (473)

This short overview of the feminine voice in the fiction of Latin-American women writers shows a growing concern to find new channels of expressing their own voices in a new language that would represent their particular perspective, a language of resistance and transgression in the face of dominant models, a voice that textualizes a plurality of social languages. This common effort of women authors constitute a new approach to language and writing that creates a new narrative spirit and calls for a new *gendered* reading of the feminine voice. Under this feminist perspective, Bakhtin’s theories on language open new possibilities to read women’s fiction in interaction with hegemonic forces and as the stratification of a multi-vocal speech.

³⁵“She who is searching for her own voice may not be a metaphorized object nor a metaphor ‘without metamorphosis’. [We should wish] To find that voice and to create our proper metaphors of what we are.”

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism

Mikhail M. Bakhtin's dialogic perception of language as a "social phenomenon" that incorporates a plurality of social voices and acts as a site for ideological interaction expands the critical parameters to analyze fiction as a reflection of the cultural, social and political circumstances of the feminine "speaking subject" in Latin America.

As stated above, most scholarly studies on Latin American women writers to date use a Poststructuralist approach and only sporadically read the texts from a dialogic angle. The advantage of this method in the Latin American context is that by viewing language as a creative and dynamic process, dialogism encompasses the social forces and marginal voices in texts of multiple languages that mirror the cultural contradictions of a continent in a turbulent process of change.³⁶

Central to my reading in this dissertation are Bakhtin's theories on language and the approach of feminist dialogics as understood by a variety of scholars.³⁷ My specific sources on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin are mainly his essay "Discourse in the Novel"

³⁶Important academic contributions on these two authors to date are several unpublished dissertations, a proliferation of articles in various literary journals and collections of essays, and a few fundamental books: Sharon Magnarelli's *Reflections/Refractions. Reading Luisa Valenzuela*; Juanamaria Cordones-Cook *Poética de transgresión en la novelística de Luisa Valenzuela*; Z. Nelly Martínez's *El silencio que habla: Aproximación a la obra de Luisa Valenzuela*; Gwendolin Díaz and María Inés Lagos *La palabra en vilo*, and Beth E. Jörgensen *The Writing of Elena Poniatowska. Engaging Dialogues*.

³⁷Such as those edited in collections by Daly A. Bauer, Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow, and in Lynne Pearce's enlightening book *Reading Dialogics*.

and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in his discussion of the *double voice*; and *The Problem of Speech Genres* for the understanding of the *utterance* in speech communication. The following exposition encompasses Bakhtin's key concepts that I consider valuable for my research and an overview of some of the notions that Feminist Dialogics have found useful for their interpretation of feminist texts. A dialogic perspective will be applied to my readings in the following areas:

1. The dialogic perspective on a literary text read in a precise social context: therefore, language viewed as a social phenomenon;
2. The conception of language as dialogic and its relation with feminist criticism;
3. The notions of heteroglossia and hybridization for a reading of Latin American fiction within the social context of class, gender and race;
4. The double-voiced discourse and the concept of *polyphony* applied to major novels.

The importance of Bakhtin's thinking lies in his perception of language. Language is not conceived of as the Saussurean *langue*, but as *parole* or speech, where an interlocutor is present at the moment of the utterance. A dialogic discourse incorporates a plurality of consciousnesses orchestrated in a text where no voice appears dominant. Heteroglossia, envisaged by Bakhtin to describe this internal dialogization of discourse, is a fundamental innovation in prosaics enabling us to read the novel as an encounter of multiple voices and social languages.

The seminal essay “Discourse in the Novel” (1935) exposes Bakhtin’s ideological approach to discourse as a *social phenomenon* and the novel as the artistic organization of a plural speech. “The word,” he writes, “is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it.”³⁸ Language as a creative act “lies between self and other” (DN 293).

According to Bakhtin, modern stylistics has dealt with discourse as relating to the individual aesthetic process and disregarded the social context. Traditional Poetics has failed to recognize the novel as an artistic genre since it approaches language as a system of norms and not in its social setting. What is important to me beyond the status of the novel is the fact that language lives in the confrontation of centripetal forces in discourse that consolidate their monologic version of truth into an official narrative, and the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia, originating from diverse social groups that stratify their ideologies in the social discourse. Bakhtin defines the novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (DN 262). A *plurality of voices*, those of the author, narrators and characters, interact in a dialogue creating a heteroglot, a multi-languaged text. Traditional stylistics had no method for reading the social interaction in discourse. In this sense, Bakhtin’s innovative approach to the novel constitutes a “paradigm shift,” an epistemological rupture in literary prose analysis.

This conception of language as dialogic opens infinite possibilities in discourse. Alien concepts and a variety of social “languages” enter discourse in a multiplicity of

³⁸“Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 279. Subsequent quotations from this essay will be indicated as DN followed by the page number.

voices, a “polyphony” orchestrated by the author. This approach has opened avenues for narratives that before were excluded from the canon. By equally privileging the voices from the center and the periphery, dialogism incorporates the centrifugal dissident forces into discourse. For this reason Bakhtin’s thought has encountered ample resonance in feminist and post-colonial criticism and in other subversive currents in their struggle for a position of power in symbolic language.

Dialogism, in Bakhtinian terminology, is opposed to *Monologism*³⁹ that allows only one version of truth, thus disregarding the plurality of voices. The centripetal forces of language tend to codify a system imposed by the dominating ideology. A monologic novel privileges the voice of the author and disregards heteroglossia. Secondary voices are absorbed by a “hermetic” language system “alien to the linguistic relativism of prose consciousness” (DN 325). According to Bakhtin a “monologic style can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a game, a tempest in a teapot” (DN 325).

Heteroglossia, as the multiplicity of social ideologies and languages coexisting in a relation of tension, and competing for discursive hegemony, is incorporated into the novel through the speech of the characters and through a variety of genres. The author is present in the selection and construction of the work in a “refracted” way. The voices of

³⁹Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson in *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics* point out three different ways in which the term ‘dialogue’ is used by Bakhtin. The ‘first sense’ by which ‘every’ utterance is dialogic; the second, in contrast to ‘nondialogic’ or monologic utterances; and third, as a “global concept, as a view of truth and the world” (130-131).

the characters intermingle with those of the author in the creative process. *Hybridization* is defined by Bakhtin as

a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of the utterance, between two linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (DN 359)

Historically, hybridization has been a dynamic factor in the evolution of language, as the author, consciously or not, has appropriated words from dialects and other socio-linguistic elements. The presence of “two linguistic consciousnesses” in a single utterance takes shape in the testimonial novel in Latin America, concretely in Elena Poniatowska’s *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*, where the voices of the author and the protagonist meet in the text, each belonging to a different social and cultural sphere. The voice and socio-linguistic world of the people is set in dialogue with Poniatowska’s artistic pulse.

This dynamic conception of language communication is also developed in the essay “The Problem of Speech Genres” (1986)⁴⁰ where Bakhtin establishes the relationship between an active speaker and an addressee. He envisages the *utterance* as a *unit of speech communication* in a chain of meaning governed by the response of an addressee. By placing the *utterance* in a *horizontal plane* of active exchange, Bakhtin presupposes the participation of the *other* in speech. He writes:

⁴⁰(1952-3). Published in English in the collection *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* in 1986.

Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. (1986, 91)

The utterance as a point of convergence of the speaker with his/her social surroundings is a locus to read the feminine voice as a *sphere of communication* that reveals the participation of women in their community.

Heteroglossia in the novel seen as “another’s speech in another’s language” (DN 324) produces a *double-voiced discourse* where two speakers interact dialogically. Each voice carries its own meanings and intentions, competing for hegemony. Irony and parody are classical examples of this form of discourse. A dialogical double-voicedness is not a polemical opposition of two minds, but rather a fertile ground for exchange of a plurality of languages and ideologies.

Gary S. Morson and Carl Emerson in their penetrating work *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics* elucidate Bakhtin’s concepts of “passive” and “active” double-voiced discourse. In the first mode, the voice of the author is in command of the utterance and the second voice passively serves his intentions. The active double-voiced word “actively resists the author’s purposes and disputes his intentions, thereby reshaping the meaning and stylistic profile of the utterance” (150).⁴¹ In short, a double-voiced discourse

⁴¹The concept of a double-voiced discourse already appears in Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929). Morson and Emerson reproduce Bakhtin’s classification of the types of discourse in single-voiced and double-voiced. In the first, discourse is a) unmediated or direct, and b) objectified, or ‘represented by a person’. The double-voiced

has a wide range of nuances that the author manipulates to produce a text of multiple languages.

Feminist criticism has appropriated the concept of double-voicedness in its “active” form. In her essay “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” Elaine Showalter writes that “women’s writing is a ‘double-voiced discourse’ that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant.”⁴² Double voice as a possible means to “bridging the gulf between the intelligentsia and the popular classes” in Latin America is suggested by Jean Franco in her analysis of testimonial literature in relation to the empowering of women.⁴³ And the author Luisa Valenzuela, commenting on a text by Clarice Lispector, says:

Because the murmur, the rumor, is the one we care to find behind the written word. All that goes unsaid and yet is there. The no-place, the murmur, the rumble of something pouring beyond the writer’s fear.⁴⁴

can be passive or active. The passive can be a) ‘unidirectional’, as in stylization, or b) ‘varidirectional’ as in parody and *skaz* (oral everyday narration). The active double-voiced discourse has a “double orientation.” It appears in: hidden polemic, hidden dialogue, and other forms of polemically organized word. 147; 154-159.

⁴² *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, 263.

⁴³ “Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private.” *On Edge. The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, 72.

⁴⁴ “So-Called Latin-American Writing.” *Critical Theory, Cultural Politics, and Latin American Narrative* 217.

Bakhtin's revolutionary approach to language as multi-voiced and to the novel as a *polyphony*⁴⁵ of ideologically distinct performers inscribes the novel as an artistic genre, governed not by a monologic poetics but by the dynamic dialogue of plural consciousnesses. In Latin America, a continent marked by ethnic heterogeneity, Bakhtin's dialogism permits the inclusion of plural cultures and ideologies in discourse.

Feminist dialogics as a resourceful method for reading the feminine voice

Feminist dialogics benefits from Bakhtin's concept of a multivocal speech to integrate the marginalized voices into discourse and challenge the dominant (univocal) word. Dale M. Bauer and Susan J. McKinstry's collection of essays on *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic* develops strategies of feminist criticism inspired by Bakhtin's theories of language and of the speaking subject in discourse. Feminist dialogics is a mode of resistance through language against the exclusion of gender, class and race, and an agency for change. In the Introduction Bauer defines the aims of this feminist practice:

For the object is not, ultimately, to produce a feminist monologic voice, a dominant voice that is a reversal of the

⁴⁵Polyphony is a concept invented by Bakhtin to describe Dostoevsky's prose. Morson and Emerson explain the polyphonic novel in relation to the author, who is one more voice in a multiplicity of independent voices engaged in an 'unfinalizable' dialogue. They quote Bakhtin's description of a polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*: as a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*" 240.

patriarchal voice (even if such a project were conceivable), but to create a feminist dialogics that recognizes power and discourse as indivisible, monologism as a model of ideological dominance, and narrative as inherently multivocal, as a form of cultural resistance that celebrates the dialogic voice that speaks with many tongues, which incorporates multiple voices of the cultural web. (1991, 4)

Bauer's approach to language as a vehicle to disavow a dominant speech is further developed by Patricia Yaeger who sees the political potential of including the subject and invigorating the "ossified" condition of phallocracy. In the "Afterword" she writes:

If the speechless subject is full of political intent, if the silent signatures of the oppressed can be recovered through a study of the dominant culture's split subjectivity, if a real force for social change labors within the ghostly voices of the semiotic, can we find room in these new heterodoxies for the noise⁴⁶ and nuisance of the dialogic? (240)

This dynamic view of language would then 'gender' the feminine voices and engage in a productive dialogue with the hegemonic forces. Yaeger further specifies the points of encounter between Bakhtin and feminist dialogics in the notion of language as 'oscillation' between *centrifugal* and *centripetal* forces, the organization of language in *stratifications* that allows for renovation, the concept of *heteroglossia* as a drive to resist dominant discourse, and *dialogism* as the method to inscribe this 'struggle' in the text.

⁴⁶"Noise" is a concept also used by Laurie A. Finke in *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* where she defines it as "that which violates the integrity of dominant patriarchal discourse" (26).

The relationship of feminist dialogics to the power of discourse is exposed by Josephine Donovan who sees the novel “as a locus of a counter hegemonic resistance to the centralized authority of official disciplines” (85-86). In my analysis of the early novels by Latin American women writers, such as Teresa de la Parra and María Luisa Bombal, I will argue that the female protagonists are in constant conflict with patriarchy and reluctant to subordination. In this context Gail M. Schwab sees dialogics and women’s writing as the means “to articulate otherness” thus creating a “dialogic textuality” opposed to monologism (69).

In the relativization of the dominant discourse, Bakhtin’s theories have allowed the inclusion of multiple voices, such as race, class, and gender. In my analysis of the fiction of Rosario Castellanos and Elena Poniatowska, I show how the women protagonists of the margins challenge the discourse of the establishment. In theoretical feminist dialogics, Mary O’Connor argues that Bakhtin’s questioning of the “transcendental subject” offers feminism a theory where plural subject positions and ideologies join together. For black American women’s writing the critique of patriarchy and the idea that the “wholeness” of men is a “fabrication” has cracked fissures and opened a process of change where silenced voices become conscious of their subjectivity. She writes:

Women must deconstruct the patriarchal image of ourselves as silent, submissive, and object of pleasure or possession, but problems arise when we start to construct our own identity. (200)

Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic is one of many feminist approximations to dialogism.⁴⁷ For the purpose of my research these essays enlighten the methods of reading feminist novels from a dialogic perspective in relation to language, power and resistance, subjectivity and agency of change. In reading the feminine voice in the fiction of Latin American women's writing my central concern is to unveil the voices of resistance in their confrontation with the master narrative, to include the social and cultural dimension through the 'noise' of heteroglossia, and to trace the subject position of female characters.

The methodology used in this dissertation benefits from the interventions of feminist criticism, Bakhtin's dialogism and feminist dialogics. Although I apply these theories as they suit my purpose, it is possible to gather them around four key thematic points: voice and language, discursive strategies, construction of subjectivity, and discursive power relations. My usage also indicates some parallels among them: Bakhtin's dialogic concept of language and his discussion of the "double-voiced discourse" is closely related to Showalter's notion of the interaction between the muted and the dominant. Bakhtin's metaphorical description of "monologism" as "a tempest in a teapot" (DN 325) is a vivid image for women's resistance to patriarchal dominance. Bakhtin's approach to language as multi-voiced and his concept of heteroglossia open avenues to integrate the voices of the periphery—the excluded other, women, native, —

⁴⁷Other valuable references are: Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow, eds. *A Dialogue of Voices. Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin* (1994); Lynne Pearce *Reading Dialogics* (1994); and various articles by feminist critics in two volumes of *Critical Studies* (1.2, 1989, and 2.1/2, 1990) dedicated to Bakhtin.

into discourse. Feminist dialogics show coincidences with the other two methods as they elaborate on Bakhtin's theories on language to relativize the dominant discourse, develop feminist strategies of resistance and act as agents of change.

In the subsequent chapters I first survey the current state of the Latin American feminist literary debate based on theoretical writings on the question of difference, the specificity of women's writing, and the validity of applying poststructuralist parameters to the critique of Latin American fiction as exposed in the new emerging theoretical voices and manifestos. In Chapter Two I examine the specificity of women's writing in representative women authors of this century analyzing the relevant discursive strategies, such as intertextuality and enunciation, and the construction of subjectivity in their fiction. In a historical overview, I concentrate on the novels of Teresa de la Parra, Maria Luisa Bombal and Clarice Lispector as examples of resistance and transgression. I consider Rosario Castellanos as a turning point in the awareness of the problematics of class and race in texts written by women in Latin American literature. The incursion of women in the public sphere with their participation in the discourse of nation-building takes shape starting with the prose of Marta Lynch in the 1960s and the novels of Angeles Mastretta in the 1990s. Chapter Two closes with an appreciation of the evolution from introspection to a social commitment elucidating the thread running through Latin American women's writing.

Chapters Three and Four each studies the authors I consider the culminating point of a tradition of feminine discourse taking into account social and political circumstances.

At this point of the discussion, I intend to read the prose of these two authors in relation to their own theoretical assertions. Elena Poniatowska's insistence that *the voice of the oppressed in Latin America includes literature by women* is central to her texts that demystify the master-narrative of the Mexican Revolution and reproduce the voices from the margins and the *social phenomenon* of the reality of poverty. Luisa Valenzuela's poetics of the feminine language that articulates hidden desires, her unique approach to the concept of "writing with the body" as a commitment to one's work, and her conviction that the task of the writer is to decode the perversions of power and to preserve the memory of the atrocities of the "Dirty War," place her in the privileged position of the woman of the (no-longer) periphery who talks back to the Center. This thesis attempts to formulate a reading model for the fiction of Latin American women writers based on their theoretical assertions.

The feminine voice in the fiction of Latin American women writers has taken the Word from the omniscient male poet who had assigned himself the task of speaking out the silences of the oppressed. But this bard spoke with his own imagination, as when Neruda said: "Speak through my words and my blood." The literature by women is born out of an interaction with the silenced Other, as they have learned to listen to the Others and reproduce their voices. The voice of women writers is an inquisitive voice of resistance, transgression and awe that pushes beyond the boundaries of censored desires and imposed silence, a voice that is first heard as a scream, like that from a newborn who has begun to write with indelible ink, in the book of the Symbolic.

Chapter One

The current Latin American feminist literary debate

If language constitutes a person, then the schools of literary theory might constitute our set of values. Or, rather, the way values are used, distorted, twisted, misrepresented, turned inside out, linked, subverted, inverted, masked, spent, dressed up.¹

Luisa Valenzuela: "The Five Days that Changed My Paper"

Feminist discourse in Latin America has been articulated at different instances and in countries first as isolated voices that responded to the vital need of women to create a female space in a society that restricted them to the confines of the home and the private sphere. The precursors Teresa de la Parra (1891-1936) in Caracas or Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) in Buenos Aires, are women of high society who had lived in Europe and were eager to create an appropriate room for self expression in their environments. Parra in her fiction, and Ocampo in her determination to propagate European avant-gardism in

¹ (1991, 6). Paper read at the 1990 MLA convention in Chicago and originally published in English. There is no Spanish version to date of this essay.

Buenos Aires, not the least through her influential journal *Sur*,² are two examples of individual efforts to achieve this aim. In her essay “La mujer y su expresión” [“Woman and her expression”] Victoria Ocampo declares the need of women to express themselves and break the “male monologue.” In an eloquent statement she encourages women to articulate themselves and dare a “dialogue” that would interrupt men’s one-sided world view:

Y es a la mujer a quien le toca no sólo descubrir este
continente inexplorado que ella representa, sino hablar del
hombre, a su vez, en calidad de testigo sospechoso.(282)³

This nuanced appeal anticipates later feminist calls to map a feminine view and formulate self-representation, a plea for the articulation of female *difference* in dialogue with, not in opposition to, men’s view. Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974) and Clarice

²Victoria Ocampo founded, financed and published *Sur*, edited 350 issues between 1931 and 1970, and continued with some interruptions until Ocampo’s death in 1979. Leading Argentinian authors such as Borges, Bioy Casares, Cortázar, Silvina Ocampo, Eduardo Mallea, and Ernesto Sábato and the Chilean Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral published in this prestigious journal. *A Room of One’s Own* and *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf were translated by Borges and published in issues 15-18, December 1935 to March 1936. A key purpose of this journal was to introduce European contemporary authors to the Argentinian public. Aldous Huxley, DH Lawrence, G. Greene, A. Camus, JP Sartre, W. Faulkner, I. Stravinsky, and Jung, among others were published in translation. The Oxford thesis by John King entitled *Sur. A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931-1970*, and published in 1986, is a thorough analysis of this journal. See also his 1990 article “Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979): Precursor.”

³“It is now women’s turn not only to discover this unexplored continent that they represent but also to speak out about men, in their turn, as suspect witnesses.” From *Testimonios*, vol 2. Buenos Aires: Sur, 1941, 269-286. Trans. Patricia Owen Steiner (Meyer 1995, 132).

Lispector (1927-1977) can also be counted as isolated forerunners of the Latin American Feminist debate. Castellanos through her journalistic contributions and Lispector in occasional texts ponder the relevance of women's writing. In the Mexico of the 1950s Castellanos had to go against the grain of her tradition to incorporate the issues of class and race in her fiction and essays.

Long before Sara Castro-Klarén formulated her theory on the “double-negativity” of the Latin American woman, Rosario Castellanos was aware of women's⁴ double discrimination in the Mexican society and of the importance of searching for new avenues of expression as a means of gaining access to power. Women and Indians are oppressed, society demands their service and sacrifice in the image of the “hada del hogar”⁵ and other constraining expectations. Women need education and independence to draw their self-portrait, *construir la imagen propia*.⁶ In an embryonic quest for subjectivity and self-definition, Castellanos believes that language and writing are a means to articulating experience and gaining freedom. Many of her journalistic essays comment on exemplary

⁴I use the term woman/women in the accepted feminist meaning of *woman* as the object constructed by patriarchy, and *women* as the engendered subjects of women's discourse. In *Engendering the Subject*, Sally Robinson defines these terms: “Woman—a discursive figure most often constructed and mobilized according to the logic of male desire—and women—actual female persons engendered by, and engendering, social and discursive practices” (8).

⁵ “Fairy-godmother in the home.” Castellanos version of the English “Angel in the house.” The essay “La mujer y su imagen” in *Mujer que sabe latín* (1973) is a strong critique of patriarchy and the social construction of gender.

⁶In “La mujer ante el espejo.” *Mujer que sabe latín*, 41. Other related essays by Castellanos on the subject are: “La participación de la mujer mexicana en la educación formal” (1973:21-40), and “La mujer y su imagen” (1973:7-20).

women authors who have attained new levels of consciousness through their writing, as in “La mujer ante el espejo” (1973) where she refers to Simone de Beauvoir:

El lenguaje va a ser el medio gracias al cual ella, que era originariamente amorfa—en tanto que “segundo sexo” en particular, en tanto que ser humano en general—va a realizar la tarea de construir su existencia, va a arrastrar los riesgos de la libertad, va a experimentar la angustia de la elección de una conducta que, gratuita, aspira a convertirse en necesaria, aunque esta aspiración sea constantemente impedida por la conciencia vigilante. (43-44)⁷

In her exploration of women’s function in society Castellanos problematizes the relationship of language and power and voices the need of breaking with the patterns of behavior assigned to gender. It is through self-knowledge that women will acquire a position of self-esteem and through language have access to freedom on an equal basis with men.⁸ In this sense, she also propagates Ocampo’s premises of establishing a dialogue with men in a quasi Bakhtinian formulation: In “Notas al margen: el lenguaje como instrumento de dominio”(1973), Castellanos writes:

⁷“Language will be the means by which she, who was originally amorphous, since she belonged to the ‘second sex’ in particular, although to the human race in general, will perform the task of constructing her existence, she will drag the risks of freedom, she will experience the anguish of choosing a mode of behavior, which should become a necessity, even though constantly crippled by a vigilant conscience.”

⁸Naomi Lindstrom in “Rosario Castellanos: Pioneer of Feminist Criticism” focuses on the fictional representation of socially prescribed female functions. She writes: “Castellanos pioneered the incorporation of sex role analysis into literary commentary” (Ahern and Vásquez 66).

El sentido de la palabra es su destinatario: el otro que escucha, que entiende y que, cuando responde, convierte a su interlocutor en el que escucha y el que entiende, estableciendo así la relación del diálogo que sólo es posible entre quienes se consideran y se tratan como iguales y que sólo es fructífero entre quienes se quieren libres. (180)⁹

Castellanos's contribution to feminist criticism marks a breakthrough in woman's and *mestiza*'s class consciousness, an awareness of the power of language to construct one's image and gain a position of 'freedom' vis a vis men. Women can then reach a broad international audience that would imprint women's view. In her fiction, Castellanos establishes an interracial encounter, a confrontation that precedes dialogue and shakes the centuries-long class division that dominated social relations in colonial and post-colonial Mexico.

Language as a quest for self-knowledge is also a central preoccupation in Clarice Lispector's writing. Although she did not write a body of critical work, as did Castellanos, *The Foreign Legion*¹⁰ in its "Chronicles" and "Bottom Drawer" sections tells about her

⁹"The meaning of the word (utterance) is its addressee: the other who listens, who understands and who, when he responds, transforms his interlocutor into his listener and addressee, thus establishing a dialogic relationship only among those who consider each other equal and is only fruitful among those who want to be free."

¹⁰*A Legião estrangeira*. Rio de Janeiro: Editôra do autor, 1964. Translated by Giovanni Pontiero as *The Foreign Legion*. Manchester, 1986. Rept. New York: New Directions, 1992. The version I use is the Spanish translation: *La legión extranjera*, trans. Juan García Gayó, Caracas, 1971.

creative experience. From these pages, it is possible to reconstruct a few ideas that anticipate future pursuits of feminist criticism.

In the opening chronicle “Los desastres de Sofia” (“Sophia’s Misfortunes”) Lispector intertwines a tale of transgression that challenges patriarchy. The schoolgirl Sofia writes a daring story where she masks her self as a “hidden treasure.” Overwhelmed by fear of her teacher’s judgment and punishment, she experiences a “somnambulist” sensation of anxiety and shame for her act of “fatal liberty.” Astonished at her idea of the ‘hidden treasure’ in the story, the teacher smiles at her saying: “Tú eres una chica extraña, ¿sabes? Eres una loquita”(32).¹¹ His words make her realize that she, a woman, is the “treasure” but also a *madwoman*. The child Sofia loses faith in authority and her physical reaction is to vomit that night. “Los desastres de Sofia” is a vivid representation of a confrontation with patriarchy, a transgression of the master-slave order where the *muted* has stolen the word.

Writing for Lispector is a vital necessity in the artist’s search for knowledge. In her effort to find the right word, she is like a “fisherman” who has as her *bait* the word to catch the “non-word,” the meaning between the lines. Style is a “humble” journey to reach *understanding*. The short text “Aventura” describes writing as a challenge and ‘adventure’ to be true to oneself:

[E]scribir me resulta una necesidad. Por un lado porque escribir es una manera de no mentir al sentimiento ...; por el

¹¹“You are a strange girl, you know? You are a madwoman.”

otro, escribo por incapacidad de entender, a no ser a través del proceso de escribir.¹²

Foreshadowing French Feminism, Lispector associates the creative act with pregnancy. “Writing” is an act of love and patience, of bearing disorder and waiting, like a mother expecting a child. The image of “El alma deformada, creciendo, cobrando volumen, sin al menos saber que aquello es espera”¹³ (“Escribiendo,” 1971, 346) reflects the slow process of gestation that can be read as a trope for writing.

Often criticized for the absence of a social commitment in her writing, Lispector claims that this is not due to indifference, but to the fact that writing is for her an existential experience. She is unable to write about social injustice in Brazil because, although the feeling for justice is of vital importance to her, it is not a *quest* as writing is for her. Her writing is an effort to *understand* herself and the Other from multiple

¹²“To write is for me a necessity. On the one hand, because to write is a way of not prevaricating feeling; on the other, because of my incapacity to understand, except through the process of writing” (1971, 214-215). The other texts from which I have drawn these findings are “La pesca milagrosa” and “Escribir, humildad, técnica” (211-213).

¹³“The shapeless soul, growing, gaining volume, without even knowing that the matter is waiting.”

perspectives. She wants to be the object of multiple readings¹⁴ and read the Other in a fertile interaction. In “La mayor experiencia,” (1971) she points out:

Antes había querido ser los otros para conocer lo que no era yo. Comprendí entonces que ya había sido los otros, y eso era fácil. Mi mayor experiencia sería ser el otro de los otros; y el otro de los otros era yo.¹⁵ (211)

In these selective, isolated cases of women authors one can glimpse some of the items of future feminist agendas. Parra in the 1920s was aware of the cultural construction of gender, while Ocampo in the 1940s exhorted women to attempt self-expression and assume a dialogue with patriarchy. Castellanos in the 1950s broadened the feminist scope as she brought forward class and race conflicts in the issue of the female double negativity and linked language to power. Lispector confronted patriarchy through her writing and saw self-knowledge as the first step towards understanding and formulating a feminine voice. These embryonic ideas that developed in isolation find a new channel of

¹⁴Lisa Casali Daidone and John Clifford in their article “Clarice Lispector: Anticipating the Postmodern” link Lispector’s writing to the *reader-response* theory when they write that in Lispector’s texts “Creation of meaning becomes a cooperative process between writer and reader, with this process remaining always fluid.” *Multicultural Literatures through Feminist/Poststructuralist Lenses* (1993). Ed. Barbara Frey Waxman. This article brings to light other aspects of Lispector’s approach to language where she “anticipates” poststructuralism and postmodernism.

¹⁵“Formerly I had wanted to be the others in order to know what I was not. I then understood that I had been the others, and that was easy. My greatest experience would be to be the other of others; and the other’s other was me.”

communication in international conferences where feminist issues are debated and globalized in a more political and organized manner.¹⁶

A preliminary survey of symposia and critical articles

At first inspired by the parameters of the Anglo-American and French feminist criticism,¹⁷ women writers and Latin Americanists have deliberated on a feminist agenda

¹⁶Although not directly related to women's search for self-representation in literature, I find it pertinent to acknowledge the work of Latin American feminists in the framework of Panamericanism and to mention Francesca Miller's valuable research paper "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena" where, with detailed historical data, she denies the belief that the Inter-American Commission of Women created at the Inter-American Congress in Havana in 1928 was "a response to the pressure tactics of the National Woman's Party of the United States and thus another example of North-American hegemony female style." Miller records the development of feminist thought and activity that evolved since the 1898 Conference in Montevideo where women discussed 'social problems' such as 'hygiene, childcare, nutrition, maternal welfare ...,' and the 1908 Conference in Santiago where women claimed access to education up to the political intervention in the above mentioned conference in Havana in 1928. An Equal Rights Treaty was then drafted originating the creation of the Inter-American Commission of Women to investigate the status of women in all 21 member states. This was not only the world's first 'governmental organization' to work on the 'rights of women', but relevant for the feminist debate as "women of the Americas looked beyond the nation-state to the trans-national arena for a *community for empowerment*, for the opportunity to articulate their ideas and to be heard" (my emphasis, 23). These facts are another proof of the sensitive North-South relationship where Latin Americans want to develop their issues independently or in cooperation, but not under the domination of the United States. See *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America. Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America* 10-26.

¹⁷Due to the fact that the conferences where the issues related to women's writing were first organized by North American universities in the late 1970s, the topics discussed were the same that interested the North American "white-academic" feminist critics,

to appraise women's writing. Latin American women writers of the 1980s and 1990s are not only liberating themselves from Western patterns of thought and patriarchal modes of discourse, but are also creating new galleries of speech by inserting their feminine and cultural outlook. A proliferation of both fiction and critical writings are contributing to the creation of a significant body of texts that reflect a clear intention to draw the cultural distances with the North.¹⁸ The debate reflects an awareness of leading Anglo-American and French feminist patterns of thought, but it is essential to be conscious of the socio-cultural differences that often function as a counter-culture in the discussion. The

namely the situation of the woman writer in society and the existence of a feminine writing. It is important, however, to point out that North American feminist criticism has developed into many currents and one cannot see them as one homogeneous body. Therefore, when I mention the Anglo-American and/or French feminism in this thesis, I refer only to those critics that have directly influenced Latin Americanists, who are mainly associated with poststructuralism and gynocriticism. Among the French critics, I discuss primarily Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray.

¹⁸I prefer the term "North" to the more commonly used "First World" to refer to the dominating theoretical thought in the Northern hemisphere, in relation to the Southern hemisphere, where "Latin America" is geographically situated. At this point it is relevant to mention a few parallels between the Latin American feminist criticism and Black feminism in their attitudes and positions of resistance towards the white middle-class North American feminism. Critics and writers such as Bell Hooks, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison are also politically oriented and distance themselves from homogenizing elitist theories. Even though the historical backgrounds of slavery in North America and colonialism in Latin America are far apart, there are thematic coincidences in the issues dealt with by both feminist currents, such as "the importance of self-definition in resisting oppression" (P.H. Collins, *Black feminist Thought* 16) as well as the association of marginality and oppression with race, class, and gender. There are more coincidences between Chicana feminist thought and Black feminism due to the fact that both cultures develop within the United States. But this subject is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For further information, see Alma M. García's "Introduction" to *Chicana Feminist Thought* 1-18.

following overview of the current Latin American feminist literary debate traces the key thematic concerns of the critical discourse.

In her introduction to the publication of the conference procedures of the 1984 II International Symposium of Literature, Juana Alcira Arancibia refers to the Symposium on Latin American 20th century literature that took place at Chapman College, California, in the year 1982, as the “first” conference of its kind (*Evaluación* 13). There had been, however, other previous conferences on the subject which have not been mentioned in this discussion.¹⁹ A pioneering conference on “Women Writers from Latin America” was sponsored by the Latin American Literary Review in 1975 at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pennsylvania. The “Center of Inter-American Writers” created on this occasion organized two further conferences, in 1976 at San José State University in California, and in May 1978 at the University of Ottawa, in Canada. This “Conference of Inter-American Women Writers” was an inter-cultural encounter of leading writers and critics of the four literary languages in the Americas: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Unfortunately, the Latin American group did not publish the proceedings and the only records are newspaper articles or personal memories of the participants.²⁰ For this reason,

¹⁹I refer to important publications that deal with the Latin American feminist debate, such as González y Ortega *La sartén por el mango* (1985), Castillo’s *Talking Back* (1992), or A.B. Jones “Latin American Feminist Criticism Revisited (1996).

²⁰Two articles by Alvina Ruprecht cover this conference in local papers: “Le congrès des femmes écrivains: aspects hispano-américains,” in *Ottawa Revue*, and “Postface au 3e congrès des femmes écrivains des Amériques,” in *Le Devoir*. The French speaking participants published their papers in *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa* 50.1 (January-March 1980). This issue lists the themes of the round-table discussions attended by all groups which were: “Is there a feminine voice in literature?, the feminine tradition

my research on the Latin American feminist debate will start with the set of symposia²¹ initiated at Chapman College in 1982 and which continued in 1984 in San José de Costa Rica. Both events had as their major concern the evaluation of the Latin-American Feminine Literature in the 20th century.

The question of the feminine voice was already raised on that occasion: “Is there any difference in the literature written by women, and if so, where can it be defined?” asks Juana Alcira Arancibia in her Introduction to the publication of the 1984 conference proceedings.²² She replies with the words of the Mexican writer Sara Sefchovich who defines that female specificity, “especificidad,” as:

in literature, women writers and society, women and the theatrical tradition, and poetry as a means of communication in the works of women poets.”
See Boucher et al. “Tables rondes.”

²¹Among the conferences that I consider as fundamental in the initiation and progress of the feminist debate in Latin America are the 1982 “first” International Symposium in Latin American 20th century literature at Chapman College, California, and its continuation held in San José de Costa Rica in 1984, from which proceedings were published in *Evaluación de la literatura femenina de Latinoamérica, Siglo XX*. Ed. Juana Alcira Arancibia. In 1983 another group of Latin Americanist critics organized a conference on women writers at Amherst College, Massachusetts, and published its papers in the important collection *La sartén por el mango* edited by Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega. The proceedings of the 1989 Conference in Minneapolis were edited by Hernán Vidal and published as *Cultural and Historical Grounding for Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Feminist Literary Criticism*.

²²Juana Alcira Arancibia, ed. *Evaluación de la literatura femenina de Latinoamérica, Siglo XX*. Arancibia’s valuable Introduction recollects the main strands of the Conference’s debate on the specificity of women’s writing. I reproduce two of her quotations from other sources, as they are not published in the Conference proceedings, and I consider them to be key contributions at the outset of the debate on this issue.

un modo particular de apropiación y transformación de la realidad, del lenguaje para expresarla y construirla del modo de estructuración de un texto.²³

In the words of Lucía Guerra, the Chilean writer and critic, the feminine perspective differs in vision and technique from that of the male authors:

la escritora como ente social en un grupo particular, posee una visión de la realidad diferente a la de los hombres y esta visión se elabora a partir de técnicas literarias que no son necesariamente idénticas a aquellas utilizadas en la literatura de sus coetáneos.²⁴

Even though it was generally accepted among the participants that the literature is “one” and “without a sexual differentiation” (15), Gabriela Mora sees the impact of the feminist contribution in “the revision of cultural codes” where new minority groups may inscribe their *cosmovision* with their distinctive views, as for example the *chicana* literature in the USA. The relevant aspect about feminine literature is that women have

²³“It consists of a particular mode of appropriation and transformation of reality, of the language to express and construct it, and of the form of structuring the text.” Quoted from Sara Sefchovich, *Mujeres en espejo. Antología de narradoras latinoamericanas del siglo XX*. In Arancibia 1985, 15.

²⁴“The woman writer, as a social being in a particular group, has a vision of reality different from that of men, and to project this vision she uses different literary techniques, not necessarily identical with those of the male writers.” Lucía Guerra Cunningham “La mujer latinoamericana frente al oficio de letras,” *La semana de Bellas Artes*: “Algunas reflexiones teóricas acerca de la literatura femenina.” 97, octubre 1979, 2-5. Quoted in Arancibia 1985, 15.

now assumed the role that history had denied them and share with men the creative responsibility in society. In the words of Zulma Nelly Martínez:

Un mundo que al redimirse de toda castrante represión se convierta en espacio energizado, por siempre transformable y por siempre transformante. Un mundo perennemente abierto a una auténtica y creativa evolución.²⁵

Arancibia's essay records the preliminary aspects of the discussion on the *difference* of women's writing: a distinctive mode of *emunciation*, a different *vision* of reality, a need to broaden the *cultural* parameters to include the voices of the periphery, and to overcome the castrating restrictions of the patriarchal discourse.

Among the publications of this Conference, Lucía Guerra's lucid essay "Hacia una estética femenina"²⁶ ("Towards a Feminine Aesthetics") examines the phallogocentric approach to language and culture and sketches the slow emergence of a feminine voice in Latin America, born in a cultural subordination in subject and discourse under the *estética criollista* that only tolerated subtle manifestations of the "feminine soul." Guerra outlines the evolution of feminine narrative in Spanish America in Gertrudis

²⁵"A world which, by redeeming itself from all castrating repression, should become an energizing space, for ever transformable and in the process of transformation. A world open to an authentic and creative evolution" (Arancibia 1985, 17).

²⁶Lucía Guerra Cunningham, "Hacia una estética femenina." In Arancibia 1985, 27-37. In her analysis, Lucía Guerra acknowledges her debt to the criteria developed by the poststructuralist theories, such as Roland Barthes's concept that the cultural code derives from an ideology that gives the text its mark of verisimilitude, to Helen Cixous's "The Character of 'Character'," where the literary character portrays the values of its society, and to Todorov's notion of verisimilitude as being linked to an external textual norm of genre.

Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* (1924), Maria Luisa Bombal's *La ultima niebla* (1935) and Mercedes Valdivieso's *La brecha* (1961) where the meek protest against the slavery of marriage in Avellaneda develops into rebellion and eventual submission to social norms in *Ifigenia*, and dares social transgression in the form of an adulterous fantasy in Bombal's novel. These texts are guided by a sense of failure in the part of the writer, the 'derrota' of having to write for a reader who "has internalized the values of the dominant masculine ideology" (35). According to Guerra, *La brecha*, published in 1961, marks a significant rupture with this traditional narrative. The story of a married woman who violates marriage vows, takes lovers, has an abortion, divorces and is successful in her career, was scandalous in the eyes of critics conditioned by social values, not only because an adulterous heroine who should be condemned, prospers, but because the text subverts the aesthetic value of verisimilitude.

The novelty of Lucía Guerra's approach is to read the evolution of a feminine thread of resistance and submission in the earlier fiction and a 'breakthrough' in the portrayal of a heroine overcoming the impositions of the social conventions. Valdivieso is a pioneer attempt to imbue a female character with the courage to live according to her personal impulses.

On this occasion, Guerra gathers in a "Manifiesto estético"²⁷ the current views of

²⁷Due to its importance as a pioneering document, I transcribe it here almost in its entirety: "Acosadas por la textualidad, por los criterios eminentemente masculinos de la crítica, por los valores de una sociedad que refuerzan la subordinación del sexo femenino, asumimos responsablemente nuestra feminidad, la verdadera o, por lo menos, la que nosotras como mujeres conocemos. Decidimos entonces suplantarlo el pudor por el detalle genuino de nuestro erotismo, por las sensaciones culturalmente silenciadas de nuestro

Latin American women writers in a clear refusal of phallogocentric criteria that have kept women in a position of subordination and marginality, coupled with a conscious affirmation of the feminine experience and eroticism and a will to engage in a feminine writing that “captures the other side of reality” to “narrate our body, our rebellion, and our anger” in a language considered inappropriate for a “decent” woman. Guerra suggests that women play the inverted game of creating masculine archetypes from the “dark shadow of the feminine collective unconscious.”²⁸

Guerra’s proclamation reverberates concepts of poststructuralism and French theories in her rejection of phallogocentric parameters and in their denunciatory tone on the place allotted to women in the Symbolic order. Her calling for a new consciousness in women writers to create a new narrative that would write the body and its hidden desires

cuerpo En nuestra escritura nos proponemos capturar el otro sello de la realidad: el tiempo medido por la lógica absurda, el orden simbólico encabezado por el Padre y las regulaciones impuestas a nuestra sexualidad caen entre los desechos de un falocentrismo que a nosotras ya no nos engaña. Nos proponemos denunciar la insuficiencia de un sistema que ha mantenido a la mujer en la marginalidad bajo la máscara alienante de angel del hogar y madre abnegada. Infinitamente aburridas son [sic/con] las imágenes falsas de la Madre-Tierra y la Madre-Terrible consideramos un derecho hacer el juego inverso y crear arquetipos masculinos porque las mujeres también hemos mitificado al hombre en lo que Carl Jung denominaba la sombra oscura del inconsciente colectivo femenino. Detestando la espiral de una historia amordazada narramos nuestro cuerpo, nuestra rebeldía y nuestra ira en un lenguaje a propósito poco apropiado para una señora decente. En resumen, describimos el continente negro de nuestra femineidad con la esperanza de que las mujeres logremos por fin incorporarnos al devenir histórico” (Arancibia 36-37). Since my text summarizes the key points of this Manifesto, I omit the detailed translation.

²⁸These thoughts, read in 1984, which clearly show a poststructuralist heritage, had important repercussions in other Latin American critical texts, such as in Luisa Valenzuela’s 1986 text “The other face of the phallus” on which I comment at the end of this chapter.

was a significant landmark at this early stage in the formulation of a Latin American feminist theory. At this point Guerra is only concerned with destabilizing patriarchal patterns of thought. In later essays she reorients her critique to encompass issues related to post-colonial theories, such as the need for a Latin American cultural construction in a continent with social stratifications and a history of cultural and political dependence.²⁹

Conferences on the topic have proliferated since. A basic critical literature is elaborated at the encounter in 1984 at Amherst College attended by (not only) women writers such as Rosario Ferré, Marta Traba, Elena Poniatowska and the emerging critical authorities on the subject, Sara Castro-Klarén and Gabriela Mora. The proceedings were published one year later as *La sartén por el mango* edited by Patricia Elena González and Elena Ortega.

On that occasion, the debate on the specificity of women's writing shows that the categorization of texts into those written by men and those written by women is still problematic. Alicia Borinsky labels this "reductionist criticism" as "claustrophobic" (14). Marta Lugones advocates the construction of a feminine canon based on the discovery of women's identity and the creation of women's own symbols. Josefina Ludmer refuses a

²⁹I refer to her essays "Marginalidad y escritura: aproximación teórica a la narrativa femenina hispanoamericana" (1985); "El personaje femenino y otras mutilaciones" (1986); "Entre la sumisión y la irreverencia" (1987); "Las sombras de la escritura: Hacia una teoría de la producción literaria de la mujer latinoamericana" (1989) which I analyze later; and the "Introduction" to her 1990 edition of *Splintering Darkness: Latin American Women Writers in Search of Themselves*.

“system of differentiation” and categorization of the feminine as “essentialist,” since women’s thought should be de-essentializing and open to its multiplicity and variants from the “first” to the “third” world and across the social stratum.³⁰ Rosario Ferré in her paper “La cocina de la escritura” asks:

¿Existe una literatura de mujeres, radicalmente diferente a la de los hombres? ¿Y si existe, ha de ser ésta apasionada e intuitiva, fundamentada sobre las sensaciones y los sentimientos, como quería Virginia [Woolf], o racional y analítica, inspirada en el conocimiento histórico, social y político, como quería Simone [de Beauvoir]? (González y Ortega 152)³¹

Ferré tells the personal experience in writing her first short story “La muñeca menor” where she had wanted to present a worldly theme in an objective manner, the ruin of a traditional social class based on family values that had been replaced by an unscrupulous generation driven by utilitarian interests, but the result is a story of love and frustration, with a passive, ‘feminine’ character incapable of overcoming her fate, a touch of defeat that she had wanted to avoid. From this lesson, she learns to give her heroines more independence and courage and a positive attitude. Should a woman writer, Ferré inquires, defend traditional feminine values in the conventional manner of a harmonious

³⁰ For a detailed exposition of the discussions see Patricia Elena González’s Introduction, in González y Ortega 13-17.

³¹“Is there a women’s literature radically different from men’s? And if so, must it be passionate and intuitive, founded on sensations and sentiments, as Virginia Woolf wanted, or rational and analytic, inspired by historical, social and political knowledge, as Simone de Beauvoir wished?”

and graceful writing, or should she create a literature that is “combative, accusatory, unconditionally realist, and even obscene?” (González y Ortega 152). Ferré’s answer is clear. A text has no sex, what is important is to write well. It is useless to debate whether there is an *escritura femenina*. “Sospecho que no existe una escritura femenina diferente a la de los hombres,” she writes “lo más lógico me parece insistir en la existencia de una *experiencia* radicalmente diferente” (González y Ortega 153).³²

A significant reply to the problematic of the specificity of women’s writing was brought to the floor by the Argentine writer Marta Traba in her challenging “Hipótesis sobre una escritura diferente” (González y Ortega 21-26) where she defines a feminine text as one that occupies a different space. She refuses the polarizing or binary connotations associating women with nature, sensibility, glandular system or lived experience. Based on a study group reading of representative feminine texts, such as Clarice Lispector, Rosario Ferré, Elvira Orphée, Rosario Castellanos, Elena Poniatowska, and Laura Antillana, among others, her controversial hypothesis proposes that the feminine texts do not follow the established canons and that they present an enchainment of events without a symbolic content. They explain rather than interpret the universe. Reality and fiction intermingle with the consequent metaphoric poverty. Their frequent use of detail brings them closer to the popular tale than to a symbolic construction, and

³² “I suspect that a feminine writing different from men’s does not exist It seems more logical to me to insist on the existence of an *experience* that is radically different.”

the structures are more related to orality in their repetitions, close endings and explanatory interruptions.³³

Marta Traba does not believe in a new model of *feminine discourse*. The texts studied reveal that the main purpose in women's writing is "telling a *true* story" in a language closer to the descriptive and sensorial image than to the "arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" (24). If women do not create a new model of writing, where is that *feminine space* to be located? Traba points out that it is to be found in the proximity to the margins, to which women have access and for whom they can speak:

Si el texto femenino queda situado en un espacio próximo a estos últimos, a los marginados culturales, en otras palabras si opera, como realmente lo hace, desde la marginación, podría perfectamente intermediar como lo hacen todas las contraculturas, entre el productor solitario y el receptor desconfiado, que es lo que hoy se presenta como situación de receptor/emisor.³⁴

³³I am paraphrasing the text which, in Spanish reads: "Entonces se podría advertir que: (1) Los textos femeninos *encadenan* los hechos sin preocuparse por conducirlos a un nivel simbólico. (2) Se interesan preferentemente por una *explicación* y no por una interpretación del universo: explicación que casi siempre resulta dirigida también al propio autor, como una forma de esclarecerse a sí mismo lo confuso. (3) Se produce una continua intromisión de la esfera de la realidad en el plano de las ficciones, lo cual tiende a empobrecer o a eliminar la metáfora y acorta notablemente la distancia entre significante y significado. (4) Se subraya permanentemente el detalle, como pasa en el relato popular, lo cual dificulta bastante la construcción del símbolo. (5) Se establecen parentescos, seguramente instintivos, con las estructuras propias de la oralidad, como repeticiones, remates precisos al final del texto, cortes aclaratorios en las historias." in González y Ortega, 23-24.

³⁴"If the feminine text is located in a space close to the culturally marginalized, if it operates, as it really does, from marginality, it could become an intermediary as other counter-cultures do, between the solitary producer and the distrusting receiver, what

For her conclusion, she quotes Bordieu in his advice: “To speak, instead of being spoken of, could be one of the tasks of the counterculture.” We women have to be aware of our marginal condition, says Marta Traba, and of our place in the counterculture, only then we shall be able to refuse “being spoken of” (26).

Traba’s polemic hypothesis, though refusing to apply binary categories to women, uses parameters to read a feminine text that are rigid classifications within the symbiotic/symbolic linguistic levels in the production of meaning. The ‘canons’ to which she compares feminine texts are rather those of male authors, and in the writing of women, I would argue, there is a conscious search for new avenues of expression, a preference for “explaining” rather than “interpreting” the universe. This fact does not diminish the value of a text, but it rather articulates another voice and also represents a different perspective. Traba’s interpretation is missing a *gendered reading* that views female experiences and representation in a cultural space that is gender determined. The approximation to the margins is not exclusive of women writers, but I find a revealing new approach in the way women interact and listen to the marginalized. Women’s fiction that reproduce testimonies and the lives of the oppressed is bringing new viewpoints into discourse, mapping unknown avenues of feminine awareness or opening new interpretations to historical events, as in Elena Poniatowska’s *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*

today is known as the reader-response theory” (González y Ortega 25-26).

(1968). I agree with Traba's enthusiasm for locating women in the space of the counter-culture as we still have a long way to go to deconstruct the patriarchal logos, but I also insist that an increasing number of women authors, such as Luisa Valenzuela and Elena Poniatowska, are speaking up to the destabilized Center.

The 1983 Conference at Amherst College dealt also with the central question of the validity of applying Anglo-American and French literary theory to Latin American feminine texts. Sara Castro-Klarén in her illuminating exposition on the subject, "La crítica literaria feminista y la escritora en América Latina" warns against the blind appropriation of feminist criticism to Latin America and problematizes women's subjectivity in a continent with a history of spoilage. She begins by defining the goals of feminism and reviewing the texts from Freud's concept of "What does woman want?" through the texts of Patricia Spacks, Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, and Irigaray and Kristeva. The objectives of feminism are: "the eradication of sexism in the ideological and practical levels of experience, with the consequent increment of feminine power" (González y Ortega 28).

On the question of the feminine subject, Castro-Klarén follows Kristeva's path of the deconstruction of the opposition between identity and difference (37), where she searches for an identity based not on sexual difference, but rather on a space from which to speak, a place in the so called "symbolic level." According to Castro-Klarén, this is

Irigaray's space "beyond the mirror"³⁵ where women's image is no longer a 'reflection' of the masculine psyche but formed by their own experience.

Based on this Western tradition of feminine submission and on the Latin American history of marginality, Sara Castro develops the notion that the Latin American woman writer suffers a double discrimination, one because she is a woman in an oppressive society and two, due to the racial conflicts. As a consequence, Latin American feminist theory that searches for a space for women from which to speak has to start from the premise of this double negativity: for being a woman and a *mestiza*. She writes:

Si la búsqueda de la autenticidad femenina, la búsqueda de un lugar desde el cual se pueda articular la palabra, se ha de llevar a cabo en la recuperación y la re-inscripción de la experiencia de la mujer como sujeto a contrapelo en y del orden patrista, entonces la lucha de la mujer latinoamericana sigue cifrada en una doble negatividad:

³⁵This is a metaphor related to Lacan's *mirror stage*, which he regards as the first step towards the acquisition of language and participation in the Symbolic order. In his conception, the mirror reflects men's world-view and women are only reflected as "other." Irigaray posits that women must traverse this 'speculative mirror' in order to create a space for women's self-representation. Elizabeth Grosz explains this stage: She [Irigaray's 'Alice in Wonderland'] goes *through* the looking glass, through, that is, the dichotomous structures of knowledge, the binary polarizations in which only man's primacy is reflected. On the other side is a land of wonder, a land that can be mapped, not by the flat mirror, but by the curved speculum" (*Sexual Subversions* 131). Irigaray's text is to be found in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* where she writes: "Cet ailleurs" de la *jouissance féminine*, c'est serait plutôt du lieu où elle soutient l'ekstase dans le transcendental qu'elle serait à retrouver Cet ailleurs de la jouissance de la femme ne se retrouve qu'au prix d'une *retraversée du miroir qui sous-tend toute spéculation*" (74-75).

porque es mujer y porque es mestiza. (González y Ortega 43)³⁶

To reinforce her argument on the condition of marginality of the Latin American writer, Castro-Klarén refers to Foucault's concept of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge" (*Power and knowledge*, 1980) as the knowledge founded "on struggle and suppression, conscious of its illegitimacy" (38). To illustrate this notion, she mentions the mestizo writer Inca Garcilaso and the woman Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz³⁷ who had to perform in order to inscribe their experiences in the inherited European tradition. This effort to recuperate one's historic relevance against the grain, has produced a "desescritura," a "desmantelamiento de agrupaciones semánticas" (39), a dislocation of syntax, as in the works of Vallejo, García Márquez, Arguedas, Rosario Castellanos, to mention just a few. To this heritage of submission, the woman and *mestiza* has to articulate the historic contents of her double negativity, of her subjugated existence.

Castro-Klarén concludes by asserting that any theory of Latin American feminist criticism has to face, but not bend to, the French theory. It is useful to reflect on the

³⁶"If the search for a feminine authenticity, the search for a space from which to articulate the word, is to take place in the recovery and re-inscription of woman's experience as a subject against the grain of the patriarchal order, the struggle of the Latin American woman is still coded in a double-negativity: because she is a woman and because she is *métis* [of mixed race]."

³⁷She refers to the historian Garcilaso de la Vega, "El Inca" (1539-1616) born in Cuzco to an Inca princess and a *conquistador*, who wrote the chronicles of the Incas, and to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), the Mexican nun who wrote a poetry of resistance.

problematic of the *écriture* and power. And she ends with a verse from Rosario Castellanos's poem saying that the solution is not to imitate Tolstoy's Ana or Madame Bovary, nor Jane Austen or Emily Dickinson, but to insist that "there must be another way to be human and to be free":

Debe haber otro modo que no se llame Safo ...
Otro modo de ser humano y libre.
Otro modo de ser.³⁸

La sartén por el mango is an essential document that articulates the key issues at the early stage of the feminist theoretical debate in Latin America. The questions of the specificity of women's writing and the validity of performing Latin American criticism with imported parameters from some of the theories of the North were argued with a clear rejection of androcentric hierarchies, a critical review of women's writing within the Latin American historical background, and a will to search for a distinctive cultural trace. Even though it was unavoidable at this point to lean on influential poststructuralist and pre-elaborated feminist theories, there was a vigilant attitude not to apply them indiscriminately in a continent marked by a different social and political constellation. This concern against the imitation of metropolitan formulas were to be more emphatically voiced in later symposia.

³⁸From "Meditación en el umbral, *Poesía no eres tú*, 1972, 326 (González y Ortega 44).

New emerging theoretical voices and manifestos

Outside of the frame of academic conferences and following the trend of thought of Traba's feminine space as associated with the margins and Castro-Klarén's concept of double negativity, Jean Franco and Francine Masiello reinforce, in two relevant essays, the importance of focusing on Latin American feminist practice in its context of marginality and of an *écriture* that challenges the demarcations of power. Jean Franco advocates a shift in 'power relations' in the form of intertextuality and enunciation to project a new subjectivity in women's writing. In the effort to shape a feminine subjectivity, Masiello reads in avant-garde fiction by women a language of resistance to the logos and the reconstruction of the Subject from an angle outside an Originator. This new language is to be found in association with other periphery groups to confront power and generate a place from where to speak. I interpolate these two essays at this point of the feminist debate as I find them relevant in their analysis of the two key discursive strategies³⁹ in the fiction of Latin American women writers: intertextuality and enunciation.

³⁹“Discursive strategies” is a term used by Foucault in his analysis of the production and control of discourse. I use the term “strategy” because it has been privileged by Latin American critics to refer to the ‘violent’ linguistic practices used by women writing from a position of disadvantage towards the dominant discourse. Debra Castillo in *Talking Back* prefers to speak of “strategies” rather than of “theory” as a methodology for her book (34). In her Introduction to *La sartén por el mango* Patricia González also speaks of ‘strategies’ to articulate a feminine discourse in a male dominated terrain as well as to guard oneself against “el peligro de la infiltración y colonización de las culturas dominantes” (16). [the danger of the infiltration and colonization by the dominant cultures].

Jean Franco in her 1986 publication “Apuntes sobre la crítica feminista y la literatura hispanoamericana” points out that the French-Anglo-American theory has contributed to a re-evaluation of the Latin American literature as it has impelled a re-reading of cultural parameters, a revision of its cultural institutions and have provided the patterns of critical thought, as deconstruction, semiotics and Marxist theories. The concern of feminist criticism is not to ask whether a text written by a woman differs essentially from one written by a man in theme or style, but rather to “explore power relations” (41), and the question of the “textual authority.” Power reflects the language of gender relations as socially determined. The woman author confronts the suffocating power of patriarchy. There is no “feminine writing” as such. In the practice of intertextuality, however, a woman can reformulate the patriarchal voice, as Silvia Molloy’s analysis of Delmira Agustini’s insertions on Rubén Darío’s *Nocturno* swans. Agustini’s bleeding swan⁴⁰ stains the idyllic image of the master. And Franco deduces:

la intertextualidad es forzosamente un terreno de lucha
donde la mujer se enfrenta con las exclusiones y las
marginaciones del pasado. (41)

⁴⁰Delmira Agustini’s two last verses of her ‘Nocturno’ read: “Yo soy el cisne errante de los sangrientos rastros, /voy manchando los lagos y remontando el vuelo.” [I am the wandering swan with the bloody traces,/ I go staining the lakes and taking off to fly]. For a thorough study of Agustini’s disharmonizing treatment of Darío’s symbol, see : Silvia Molloy: “Dos lecturas del cisne: Rubén Darío y Delmira Agustini” (González y Ortega 57-70).

This approach to intertextuality differs from Lucía Guerra's "Manifiesto estético" where women writers want to free themselves from intertextuality, as a model of "subordination," claiming that women have to opt for another narrative perspective. This distance in approach reflects the evolution in the feminine voice from Delmira Agustini's iconoclast attempts to today's rejection of the master narratives.

Jean Franco's analysis points out that the shift in power relations can also be seen in the form of enunciation. The use of the masculine narrator in women writer's text, as in those of Clarice Lispector, Cristina Peri Rossi or Rosario Ferré, performs an "unmasking of generic hegemony" in an act of "deicidio" to expose the masculine-feminine hierarchy (42).

The crisis of the master narratives has opened new avenues to the voice of women authors in Latin America, as the discredit of totalizing parameters provides a locus for their discourse.

Francine Masiello agrees with Jean Franco's premise that the feminist activity is a path to construct power and to transform the process of enunciation, to create a new definition of womanhood and of feminine discourse. In two key essays Masiello traces the emergence of otherness in Latin American feminine writing. "Texto, ley, transgresión: Especulación sobre la novela (feminista) de vanguardia," and "Discurso de mujeres, lenguaje de poder: reflexiones sobre la crítica feminista a mediados de la década del 80."

Reading the novels of avant-garde writers of the first half of this century, Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia. Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se aburría* (1924),

María Luisa Bombal's *La última niebla* (1935), and Norah Lange's *Personas en la sala* (1950), Masiello sees a defiance to the masculine logos, a "formal transgression" in the structure and frames of reference. In short, these works "reject the paternal axis of social significance" and challenge the vertical hierarchies in the family by creating new relationships among women and reshaping the self-awareness of the protagonist through a new approach to her body ("Texto" 808).

The logocentric discourse is questioned through ruptures in the text, a resistance to the predominant narrative. Masiello juxtaposes the feminine texts to contemporary masculine classics such as Hugo Wast's *La casa de los cuervos*, or Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara*, written using the values of the master narratives, where women are sinister intruders, charged with evil forces in the world of reason and male power.

In the novels written by women, the feminine protagonist is seen as marginalized. In *Ifigenia* the women are disinherited, "desheredadas." María Eugenia is socially ostracized, excluded from her civil and property rights. This sense of orphanage also permeates *Personas en la sala*, where the tutor's house is perceived as a prison. In *La última niebla* the prison is the family surroundings. Both protagonists resist by trying to escape to the world of imagination where they create their personal space. Their resistance is a rejection of the inherited values rooted in family and social norms.

This defiance of masculine laws and power, the refusal to accept the inherited 'angel in the house' image of a woman, is reflected in the process of enunciation, i.e. of assuming a position in language.⁴¹ Masiello writes:

De ahí que la novela femenina exponga dos tendencias subversivas: la primera, indicada en el proceso de fragmentar el mundo coherente tal como viene descrito en el discurso del patriarcado; la segunda, en su deseo de destruir la unidad del sujeto como proyección de una lectura específicamente masculina. Se trata, en otros términos, de dar nueva definición a la mujer, con la cual ella hace hablar al cuerpo (como manifestación de lo visible) y se afirma con discurso propio. ("Texto" 808)

The new *escritura femenina* in its fragmentation of the narrative world opens a new discourse, one that separates "heredity from body, name and property" and conceives a "new totality of the woman without roots in its past" (808). Language is fractured and amplified with a 'pastiche' of music, noise, oral tales, visual images, such as photographs or fog, or a new treatment of the feminine body.

⁴¹Vincent M. Colapietro's *Glossary of Semiotics* (1993) explains the relevance of *énonciation* to feminists. According to the linguist Emile Benveniste, *énonciation* is used "to designate the act by which the utterer assumes a position within language. The assumption of such a position inevitably involves taking part in a complex, historical process. Upon any participant in such a process, the force of various forms of oppression will be exerted; but then so will the possibilities for various kinds of liberation be available" (99). Jeremy Hawthorne in *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Terms* differentiates the French "énonciation" from the English "enunciation" when he writes: "When *énonciation* is used in French it more usually has the meaning we attribute to *utterance*, that is to say it calls to mind the *act* of producing a form of words which involves a human SUBJECT [whereas] *enunciation* in English ... often implies the precise act-in-a-context which produces a person-oriented utterance, but it can also have a more restricted sense of the *evidence* remaining in an utterance that it stems from a *subject's act-in-a context*" (1992, 57).

Feminist avant-garde literature, with this rupture with the logos and search for new channels of signification, sets the preliminary step towards the reconstruction of the subject outside of the Symbolic order. It is a subject that denies its inherited name, its prescribed identity, that opens feminine experience to multiplicity, and questions the value of a regulatory Subject at the origins of meaning. In Masiello's words:

Primero ... se rechaza la importancia del nombre como base de identidad de la mujer, para explicar que el sujeto femenino no se constituye exclusivamente en el lenguaje ni de acuerdo a las leyes de la herencia. En segundo lugar, rechaza la experiencia de la mujer tal como está radicada en el *locus* exclusivo; en cambio, se abre la posibilidad de múltiples repeticiones y desdoblamientos posibles. De esta manera, se cuestiona el valor de un sujeto "originador" que se apropie de todos los eventos y de sentido a las cosas. ("Texto" 821)⁴²

"Discurso de mujeres, lenguaje del poder: reflexiones sobre la crítica feminista a mediados de la década del 80" (1986) adds to Masiello's feminist theories of resistance, the new concept of marginality. In her struggle against power and uniformity, the Latin American feminist writer defies the dominant social hierarchy, establishes bonds with other marginal groups, the popular culture, exile narrative, the poor and the colonized.⁴³

⁴²"First ... one rejects the importance of the name as a basis of woman's identity, in order to explain that the feminine subject is not constituted exclusively in language nor according to the laws of heredity. Second, one rejects woman's experience as located in the exclusive *locus*; instead, the possibility opens up of multiple repetitions and unfoldings. In this way the value of an Originating subject that appropriates all events and signification is put into question."

⁴³Masiello's account of the discursive practices in Latin American women's writing shows many coincidences with North American post-colonial and Black feminist

Feminine subjectivity is an important tool against oppression and imposed silence, a “bridge between private life and public actions” (“Discurso de mujeres” 57). Masiello finds that authors such as Marta Traba, Cristina Peri Rossi and Luisa Valenzuela write

en contra del discurso del poder ... escriben desde lo amorfo, lo no nombrado del espacio y del lenguaje; condensan lo público y lo privado, buscan un nuevo idioma, articulan un nuevo espacio para sí mismas. (“Discurso de mujeres” 56)⁴⁴

In that feminine space, subversion demands a hybrid language, “un idioma híbrido,” (56) the zone of Bakhtin’s “discurso doble,” a double discourse resulting from woman’s absence from the centers of power and her need to “invent a hybrid language that both recognizes the structure of power and offers an alternative,” (56) the necessary

theories. As I mentioned before, there is a basic parallel between Black and Latin American critics who want to distance themselves from homogenizing white middle class metropolitan theories. Both feminist positions also see their association with the margins as a source of empowerment. In dealing with post-colonial theory, one must also beware of rash generalizations, as the process of de-colonization in Latin America from Spain and Portugal started in the early 19th century and it is debatable how far this region is still a ‘colonized’ subject of other powers. For the purpose of my analysis, the relevant intersections are those which deal with matters of oppression due to class, race or gender, a distrust of cultural imperialism, a resistance to the master discourses of patriarchy, the questioning of a Legitimizing Object and subverting the canon, and the aim to assume the position of a Speaking Subject. For an understanding of this matter, see the chapter “Surviving Theory” in Djelal Kadir *The Other writing. Postcolonial Essays in Latin America’s Writing Culture*.

⁴⁴“Against the discourse of power ... they write from the amorphous, the unnamed from space and language; they condense the public with the private, they look for a new language, they articulate a new space for themselves.”

unfolding in order to be heard. As a peripheral group, feminists build a group strategy with other marginalized groups and stand up to the master-narrative with their Otherness.

Jean Franco's response to the validity of reading Latin American literature under theoretical lenses contributes by expanding the problematic of the specificity of feminine language to the question of *power relations*. In my view, it is a crucial first step towards a gendered reading of women's texts. Intertextuality and enunciation are useful tools in revealing strategies of how to read a feminine voice, as they depict the condition of exclusion and challenge a relation of subordination. Masiello's argument reinforces Traba's and Castro-Klarén's premise of associating women's writing with the margins, and I see this scheme as legitimate to attain power and a space to articulate a new language.

Geographically, but not intellectually, removed from the North American academic sphere, a "Primer Congreso de Literatura Femenina Latinoamericana" met in Santiago de Chile in 1987 with the attendance of local writers, such as Diamela Eltit, and Latin Americanists teaching in North America, such as Lucía Guerra and Beatriz Sarlo.⁴⁵ The opening paper by Eliana Ortega delineates the purpose of the encounter as "an affirmation of the feminine discourse within its own tradition," self definition and questioning of the canon. In a declaration with messianic overtones she says:

⁴⁵The proceedings were published under the title *Escribir en los bordes. Congreso Internacional de Literatura femenina latinoamericana, 1987* and were edited by Carmen Berenguer, Eugenia Brito, Diamela Eltit, Raquel Olea, Eliana Ortega, and Nelly Richard.

Este congreso es la toma de posesión de la palabra literaria de la mujer; es la constitución de una subjetividad femenina latinoamericana, y es un acto para posesionar dicha subjetividad en y desde el Chile histórico de 1987. (Berenguer et al. 30)⁴⁶

The discussion of the central question of approaching feminist criticism from a Latin American perspective reveals the dangers of cultural dependency and the conscious effort of women to formulate a discourse based on their experience and historical circumstances. Diamela Eltit speaks of “five hundred” and not only “one hundred years of solitude” that have marked Latin American culture since the colonizers imposed their history and their “dominant voice” through terror and the violation of the Indian woman’s body, and through her, reduced other voices to *mestizaje* and dispossession.⁴⁷

Lucía Guerra and Nelly Richard contribute with a didactic exposition of poststructuralist theories on feminist criticism and women’s writing. The *specificity* of women’s aesthetics is to be found in a redefinition of the Subject. For Lucía Guerra, as she had said in other papers, the *specificity* of women’s writing is to be found in the infiltrations of her subversive voice in the masculine dominant “intertextual space,” in her

⁴⁶“This congress takes possession of women’s literary word; it constitutes a Latin American feminine subjectivity, and it is an event to install that subjectivity in and from the historic Chile of 1987. “Y después de todo aquí estamos” (Berenguer et al. 30).

⁴⁷Diamela Eltit’s words read: “Esta antigua voz dominante, incubada artesanalmente en el cuerpo de la mujer indígena, ya violada, ya obsecuente, ya aterrada, portadora mayoritariamente de la modificación étnica y cultural en nuestro continente, sometió a las otras voces, voces indígenas, al estatuto de la indigencia materna y, al mestizaje, necesario para el repoblamiento, al cerco límite de la despartenencia histórica.” “Las artistas del congreso” (Berenguer et al. 17).

vision from the angle of subordination and marginality. The feminine Subject can be constituted in language in feminine versions of the *Bildungsroman* and in the exploration of the language of the body (Berenguer et al. 77).⁴⁸ In her paper “De la literatura de mujeres a la textualidad femenina,” Nelly Richard defines the feminine Subject in terms of semiotic/symbolic, feminine/masculine opposition and associates the feminine experience with “fractures” and transgressions of the normative language. Richard proposes a concept of the feminine as a “marca enunciativa,” or enunciative mark, a discursive strategy that relates to a new role for women, active, mobile and multiple, capable of destabilizing the hierarchies and power structures to formulate a new discourse. She views the *feminine* as a “fuerza de organización textual” and an open text:

Me parece que sólo una teoría de la escritura abierta a la heterogénea pluralidad del sentido como resultado de una multiplicidad de códigos (sexuales, pero también políticos y sociales, ideológico-literarios, etc.) entrecruzados en la superficie del objeto semiotizado, es capaz de poner en acción una lectura destotalizadora; y por ende, de movilizar lo femenino como pivote contra-hegemónico de los discursos de autoridad. (Berenguer et al. 51) ⁴⁹

⁴⁸Lucía Guerra’s article “Silencios, disidencias y claudicaciones: Los problemas teóricos de la nueva crítica feminista” reads: “De manera similar, en el texto producido por la mujer se observa una diglosia fundamental en la cual la escritura adopta y se asimila a un espacio intertextual de carácter masculino y dominante estratégicamente ubicando elementos de una visión de mundo subordinada a través de márgenes, vacíos, silencios, inversiones y mímicas con valor subversivo.”

⁴⁹“It seems to me that only a theory open to the heterogeneous plurality of meaning as a result of a multiplicity of codes (sexual, political and social, ideologic-literary, etc.) intertwined with the surface of the semiotized object, is capable of setting in motion a detotalizing reading; and therefore of mobilizing the feminine as a counter-hegemonic pivot of the authoritative discourses.”

These interventions give evidence of a fundamental breakthrough in women's approach to writing as a new avenue of self definition. The remapping of a feminine Subject outside the framework of patriarchy and the deferral of authority to project a new optic has brought about a self-discovery of epiphanic significance. In a later article "¿Tiene sexo la escritura?" Nelly Richard states that the 1987 First Congress of Latin American Feminist Literature opened a dialogue among women writers that made them aware of their struggle for a common cause, for a gendered inscription in their own voices.⁵⁰

The next important international conference on Latin American feminist literary criticism was held at the University of Minnesota in the Spring of 1988 and included the participation of Naomi Lindstrom, Gabriela Mora, Elizabeth J. Ordoñez, Sara Castro-Klarén, Amy Kaminsky, Cynthia Steel, and Lucía Guerra-Cunningham. The conference focused on the problematic of the validity of applying standard feminist criticism to the cultural spectrum of Latin America if this criticism is not encompassed in a theory that brings out the heterogeneity of the region. In the Introduction to the publication of the conference papers, Hernán Vidal⁵¹ points out the danger of reducing feminist criticism to

⁵⁰In *Debate feminista* 5.9 (Mexico: Marzo 1994): 127-139. In the same volume, Lucía Guerra traces the formation of a feminine Subject that emerged by 'splintering' the patriarchal images. She further defends women's writing often accused of essentialism as being the product of a new mode of representation. See "La problemática de la representación en la escritura de la mujer," 183-193.

⁵¹Hernán Vidal, ed. *Cultural and Historical Grounding for Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Feminist Literary Criticism*, published in 1989.

a reproduction of known theories outside of the frame of the “social, ethnic and historic diversity” (Vidal 8). Many of these theories are formulated in response to North American academic Women’s Studies programs based on other cultures (Vidal 8). Gabriela Mora in “Un diálogo entre feministas hispanoamericanas” reproduces a discussion on the topic where the urgency of social and political reality seems more relevant to the women authors than the question of gender or representation, lesbianism or maternal thinking. The expositions show a thorough internalization of the French-Anglo-American theories but a clear insistence on the cultural differences and resistance to homogeneity.

Lucía Guerra-Cunningham’s seminal article “Las sombras de la escritura. Hacia una teoría de la producción literaria de la mujer latinoamericana,” analyses the subordinate condition of women in a system where the feminine “lo femenino” is conceived as a “sombra,” a shadow reflecting the inferior and vicious human elements:

La sombra concebida como el doble incorpóreo de todo cuerpo tangible, como el reflejo engañoso de lo real y como imagen de la parte primitiva, maligna e inferior del ser humano ... un elemento temible. (1989, 129)⁵²

This shadow, however, is not always passive. It projects a second dimension, a phantasmagoric reflection which creates fractures that destabilize the legitimized object:

⁵²“The shadow conceived as the incorporeal double of all tangible body, like the deceiving reflection of the real and like an image of the primitive, malignant and inferior part of the human being ... a dreadful element.”

Se añade así una segunda dimensión al objeto legitimizado que en su reflexión fantasmática adquiere fisuras desestabilizadoras: brechas, silencios y márgenes que la sombra instaure soterradamente negando la unicidad totalizante del objeto, haciendo de su presencia tangible solo una alternativa que, por opciones claramente ideológicas, ha resultado favorecida por el sistema dominante. (1989, 128)⁵³

Feminine writing abides in this second space. The metaphor of the shadow points out the relationship that it still holds to the Legitimized Object, a notion that recalls Masiello's already mentioned idea of transgression and rupture as a feminine tool to subvert the patriarchal law.

Writing fiction is a process of finding one's own identity as a woman, by trespassing the cultural obstructions of phallocentrism, "bucear las zonas silenciadas de ese otro Ser sitiado en el vacío y más allá de los límites asignados a un Sujeto masculino y un Otro femenino" (1989, 141).⁵⁴ According to Guerra, Latin American women authors have used diverse strategies from intertextuality and a position of subordination in the early works of Avellaneda or Parra, a mimic process that masks subversion in Allende's

⁵³“ In this manner, a second dimension is added to the legitimized object, which acquires in its phantasmatic reflection destabilizing fissures: breaches, silences and margins that the shadow restores covertly, denying the totalizing uniqueness of the object, thus making of its tangible presence a mere alternative which, due to clearly ideological options, has been privileged by the dominant system.”

⁵⁴“To dive into the silenced zones of that other Being located in the void and beyond the limits assigned to a Masculine Subject and a Feminine Other.”

La casa de los espíritus (1982), to a belligerent discourse of rebellion and sexuality in Rosario Ferré's *Papeles de Pandora* (1976).

The feminist association with marginal groups is seen by Lucía Guerra not from the "bourgeois perspective" as a reflection of women's humanitarian character, but rather as a pact with the subjugated, "una identificación con el Otro que en su posición de vencido y dominado funciona como imagen especular de la condición femenina" (1989, 150).⁵⁵ Elena Garro's *Recuerdos del porvenir* (1963) and Rosario Castellanos's *Bahin Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962) can be read as a resistance to power structures reflected in the man-woman, master and oppressed relations. Subordination is expressed in silence, in a mangle of speech on the part of the indigenous peoples.

Lucía Guerra-Cunningham proposes the creation of a "contra-discurso," based on the differentiation of the two concepts of "lo femenino," the phallogocentric, and the feminine envisaged as "zone rooted in subordination, silencing and repression" (1989,151). How to define, she asks, what has remained in the shadow without falling into the errors of the dominating force in a continent dominated by discrimination and imperialism? Contemporary Latin American women writers are aware of this dichotomy, man-woman, oppressor-oppressed, and are developing new perspectives of writing in an innovative discourse of sexuality, as in Sylvia Molloy's *En breve cárcel* (1982), or giving voice to the silenced, such as the marginalized Jesusa Palancares in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969), or in the testimonies of Domitila Chungara and

⁵⁵"An identification with the Other who, in his position as defeated and dominated, functions as specular image of the feminine condition."

Rigoberta Menchú. Or even in Albalucía Angel's feminine utopia of *Las andariegas* (1984) that depicts a feminine collectivity in a world freed from masculine power.

To conclude, Lucía Guerra explains her personal dilemma as a writer and critic who is conscious of her limitations and dissatisfaction with the state of feminine critical discourse:

Conciencia/Utopía que se duplica al asumir mi rol de escritora latinoamericana cuando se trata de definir lo femenino puesto que asumir una identidad genera el dilema de un proceso de inserción o un proceso de anulación de las categorías dominantes. (1989, 156)⁵⁶

And to answer to the question of the validity of following the parameters of Cixous or Irigaray's critical framework in a continent marked by torture and oppression, she asks:

Hasta qué punto ese gran seno femenino que alimenta la escritura en la teoría de Cixous adquiere significados diferentes cuando aloja la fotografía de un desaparecido? ("Las sombras de la escritura" 157)⁵⁷

⁵⁶“Conscience/Utopia that duplicates itself when I assume my role as a Latin American woman writer who tries to define the feminine since to assume an identity generates the dilemma of a process of insertion and of nullification of the dominant categories.”

⁵⁷“To what extent does the large feminine breast which feeds the écriture in Cixous's theory attain different meanings when it lodges the photography of a *desaparecido*.”

Lucía Guerra's theoretical thought has evolved since her declarations in her "Manifiesto Estético" of 1985. While she still follows poststructuralist optics of the feminine Subject as a destabilizer of the patriarchal Logos, her Jungian idea of a phantasmagoric shadow as an inferior image of the Legitimized Object brings a new perspective. Women have to search for new spaces or zones of dwelling in order to create a *counter-discourse* that inscribes the unexplored traces of their existence, their *silences* and fragmentary speculations. In Latin America the historical reality of dependence adds to the subordination and repression of women in general. Her dilemma as a writer who follows or does not follow poststructuralist models is overwhelmed by the external tangibility of political persecution, torture and elimination of the opponents. North American critic Alice Jardine's observation on the predominance of power over social aims in the articulation of French theory and praxis reinforces Guerra's dilemma as a woman writer and warns of the danger of becoming "reactionary" if the text neglects the social and political context:

I perceived a series of impasses between theory and praxis: theories of woman or the feminine and their insistence on the (always) potentially subversive power of the feminine in patriarchal culture had produced either no possibility for social and political praxis or had resulted in a praxis that I perceived as being reactionary for women. (*Gynesis* 260)

An important issue of Feminist Critique in the late 80s and 90s is women's relation to power. In Latin America, women writers have been concerned about the

impact that the social and political system have on individual freedom. For the Puerto-Rican author Rosario Ferré (1938), a woman writer cannot be *genuine* unless she knows herself. External impositions and emotional solitude and feelings of guilt constrain women from reaching *authenticity*. To overcome this repression women should *question the moral, religious and political* factors that reinforced that frame of power. In her essay “Woman’s Authenticity in Art”(1986) Ferré encourages women “to learn to examine their own eroticism and how to derive from their own sexuality a latent and rarely exploited vitality”(259). The Chilean feminist Julieta Kirkwood (1936-1985) approaches power from a Foucauldian angle as she points out that for women, in their marginal position, knowledge is first a question of a *will-to-knowledge* as they live in a situation of inequality and oppression. The relationship between feminism and power is one of absence. Under patriarchal culture women have been allocated to the private space and their *desire for power* restrained. In her essay “Feminists and Political Women,”(1986) Kirkwood proposes three steps for women to achieve power. First, a “de-subjugation of our own will” and “*de-legitimation* of what is denied to us;” second, “an effort to liberate our own subjectivity by means of an attack on culture, on taboos and sexual limitations, arbitrary over-empowerment, or categorization;” and third, “the establishment of communitarian practices to break down the normative value of individuality” (272).

These texts originating from diverse regions in Latin America, be it Mexico, Puerto Rico or Chile, unfold women’s relationship with power as a deprivation closely associated with the authority of a society that through education subordinates women to

certain roles in the social hierarchy imposed on them. Knowledge associated with the female body as a vehicle towards authenticity freed from social sanctions was Ferré's quest, while Kirkwood saw women's freedom curtailed by *authoritarianism*. These ideas that developed in isolation find again a new channel of communication at international conferences where feminist issues are debated and globalized in a more political and organized manner.

A first major attempt at compiling the existing trends in Latin American feminist literary practice is the brilliant book by Debra A. Castillo *Talking Back. Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (1992).⁵⁸ On the question of the validity of incorporating Eurocentric theories to Latin America, she mentions Gayatri Spivak's warning that "varieties of feminist theory and practice must reckon with the possibility that, like any other discursive practice, they are marked and constituted by, even as they constitute, the field of their production,"⁵⁹ and she advises caution. The metropolitan critics and the Latin Americanists must consider the wide cultural scope and the distinctiveness of the object studied in order to avoid an "imperialistic" approach:

⁵⁸The first part of this title coincides with bell hooks's *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, published in 1989. Castillo does not mention hooks's publication and she uses the expression in her own terms: "Sharing recipes in the august pages of respected journals like *PMLA* is one way of talking back to Bullrich's inopportune caller" [who interrupts a woman writing, p. XV]. bell hooks explains her title in Chapter 2 where she writes: "In the world of the southern black community I grew up in, "back talk" and "talking back" meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (5).

⁵⁹Castillo, *Talking Back* 3. Quoted from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" 319.

[I]n the perceived absence of indigenous theory, the Latin Americanist tends to conscript other theories to fill the gap, ironically, uncritically, and sometimes inappropriately utilizing the resources of a first-worldist approach in the service of the critique of imperialism, creating strange hybrids of dubious applicability and—in the context of the nations of Latin America—with unacceptable political ramifications. This is one of the major unresolved issues of post-colonial feminist theory. (33)

Debra A. Castillo posits that in Latin America, specifically in the cases of the Mexican or Cuban revolutions, the formulation of theory has followed the practice that the political theory was elaborated “a posteriori” (32). As for literary theory it would be “premature and overly optimistic” to extract a theory since the “groundwork” is still in the making. Her book borrows critical practices from poststructuralism and post-colonialism and draws her own strategies based on her reading of the texts in a Latin American framework. As my previous research has shown, women writers and critics have attempted to formulate a theoretical approach to language that has gradually built a critical corpus with particular emphasis and positions. I agree with Castillo that the “groundwork” is still in the making. The issues are open to further development, but there is an increasing tendency among the critics to focus on self-definition, cultural diversity and liberation from hegemonizing Eurocentric parameters.

Sara Castro-Klarén in another relevant essay, “The Novelness of a Possible Poetics for Women,” rejects the blind transposition of Anglo-American and French

theories to Latin American critique and argues along Kristeva's line that the feminine poetics are to be found in a *space* where women develop their own *symbolic contract* in interaction with the inherited patterns of (Western) thought and within a historical context. This historical direction is essential when dealing with Latin American women as they are marked by race and feminine marginality, and Castro-Klarén reinforces her argument with Showalter's concept of *gynocritics*:

Gynocritics is, roughly speaking, historical in orientation; it looks at woman's writing as it has actually occurred and tries to define its specific characteristics of language, genre, and literary influence, within a cultural network that includes variables of race, class, and nationality. (1989, 96)

Confronted with the texts of Latin American women authors, Castro-Klarén lists the misogynist portrayal of women in the fictional canon. She urges a re-reading and re-writing of the literary history under deconstructive lenses of analysis in order to read them from a feminist perspective. Castro-Klarén also suggests a Bakhtinian approach that would "open up sufficient cracks as to enable us to re-draw the figure of women-men in history" (105). She closes with an encouraging statement for Latin Americanists:

[T]he study of Latin American literature is ripe for a re-writing of its history. The figure of Women and the subsequent problematics implied by its presence should

cause a profound re-thinking of the possible history of Latin America and its symbolic system. (1989, 195)⁶⁰

Leading trends of the feminist literary debate

The preceding pages outline the main positions in Latin American feminist literary criticism as exposed in key essays and the on-going debate in academic journals and conferences.⁶¹ A basic consensus on the relevance of including the sociological and

⁶⁰Besides Debra Castillo's *Talking Back* (1992) two important books published recently have contributed to enlarging the debate. Amy K. Kaminsky *Reading the Body Politic. Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (1993) attempts a reading of sex and politics with a materialistic feminist lense. Noting that the "political" and the 'aesthetic' in the North American tradition have been treated as opposite entities, her work aims at a gendered and ideological reading in five recent authors who deal with female eroticism, exile and persecution. Myriam Yvenne Jehensen's *Latin American Women Writers. Class, Race, and Gender* (1995) is a useful compilation of a canon of Latin American women writers that combines a feminist theoretical reading organized around themes and socio-cultural backgrounds.

⁶¹After the main body of this chapter had been completed, A.B. Jones published "Latin American Feminist Criticism Revisited," where she critically reviews the main trends in criticism through the conference papers published by González y Ortega and Hernán Vidal, and the works of Jean Franco, Debra Castillo and Amy Kaminsky that I also mention in my research. She describes the Latin American feminist debate as a "tension between micropolitical and macropolitical concerns" represented in features such as: "a desire for an appropriately and specifically Latin American and more broadly materialist critical theory, but also a questioning of identity and appropriateness/appropriation in this context; a rejection of binary oppositions but also of the over-hasty metaphorization of material and social bodies in such notions as hybridity; an acknowledgment of both the inevitability of theoretical mediation and the need for greater openness to innovative local practices which might otherwise be dismissed as theoretically naïve; a concern for the social and material other but also for the status of

historical differences in any critical approach, seems to be widely recognized. In the analytical discussion of the texts, the effort to determine a feminine voice has pointed out several discursive strategies. Lucía Guerra-Cunningham's aesthetic manifest rebels against feminine subordination, against the image of the 'angel in the house' and pleas for speaking up about the other side of reality, the silenced zones of femininity. She rejects the archetypal images of women as seen by men and proposes an inversion in enunciation, to create a new representation of men. Sara Castro-Klarén introduces the concept of the double negativity of the Latin American woman who suffers a double marginality, for being a woman in a patriarchal society, and for being *a mestiza*, subject to racial discrimination as a result of colonial ideology constructed on the inferiority of the non-white. The question of marginality is an important element in the approach to women and feminine texts in Latin America, as in the postulates of Marta Traba, Jean Franco,⁶² Francine Masiello, and Lucía Guerra.

Debra A. Castillo sees the association of women with the margins as a source of political strength as women writers can act not only as the voice of the marginalized, as in

distinctions between the other and the same, the material and the theoretical, critical theory and social practice." See *Latin American women's Writing. Feminist Readings in Theory and Crisis* (Brooksbank and Davies 212-213).

⁶²For a discussion of the association of women with other marginal groups, their common concerns and their eventual political force, see Jean Franco's "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third World Intelligentsia." *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Nelson and Grossberg 503-515.

testimonial literature, but also for reinterpreting the differences between the culturally dominant and the Other. She writes:

Marginality is a tool for both marking and masking very real differences, as well as for creating false differences out of the cultural, economic, philosophical, and ideological exigencies of an antagonistic politics. Double-talk, talking back, if unattended can fall into the double crossing of that resistance. (61)

This association of the writer with the poor or discriminated against and its political implications is not new in Latin American Literature, as the works of Vallejo, Neruda, García Márquez and many others exemplify. What is relevant about the approach of women authors to the disinherited is that both voices were before silenced and women focus on other issues, like the private spheres or the sense of public guilt, as in these verses of Rosario Castellanos's poem "El pobre" ["The pauper"]:

Del idioma que algunos atesoran
Le dieron de limosma una palabra
para pedir su pan y otra para dar gracias.
Ninguna para el diálogo
...
Y hay algo más. El puño se nos cierra
para oprimir; y el alma
para rechazar lejos al intruso. (1960, 32-33)⁶³

⁶³“ From the language that some treasure/ they gave him as alms one word/ to beg for his bread and another to thank./ None for the dialogue And there is something else. The fist clenches/ to oppress; and the soul shuts /in order to repel the intruder.”

Among the important issues debated at the various conferences on Latin American women's writing that I reviewed was the question of the legitimacy of applying the parameters of the dominant currents of the Anglo-American and French literary theories in the critique of Latin American literary works. The generalized opinion voiced by Sara Castro-Klarén that Latin American criticism should beware of the "blind" application of metropolitan theory shows the will to distance oneself from Eurocentric influences. Writers and critics insist that the reality of Latin America presents social and cultural conditions that demand an independent approach. However, it is important to point out that the central points of discussion, such as the specificity of women's writing and the search for a discourse that reflects women's difference, the resistance to patriarchal domination, and the association with the margins together with problems of gender, class and race privileged among Latin Americanists, are central issues of feminist and post-colonial theories in the "Center." It may be a paradox that the North American academia has played an important role in the development of a Latin American feminist tradition as the best known critics live and work at American universities, such as Juana Alcira Arancibia, Hernán Vidal, Lucía Guerra-Cunningham, Sara Castro-Klarén, Sylvia Molloy, Debra Castillo, to mention just a few. Important journals of Latin American Criticism, such as the *Revista Iberoamericana*, *Hispanamérica*, *Alba de América*, and important books on the subject are published by the universities in California, Minnesota, Texas, and by the Latin American Literary Review Press in Pittsburgh. It is also true that countries like Mexico, Argentina, and Chile produce important publications in this area, but the marketing and distribution do not reach the spheres of the North

American publicity. One important factor for this situation is without doubt the political conditions of repression and exile that forced many intellectuals to leave their countries, mainly Argentina and Chile in the years of the dictatorships. These circumstances have produced an enriching exchange that has benefitted both sides, as the North American academia has gained a generation of professors with their Latin American world-view, and the Latin American scholars have expanded their perspective into a more international arena.

My preceding research on the critical writings of Latin Americanists also shows that the more relevant writing strategies to formulate a feminine discourse in Latin American fiction are intertextuality, renewed forms of enunciation,⁶⁴ and the construction of subjectivity.

Jean Franco's premise that intertextuality is a field of confrontation between women and their subordination in the past, is further developed in Masiello's analysis of transgression in avant-garde novels, and in Lucía Guerra's metaphor of feminine writing being a "shadow" of the 'Legitimized Object'. But the internalization of this subjugating aspect of intertextuality is contributing to the evolution of feminine discourse into what

⁶⁴In her analysis of Valenzuela's "The Word, That Milk Cow," Debra Castillo points to some modes of enunciation when she writes: "Resistance to the *same*, the slight but crucial differences of enunciation, the lyric evocation of the conditional tense of myth, the electrical charge of cow-words: the delicate distinctions and subtle displacements cipher a particular repertoire of linguistic practices that respond and correspond to the need of the Latin American woman writer to encode, in a more trivial manner, her shifting set of mutually exclusive, equally valid, alternative roles" (*Talking Back* 64-65).

Lucía Guerra calls the “contra-discurso,” and can be understood as a new form of enunciation, trying to write what had been silenced, what had remained in the ‘shadow’.

And in the words of the Argentine author Luisa Valenzuela who has asserted her belief in the “existence of a feminine language,” this *enunciation* is described as:

What we women will do, and are now doing, is to effect a radical change in the electrical charge of words. We are inverting the poles, making them positive or negative depending on our own needs and not following the rules of the inherited, phallogratic language. (“The Word” 96)

Enunciation as a an act of producing discourse has also been a privileged strategy to construct a feminine subjectivity based on women’s cultural views and experiences. Through their choice of a feminine speaking subject that questions historical and cultural patterns of thought and articulates their consciousness, Latin American women writers are opening new directions of meaning thus creating a new discourse. According to Nelly Furman, enunciation is a “strategic position,”

Because thinking in terms of a *subject of enunciation* allows us to delineate the choices available to individual writers and reveal the position they take in established forms of discourse The subject of enunciation is the structure and the space where poststructuralist criticism inscribes political and cultural ideology.” (“The politics of language” 66)

Elena Poniatowska's and Luisa Valenzuela's theoretical orientations

Within this theoretical framework, critical texts of Elena Poniatowska and Luisa Valenzuela illustrate two different currents in contemporary writing in Latin America. "Literature and Women in Latin America"⁶⁵ by Elena Poniatowska opens with a declaration of adherence to the marginalized:

La literatura de las mujeres en América Latina es parte de la voz de los oprimidos. Lo creo tan profundamente que estoy dispuesta a convertirlo en leit-motif, en un ritornello, en ideología. Es también la continuación de ese largo grito que ha dado la mujer y que Rosario Castellanos consiguió en su "*Jornada de la Soltera*" "... y a la hora en que los deudos se congregan/alrededor del fuego, del relato/ se escucha el alarido/ de una mujer que grita en un páramo inmenso". La actual literatura de las mujeres ha de venir integrada al gran flujo de palabras de los oprimidos La que hace surgir esta literatura es una realidad indignante y dolorosa. Queremos dejar constancia aquí y ahora, sin hacernos ilusiones, y, meter nuestro rollo en una ánfora que flote desesperadamente y llegue al otro lado del mar, al otro lado del tiempo para que los que vengan sepan cuan alto fue el

⁶⁵ "The voice of the oppressed in Latin America includes literature by women. I believe it so deeply that I'm willing to make it a leitmotif, a ritornello, an ideology. This literature is the continuation, too, of that long shriek that Rosario Castellanos wrote about in her *Jornada de la soltera*: "and when the kinsmen gather / around the fire and the telling, / the shriek of a woman on a vast highland can be heard." We must think of women's literature today as flowing with the rich wordstream of the oppressed The cause for this literature is a painful and outrageous experience. We want to bear testimony of this here and now, beyond self-deceit, and then we want to send our scroll in a bottle that will float anxiously to the other end of the ocean, to the other end of time, so that those to come will know how loud was the shriek of their predecessors." Trans. Nicolas Wey. *Women's Writing in Latin America*. Castro-Klarén et al. 81. From *Eco* (Bogotá) 42.5 (1983): 470. In her footnote, Castro-Klarén gives as reference "*Eco* (Bogotá) 3" which is incorrect.

grito de quienes los antecedieron. ("Mujer y literatura en América Latina" 462)

The affiliation of women with the periphery is essential to Poniatowska's ideology as her narrative is constructed on the *voice of the oppressed* and of those excluded from the mainstream. The text quoted above speaks of poverty, not philosophically, or in the sense of hunger, "but rather the misery of solitude, displacement, and indifference" (82). Echoing Castro-Klarén's idea on the *double-negativity* of the Third-World woman, Poniatowska writes that the Mexican women's oppression is twofold since submission was introduced by the Conquest and Christianity, and because women are also repressed due to their gender. Women who have attempted to free themselves, like Sor Juana in the seventeenth century, were silenced or isolated. In this context, Jesusa Palancares, the protagonist of *Hasta no verte Jesus mio* (1969) emerges as a new character type in Latin American fiction. Jesusa is a "desmitificadora" ("Mujer y literatura" 468)⁶⁶ as she portrays an unseen side of reality, and she demystifies the heroism of the Mexican Revolution by calling it "idiotic," since it confronted brother against brother, and all fighters whether Carrancista, Villista or Zapatista, were "penniless and hungry." The author-narrator is aware of the silence imposed on this view of the events, and she adds:

⁶⁶"destroyer of myths" Trans. N. Wey. ("Literature and Women" 84).

Pero ésas son cosas que, como dicen, por sabidas se callan.
(*Hasta no verte* 94)⁶⁷

By inserting the voice of the margins in her work, Poniatowska is transgressing historical and cultural master-narratives. Her intertext of the official discourse is a web of confrontation or a *counter-discourse* of the official rhetoric. By her choice of new subjects of enunciation that includes the initial *shriek* of women, and the orality and the world view of the oppressed, Poniatowska is using language to assert her ideological position and as a political and cultural statement.

Luisa Valenzuela in her writing is conscious of creating a feminine aesthetics, a feminine language that names what has been unrepresented. In her essay “The other face of the phallus” (1986) she postulates that “women are on the uncharted face of the phallus, that which has not yet been named” (1986, 243). Language has been masculine gendered. Men’s perspective has given meaning to words and men have imposed a censorship in what a woman can say or feel. In order to articulate their own discourse women must, in Valenzuela’s words: “impose our own chemistry, inject estrogen in our writing” with force and conviction. She writes:

This feminine language, if we can call it such, this obscure discourse coming from the depths of the guts, can be defined as a *fascination with the disgusting*: in Spanish, “un regodeo en el asco.” (“The other face” 244)

⁶⁷“But, as they say, those are things we keep to ourselves because we keep their secret.”

A first step in the articulation of a *feminine language* is to free oneself of patriarchal impositions and prohibitions, and to accept our *obscure* desires, surmounting feelings of fear and “shame.” Through this process of atonement and liberation women can reach a “cosmic” vision.⁶⁸

Luisa Valenzuela’s aesthetic project brings to mind Julia Kristeva’s definition of the newest generation of feminism, where the struggle is no longer concerned with political, economic or professional demands, but with “sexual equality,” the sexual difference and women’s ‘relationship to the symbolic’. In Kristeva’s words:

La pointe la plus fine de la subversion féministe apportée
par la nouvelle génération se situera désormais sur ce terrain
fait de la conjonction inséparable du sexuel et du
symbolique, pour essayer d’y trouver le spécifique du

⁶⁸In one of her early theoretical papers “Mis brujas favoritas” [1982, “My Favorite Witches”] Luisa Valenzuela already deals with the question of the existence of a feminine language. She associates it with the unconceivable, with a transgression of the established order that has ‘castrated’ women for so long. The *witch* represents the outlawed voice, the ‘mouth’ that threatens when she speaks up. Valenzuela writes: “De tantos velos que habrá que ir rasgando en lo posible (desvirgamiento de mitos, fuerza que debemos asumir): el que oculta la dicotomía puta/santa, establecida por el hombre.” [From so many veils that will have to be torn as far as possible (the de-virginization of myths, which we must assume): the one that conceals the dichotomy whore/saint, established by men]. In *Theory and Practice of Feminist Literary Criticism*, Mora and Van Hooft 88. Z. Nelly Martínez in *El silencio que habla: Aproximación a la obra de Luisa Valenzuela* (1994) interprets the *witch* as the ‘writer’ in the work of Luisa Valenzuela and she adds: “La escritora que, abierta o veladamente, desafía el verbo consagrado y pone en habla las voces de la subversión” 12. [The writer who, openly or covertly, challenges the consecrated word and sets the voices of subversion into speech].

féminin d'abord, de chaque femme pour finir. ("Le temps des femmes" 10)

A central aspect in the prose of Luisa Valenzuela is the problematic of writing under a dictatorship. In multiple theoretical texts that I analyze in detail in Chapter 4, Valenzuela links literature to political oppression. The construction of subjectivity is no longer limited to aspects of subversion of the patriarchal logos, but it expands into the challenge of finding one's voice in a confrontation with official censorship and repressive power. In her essay "Escribir con el cuerpo" ["Writing with the Body"]⁶⁹ she speaks of the commitment of the writer to articulate what is hidden and resists to be said, of overcoming fear and verbalizing the images that escape from the collective memory of terror:

Una también se pregunta—y esto sí que es embromado—se pregunta para qué escribe. Porque una en este caso pertenece cuerpo y alma y mente al llamado tercer mundo donde existen urgencias para nada literarias. Después surgen todo tipo de respuestas (excusas). La necesidad de conservar la memoria colectiva es una de ellas, bastante indiscutible. (36-37)⁷⁰

⁶⁹"Escribir con el cuerpo." *Alba de América*. 11.20-21 (July 1993): 35-40. "Writing with the Body." Trans. Cynthia Ventura and Janet Sternburg. J. Sternburg, ed. *The Writer on Her work*. Volume II. *New Essays in New Territory*. New York: Norton, 1991. 192-200.

⁷⁰"You also ask yourself—and this is really overwhelming—why write at all? In my case, I belong, body and soul and mind, to the so-called Third World where certain needs exist that are not at all literary. Then other responses (or perhaps they are excuses) come to mind. The need to preserve the collective memory is undoubtedly one of them." "Writing with the Body." Trans. Cynthia Ventura and Janet Sternburg. Sternburg 194.

As I have shown in the preceding discussion about these authors, the theoretical writings of Poniatowska and Valenzuela mark two clear tendencies in Latin American women's fiction. Both writers deal with the problematic of oppression under patriarchy and political power, but Poniatowska's prose introduces the voices of those marginalized by social, economic or political circumstances, while Valenzuela's narrative is a more direct confrontation with perverted power equated with dominating patriarchy. On the thematic of the specificity of women's language, Valenzuela gives a clear affirmation of the existence of a feminine language, while Poniatowska's writing introduces multiple voices in a hybrid text. As for the question of the validity of applying standard feminist critique, both authors distance themselves from abstract theories as they find the urgency of representing the social and political reality a more immediate and relevant challenge. In her paper "The Five Days that Changed My Paper" that I quote at the beginning of this chapter, Luisa Valenzuela says:

If language constitutes a person, then the schools of literary theory might constitute our set of values. Or, rather, the way values are used, distorted, twisted, misrepresented, turned inside out, linked, subverted, inverted, masked, spent, dressed up.
I learn from literary theory not how to write (theory has to be created as you go), not even how to read a text. I learn how to read reality from various points of view. (6)

With this statement Valenzuela phrases the will of many Latin American writers not to regard literary theory as the primary objective of their critique. The role of the writer is *to interpret the changing times*, and the critic should read the voice of the

author in the text and avoid the temptations of applying theoretical labels to their readings. In “The Five Days ...” Valenzuela further states:

Literary theory gives us the tools for this interpretation. Or, more dangerously, literary theory might be shaping the tools with which the mutation of values is implemented. (6)

Chapter Two

Historical overview of 20th century Latin American innovative writing by women

Latin American women writers have been absent from the literary canon except for a few female poets and isolated examples of women's prose production.¹ In this chapter I look for the specificity of women's writing in the works of representative women authors who, through their language strategies, have confronted the hegemonic discourse and created a feminine imagery based on their experiences and world-view. As mentioned in the previous chapter, focusing on intertextuality, enunciation, and the emergence of a new subjectivity have been the three key discursive strategies in women's prose. My purpose is to read the texts focusing on the self-representation of women as

¹As late as 1989 Luis Sáinz de Medrano in his 743 page compendium of *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* (Madrid: Taurus) dedicates one out of twenty segments to the 'poesía femenina' and does not name any women in his long index of writers in the last one hundred years. Novels such as *Ifigenia* or *La última niebla* receive condescending compliments in a few lines.

engendered subjects,² as women who are conscious of their subaltern condition and of the social circumstances that shape their subjectivity. In my analysis I will refer to poststructuralist³ and dialogic theories depending on the pertinence to each novel.

I have divided this chapter into three sections and a conclusion to trace the construction of subjectivity and the process of socialization, the awakening of the awareness of the Other,⁴ and the conquest of the public space as a site of women's

²In the *Glossary to The Feminist Reader*, Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore define *subject* as "That which acts and speaks, which says 'I'. Because the subject is not the origin but the effect of the meanings it speaks, it can never be fully present to itself in its own utterance. It is thus inevitably split, unfixed, in process" (248). This concept of the subject as *unfixed* and *in process* is central to the feminist debate. Judith Butler in her critique of "'Women' as the Subject of Feminism" goes beyond the discerning of the concept of the subject, and interrelates it with the power structures. She writes: "It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women,' the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (1990, 2).

³Chris Weedon (1987) in her chapter on "Language and Subjectivity" explains the poststructuralist theory of subjectivity when she writes: " Yet poststructuralism's concern with the discursive construction of subjectivity, with the role of social institutions and the heterogeneous forms of power governing social relations is motivated by a primary concern with understanding the position of individual women in society and the ways in which they are both governed by and *resist specific forms of power*. This involves not a devaluing of women's experience but an understanding of its constitution and its strategic position within the broader field of patriarchal power relations" (74-75, my emphasis).

⁴I capitalize Other to differentiate it from the commonplace sense of "other than" the one. I refer to Other in its connotation of *alterity*, described as "what has been excluded or marginalized in dominant discourses in Western Culture." (Colaprieto: *Glossary of Semiotics* 20). For my purpose the Other includes those human beings who have been excluded and underrated from the systems of representation. I do not use the term in Lacan's sense of the capitalized O where "Other" represents "the ultimate signifier of everyone the subject is not, as well as everything the subject does not have" (*The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, Childers and Hentzi 216). Toril Moi also explains the Lacanian use of this term when she writes: "The

identity. In the first part, the early novels of de la Parra and Bombal center on the feminine character as located in the home and concerned with her individual ego and personal struggle against imposed social norms. The final submission to patriarchy finds a rupture in the novel of Mercedes Valdivieso. The feminine voice is expressed in a language of resistance and feeble transgression of established behavior. In this early phase, the prose of the Brazilian author Clarice Lispector reaches maturity in a new aspect of subjectivity, her quest is intellectual and her language an experiment in new avenues of feminine expression.

The second part covers the prose of Rosario Castellanos that proves a significant advancement in women's self-representation. Her texts function as a social ice-breaker in the awareness of the Other, an introspection into the world of the Other Mexican, of the dispossessed class and race and as a cultural statement of an author conscious of the divisions caused by social injustice.

The third part of this chapter deals with the expansion of women's subject positions from the private to the public space and women's involvement in political activity and the discourse of the nation. Marta Lynch and Angeles Mastretta are only two examples of the increasing engagement of women in roles traditionally reserved for men.

The prose of Latin American women authors has developed from a meek outcry against social imprisonment to an engagement in the social and political discourse. It is

most important usages of the Other are those in which the Other represents language, the site of the signifier, the Symbolic Order or any third party in a triangular structure" (*Sexual/Textual Politics* 100-101).

through language and their writing that women have constructed their own subjectivity, not based on the canons and laws of patriarchy but on the voices of their self-awareness.

These works can also be read as an echo of Sally Robinson's enlightening book

Engendering the Subject where she writes:

To speak as a woman across these contradictions means to disrupt the prohibitions against woman's speech and, thus, to challenge male privilege and masculine hegemony over the place of enunciation. It is in the process of speaking that one becomes a woman, that one occupies different *subject positions* marked by gender, race, class, and other cultural differences. (12, my emphasis)⁵

From Teresa de la Parra to Clarice Lispector: Resistance and transgression

As a starting point and an example of Bauer's theory of "failed community" I have chosen Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* (1924). This novel will be contrasted with *La brecha* (1961) by Mercedes Valdivieso, considered the first "feminist" novel in which the protagonist acts as an engendered subject.⁶ *La última niebla* (1935) by María Luisa

⁵Women's writing as a viable means to constructing subjectivity is a key to the debate on the specificity of women's writing. Catherine Belsey in her essay "Constructing the subject: deconstructing the text" points out the importance of language and ideology in the construction of subjectivity. Based on theories of Althusser on the 'interpolation of the subject in the context of ideology' and on Lacan's view of the subject as 'perpetually in process of construction', Belsey sees a productive field for the transformation of women and class structures (50-52).

⁶An engendered subject is one who is conscious of his/her differences from the opposite sex and acts accordingly. In the case of women, the feminine engendered

Bombal lies between the two in the heroine's attempts to acquire a subject position, and *La señora Ordoñez* (1967) by Marta Lynch serves as an example of feminine access to the public space.

Ifigenia. Diario de una señorita que escribió porque se fastidiaba [*Ifigenia, the Diary of a Young Lady Who Wrote Because She was Bored*, 1924] is the story of a heroine trapped between the centripetal forces of the Caracas aristocracy and the liberating impulses of her inner being that longs for independence and self-realization. After the death of her father, María Eugenia Alonso has returned from a long stay in Europe to encounter the rigid and codified system of society that prescribes how a young lady must behave. Educated in Paris, where she acquired an open mind and a taste for freedom to decide her own destiny, she faces the patriarchal power of the Grandmother and of the old spinster Aunt Clara who exert their influence to trigger a turning point in her development. The novel portrays the struggle between her acquired subjectivity and her progressive objectification in the new society that leads to her final sacrifice and submission.

Teresa de la Parra is aware of the power play in her novel, and she designs María Eugenia's resistance through her unsaid comments, her gestures, and her silent thoughts.

In a letter to a friend Parra writes:

subject is aware of her situation of oppression and of the social elements in the construction of her subjectivity.

Lo único que considero bien escrito en *Ifigenia* es lo que no está escrito, lo que tracé sin palabras, para que la benevolencia del lector fuese leyendo en voz baja y la benevolencia del crítico en voz alta.⁷

In her process of reeducation in Caracas, María Eugenia resists the voices of constraint. Even if she attempts to defend her liberal position, she becomes engulfed by the overpowering arguments of social prestige and money. She sees herself falling into her Grandmother's clutches when she senses her embrace as "la garra abierta de este monstruo que se complace ahora en cerrarme con llave todas las puertas de mi porvenir, este monstruo que ha ido cegando uno después de otro los ojos azules de mis anhelos" (38).⁸ Shortly after her arrival, María Eugenia wants to practice the piano, as she would like to play like the famous Venezuelan artist Teresa Careño, but the Grandmother curtails her aspiration because of their mourning. María Eugenia insists that her music is meant to comfort sorrow and that she will play only nocturnes and sad music. But the memory of the deceased father is sacred, and the girl should rather "educate her heart" (58) for sacrifice, as expected from a woman. Later on, when she meets Gabriel Olmedo at the house of her good (unwanted) friend Mercedes Galindo and falls in love with him, her tutors relegate her to their country estate for three months. At this point, she protests that

⁷"The only thing I consider well written in *Ifigenia* is what is not written, what I traced without words, for the benevolent reader to whisper, and for the critic to read aloud." Letter to Eduardo Guzmán Esponeda, 1926. Quoted by Julieta Fombona in the Introduction to Parra's *Obra*, p. ix.

⁸"The open claws of this monster who takes pleasure in locking all the doors of my future, this monster who has progressively blinded the blue eyes of my desires."

even if they want to lock her up in San Nicolás, like in the prisons of the Inquisition, she will not submit to the rules of the family. They may lock up her body, she says, but her spirit is free as a bird and she will fly away to marry Gabriel Olmedo. The dominant Grandmother has means to crush her subversion. Gabriel's messages never reach her, and in his despair he marries another woman.

If María Eugenia's subject position is reduced by the powers of the family, her encounter with César Leal, who asks her in marriage, will press out the last sparks of her self esteem. Leal, a Senator with money and social prestige, is a desirable partner from the family's point of view to provide for the orphan and disinherited young girl. A master-slave⁹ relationship is immediately established as María Eugenia rapidly silences her feelings and surrenders her will. At their first meeting she senses he is a "luxuriant tree loaded with branches, leaves and fruits" that had "magically" sprung from the ground (205).¹⁰ Her inner rejection of him "dissolves like a sugar cube in water" (206) in his presence, her intentions to end the relationship are twisted into words of acceptance. Her

⁹The "master-slave dialectic" concept was conceived by Hegel to illustrate the relationship of dependency between two individuals, in which one assumes the dominant role but also needs the 'other' on whom to exert power on and as his own reflection. Since each one needs the other to recognize his own worth, a relationship of mutual dependency is established in which one has the role of the independent master and the other of the depending slave. This idea was further modified by Alexander Kojève and Lacan. For a detailed explanation see Gwendolyn Díaz "De Hegel a Lacan: El discurso del deseo en *Cambio de Armas* de Luisa Valenzuela."

¹⁰The image of César Leal as a majestic tree underlies their rapport, where he stands as the powerful protector, vertical and monologic.

mind and her tongue utter a double voice, her inner feelings of refusal are converted through the pressure of “good manners” and the mighty presence of Leal:

Y aquí mi lengua titubeó un instante. Tuvo la absurda sensación de que yacía sobre ella el peso material de los cuatro circundantes, y entonces, en medio de una gran turbación que Leal volvió a juzgar encantadora, *torció en absoluto el rumbo de la frase*. (210, my emphasis)¹¹

The twist in her tongue brings to mind of Bakhtin’s description of the *hidden polemic* form of the *active double-voiced* speech as “a word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word”:

But here also belongs all self-deprecating overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance, speech with a thousand reservations, concessions, loopholes and the like. Such speech literary cringes in the presence or the anticipation of someone else’s word, reply, objection. (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 196)

César is personified as the executioner and despot who will tame the rebel, a “mujer bachiller” who likes literature and modern fashion. He is the “agency of power,” the authority who will encapsulate María Eugenia into the law of the master. The only escape the heroine has is her lying, her mode of subverting the monologic voice of patriarchy that condemns her pride and joy in her culture and knowledge.

¹¹“And my tongue twitched for a moment. I had the absurd sensation that the entire weight of the four persons present laid over it, and then, in the middle of a great confusion, that Leal judged charming, it deviated the direction of my speech.”

The triad Grandmother, Aunt Clara and César represent the “community” in Bauer’s sense of the authority that determines the rules and engulfs resistance into the center. She explains:

Once these women characters choose to resist the dominant codes, the community responds with a counter-stroke to overturn, negate, or appropriate the resistance. (*Feminist Dialogics* 167)

María Eugenia stands “at the point of contradiction between the alienated female voice and the interpretive community anxious to incorporate and domesticate that voice in order to silence its threat” (Bauer, x). The characters with whom María Eugenia feels empathy are gone, dead, or are powerless (Mercedes Galindo, Uncle Pancho, or the maid Gregoria) . Her last attempt at rebellion is to elope with Gabriel Olmedo, after their romantic reencounter at the death bed of her uncle Pancho, but the plans collapse due to her hesitation. The centrifugal forces of resistance have failed to establish a ‘dialogue’ with the dominant community led by the grandmother. The ‘alienated’ heroine has been mastered. Aware of her condition, she writes in her diary:

Y ya completamente vencida ... por la fuerza de mi destino,
o por la negación completa de mi voluntad, anulada por
aquella voluntad poderosa ... me di a callar definitivamente.
(303)¹²

¹²“And totally defeated ... by the force of my destiny, or by the total denial of my will, annulled by that powerful will ... I opted for silence.”

Caught in the dilemma of being truthful to herself or submissive to the Law, María Eugenia perceives the violence she does to her Self. She has been transformed, objectified. She neither speaks nor acts according to her desires. Only in her mind and writings can she keep her private space. The day of her wedding, she advances to her sacrifice, as Euripides's Greek Iphigenia who chose to die for the good of the 'community'.¹³ María Eugenia Alonso surrenders to the

[d]eidad terrible y ancestral; dios milenario de siete cabezas
que llaman sociedad, familia, honor, religión, moral, deber,
convenciones, principios. (310)¹⁴

Teresa de la Parra's novel was a scandal, and masculine criticism until the 1970s was incapable of reading the feminine voice.¹⁵ In a lecture given in Colombia in 1930, the author protests that *Ifigenia* is not a "revolutionary propaganda" but "the exposition of a typical case of our contemporary illness, the hispano-american bovarism, the acute

¹³ In Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the heroine has internalized her duty when at the altar exclaims: "Begin the rites My father, the great king, shall place his right hand on the altar; for behold I am come to bring Freedom to Achaia and victory to the Argives. Lead me to the foot of the altar. Mine shall be the glory of bringing Ilion low Raise the hymn to Artemis, the blessed Virgin! The Fates call on me, and I give my blood and my life" (46).

¹⁴"Terrible and ancestral god; millenary seven-headed god called society, family, honor, religion, moral, duty, conventions, principles."

¹⁵Elsa Krieger Gambarini in "The Male Critic and the Woman Writer: Reading Teresa de la Parra's Critics" summarizes this criticism: "There exists a level of critical discourse that does not acknowledge the feminine subject who writes in all her complexity nor the feminine text that speaks with all its ambiguity, but it knows only an imago, a cultural construction of the feminine" 191.

unsuitability against rough temperature changes and the lack of fresh air in the environment" (*Obra*, "Influencia de las mujeres en la formación del alma americana" 473). Her book only 'reflects' the inner rebellion of the young girls in the Caracas society entangled in an 'oppressive' atmosphere.

The value of *Ifigenia* within the Latin American fictional scene is the inscription of women's resistance against the violence done to them by society. Teresa de la Parra's writing in the 1920s already has her women characters speak as women in a society that demands their prudence and resignation. Her text challenges patriarchal hegemony through its mode of producing discourse, through its enunciation. Maria Eugenia's acts of transgression are punished and her subject position ultimately reduced by the power of the family. Nevertheless, by placing the woman character in opposition and at the bending point of contradiction between the self and the social system, the prose of de la Parra has contributed to the development of the resistant subject in women's fiction.

If the heroine of Teresa de la Parra is defeated by society, the protagonist of Mercedes Valdivieso's *La brecha* [1961; *Breakthrough*, 1987] represents a headway in the acquisition of a subject position. Her process of development is the reverse of María Eugenia's as the nameless young girl marries at 19 "como todo el mundo se casa,"¹⁶ but when she realizes that she does not love her husband Gastón, she initiates the

¹⁶ "Like everyone else does" 9. Trans. Graciela S. Daichman. All translations to *La brecha* are hers and are taken from the English edition of *Breakthrough*, referred to as *B*.

construction of her subjectivity by listening to her own aspirations and desires and by interacting with others in a fruitful dialogic exchange.

To analyze this aspect of the novel, I base my reading on Lynne Pearce's *Reading Dialogics* in which she proposes three steps for analyzing subjectivity by assessing how characters "construct and conduct their self-other relations; how they posit their interlocutor (singular or plural), and how they respond to his or her presence" (152).

The heroine of *La brecha* gains subjectivity through dialogue within multiple discourses. She listens first of all to her own feelings when she becomes aware that her husband bores her, when she is disgusted by her pregnancy that would limit her freedom, and when she yearns for self fulfillment. Her relationship to Gastón becomes estranged in spite of his efforts to regain her love. Frustrated by the lack of communication, he adopts a dominant role, but in her eyes, he is "una sombra que huía de materializarse" (31).¹⁷ She regards Gastón's existence as a non-being, as immaterial.

The experience of maternity first immerses her in the dark—"Todo estaba oscuro dentro de mí"—(23),¹⁸ as it provokes anguish and a deep resentment against her husband. But when her son is born, she feels tenderness towards him. A positive mother-son relationship develops and when Gastón and she finally part, the child becomes an emotional support to her. She decides to never again go through the calvary of pregnancy:

¹⁷"A shadowy presence" (B 23).

¹⁸"Everything was dark inside me" (B 18).

“Apreté las manos contra mi vientre sobre las sábanas: Nunca más” (34).¹⁹ And she keeps her promise by aborting her next child.

Listening and acting according to her inner drives are a first step toward self-realization. Her interaction with other characters helps her grow internally. To break a marriage in Chile in the 1960s, a country where divorce is illegal, the protagonist has to struggle with similar centripetal forces as María Eugenia Alonso. Gastón himself and the very strict Catholic mother-in-law fear scandal and violently defend the honor of the family. But for her, the separation is a decision, not a transgression. Her unconventional friends Nicolás and Marta encourage her with their support. At the moment of rupture, when she moves into her own apartment, Nicolás reassures her:

Ay del que retrocede! Te arrancarán los ojos y te pondrán la
rueda del molino. Cuesta sangre romper, levantar cabeza; la
compensación comienza con la soledad, pero ya se ha
abierto una brecha: aguanta. (76)²⁰

Having earned her independence, the heroine has to find a means of sustenance. Her limited education permits her to work only as a secretary and live modestly. She has resisted the coercion of marriage and society even at the cost of sacrificing her bourgeois existence and comfort. Almost a hundred years after Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), the

¹⁹“I pressed my hands against my stomach on the sheets. Never again” (B 25).

²⁰“Alas, for those who back down! They will pluck out your eyes, will “bind you with the fetters of bronze,” and “you will grind corn in the prison house.” It costs blood to break away, to get off the ground. Being alone is the first compensation for all that, but there has already been a breakthrough; hold on” (B 54).

caged bird-doll-object metaphor is able to acquire subjectivity and free herself from the conjugal bond. By challenging the dominant hierarchies, she has become an engendered subject who thinks, speaks, and acts individually. Through her experience, she has learned a new language, she has become an agent of her own 'becoming'. The novel has an open ending, where the nameless young woman, "como un recluso que hizo saltar la cerradura de su calabozo" (142)²¹ feels revitalized to pursue her quest for truth and freedom.²²

Yvette Malverde Disselkoe in "De *La última niebla* y *La amortajada* a *La brecha*" reads this novel as an intertext of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where the heroine is expelled from paradise, but is not destroyed by the curses she receives. She overcomes the fear of original sin for her sexuality and finds liberation in her work. She fulfills her emancipating project without being punished:

²¹"Like a prisoner who has broken the lock of his jail cell" (96).

²²Raquel Olea in her chapter "La palabra maldita. Dos tiempos en la escritura de Mercedes Valdivieso" points out the importance of *La brecha* as the exploration of new feminine 'spaces' and 'identities' emerging from women's choices and desires. She writes: "La protagonista se construye como una voluntad de ser que posibilita dislocar el cumplimiento de las ordenanzas y vigilancias con que las policías simbólicamente establecidas ejercen las sujeciones culturales. Mercedes Valdivieso ejerce la *construcción de una sujeto femenina* en libertad de elegir su propia vida. No es la libertad como modo de existencia lo que esta novela pone en juego, pero sí el derecho a la libertad de escoger. Pienso que ese es su desacato. Es el paso feminista que construye *La brecha*." (1998, 104, my emphasis). [The protagonist is constructed as a will to be which allows the dislocation of the fulfillment of laws and watchfulness that the symbolically established police exerts on the cultural subjections. Mercedes Valdivieso exerts the *construction of a feminine subject* with the freedom to choose her own life. It is not freedom as a way of life that this novel questions, but the right to the freedom of choice. I believe that this constitutes its irreverence. This is the feminist step constructed by *La brecha*].

Al plantear una feminidad autónoma *La brecha* contradice y desdice la maldición del Padre, produciéndose también la liberación de la culpa y del temor, siempre presentes en la protagonista durante su trayecto emancipatorio.²³ (76)

In contrast with previous novels in the Latin American feminine spectrum, *La brecha* portrays an engendered subject that acts as an agent of change. Valdivieso proposes a language of transgression without punishment, of courage without sacrifice and therefore a liberation of the constraints of traditional narrative. Using the intertext of the lost paradise as a passage toward emancipation, this novel opens plural interpretations for reading the feminine text as “a site of contradiction” (Belsey “Constructing the subject: deconstructing the text” 1985, 50), a Subject in the process of becoming.

A new variant in the acquisition of a feminine subject position is posited by the heroine in *La última niebla* [1935; *House of Mist*, 1995] by the Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal. Feminine sexuality is for the first time expressed through desire and through the language of the body. In “La marginalidad subversiva del deseo en la *La última niebla* de María Luisa Bombal,” Lucía Guerra-Cunningham sees this novel as “el primer gesto transgresivo en la producción narrativa de la mujer latinoamericana” (56)²⁴ and she writes:

²³“By establishing an autonomous femininity, *La brecha* contradicts and recants the curse of the Father, also achieving the liberation from guilt and fear, ever present through the protagonist’s emancipatory path.”

²⁴“The first transgressive gesture in the feminine Latin American narrative production.”

La autora, al incorporar en su modelización de la feminidad, impulsos sexuales que corresponden a la vivencia de lo insaciable ... subvierte los valores de la ideología dominante instituyendo el desear al nivel libidinal como un elemento primordial en la constitución del Sujeto femenino.²⁵ (56)

Lucía Guerra further develops four stages in the heroine's process of subjectivization: 1) the intuition of absence and desire; 2) the encounter with Regina; 3) the "mediating and promoting agent" of her libidinal consciousness, the discovery of her own body through the immersion in the pond, and 4) her real or dreamed sexual encounter with her lover that gives her, in the site of her Subjectivity, the knowledge of bodily pleasure.

For my analysis, I follow these four phases under a new constellation, and show how her subjectivity is constructed from the dialogic angle of resistance and through an encounter with a feminine addressee.²⁶

Weariness and a sense of the futility of her existence, metaphorically wrapped in a persistent mist, makes the nameless protagonist ponder her misery. Married to a childhood friend and widower, who seeks in her the spirit of his dead wife, the heroine soon realizes that Daniel wants to recreate in her the image of the other woman. In her

²⁵"The author, by incorporating in her model of femininity the sexual impulses corresponding to the living experience of the insatiable, subverts the values of the dominant ideology by instituting desire at the libidinal level as a primal element in the constitution of the feminine Subject."

²⁶Lynne Pearce in *Reading Dialogics*, suggests a strategy of reading the gendered subject in its interaction with a "female" addressee. See 105-108.

world, the husband represents a ‘failure’, a lack of perception and response to her desires. She is aware of her wasted beauty in a loveless relationship. Her resistance is reflected in a “turbia inquietud”(46),²⁷ a restlessness that she cannot articulate. In this first stage of her new subject position, the Self-Other relationship with Daniel is inscribed in a vacuum, as a deficit of communication and distress.

The arrival of Regina marks a decisive turn in the awakening of her libidinal drive. Hardly any words are spoken between the two, but the presence of a female addressee acts as a stimulus for change. There is a dialogue of bodily gestures, a non-verbal exchange that sets the protagonist’s desires in motion. In Bakhtinian terminology, there is a ‘dialogic interaction’ that informs the subject’s “ideological becoming,” which is attained in exchange with and objectivization of the “word” of the other. The protagonist senses the passion that emanates from Regina’s body and the gaze of her lover as she glimpses their secret embrace, or the sensual aura when she plays the piano:

Regina vuelve a cruzar el salón para sentarse nuevamente
junto al piano. Al pasar sonríe a su amante, que envuelve en
deseo cada uno de sus pasos.
Parece que me hubieran vertido fuego dentro de las venas.
Salgo al jardín, huyo. (48-49)²⁸

²⁷“A turbid anxiety.” My translation. Although *La última niebla* was translated by the author in 1947, the English edition made major changes in the text. For this reason all translations of this novel are mine. See Naomi Lindstrom’s Foreword in the 1995 English edition for a brief comparison between the two versions.

²⁸“Regina walks through the salon to sit again at the piano. In passing, she smiles at her lover, who wraps each of her steps in desire. /It is as if they would have poured fire into my veins. I go out into the garden, I flee.”

This silent communication with Regina articulates the unspeakable in the heroine and sets her inner drives in motion. She faces the mirror and sees her discreet, tied hair (as her husband wants it) as an imprisoned version of Regina's voluptuous hairstyle. Impelled by this stimulus, she runs into the garden, embraces the tree wishing it were "un cuerpo ardiente y rodar con él, enlazados, por una pendiente sin fin ...!" (49).²⁹ She undresses and swims to discover her handsome body as she feels how:

Tibias corrientes me acarician y penetran. Como con brazos de seda, las plantas acuáticas me enlazan el torso con sus largas raíces. Me besa la nuca y sube hasta mi frente el aliento fresco del agua. (49-50)³⁰

The dialogic exchange with Regina's discourse has made the narrator conscious of her desires,³¹ the addressee has acted as an "interlocutory support" (Pearce 89), her

²⁹"An ardent body and wanting to roll with him, interlocked, down an endless slope."

³⁰"Tepid currents caress and penetrate me. As if with silk arms, the water plants intertwine my trunk with their long roots. The fresh breath of the water kisses my nape and climbs to my forehead." The heroine's revelation of her own body as a locus of desire and of inscribing her subjectivity anticipates Cixous' concept of "writing the body." See "La venue à l'écriture" or "Le rire de la Méduse" where she encourages women to write themselves: "Ecris-toi: Il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre. Alors jailliront les immenses ressources de l'inconscient" (43).

³¹This encounter between two women can also be read under René Girard's optic of "le désir triangulaire" where he establishes a third person between subject and object, which he calls "le médiateur du désir" (*Mensonge Romantique et vérité romanesque* 12). From this perspective, Regina is the "mediator of desire" that ignites the dormant desire in the protagonist, the external mediator who initiates the internal transformation of the subject towards the object of her desires. Girard writes: "C'est la transfiguration de l'objet désiré que définit l'unité de la médiation externe et de la médiation interne. L'imagination du héros est la mère de l'illusion mais il faut encore un père à cet enfant et ce père est le médiateur" (30). This encounter could also suggest Lesbian overtones in the

‘word’ has been objectivized in the heroine’s sensuous experience. As the guest leaves, the mist penetrates the home, but the glance of Regina remains “con su mirada de fuego y sus labios llenos de secretos”(53).³²

The fourth stage in the construction of the heroine’s subjectivity is the encounter with her lover. As he appears, fog dissipates, an entourage of light and warmth surrounds the atmosphere. These sensations contrast with Daniel’s cold and blurred surroundings. The “hueco vacío del lecho”³³ of Daniel’s bed is replaced by his body that envelops her “como una grande ola hirviente [que] me quema, me penetra, me envuelve, me arrastra desfallecida” (61).³⁴

The mysterious lover represents to her the attainment of her libidinal desires. No single word is heard between the two, the dialogical interaction occurs at the sexual level. Unchained by the encounter with Regina, the awareness of her body reaches a new meaning. Whether the lover is real or a projection of her delirium, the impact he had through their passionate interaction reveals to the heroine a new knowledge about her

intensity of the attraction that the nameless protagonist feels towards Regina and in the mysterious and ambiguous character of the lover. She is aroused by Regina, not by the male lover. But Bombal does not further develop the relationship between the two women, as the guest leaves shortly afterwards. At the end of the novel, Regina is in the hospital “deformada” because she is recovering from a failed suicide. The protagonist feels she is more miserable than Regina who, at least, had the courage to live her passion while she can only live from her memories.

³²“With her fiery gaze and her lips full of secrets.”

³³“Hollow space.”

³⁴“Like a huge boiling wave,[which] caresses me, burns me, penetrates, wraps, and drags me languishing.”

own body, about her capacity to experience pleasure. The lover does not utter a sound, but their exchange enriches her body language.

At the end of the novel when, after a frustrated effort to reunite with her ambiguous lover, she gives up her pursuit:

¿[P]ara qué luchar? Era mi destino. La casa, y mi amor, y mi aventura, todo se ha desvanecido en la niebla; algo así como una *garra* ardiente me toma, de pronto, por la nuca; recuerdo que tengo fiebre. (98, my emphasis)³⁵

The anonymous narrator returns to the logos. Still, she attempts to throw herself under the wheels of an ambulance, but Daniel grabs her arm and reintegrates her in the domestic space of home and husband.

Lo sigo para vivir correctamente, para morir correctamente, algún día. (102)³⁶

The itinerary of the heroine ends, like in Parra's novel by embracing the "claws" of law and order. The importance of Bombal's narration is, however, that the protagonist, by subverting the discourse of sexuality, has become aware of her own body, has appeased her inner desires, and has articulated her subjectivity. Her defiance, if only at the

³⁵"Why struggle? It was my destiny. The house, and my love, and my adventure, all has vanished in the mist; something like a burning clutch grabs me, suddenly by my nape; I remember that I have a fever."

³⁶"I follow him to live correctly, to die correctly, some day."

level of her fantasy, has created a new locus of resistance, transgression, and self realization.

These three authors, de la Parra in the 1920s, Bombal in the 1930s and Valdivieso in the 1960s question the position of women in society and resist traditional narrative strategies. In presenting their stories of resistance they use common metaphors, such as the caged bird and the clutches of patriarchy in Parra and Valdivieso, the image of the tree to represent masculine protection in Parra and Bombal, and the use of lies as a mode of subverting in Parra and Bombal. Transgression used as a conduit of female empowerment is a step towards the construction of subjectivity in these early novels centered in the home. In the next section, I introduce Clarice Lispector, a Brazilian writer who makes incursions into new areas of discourse. Her experiments in language and her deconstructive approach to myths is another feminine transgressive device to subvert master narratives and patriarchal thought.

Clarice Lispector: A postmodern voice in *écriture féminine*

Et nous entrons, par son écriture-fenêtre, dans la terrible
 beauté d'apprendre à lire: se vivre, en allant , à travers
 corps, de l'autre côté du moi. Seule une femme peut donner
 l'exemple d'un tel risque non simulé: aimer le vrai du
 vivant, ce qui semble *ingrat* aux yeux narcisse, le sans-
 prestige, le sans actualité, aimer l'origine, s'intéresser

personnellement à l'impersonnel, à l'animal, à la chose. A l'autre. (Hélène Cixous)³⁷

On October 12, 1978 Hélène Cixous encountered the world of Clarice Lispector in the text *Água Viva* that incarnated Cixous's vision of *écriture féminine*. The book *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange* shows Cixous' fascination with the *voice*, with Lispector as an invigorating gift from Brazil of

une femme à l'écriture assez courageuse pour oser s'avancer, dans un mouvement effrayant d'arrachement de tout son être, jusqu'à la vérité de l'écrire, qui est une vraie folie, la folie de la vérité, la passion d'approcher de l'origine des êtres, au risque de s'éloigner de l'histoire. (25)

To Live the Orange praises Lispector's "two courages": "That of going to the sources"³⁸ "celui d'aller aux sources" and the courage "to disbelieve," "le courage de ne pas croire"(29). Cixous's perception of Lispector's philosophical endeavor is shared by various critics who read *A Paixão segundo G.H.* [1964, *The Passion according to G.H.*]³⁹ as a quest for the origins (Barbosa), or for literary discourse (Frizzi), or as the laboratory for coming to

³⁷"L'approche de Clarice Lispector. Se laisser lire (par) Clarice Lispector *A Paixão segundo C.L.*" *Poétique* 408. Other important works by Cixous on Lispector are "Reaching the point of Wheat, or A Portrait of the Artist as a maturing Woman," (1984) and the collection of essays *Reading with Clarice Lispector* (1990).

³⁸Trans. Ann Liddle and Sarah Cornell. Bilingual edition of *Vivre l'orange. To live the Orange* 28. A large section of this work has also been published in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*. Ed. Susan Sellers.

³⁹Clarice Lispector, *A Paixão segundo G. H.* All citations from Portuguese are from the 1974 edition. *The Passion according to G. H.* Trans Ronald W. Sousa, 1988. All translations from the Portuguese text are from this edition and referred to as *TP*.

the source of language (Sousa).⁴⁰ In my analysis I propose a reading of *The Passion* as the journey of a postmodern female Faust⁴¹ in search of truth and knowledge in an introspective quest into the essence of his being. The female protagonist G.H. goes through a dark tunnel into an empty room, a blank page, that will be the “laboratório de inferno” (69), the “hellish laboratory” (51) where she will encounter and kill a cockroach. This minimal act will unleash her meditation on the ‘sources’ of her being, on the unreliability of truth, and on the morality of her transgression. For her journey, as her reader’s, will be accomplished by “atravessando inclusive o oposto daquilo de que se vai aproximar”(5).⁴² She must renounce her ordered existence, descend into the Hell of doubt and sacrilege, pass through the orgiastic Sabbath’s night of blasphemy, to find the source of knowledge:

E agora eu estava como diante Dele e não entendia—estava
inutilmente de pé diante Dele, e era de novo diante do nada.
A mim, como a todo o mundo, me fora dado tudo, mas eu

⁴⁰M.J.S. Barbosa “Brass’s Delirium and G.H.’s Reverie: the Quest for the Origin of Time” (1992); A. Frizzi “The Thread of Return: Notes on the Genesis of Literary Discourse in Clarice Lispector’s *A paixão segundo G.H.*” (1989); R.W. Sousa “At the Site of Language: Reading Lispector’s G.H.” (1989).

⁴¹By postmodern Faust I mean the retelling of the legend of the man who sold his soul to the devil to acquire magical powers. Each generation has created its own version of the legend. Geneviève Bianquis in her book *Faust a través quatre siècles* (1955) describes the modern version of the legend as: “une allégorie de l’esprit humain perpétuellement en travail, avide de liberté et de science, entravé par les défailances de la chair, mais respectable dans la sincérité de son effort. Il ne s’agira plus de condamner aux flammes éternelles cette âme inquiète” 8.

⁴²by crossing, she “must traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached” (*TP* p. v).

quisera mais: quisera saber desse tudo. *E vendera a minha alma para saber.* (*A Paixão* 161, my emphasis)⁴³

At the outset of her enterprise G.H. had cast off her “terceira perna,” her “perna protectora ... uma verdade” (11).⁴⁴ that held her safely tied to the rational system.⁴⁵ By discarding her support she experiences a “life-giving death.” A transgression:

A fina morte que me fez manusear o proibido tecido da vida.
(13)⁴⁶

Having lost fear of fear and having gained a “aterradora liberdade que pode me destruir”(10)⁴⁷ G.H. abandons her “feliz rotina de prisioneira” (10)⁴⁸ to plunge into chaos and reflection. The existential experience results in disillusionment, the collapse of her cultural

⁴³“And now it was as though I was before Him and did not understand—I was uselessly on my feet before him, and it was once more a nothingness that I was before. For me, as for all of us, everything had been given, but I wanted more: I wanted to know about everything. *And I had sold my soul to know*” (TP 127).

⁴⁴“third leg,” her “protective leg, ‘a truth’ ” (TP 6).

⁴⁵Foucault’s opening remarks in *L’Ordre du discours*” transmit a similar malaise when facing the task of renouncing the inherited discourse. “Il y a chez beaucoup, je pense, un pareil désir de n’avoir pas à commencer, un pareil désir de se retrouver, d’entrée de jeu, *de l’autre côté du discours*, sans avoir eu à considérer de l’extérieur ce qu’il pouvait avoir de singulier, de redoutable, de maléfique peut-être” (8, my emphasis).

⁴⁶“That purified death that made me sort through the forbidden weft of life” (TP 7).

⁴⁷“horrifying freedom that can destroy me” (TP 5).

⁴⁸“happy prison routine” (TP 5).

system—”como depois de uma catástrofe, a minha civilização acabara,” (81)⁴⁹—and the revelation that beauty is not a civilizing force but rather “uma grande superficialidade medrosa” (192).⁵⁰ She had freed herself of the “medo do feio” (19)⁵¹ but after realizing that “Deus não é bonito,” (190)⁵² she is terrified to see that her former concept of aesthetics is meaningless. Expelled from paradise, she is frightened:

Eu tinha medo da face de Deus, tinha medo de minha nudez final na parede. A beleza, aquela nova ausência de beleza que nada tinha daquilo que eu antes costumava chamar de beleza, me horrorizava. (116)⁵³

Her journey demands courage to doubt and negate established truths. She feels that the ‘violence’ against God is also against herself: “minha violência para com Deus tem que ser comigo mesma” (181). She is aware that her transgression is a violation, but her morality based on her “desejo de entender,” (21) her “desire to understand,” (14) is also an act of bravery when she admits:

⁴⁹“Just like after a catastrophe, my culture had ended” (*TP* 61).

⁵⁰ “a huge, timid superficiality” (*TP* 153).

⁵¹“fear of the ugly” (*TP* 13).

⁵²“God’s face is not pretty” (*TP* 152).

⁵³“I was afraid of God’s face, I was afraid of my final nakedness on the wall. The beauty, that new absence of beauty that had nothing to do with what I had been in the habit of calling beauty, terrified me” (*TP* 89).

Mas agora sei que tenho de ter uma coragem muito maior: a de ter uma outra moral, tão isenta que eu mesma não a entenda e que me assuste. (185)⁵⁴

In her pursuit of truth G.H. also has to go through the ‘passion’ of fright and error.

Se a “verdade” fosse aquilo que posso entender—terminaria sendo apenas uma verdade pequena, do meu tamanho. A verdade tem que estar exatamente no que não poderei jamais compreender. (131)

⁵⁵In her Faustian search for truth, she experiences that “o inferno já me tomara, meu amor. O inferno da curiosidade malsã,”(91)⁵⁶ and that “a minha vontade de querer era mais forte do que a minha vontade da salvação” (87).⁵⁷ After a “trajetória milenar de orgia e morte e gloria e sede” (164)⁵⁸ G.H. finds the “secret” of her inquisitions. She had not found a solution to the enigma but “o proprio enigma,” (165) “the enigma itself”(130). She can now spell out that “a coisa,” “the thing,”—reality—can never be apprehended. The ‘divine is the

⁵⁴“But I now know that I have to have a much greater courage: the courage to have another morality, so empty that I don’t understand it myself and it frightens me” (*TP* 148).

⁵⁵“If truth were what I can understand ... it would end up being but a small truth, my-sized. Truth must reside precisely in what I shall never understand” (*TP* 101).

⁵⁶“Hell already had hold of me, my sweet, the Hell of a morbid curiosity” (*TP* 70).

⁵⁷“my will to want [was] stronger than my will to salvation” (*TP* 67).

⁵⁸ “millenary trajectory of orgy, and death and glory and thirst” (*TP* 130).

real' (161,162)⁵⁹ but "é pecado entrar na matéria divina," (172)⁶⁰ and therefore it is a transgression to attempt truth and knowledge. It leads to the destruction of the humanist edifice. G.H. needs the support of 'the hand', the reader, to articulate her deconstructive perception of truth :

a maior falta de crença na verdade da humanização seria
pensar que a verdade destruía a humanização. (173)⁶¹

The postmodern Faust has been 'de-heroized' and 'depersonalized', unnamed. Her meditation on the life and death of the cockroach brings her the wisdom of the unheroic size of human beings. This is not the insatiable Faust of the Enlightenment who makes a pact with the devil in exchange for power, knowledge and the possession of beauty. By drinking the plasma of the millenary beetle, G.H. makes a pact with the symbol of the eternal in order to approach the divine. She undergoes an internal metamorphosis, and her epiphany is an anticlimactic ecstasy: "O que não sou eu, eu sou" (216).⁶²

The unheroic and anti-humanistic mood, the new mode of expression of a language not bound to logocentrism, a language that distrusts the Cartesian patterns of thought, together with a fluidity of prose, a rhizomatic and asymmetric structure, and the courage to

⁵⁹Like in each of the 33 sections of the book, here too the sentence that closes a segment is identical to the one opening the next segment.

⁶⁰"it is a sin to go into the divine matter" (TP 136).

⁶¹"the greatest disbelief in the truth of humanization would be to think that truth would destroy humanization" (TP 138).

⁶²"What I am not, I am" (TP 172).

depersonalize the subject make Clarice Lispector's prose a leading example in the search for a new language at the source of meaning. Lispector's aesthetic quest can be described in Douwe Fokkema's words when he points out that the 'modern' aesthetics driven by "curiosity and awareness" is being replaced by

an attempt to create ways for an individual experience of independence—from where a reinterpretation of so-called reality can be undertaken, a reinterpretation that avoids fixation and tends to remain permanently ambiguous. (Calinescu 236)

The postmodern atmosphere that transcends *The Passion according to G.H.* also echoes Terry Eagleton's description in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*:

Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. (vii)

The Passion according to G. H. is also an example of *écriture féminine* that can be read from a comparative perspective with Cixous's "La venue à l'écriture" (1976). Cixous sees writing as "a way of fending off death" ("pour barrer la mort" 13), as a response to an "urge to write" that makes the female author "jump the abyss," and overcome fear and suffering to engender a text. "Il y a un abîme. Il y a le saut. *On* le fait.

Ensuite, une gestation de soi—en soi, atroce” (46).⁶³ In a comparable context, Lispector uses the image of the abyss:

—Escuta, não te assustes: lembra-te que eu comi do fruto proibido e no entanto não fui fulminada pela orgia de ser Ouve, por eu ter mergulhado no abismo é que estou começando a amar o abismo de que sou feita. (*A Paixão* 174)⁶⁴

The maternal element in writing, as the mother’s rhythms, the lyric fluidity of language, or the voice-milk metaphor of Cixous’ theorizing can be found in Lispector’s text:

E agora sentia o gosto do nada. Velozmente eu me desviciava, e o gosto era nove como o do leite materno que só tem gosto para boca de criança. (*A Paixão* 122)⁶⁵

It is also possible to set a parallel between Lispector’s (in 1964) and Cixous’s (in the 1970s) association of the maternal metaphor with the origins. In *The Passion* the *mother’s milk* is related to a “primal taste” (95) that the narrator experiences after an act of purification that leads her to perceive “the taste of real identity” (95). In Cixous’s “Le

⁶³The militant call on women to end their silence and era of submission by overcoming the fear of the abyss is present in many of Cixous’ texts besides “Le rire de la Méduse”. See also “Sorties” in *La jeune Née*. (1975, *The Newly Born Woman*).

⁶⁴“Listen, don’t be afraid: remember that I have eaten the forbidden fruit and was nonetheless not struck down by the orgy of being Listen, it is because I dove into the abyss that I am beginning to love the abyss I am made of” (*TP* 139).

⁶⁵“And I now experienced the taste of nothingness. I quickly uncorrupted myself, and the taste was new like the taste of mother’s milk that has a taste only to the mouth of the child” (*TP* 95).

rire de la Méduse” the “mother’s milk” is the *white ink* of her writing linked to the elementary speech, to the first *song*, “the first voice of love” (Marks and Courtivron 251), “le *chant*, la première musique, celle de la première voix d’amour, que toute femme préserve vivante” (“Le rire” 44).

Writing as an act of love, or as an articulation of the “coffre de bijoux” of the unconscious, and as a language of the body when Cixous writes: “écoute ce que ton corps n’osait pas laisser affleurer” (“La venue à l’écriture” 61) or “La vie fait texte a partir de mon corps” (63) are also present in *Lispector*. I find this ‘language of the body’ particularly relevant in the birth metaphors, the tone of pre-climactic expectation in the first fragments of *The Passion* until G.H. kills the cockroach. Lispector’s phrases “eu ... ia existir” (23),⁶⁶ “do ritual com que já nasci” (119),⁶⁷ represent a pre-natal expectation. Also when she communicates the sense that abandoning “o que foi uma vida toda organizada pela esperançadói como separar-se de um filho ainda não nascido” (175-176),⁶⁸ she associates this rupture with childbirth. Her awakening as a woman is compared to a birth, offset by the “primeiro grito—um primeiro grito desencadeia todos os outros” (73).⁶⁹ And when she becomes ‘human’ in her own terms after the expulsion from paradise, she feels:

⁶⁶“I ... was going to begin to exist” (TP 15).

⁶⁷“ritual with which I have now been born” (TP 91).

⁶⁸“a life completely organized by hope hurts like separating from a yet unborn child” (TP 140).

⁶⁹“initial scream—a first scream [that] sets off all the others” (TP 55).

Estou tendo essa coragem dura que me dói como a carne
que se transforma em parto. (193)⁷⁰

The voice of Clarice Lispector has the courage to utter the primal scream, the courage to listen to her inner call, and to write her postmodern vision of the collapse of the foundations of Western culture. This text of Lispector is an intertext that appropriates a patriarchal archetype, the male Faust in his search for truth and knowledge and creates a “double voice,” an anti-climactic reverse discourse of truth and beauty that inscribes a feminine voice liberated from fear. Lispector’s search also parallels Cixous’s journey to the sources where she has the “courage” of questioning the master-narrative and articulating her findings, her “folie de la vérité” (*Vivre l’Orange* 25). Her quest also reinterprets the myth of the expulsion from Paradise where the protagonist G.H. is a new Eve, one who does not expiate her rebellion, but who regains her Self in a new level of understanding. This attitude undermines the basic Christian premise of salvation.⁷¹ The formerly muted “double-voice” has inscribed a “counter- discourse” in the literary canon. Clarice Lispector’s *passion* has been a crusade for the authenticity of truth, for the origins of knowledge, for the unattainable source of our being.

⁷⁰“I now have that hard courage that hurts me like the flesh transformed in childbirth” (*TP* 154).

⁷¹*The Passion* can also be read as a counter-discourse of the founding biblical text. Not only does the book have 33 sequences, but also the story of the *passion* of Christ is retold from her introspective perspective and in her language, as opposed to the male (logos) generated text of Christianity.

Rosario Castellanos: The inclusion of plural languages and the problematic of class and race in texts written by women

Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of the on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behavior. (Michel Foucault)⁷²

Latin American feminine⁷³ writing can be read as a cultural statement and as a deployment of the *Zeitgeist* or state of culture from the moment that women writers turned their gaze to the Other subject, the one in the periphery, deprived of voice and power. From the outset of feminine narrative in Latin America, women have been conscious of their condition of subjugation, and of their position at the other side of power. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's pioneer novel *Sab* (1841) recounts the discourse of slavery in Spanish Cuba.⁷⁴ In our century, it is the prose of Rosario

⁷²"Two Lectures." *Power/Knowledge* 97. I reproduce this text and the following quotes from these lectures in English and they have not been published in French. Under "Translation and Sources," in the edition by Colin Gordon it says: "These two lectures, which have not appeared in French, were transcribed and translated by Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino in Michel Foucault, *Microfisica del Potere* (Turin, 1977), p. xi. There is no individual credit for the English translation of this section.

⁷³ For an explanation of my use of the adjective *feminine* see note 16 in the Introduction.

⁷⁴In a framework of Romantic utopia, the author introduces a denunciation of the injustices of slavery through the voices of Sab, the 'noble' slave, and Carlota the 'white' heiress of the plantation. The rhetoric of freedom is extended to the theme of marriage as a form of enslavement. Nara Araujo considers *Sab* a "founding text" that initiates the discourse of marginalization as rooted in society. I would, however add that *Sab* is a "founding" work not only for Avellaneda's writings but also for the feminine prose in

Castellanos (Mexico 1925-1974) that first questions the mechanisms of power in the conflictive master-slave relationship that ruled interracial and gender exchanges in the land since colonial times. Her novels are an attempt to understand the motivations behind a subordinate behavior, the vehicles of resistance in the construction of subjectivity and the possible role of women characters as agents of rupture and change.

The theoretical frame I have chosen to analyze Castellanos' prose derives from Foucault's and Weedon's writings, and from Robin and Angenot's approach to the text as a reflection of the ideological and cultural discourse of the author. Bakhtin's dialogical approach and Susan S. Lanser's theories on the authority of the feminine discourse will also guide my examination of her second novel, *Oficio de tinieblas*.

Poststructuralist theories on subjectivity and the discourse of power owe a great deal to Foucault's deconstructive approach to history and his analysis of the role of the institutions in the constitution of the self.⁷⁵ Although Foucault did not specifically deal

Spanish America as it introduces a preoccupation with the marginalized and with the woman subject as repressed by the social institution. *Sab* was first published in Spain and censured by her relatives, who bought the edition in order to avoid the shame of her abolitionist ideas. Only in 1914 was the novel published in Cuba in commemoration of her centennial and after slavery had been abrogated in 1886. For a detailed review of *Sab*'s critical path, see the Introduction to the English edition translated and edited by Nina M. Scott.

⁷⁵See, for example: *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* [*Discipline and Punish* 1975] and *Histoire de la sexualité I* [*History of Sexuality I: An Introduction*, 1976].

with the problematic of gender, feminist critics have privileged his approach to explore social relations. Caroline Ramazanoglu in her Introduction to the collection of essays *Up Against Foucault* points out areas where Foucauldian theories have been productive: his conception of power relations for the construction of gender, and his questioning of the origins of meaning as a tool for analyzing “the nature and causes of women’s subordination” (2-3). She summarizes his contribution as: “Foucault offers us a theory that bodies and sex are social constructions and are produced as effects of power” (7). This discussion has contributed to the feminist concept of the social (rather than biological) construction of gender, but it ignores women’s personal experience to explain subordination; it illuminates the questions of oppression, empowerment, and sexual politics, but neglects the value of the subject as an agent of change, and therefore it also produces tensions with feminist theoreticians.⁷⁶

Chris Weedon’s *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* further highlights the relevance of Foucault’s theory of discourse for Feminism as a means of engendering knowledge and power. Seeing discourse as “always part of a wider network of power relations” (108), Weedon refers to *reverse discourse* as a mode of resisting the dominant power, of generating an alternative form of knowledge and of constructing

⁷⁶Ramazanoglu argues against Foucault’s rejection of the ‘agency of the human subject’, which is essential for feminist emancipation. She writes: “From Foucault’s perspective, it does not make sense to think of political change, as feminists conventionally have done, in terms of emancipation from oppression. It does make sense to think of transforming political relations through the production of new discourses and so new forms of power and new forms of self” (24).

subjectivity.⁷⁷ Discourse is not viewed as an opposition of ‘bipolar’ categories of powerful/powerless, but as active in a wider ‘field of force relations’ where cultural patterns are defined “through relations of class, race, gender, religion and age” (110). This view of discourse as shaped by dynamic power relations and as a means of subverting the dominant forces through resistance, opens new avenues for reading Latin American women authors such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Rosario Castellanos, Angeles Mastretta, and Elena Poniatowska, whose novels point beyond the private sphere of the sentimental story into a counter discourse that includes class, race, and gender.

In his inaugural lecture, *L'Ordre du discours*, at the Collège de France Michel Foucault analyzes the ‘genealogical’⁷⁸ aspects of the formation of discourse. Discourse is controlled by external procedures of power and desire, and by internal ideological selection by the author. Society controls discourse through systems of exclusion, “systèmes d’exclusion,” by naming the “forbidden,” as the language of sexuality, madness (the word of the irrational), and “a will to truth” that perpetuates the established truth—l’interdit, la folie, la volonté de vérité.—This *volonté de vérité* is supported by the

⁷⁷Weedon borrows this concept from Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality I* in which, speaking about homosexuality, he points to the “formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse” as means of demanding legitimacy and acknowledgment in the same ‘categories’ as it is condemned. Weedon describes it: “Reverse discourse enables the subjected subject of a discourse to speak in her own right” (109) .

⁷⁸In “Two lectures,” Foucault writes: “A genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges [sic] from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse” (85).

societal institutions, such as rituals, doctrines, education, and the law. To examine this phenomenon at its origins, Foucault proposes to

[r]emettre en question notre volonté de vérité; restituer au discours son caractère d'événement; lever enfin la souveraineté du signifiant. (53)

Foucault's critique of rationality, of the idea of a 'sujet fondateur' (49)⁷⁹ as a source of meaning, and his view of the event as not being fixed but 'discontinuous' and hazardous, mark a breach in the understanding of discourse and expose its violent origins in the 'force relations' of domination and repression. The relevance of these concepts extends to the construction of subjectivity, not as the product of our conscious determinations, but as regulated by external circumstances.

Discourse enters the literary text through a process of selection by the author. Régine Robin and Marc Angenot in their article "L'inscription du discours social dans le texte littéraire" posit the social relevance of the text as a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* or the image of the state of culture, and the importance of the author as an 'ideologue' who does not only reproduce the 'rumor' of social discourse but who establishes his authority through an ideological systematization of a chaotic material. Social discourse is

⁷⁹The "founding subject" animates language and establishes "des horizons de signification." In *L'Ordre du discours*, Foucault writes: "Dans son rapport au sens, le sujet fondateur dispose de signes, de marques, de traces, de lettres" (49).

represented by multiple voices and ideologies in a conflictive confrontation, without a hegemonic privilege.⁸⁰

These concepts of instability and polysemy in discourse echo Bakhtin's ideas of 'messiness' and polyphony. Sociocriticism inscribes the voices of the margins and periphery, of plural ideologies and stratifications, and of disrupting anti-hegemonic discourses.

Foucault's deconstruction of the 'founding subject,' and Robin and Angenot's inclusion of the social ideological texture in discourse will guide my analysis of the narrative of Rosario Castellanos as a reflection of her social and political commitment.

Bahín Canán (1957)⁸¹ tells the chronicle of the fall of the House Argüello, the landowners' dynasty in the isolated Chiapas region at the time of President Cárdenas's land reform. The novel orchestrates a plural ideology of voices that interact dialogically in a tense terrain of reversing master/slave relations. In an interview with Emmanuel

⁸⁰They write: "L'unité dont il convient de partir pour penser le travail littéraire, ce n'est pas (ou c'est rarement) l'idéologème univoque, mais ce sociogramme comme agglomérat, comme vecteur sémantique conflictuel" (58). *Sociogramme* is defined by Claude Duchet as: "Ensemble fou, instable, conflictuel, de représentations partielles centrées autour d'un noyau, en interaction les unes avec les autres" (Robin et Angenot 57). The exact reference to this quote is not given in this article. However, in another publication, "Pour une socio-poétique de l'imaginaire social," Régine Robin refers to this quote as originating in an unpublished seminar given by Duchet in the Fall of 1984 at the Mexican university UNAM, 106).

⁸¹Rosario Castellanos, *Bahín Canán* (1957; 18th reprint 1993; page citations are from the reprint edition). *The Nine Guardians*. Trans. and Preface Irene Nicholson (1992). All translations from the Spanish text are from this edition and referred to as *TNG*.

Carballo, Rosario Castellanos says that what drew her to write on ethnic subjects was the concern “with the mechanisms of human relations,” and to understand:

[Las] constantes que determinan la actitud de los sometidos frente a los sometedores, el trato que los poderosos dan a los débiles, el cuadro de reacciones de los sojuzgados, *la corriente del mal* que va de los fuertes a los débiles, y que regresa otra vez a los fuertes. (127, my emphasis)⁸²

Bahín Canán can be read as a novel of power-knowledge relations in a class and race context where the *stream of evil* held by the dominant class for centuries reaches a turning point at the moment when the subjugated acquire the knowledge, learn the language of the master, and establish a ‘reverse discourse’⁸³ that subverts the balance of power. This climactic epiphany is revealed at the shocking instance when Felipe, the Indian rebel, dares speak to César Argüello in Spanish, the forbidden language of the landlord.⁸⁴

⁸²“The factors that determine the attitude of the oppressed in relation to the oppressors, the treatment given by the powerful to the weak, the range of reactions of the subjugated, *the stream of evil* that is inflicted by the powerful on those who are weak, and which comes back again to the powerful.” This interview was first published by Carballo in 1965, and recompiled by Beth Miller and Alfonso González in *26 autoras del México actual* in 1978.

⁸³See above note 77.

⁸⁴Myriam Y. Jehenson in *Latin -American Women Writers. Class, Race, and Gender* sees a similar power play in Castellanos’ *The Nine Guardians* and Elena Garro’s “The Three” when she writes: “The indigenous peoples in their works, once they become conscious of how power/knowledge relationships have worked in their object formation, reappropriate the master’s tools and use them to re-construct themselves as subjects.”

The discourse of gender interlocks with the sociogram of subordination in the representation of women of different social strata in conflict with force relations of patriarchy and race.

This vast socio-ideological texture in Castellanos's novel can also be read as an example of heteroglossia, as described by Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel":

[L]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the *co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions* between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (DN 291; my emphasis)

The languages that co-exist in *Balún Canán* are definable in three basic socio-ideological discourses: feudal, marginalized, and the excluded Indian.⁸⁵ Language is used as a tool of domination and as a metaphor of power. Tzeltal is the language spoken by the Indian to communicate among themselves and with the 'patrón' or landlord who speaks Tzeltal with them. The women in the landholder's house speak only Spanish, but the Indians who serve them, like the child's nurse, the 'nana' must learn the language of the powerful. For this reason the establishment of a school on the grounds of the ranch is an

⁸⁵I call *feudal discourse* the use of language as the tool of domination ('instrumento de dominio' in Castellanos' nomenclature) that the landlord class exerts in a *feudal* lord-servant relationship, where the underprivileged lack basic rights of free mobility, education and self-expression. The language of the *marginalized* is the discourse of the periphery, of those who— like women or peasants— do not participate in the mainstream of power; and the *excluded Indian* is the Tzeltal or Tzotzil language and mental discourse of those who do not have access to the official language, Spanish, and its related power structure.

arena for a power-play contest. César Argüello first condescends by bringing his ‘bastard’ nephew to become the teacher, hoping to still keep the upper hand. Due to his marginal condition as illegitimate son, Eduardo’s ‘ideological’ language is not the same as his uncle’s. He does see the injustices perpetrated to the peasants, but he lacks the strength of character or motivation to be a positive agent for either side. Felipe, the ‘wandering’ peasant who had left the hacienda Chactajal and had become imbibed with the emancipating doctrines of Cardenas’s reforms, has learned the language of the ruler and will use it as an agency in his interaction with the power structure. The voice of the mute challenges the dominant. Felipe and his followers discard Eduardo as a teacher and demand one who would also speak Tzeltal. César is not ready to give in and wants to postpone the issue until after the processing of the sugar cane harvest. As a reply, the land estate is caught in a fire and the production is lost. Once more César will attempt to use his nephew as an ‘agent’ by giving him a letter for the authorities pleading for justice, but Eduardo is shot on the road and his corpse returned tied on the back of his horse. Chactajal has been destroyed by fire, and the dispossessed Argüello family has to abandon the land of their ancestors. The “stream of evil” has completed its cycle by flowing from the powerful to the weak and returning again to the powerful landlord. In a dialogic confrontation of conflicting socio-ideological ‘groups’, power and knowledge have inverted positions.⁸⁶

⁸⁶Debra Castillo in “Rosario Castellanos: Ashes without a Face” reads the discourse of power relations as a “double-voiced text” where “The juxtaposition of the two [cultures] creates not a harmonious whole, but a strategic positioning of an entire set of resistances to repression” (253).

Castellanos leaves an open ending as the discord remains unsolved, but what is important is the breakthrough in Foucault's sense of institutional power structures:

Felipe's transgression opens a new path of liberation in interracial struggles.⁸⁷

Similar patterns of power relations and dialogical interaction can be established among other characters in the novel. As a brief example, the conflict between the two children, the nameless seven-year-old girl narrator and her younger brother Mario represents the suppression of women in a patriarchal society. The child resents being born a woman because her mother gives most attention to her brother Mario, the "heir" who will carry the name of the family. She is forbidden to read the family annals that she slipped out of her father's cabinet, as her mother reminds her: "No juegues con esas cosas Son la herencia de Mario. Del varón" (60).⁸⁸ When Zoraida is told that the witches will devour her son, and the child falls ill, she protests that if they wanted to take her child, it should not be the boy (250). And at Mario's wake, the father's friend Jaime Roveló tells the little girl:

⁸⁷In *Surveiller et punir* Foucault discusses the function of acts of resistance in the network of power. He considers power "pas conçu comme une propriété, mais comme une stratégie" (31) that the dominant class exercises on the subjugated. Acts of rebellion do not radically destroy the dominant structures but create "des foyers d'instabilité dont chacun comporte ses risques de conflit, de luttes, et d'inversion au moins transitoire des rapports de forces" (32). This important concept of the "temporary inversion of the power relations" caused by "focuses of instability" is central to my analysis of Castellanos's fiction. (*Discipline and Punish*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. 1995, 27). In her next novel, *Oficio de Tinieblas*, Castellanos will further develop this tension in the "perpetual battle" (1995, 26) of the Chamula Indians and the landowners.

⁸⁸"You mustn't play with these things They are Mario's inheritance. The male child's" (*TNG* 59).

Ahora tu padre ya no tiene por quién seguir luchando. Ya estamos iguales. Ya no tenemos hijo varón. (281)⁸⁹

The defensive response of the child-narrator to her brother's privilege of power is to wish his death, and when it comes, she suffers from guilt. Only through her writing, will she subvert Mario's Subject position and break her silence and subjugated existence. This fictional instance reflects Rosario Castellanos's internal conflict and her prose will develop from these negative experiences of rejection and social injustice. Her condition of disadvantage will make her aware of the parallel pattern of exclusion endured by the Other Mexican, and through her writing Castellanos will act as agents of change.

Rosario Castellanos's feminine voice emerges from her ethical imperative to understand the situation of injustice of the dispossessed and the marginal position of women in the Mexican society of the 1950s. Writing *Bakín Canán* was her first attempt to fulfill the moral "debt" she felt towards the Indians she had known from childhood: "Me sentía en deuda, como individuo y como clase, con ellos."⁹⁰ In her fundamental interview with Emmanuel Carballo she states that she writes in order to elucidate what she does not

⁸⁹"Now your father has nobody to go on fighting for. We are in the same boat. Neither of us has a man-child any more" (TNG 263). These instances are autobiographical, as Elena Poniatowska writes in *¿Ay vida no me mereces!* When Rosario Castellanos's younger brother Benjamín died of appendicitis she heard her father saying "Ahora ya no tenemos por quién luchar" (91). [Now we no longer have someone for whom to fight].

⁹⁰"I felt indebted to them, as an individual and as a class." Quoted by Elena Poniatowska in *¿Ay vida, no me mereces!* 93.

understand.⁹¹ Her second novel *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962)⁹² is a process of unveiling the enigmatic character and behavior of the Chamula Indians of Chiapas in an effort to decipher their social conduct. In her Indian-related fiction,⁹³ Rosario Castellanos searches for the Other, she listens to the voice of the other ‘class’ to reproduce in a failed dialogue of two races, the sound of the subaltern⁹⁴ Indians and the dominant Ladinos, or non-Indians.⁹⁵ It was the “perturbing discovery of the existence of the other” that brought her to abandon the intimate sphere of her writing to embark on a novel with a social commitment. In *Mujer que sabe latín*, she confesses:

⁹¹Beth Miller and Alfonso González 129.

⁹²Rosario Castellanos, *Oficio de tinieblas*. (1962; 18th reprint 1996; page citations are to the reprint edition). *The Book of Lamentations*. Trans. Esther Allen (1996). All translations from the Spanish text are from this edition and referred to as *BoL*.

⁹³Castellanos does not want to be classified as an “indigenista” writer, as this tradition presents the Indian as ‘bon sauvage’ characters and exotic victims. She protests that this ‘simplicity makes her laugh’ and says that the Indians are as human as the white, and as such may be as violent as their masters. The problem lies in their ‘miserable’ living conditions that have “atrophied their best qualities” (Miller and González 130).

⁹⁴I choose the word “subaltern” not only to mean subordinated or subservient, but also as an introduction to my discussion later in Chapter Three where I use it in the context of Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and where it has the connotation of inferior to an elite. See note 62 in Chapter 3.

⁹⁵The word *ladino* is used to signify the privileged, non-Indian class. Joanna O’Connell explains the etymology and current usage of the word as the term originally was used to designate the language of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. In present Mexico, Ladino is not necessarily synonymous with White, nor with Mestizo. She writes: “These two ethnic categories, Indian and Ladino—socially constructed by colonialism and through mutual exclusion—continue to determine most aspects of life in Chiapas and other Mayan regions today” (1995, 51). For my discussion I follow Castellanos’s usage of Ladino to mean the non-Indians.

Lo que ocurre es que yo tuve un tránsito muy lento de la más cerrada de las subjetividades al *turbador descubrimiento de la existencia del otro* y, por último, a la ruptura del esquema de la pareja para *integrarme a lo social*, que es el ámbito en que el poeta se define, se comprende y se expresa. (203, my emphasis)⁹⁶

In my analysis of *Oficio de Tinieblas* I trace the voices of resistance as portrayed by Catalina, the Chamula priestess who leads her people to opposing their idols against the established religious order in the hope of achieving freedom and justice. I further examine interracial relations between the Chamula Indians and the Ladino world as the antagonism of ‘two linguistic consciousnesses’ from the perspective of Bakhtin’s concept of hybridization. Castellanos’s novel reflects the thwarted communication of two visions, a disencounter of cultures that represent conflicting perceptions of justice and lawful order.

Catalina Díaz Plujá, the infertile wife of the tribe’s Judge Pedro González Winiktón, rebels against her sterility. Unable to bear a child, she assumes a leading role in the community by becoming an *ilol*, a priestess who will mother stone idols and who will encourage her people to enact a crucifixion of her adoptive son, Domingo, in a desperate effort to countervail the supreme sacrifice of the Catholic faith and through it become

⁹⁶“What happens is that I had a very slow journey from the most hermetic subjectivity to *the perturbing discovery of the existence of the other* and, finally, to the breaking of the couple scheme in order to integrate myself into the social sphere, the locus where the poet defines, understands, and expresses himself.” It is relevant to point out that this discourse and gaze toward the Other class was not present in previous women’s fiction with the possible exception of Gómez de Avellaneda who was aware of the situation of injustice in slavery. Writers such as de la Parra, Bombal, and Valdivieso dealt with women’s problems in their immediate social surroundings.

equal to the *caxlanes*,⁹⁷ the powerful ladinos. Driven by her handicap of physical sterility, Catalina is a dynamic and central figure in the Chamula world. She acts as a voice of resistance and transgression. As an *ilol* she becomes the leading force in uniting her people in their effort to regain their displaced⁹⁸ faith and self-esteem. Her physical drawback will engender anxiety and a sense of rejection and loneliness that will develop into a yearning for power. The priestess Catalina assumes the voice of the oppressed Chamula community to gain representation in their struggle for justice and liberation against the Ladino rule that holds the symbols of dominion.

Catalina is an example of a woman whose voice unfolds from a situation of disadvantage and pain, and from a will to overcome an oppressive condition. Deprived of the role that society demands of a woman, to bear children, she assumes the symbolic maternity of her tribe. Her voice acquires authority through an alliance with her people and the Indian oral tradition. In Susan S. Lanser's terms, Catalina's "discursive authority ... is produced interactively" (*Fictions of Authority* 6) as it relates to a 'receiving' audience, her Indian community. In her close association with the lost memory of her people, Catalina's voice can be read under the lenses of feminist dialogics where the

⁹⁷Words originating in the Tzeltal language, such as *ilol* for priestess, *caxlán* for the white or those who speak *castellano*, the language of Castilla, are used interchangeably through the novel.

⁹⁸I do not use this term in the psychoanalytic sense of redirecting energies and emotions, but in the sense of Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary that defines it as: "to remove from the usual or proper place; to expel or force to flee from home or homeland." In this sense, it connotes the violent removal and replacement of the center, of the *plaza* that was exerted by the cultural imposition of the Spanish conquest. It is not only a physical, but also a *cultural* displacement.

voices of women acquire power in discourse through a noncompliance with the dominant speech. Catalina's prophetic language springs from a recollection of past beliefs and hopes, from the oral transmission of an eradicated past. From a Bakhtinian perspective Catalina's language "oscillates" between the centrifugal force of orality and the centripetal forces of the established order and religion.

Her speech is stratified in plural levels of resistance, a rejection of her personal handicap, an ideological confrontation with the power of the Church, and a political condemnation of the Ladino sense of (in)justice. In this sense Catalina's language represents the indigenous voices of the Chamula people, their frustrations and hopes, their suffering and struggle towards equality and human dignity.

Catalina's leadership skills develop as a reaction to situations of injustice. Through the novel the reader perceives that at the origins of the interracial relations lies a violation of human dignity. The first encounter of Tzotzil women with Ladino girls ends in the assault of the merchandise the rural women bring to sell in the city. The one girl who could escape, Marcela, arrives in Ciudad Real only to be raped by the patriarch of the town, Leonardo Cifuentes. Shocked by the harassment, Catalina assumes her leading role as she defends Marcela from her mother's anger and offers to take her home under her protection. Catalina realizes that the innocent girl has been abused by a man and is moved by compassion and also by "un oscuro impulso" (*Oficio* 44)⁹⁹ that we later find out is the scheme to marry the dishonored girl to her idiot brother Lorenzo. In this manner, Marcela

⁹⁹ "a dark impulse" (*BoL* 38).

will ironically receive ‘a name’ “un nombre para cubrir su cabeza, título de esposa ante la gente” (45).¹⁰⁰ Her child born ‘on the day of the eclipse’ is Domingo, a boy who will grow up under Catalina’s and Pedro’s love and care. This episode is an example of her struggle against her fate and against the injustices perpetrated to her community. Her husband Pedro, even though he is a Judge in the Chamula world, is impotent in bringing justice to his people when they are victims of the Ladino lords. His inactive behavior is the result of a long history of unpunished violations and crimes against his kinsmen, not the least the rape of his own sister. But Pedro also tolerates Catalina’s wrongdoing when marrying Marcela to her brother. Despite his position of authority in the tribe, Pedro is paralyzed to act in defense of the double victim, Marcela. This text shows Rosario Castellanos’s ambiguous approach to her Indian protagonists. Both Catalina and Pedro are conscious of the violations they witness but their reactions are inadequate. Pedro is well intentioned but weak; and Catalina has the strength to help her people in need but is also motivated by dark forces. Her doings are associated with witches and tenebrae.¹⁰¹

Catalina becomes the religious leader of her people when her deeds acquire a supernatural dimension. This phenomenon develops from an inner anxiety that originates

¹⁰⁰“a name to cover her head, the title of wife to confront others with” (*BoL* 39).

¹⁰¹In a soliloquy she confesses her witchlike inclinations which spring from feeling rejected: “Lo arrancaron de mi regazo como si ya hubiera crecido y madurado. Me dejaron otra vez sola. Bruja, mala, ilol. Castigan el daño que hice, el que quiero hacer. San Juan Fiador, ten compasión de mí! (1962, 191). “They snatched him from my lap as if he were already grown and ripened. They left me alone again. Bruja, evil, woman, ilol! They punish the harm I did, the harm I want to do. San Juan Guarantor, have pity on me!” (*BoL* 204).

after her maternal care for Domingo is no longer asked for. As the boy is big enough to accompany Pedro in his wanderings, Catalina feels lonely and abandoned. In her distress, she remembers a childhood experience when she and her brother Lorenzo found a cave with a demoniacal figure that made them tremble and caused Lorenzo to lose his speech. She now senses an urge to return to the place and find the old idols. In a moment of revelation, she articulates a prophecy:

—Está madurando el tiempo; se acercan los grandes días,
los días nuestros. El hacha del leñador está derrumbando el
árbol que ha de caer para destruir muchos. Te lo digo a ti y
a ti. Que lo que se acerca no te coja desprevenido. Alístate,
preparate. Porque se aproxima un gran riesgo.
(*Oficio* 195)¹⁰²

The cave of Tzajal-hemel becomes a place of cult and pilgrimage. The sacristan of the Church of San Juan Chamula visits the temple and sees his power challenged. Xaw Ramírez, who has access to both cultures, chooses to betray his kin by denouncing the pagan activities. In an act of violence, the parish priest Manuel Mandujano destroys the stone gods as symbols of idolatry. Catalina suffers defeat and humiliation. She experiences a new dimension of loneliness, she feels forsaken. The Ladino forces of Church and landowners castigate her rebellion with rage. The humble huts of the Chamulas are burnt down and the women imprisoned and sent to Ciudad Real. This

¹⁰²“The time is growing ripe; the great days are approaching, our days. The woodcutter’s ax is chopping the tree which must fall in order to destroy many people. I am telling you and you. Do not let what is coming catch you off guard. Get ready. Be prepared. Because a great peril is coming soon” (*BoL* 209).

marks a new step in racial confrontation.¹⁰³ Catalina cannot understand that her delirium and priestess acts should be condemned as a form of insurrection. This incident illustrates Bakhtin's concept of hybridization as the "two consciousnesses" of the Ladino and Chamula cultures diverging. Catalina and her followers see in the idols a reassurance of their hope for liberation while the priest sees them as an act of disobedience. The conflict of power where the subjugated awaken to their abject condition and express their will to change is punished by the dominant forces who cannot listen nor understand the voices of the other class, as they are accustomed to their servitude and silence.¹⁰⁴ A dialogue is not possible and the prose of Rosario Castellanos points to the cultural barriers of mistrust and anxiety that separate the two visions, the dominant and the suppressed.

After the imprisoned women return to their village, Catalina embarks on a new phase of her leadership. The *ilol* shapes new idols and reestablishes her practices at the cave of Tzajal-hemel. The crusade is revived with a new impetus. Leonardo Cifuentes and his team of landowners alarm the Bishop who ignores the threat. But the emissary of the

¹⁰³Mario Benedetti in his article "Rosario Castellanos y la incomunicación racial" (1963) points out the lack of communication between the two races that "suggests a continuation of distrust and animosity." *Letras del continente mestizo* (1967, 167-168).

¹⁰⁴A decade before Foucault wrote on the intrinsic connections between discipline and power, the fiction of Castellanos was showing how power relations operate within this system and how relations were exacerbated by the coexistence of two races. In his second lecture on *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault writes: "But I believe that we find ourselves in a kind of blind alley: it is not through recourse to sovereignty against discipline that the effects of disciplinary power can be limited, because sovereignty and disciplinary mechanisms are two absolutely integral constituents of the general mechanism of power in our society" ([1972]1977, 108).

Church, Father Mandujano, goes back to the cave aided by armed civil forces, this time to meet his own death in a bloody massacre. Sexton Xaw escapes frightened. The Chamulas now hold the upper hand but not for long as the Ladinos orchestrate an Indian uprising in order to convince the Governor and the phlegmatic Bishop to support them, and also to create unrest and animosity in the population against the Indians. Nevertheless a group of peasants who had come into Ciudad Real following orders of their master were accused of the uprising and incarcerated. It is a poignant example of the divergence of minds between Ladinos and Chamulas and of the implications that Spanish, as the language of the powerful, has a definite influence on the people. The judicial cross-examination could not bring any light to the conflict as the inculpatated did not understand the terminology of “tomar por asalto” and “vasta sublevación” (*Oficio* 282)¹⁰⁵ for which they were blamed. The bad faith and cynicism of the Ladinos had maneuvered this plot in order to raise fear against the Indians and suspicion in the government against Fernando Ulloa, the envoy in charge of the redistribution of the land. Two angles of vision on justice contend here: the Indians’ natural sense of equity and the Ladino’s position that interprets legality as a tool to defend their own interests.

As Holy Week approaches, the political and religious polarization between the opposing fractions intensifies. After the false alarm of the imminence of an Indian attack at Ciudad Real disseminates, hostility and panic load the atmosphere. The Ladino masters are determined to inflict an exemplary punishment on the rebelling Chamulas. In this

¹⁰⁵ “take by assault” and “vast uprising” (*BoL* 304).

tense climate, the population celebrates the Holy Week. In a syncretism of cultures, the Indians attend the traditional Catholic ceremonies at the Church of San Juan Fiador and Catalina takes the child Domingo to the Good Friday service. At the sight of the multitude participating in the religious ceremony, she feels again forsaken and her maternal relationship to her community betrayed. Her role as priestess so closely imbibed in the burden of her sterility is illustrated in the words of Castellanos:

Catalina, la estéril, pero que sabía de la maternidad más que tantas madres, había dado de sí, como en el parto, en cada acto de adoración, de admonición, de consejo. Su cuerpo (¿era todavía su cuerpo?) se había convertido en un receptáculo, dócil para albergar lo sobrenatural, transparente para dejar que se manifestara el milagro Que venga el sediento y beba del agua serenada! Que el que padezca hambre devore esta sustancia que ha de confortarlo! Y ardía, para iluminar la tiniebla donde se pierde el ignorante. (314)¹⁰⁶

Her sterility at the origin of her resistance has evolved into a maternity towards her Chamula community in her role as *ilol* and carrier of the hopes of justice. Childless, she feels her womb ready to receive a wonder, eager to mother the hungry and unfortunate. Her handicap has led her to transgression and disobedience of the Christian rule. As she

¹⁰⁶“Catalina, the barren woman who knew more of motherhood than many mothers, had given of herself, as in childbirth, in every act of adoration, admonition, council. Her body (was it still her body?) had become a receptacle, meekly lodging the supernatural, transparent so the miracle could manifest itself Let those who are thirsty come and drink of the cool, clear water! Let those who are hungry devour this substance that will comfort them! And she burned to illuminate the darkness where those who are ignorant become lost” (*BoL* 340).

watches the Good Friday ritual she remains silent, bitter in her disillusionment to see her stone gods deserted. She ponders:

El silencio es la boca hambrienta del abismo. Hay que
aplaclarla arrojando a su fondo lo que ha de saciar su
hambre: una víctima. (317)¹⁰⁷

In a fast growing trance she utters a scream.¹⁰⁸ She is conscious that the only way to end the silence of the subjugation of her people is by offering a victim to the gods, a crucified victim that would pair the Christian symbol of salvation. She is the *ilol*, the liaison of the supernatural powers to her people who will carry the sacrifice to its last consequences. Domingo, “the one born during the eclipse” is her chosen prey, he stands beside the wooden cross. As a carrier of the “potencias oscuras” she tells her people that the times of tribulation are over:

¹⁰⁷“Silence is the ravenous mouth of the abyss. It must be placated by flinging the only thing that will satiate its hunger into its depths: a victim” (*BoL* 343).

¹⁰⁸A scream is an important element to end subjugated silence and emerge with a voice. In *¡Ay vida, no me mereces!* Poniatowska comments on Castellanos’s famous speech of 15 February 1971 at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City where she denounced the injustice of the discrimination against women. According to Poniatowska women in power had assimilated their voices to the choir of men in politics and had not dealt with women’s condition. But Rosario’s denunciation was a “grito,” a scream that has characterized her writings since 1955 and her work within the “engranaje oficial,” the official network ([1985] 1992, 46). This shriek or scream is a recurrent metaphor in writings by Latin American women to enunciate their act of taking up the word in a violent manner, their way of being born into language, as the usage by Lispector and Valenzuela also suggests. This “grito” may also be interpreted as a scream that subverts the “grito de independencia” at the start of the independence wars against colonial Spain in the 19th century.

Las potencias oscuras se reconcilian con sus siervos y les conceden el don que ha de hacerlos semejantes, en fuerza, en mando, a los caxlanes. Derramarán la sangre de un inocente y los que la beban han de levantarse llenos de ímpetu. Cristo tenían de más los otros. *Cristo también tendrán ahora ellos.* (*Oficio 318*, my emphasis)¹⁰⁹

In a parody of the Old and New Testaments, Castellanos duplicates the rebellion of the angels in Genesis who want to become equal to God, and appropriates the paramount sacrifice of Christianity. In an act of ideological defiance, Catalina deconstructs the religious *founding subject* of the Catholic Church. Led by their woman prophet, they will engender their own redeemer. The scene that follows is a nightmare of horror. Sacristan Xaw is now at the side of the Chamulas contributing to the ferocity of the event. After the consummation of the ordeal the priestess Catalina speaks:

—Aquí llegamos todos al final de la cuenta con el ladino. Hemos padecido injusticia y persecuciones y adversidades. Quizas alguno de nuestros antepasados pecó y por eso nos fue exigido este tributo. Dimos lo que teníamos y saldamos la deuda. Pero el ladino quería más, siempre más. Nos ha secado los tuétanos en el trabajo; nos ha arrebatado nuestras posesiones; nos ha hecho adivinar las órdenes y los castigos en una lengua extranjera. Y

¹⁰⁹“The dark powers are reconciled with their slaves and have given them the gift that will make them equal in strength and power to the Caxlanes. When the blood of an innocent is spilled, those who drink it will rise up with the new might. Christ was what the others had over them. Now they would have Christ” (*BoL* 344). The last two sentences in this translation do not transmit the idea that Christ as the redeemer had been the possession of the Caxlanes and that, through this sacrifice of the innocent Domingo, the Chamulas have gained a source of power through their own redeemer. My translation would be: “Christ had been for too long the privilege of the others. Now we also have our Christ.”

nosotros soportábamos, sin protestas, el sufrimiento,
 porque ninguna señal nos indicaba que era suficiente.
 Pero de pronto los dioses se manifiestan, las potencias
 oscuras se declaran. Y su voluntad es que nos igualemos
 con el ladino que se ensoberbecía con la posesión de su
 Cristo.

Ahora nosotros también tenemos un Cristo. (*Oficio* 324)¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰“We have all reached the end of the story with the Ladino. We have suffered injustice and persecution and adversity. Perhaps some of our ancestors sinned and that is why this tribute was exacted from us. We gave what we had and paid the debt. But the Ladino wanted more, always more. He has dried up the marrow of our bones with work: he has robbed us of our possessions; he has made us guess at the orders and punishments he gives in a foreign language. And we endured the suffering without protest because no sign told us that it was enough.

But suddenly the gods showed themselves, the dark powers spoke. And it is their will that we become equal to the Ladino who grew haughty in the possession of his Christ. Now we too have a Christ” (*BoL* 350).

Even though the external circumstances have a historical origin,¹¹¹ Rosario Castellanos is using the voice of her protagonist to enumerate and condemn the Ladino exploitation and abuse. This scene is the culmination of Catalina's labor as leader of the Chamulas. Her trance has brought her to sacrifice her adoptive son, the child she mothered who had been estranged from her. She is the prophet that will lead her people to a promised land. Driven by her pledge of redemption, the Indians plunder the farms with brutality and rancor in the hope of becoming masters. They are convinced that by having their own Christ they will become immortal. But the death of one of them in a confrontation soon disrupts their beliefs. Baffled and enraged, they invade the temple of San Pedro Chenhalhó and massacre the sheltered women and children.¹¹² Catalina's

¹¹¹On the back cover of her book Rosario Castellanos states that these events are based on the historical fact of the Chamula uprising of 1867, which culminated in the crucifixion of an Indian Christ. In her fiction, she moved the events to the more recent upheaval connected to Cardenas's land reform. In addition, the revitalization of the native beliefs in the form of idols, its link to the 1867 Tzotzil rebellions and massacres in Chiapas are historically documented in local periodicals and in the chronicles of Cristóbal Molina *War of the Castes: Indian Uprisings in Chiapas, 1867-70*. Trans. Ernest Noyes and Dolores Morgandanes in 1934, and Vicente Pineda, *Historia de la sublevaciones habidas en el estado de Chiapas* published in Chiapa in 1888. A summary of the relevant passages of these texts can be read in Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King. The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas P, 1981), chapter 9, 119-125. The priestess can be identified as Agustina Gomes Cheche, but the person who incited the people to crucify one of their own caste was the *fiscal* Pedro Díaz Cuscat. Bricker reproduces Pineda's description of the crucifixion on Good Friday 1868 of a 'ten-or eleven-year-old boy named Domingo Gomes Checheb who was nailed to a cross in the plaza of Tzajalhemel.' 121. See also Joanna O'Connell's discussion on the matter in *Prospero's Daughter. The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* (1995) 133-136.

¹¹²Frantz Fanon in *Les damnés de la terre* [1961; *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963] points to the chaotic behavior and "aggressive patterns" that people develop, when obliged to inhibit the expressions of their own culture. He writes: "La négation culturelle,

paradoxical triumph is short lived. The words of the *ilol* have not been fulfilled. She has lost the battle and her power over her people. Shivering, she recalls the image of the crucified child and feels “como bestia capturada en una trampa,” (*Oficio* 345)¹¹³ a victim of her ‘dark trade.’

Catalina’s role as a mother of her people can also be read as an intertext of the biblical Maria, the Virgin who *mothers* the redeemer of mankind. The Christian mythology portrays an obedient Virgin who is the loving mother and the consoler of the people. Catalina is also a Virgin mother who brings hope and consolation but she is associated with *dark forces*, with the power of witches that communicate with the supernatural. Her *oficio*, her craft is bleak, and born from a situation of rebellion, not of submission. If Catalina is a *Mater dolorosa* who laments the death of her son, she does not feel as a martyr but as a “trapped beast,” cheated by her gods and dreams of salvation. The biblical archetype is transformed in the female character of Castellanos into a witch-like figure who acquires speech to carry her people out of subservience.¹¹⁴ In a

le mépris des manifestations nationales motrices ou émotionnelles, la mise hors-la-loi de toute spécialité d’organisation contribuent à engendrer des conduites agressives chez le colonisé. Mais ces conduites sont de type réflexe, mal différenciées, anarchiques, inefficaces. L’exploitation coloniale, la misère, la famine endémique acculent de plus en plus le colonisé à la lutte ouverte et organisée. Progressivement et de façon imperceptible la nécessité d’un affrontement décisif se fait prégnante et est ressentie par la grande majorité du peuple” (1968, 168). Fanon’s text is an anti-colonial discourse and refers to the conditions in Africa, but the situation of exploitation and the atmosphere of native revolt is comparable to the one described by Castellanos in Mexico. In this point the Latin American feminist discourse intersects with post-colonial theory.

¹¹³“like an animal captured in a trap” (*BoL* 373).

¹¹⁴As in Lispector’s *The Passion*, Castellanos in *Oficio de tinieblas* subverts the Bible, a founding text of Western culture. But Castellanos’s writing adds the important

time of despair she articulates the repressed aspirations of her clan. At the end of the story, when the *nana* ends her tale, Catalina remains as a woman of great fame but whose name is associated with evil powers and should be erased from memory.¹¹⁵

The tone of this text does not reflect the orality of the Indians, but an intellectual stylization of a writer who is in possession of her tools. It is an elaborated syncretism of the Indian victimization by the Ladino landowners and a cry of protest that echoes the Chamula rebellion of 1867 and the confrontations during Cardenas's Land reform in the 1930s. Castellanos's discourse reproduces her political statement that condemns racial abuse, colonial rule, and the barriers imposed by the privileged use of the Spanish language.

element of racial confrontation and shows a similar dynamic to the discourse of Black feminism. Castellanos and other Latin American feminist writers coincide with Afro-American discourse in deconstructing master-narratives to show how they legitimate slavery. Both currents also show how women, who are marginalized and excluded as persons, are affirming their existence as subjects by deconstructing the texts that denied their participation as legitimate speaking subjects.

¹¹⁵Stacey Schlau in her article "Conformity and Resistance to Enclosure: Female Voices in Rosario Castellanos' *Oficio de Tinieblas* [*The Dark Service*]" also links Catalina's doings to Catholic *mariology*. By portraying Catalina as a "spiritual mother," Castellanos "approximates and simultaneously subverts Mary in her maternal aspects as mediator between her son's and humanity's reality." *Latin American Literary Review* 12.24 (Spring-Summer 1984), 52.

Oficio de Tinieblas intends to unfold the hidden motivations of the behavior of the opposing forces in an effort to examine interracial relations in Mexico. The long class struggle between the owners of the land and the dispossessed is exposed under the lenses of a cultural clash as the Ladinos do not see the Indians as worthy human beings. The Indian child of the wet nurse is left to die as ‘worthless’ in order to yield his mother’s milk to breast-feed the daughter of the Cifuentes master.

As a daughter of the Landowners, Castellanos has access to both worlds, and she can differentiate the nuances in their character traits. Her portrait of the native is by no means an idealization. Indians are depicted as ignorant and associated with alcohol and superstition; but they are also portrayed as the result of a long-lived victimization and deprivation that has imbued them with mistrust and fear of the Ladino. Uneducated in the rhetoric of the holders of the law, they do not understand the rules of the game, and the detriment of the language barrier places them in a situation of disadvantage.

In this complex situation, the conflict of minds goes beyond the bipolar opposition Ladino/Indian. The idealist and cultivated emissary of the Government, Fernando Ulloa, meets with a barrier of communication as he wants to discuss with Cifuentes and the lawyer of the town the new laws on the rights of the Indians. Their minds cannot find a common ground as the Ladinos consider themselves the owners of the land on historical grounds and are not prepared to yield on their acquired rights even if at the origins of their right lies a crime, as in the case of Leonardo Cifuentes who usurped the land of his half brother, killed “accidentally” by him. The landowners possess the land and the power. In the universe of Rosario Castellanos, the Indians have access to the

realm of their memories and dreams of foregone glories. They have been displaced, driven out of their territories. Catalina can be leader in the microcosm of her tribe, but outside she is subordinated, like her race, to the will of the oppressors. Catalina represents the hopes and dreams of her race and the author gives her people a voice through her actions, but her thoughts are manipulated by the author. The prose of Rosario Castellanos is a radical attempt to approach the Other Mexican, the non-Ladino, the dispossessed native, and the women in their struggle against their marginalization and fate.

Literary criticism has often stamped women mediators as traitors. The famous interpretation of Octavio Paz of the Malinche as traitor in the 1952 *Laberinto de la Soledad* has initiated the stereotypization of the mediator. In her renowned study *Plotting Women, Gender and Representation in Mexico*, Jean Franco argues that a triple treachery takes place when an author appropriates the oral traditions of the community, as they first transform the oral tale into a written text, thus “threatening the very existence of the community.” This exercise leads into a second type of treachery as it betrays the very ‘nature’ of the story. The third betrayal is “that of the community between writer and reader” as the actor of the tale is a ‘nonreading’¹¹⁶ public. Referring to Castellanos’s *Oficio de Tinieblas*, she writes:

¹¹⁶Term used by Debra Castillo in reinforcing Franco’s argument when she writes: “The treachery may take place on other levels as well, for by abandoning the implicit public (nonreading) for the other, mainstream public, the writer betrays herself once again, establishing a contact with a reader that is not her reader, making a space for the ineluctable reappropriation of the margins” (*Talking Back* 220).

[T]reachery takes place not so much between writer and reader as on the level of the enunciated—that is, in the space where plot, character, and novelistic time are interwoven. These novels therefore register the first type of treachery, that which takes place in the shift from the community bound by orally transmitted culture to the nation. (*Plotting Women* 132)

This accusation made by two central critics in the Latin American feminist spectrum leaves one to ponder on the image that the North American academia has of the southern hemisphere. Rosario Castellanos approaches the question of the Other, not with an intention to ‘betray’ their cultural heritage, but in an effort “to understand” the mentality and behavior of the Chamula Indians. Castellanos is not necessarily the post-colonial writer of the upper class, whom Castillo associates with Trinh Minh-ha’s ‘author’ “situating herself *above* her work” (220).¹¹⁷ Castellanos captures the plurality of languages, the multiple consciousnesses that coexist in a society where more than one world view abide. By listening to the voice of the neglected Other, the author avoids a monologic position and attempts to reproduce the sounds of the marginalized in a heteroglossic orchestration with the Ladino world she knows too well. Having suffered discrimination before her younger brother, she was capable of sensing the injustices perpetrated by the Ladinos in the interracial conflict. If the Indian in the previous Latin American fiction has been regarded as the ‘barbarian’ Other, the novels of Castellanos are

¹¹⁷Castillo refers to Trinh T. Minh-ha’s statement that the Third World woman writer: “as a holder of speech, she usually writes from a position of power, creating as an “author,” situating herself *above* her work and existing *before* it, rarely simultaneously *with* it” (*Woman, Native, Other* 6).

a turning point in the representation of alterity, free of the binary discrepancies. Even if one accepts the argument that Castellanos writes for a public who cannot *read her text*, Franco and Castillo's vision of the treachery performed by the allocation of the legends of the oral tradition can only respond to an essentialist and stereotyped view of ethnocentricity or a puritan reading of the native Other. The portrait and psychology of Catalina have been constructed with pieces of historical events transplanted into a modern political and social reality in a positive effort to reproduce the failed communication of two parallel cultures. *Bahín Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas* are attempts at bridging the gap of (mis)understandings between Chamulas and Ladinos, confronting two opposite *Weltanschauungen* in an effort to establish a dialogic interaction.¹¹⁸ But the voices do not meet, they run parallel, as a double voice of the dominant and the mute and of two cultures that are separated by a wall of anxiety and distrust.

¹¹⁸In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin writes: "a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even to an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice. Thus dialogic relationships can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically" ([1984] 1997, 184. This definition draws near Castellanos' text that counterposes both 'semantic positions' and where the word of one sector 'permeates' the other as water filters through a wall. The example of Domingo's crucifixion can be read as an attempt at a double voiced speech, where the Christian story infiltrates into the Indian, the *other's* utterance. Although Bakhtin did not include the categories of ethnicity and power relations in his theoretical writings, his dialogical approach can be developed with the new categories of race and class in reading Latin American texts. In my analysis, Bakhtin's concept of polyphony that includes multiple voices intersects with feminist gender theory, with post-colonial views, and with Latin American women's critique.

From the private to the public space: The role of women in the building of the nation: Marta Lynch and Angeles Mastretta

La señora Ordoñez (1967) by Marta Lynch expands the feminine experience to the public sphere. Blanca Maggi is not only the protagonist of a commonplace sentimental story, but through the political engagement of her husband, she participates in the rise and fall of Peronism of Argentina in 1945 and after. The novel introduces a multiplicity of social languages that intertwine with the voice of the protagonist and radiate an ample picture of society and the political unrest at the moment of the clashes between the power of the oligarchy and the emergent popular forces of Perón's 'Justicialismo'. It could be said that 'heteroglossia' enters the feminine novel.

For my analysis I shall employ Bakhtin's concept of *sociological stylistics* which he describes as:

The internal social dialogism of novelistic discourse requires the concrete social context of discourse to be exposed, to be revealed as the force that determines its entire stylistic structure, its "form" and its "content," determining it not from without, but from within. (DN 300)

La señora Ordoñez presents a complex 'stratification' of ideologies that interact in the life of Blanca Maggi, her conservative education in a second generation Italian middle class family, the Catholic and restricted upbringing through her 'Castilian' mother, the political slogans of Peronism contrasted with ideas of radicalism in Blanca's father,

some flashes in the artistic community, and the emotional discourse of marriage and adultery in her personal sphere.

Blanca Maggi Ordoñez is a woman of 40 who has two basic preoccupations in life: to overcome boredom, and to stop the process of aging.¹¹⁹ In an interview with M.P. de Francescato, Marta Lynch says that *La señora Ordoñez* tells “la lucha empecinada de una mujer con el tiempo de su vida y con su desubicación” (41).¹²⁰ Blanca describes herself as “la mujer niña ávida de sensaciones de amor y alegría, la cazadora en cercado ajeno, la ansiosa de emoción que se interroga con temor si todo ha terminado” (293).¹²¹

The social context where Blanca is confronted with the political discourse is the underground organization of the “Alianza,” the “fuerzas de choque” or shock troops of the illegal fascist groups that supported Perón before he came to power. Married at 19 with Pablo Achino, a fanatic activist, Blanca espouses his cause to compensate for their frustrated conjugal relationship. Her political involvement becomes a game where she

¹¹⁹Marcia L. Welles in her article “The Changing Face of Woman in Latin American Fiction” analyzes novels by four women authors, Bombal, Serrana, Bullrich and Lynch and points out *aging* as an important element in the ‘use—value’ of the ‘commodity’ woman. She writes: “The body is thus a sign, an indicator of a woman’s being-in-the-world as an object valued for its erotic attraction and fertility.” And she later adds: “Because the value of a woman is not intrinsic but extrinsic, dependent upon the evaluation of others, the characters are painfully aware that their commodity value decreases with age.” *Women in Hispanic Literature. Icons and Fallen Idols*. Ed. Beth Miller 286.

¹²⁰“The stubborn struggle of a woman with time in her existence and with her disorientation.”

¹²¹“The childish woman avid for sensations of love and happiness, the hunter in a foreign land, craving for emotions, who asks herself frightened if it is all over.”

could participate in the beginnings, the triumph, and the return of Peronism. Later in life, remembering her experience in a flashback, she is aware of the impact the political discourse had on her:

Tan salvaje e ignorante como era me adherí a su credo de implacabilidad y a sus resortes de codicia, racismo, odio a los judíos y exaltada pasión por el país. Cuanto pudiera conducimos a los pies y a la voluntad del líder nos lo contagiamos como una dulce y misteriosa enfermedad, y como todo lo que había odiado en la familia, desde el orden hasta la convención, quedaba atrás, me sentí dichosa. (121-122)¹²²

Her rigid upbringing is ever present in her development. When attending a Party Congress she hears the rhetoric of the passionate Cantón, and the voice of her father's 'Radicalismo' reverberates in her mind. For the middle-class liberal Ernesto Maggi, the Alianza is "un cuerpo de asesinos"¹²³ and the 'descamisados' an infection in the promised land of Argentina. Amid the excitement of the political speeches, Blanca senses the "ácido placer de mandar a mis padres al demonio"¹²⁴ (123) and confirms her splitting with the paternal ideology.

¹²²"I was so savage and ignorant that I adhered to their creed of implacability and to their greed, racism, hatred against Jews, and their exalted passion for the country. Whatever could bring us to the feet and will of the leader contaminated us like a sweet and mysterious illness, and as everything that I had hated in my family, order and convention, was left behind, I felt fortunate."

¹²³"a group of assassins."

¹²⁴"The acid pleasure of sending my parents to hell."

Even though she participates in the effervescence of events, she sometimes questions their ethics. When the Axis is defeated, she sees her comrades change flags and hang out the French and English colors and also buys a flag. But marching down Florida Street, Blanca feels loathsome:

Todavía rememoro el asco cuando las otras movían sus
banderitas multicolores ... y es ahí que me remordía la
conciencia y sobrevenía el asco. (125)¹²⁵

At this stage of her interaction with the political debate, Blanca participates as an enthusiastic novice contaminated by their fanaticism. The experience serves as a double outlet for her emotional adversity and as a revolt against her authoritarian upbringing, but it does not transform her from within. A vivid instance occurs when the Polish activist Wanda enrages the other women with her slogans and Blanca remains silent, or when signing as a volunteer she is asked to declare her affiliation, she only writes “nacionalista” (126).

Perón reaches power and Pablo Achino stands high on the ladder of favorites. Blanca, however, has her reservations. At an Opera Gala in the elegant Teatro Colón, she feels no excitement when Perón and Evita walk in, she rather humorously associates his appearance with the tango idol Carlos Gardel. During intermission she has the opportunity to speak to the First Lady and Blanca cannot help being transported “with an adolescent fervor” (228) that makes her promise to be a “good” party member. She again

¹²⁵“I still remember the nausea when the other women shook their multicolored flags ... and where my conscience felt remorse and revulsion.”

encounters the Dame at the mourning of her husband, who had died as a hero in a violent assault with the opposition. At the end of this episode a civil war with bombings and church burnings brings Perón's glory to a close. Shaken by the great turmoil, Blanca believes that the history of her life has been "cut in two." She describes her experience as 'epic':

Aunque no se quiera fue nuestra epopeya y la acepté con alegría. La viví con felicidad agitando mi matraca Aún me enorgullece imaginar que supe verla y permanecí fiel a las convicciones que arrastraba; quizá fue esa la mayor perdurabilidad de una pasión, el enconado afán de hallar un país ... quise una Argentina libre donde no haya que reírse del Himno y la Bandera. (342)¹²⁶

The last instance of her political experience occurred ten years after the death of Pablo Achino when she was already married to Raúl Ordoñez and enjoying a comfortable bourgeois existence. An invitation to the Party Congress awakes her spirit of adventure and revives her political enthusiasm. At the meeting, however, she is told that there has been a mistake, that only registered party members can partake in the conference. Her fervor and commitment deflate and Blanca abandons her involvement. The public trajectory ends in a retreat. Blanca's dialogic interaction with the political scene in

¹²⁶ "Whether we want it or not it was our epopee and I accepted it happily. I agitated my rattle ... It makes me proud to imagine that I was aware of it and remained loyal to its convictions; perhaps this was the longest lived passion, the stubborn solicitude to find a country ... where one did not need to laugh at the National Anthem or at the Flag."

Argentina of the 40s and 50s had served as a means to channel her resistance to the patriarchal home but did not shape her character substantially.

Blanca Maggi's 'social dialogism' can be explored in plural contexts in both the public and private domain. Her mediocre attempts at art introduce another angle of feminine integration in a non-domestic space. Her personal experience as daughter, wife and mother opens new perspectives in the social dialogue. As compared with the previously analyzed novels, the sentimental journey of the heroine is a story of bovarism and ennui, of dissatisfaction and transgression, of adventure and failure. Lynch's document brings the sexual violation of morals to a more overt description and the psychological portraits to a more complex plane. Her transgressions reach grotesque overtones, as in the "master/dog" (85) relationship with her husband Raul Ordoñez, or in the abjection and self-destruction in which the affair with the vicious Rocky entangles the protagonist. At the end of the novel, Blanca is as disoriented as at the outset, even if she has gained insight in the social forces that condition her. The author sees Blanca Ordoñez as:

[S]olo es fiel a su avidez interior porque la historia misma desfila ante us ojos sin que ella consiga adherirse a otra cosa que no sea su desesperada lucha -física y amorosa- con la devastación del tiempo. ("Con mi obra" 62)¹²⁷

¹²⁷"She is only faithful to her own internal avidity because history parades before her eyes without her being able to adhere to anything other than her desperate struggle—physically and emotional—with the devastation of time."

The relevance of *La señora Ordoñez* in the development of the feminine voice in Latin American women's narrative is the expansion of the fictional space beyond the private locus to include women's participation in the political happenings of their times. This access of the narrative female characters to the public sphere is not only an indication of women's changing role in society, but also the result of resistance and transgression to women's existence. If Marta Lynch barely glimpses the idea of relating public activity to erotic subordination, the prose of Luisa Valenzuela juxtaposes the erotic subjection to patriarchal domination with women's resistance to political repression and authoritarianism. This combination of eroticism and female political activity in the fictional arena is also present Angeles Mastretta's novels *Mal de amores* and *Arráncame la vida*, both of which integrate the political scene of pre- and post-revolutionary Mexico into the narrative.

The building of a nation: *Plotting Women* and *Mal de amores*

Nations ... are not only territories, peoples, and government, but are also "imagined"—that is, they articulate meanings, create exemplary narratives and symbolic systems which

secure the loyalty and sacrifice of diverse individuals. (Jean Franco)¹²⁸

Jean Franco outlines the state of culture in Mexico after independence from Spain in 1821, as a liberal intelligentsia emerged in Mexico around ‘the press and the coffee houses’¹²⁹ that replaced the clerical discourse of colonialism. The image of a modern, rational and democratic nation was further encouraged by the long regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910) that built railways, attracted industry, and transformed Mexico City into an elegant metropolis. The rural population, the lower classes, and women, however, did not participate in this phenomenon of modernization, and remained at the basis of the cultural and economic strata. ‘Porfirism’ became synonymous with repression and authoritarianism; the disillusioned intelligentsia felt betrayed and a new nation-building discourse emerged that eventually led to the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

*Mal de amores*¹³⁰ [1996; *Lovesick*, 1997] by Ángeles Mastretta registers the *Zeitgeist*, the atmosphere of anxiety of this pre-revolutionary era. In a conversation with his ‘con-tertulianos’ Diego Sauri conveys the morale of dissatisfaction:

No creía como otros que en México todo había sido igual
los últimos treinta años. Creía que el sueño había sido
traicionado, porque la vida siempre traiciona los sueños. La

¹²⁸ *Plotting Women*, 79. She refers to *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson.

¹²⁹ In Mexico and other centers of Latin America it was rather in the homes where the “tertulias,” a gathering to discuss actual matters took place.

¹³⁰ *Lovesick*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Penden, 1997. All translations from the Spanish text are from this edition and referred to as *L*.

república con que había soñado su generación debió ser democrática, igualitaria, racional, productiva, abierta a las novedades y al progreso. Pero él había envejecido viéndola convertirse en el reino de los grandes ricos, seguir siendo territorio de la desproporción y el autoritarismo.(184)¹³¹

The novel whispers the rumors heard in the Sunday tertulias at the house of Dr. Cuenca, where Diego Sauri, like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, reports on the progress of events. The poet Rivadeneira contributes with the epical tone, and Milagros Veytia, the emancipated activist, with her manifestos and humanitarian help to the poor and the wounded. In this atmosphere of political effervescence, Daniel Cuenca breathes idealism and a sense of his country “lastimado por la infamia” (87)¹³² that impels him to become one of the carriers of the ‘messianic’¹³³ spirit of the Revolution. The pages record historical events of violence, corruption, repression, and electoral fraud. The massacre at the copper mines in Cananea in 1907, the clandestine activities of Daniel, the emergence

¹³¹“He did not believe like others that for the last thirty years things in Mexico had been fair. He believed that the dream had been betrayed, because like always betrays dreams. The republic his generation had dreamed of should have been democratic, egalitarian, rational, productive, open to new ideas and to progress. But he had grown old watching it turn into a kingdom for the extremely wealthy, still a land of inequality and authoritarianism” (L 183).

¹³²“wounded by the infamous actions” (L 84).

¹³³ In her chapter on “Body and Soul: Women and Postrevolutionary Messianism, in *Plotting Women*, Jean Franco speaks of the “Messianic spirit that transformed mere human beings into supermen and constituted a discourse that associated virility with social transformation in a way that marginalized women at the very moment when they were, supposedly, liberated” (102). Franco refers to the postrevolutionary spirit of the 1920s embodied by Vasconcelos and Diego Rivera, but I borrow her characterization to illustrate the pre-revolutionary fervor that was already ‘messianic’ in embryo in Daniel Cuenca and Emilia Sauri.

of the “antirreleccionista” groups that opposed Díaz’s re-election, their faith and disappointment in Madero’s leadership, bloody demonstrations, war actions, political quarrels at the top of the revolutionary leadership, the discourse of fear and terror at the prelude and during the Revolution, these factors all enter the text interwoven with the agitated love story of Daniel and Emilia.

The characters that Mastretta selects for the historical narrative are not of the heroic texture of the Mexican Revolution fictional canon¹³⁴ but rather of the “dissident subjects” (Franco xii) ingrained in the social and ideological context of the afflicted nation. As Felipe in *Bahín Canán* and Tina Modotti in *Tinísima* resist the dominant discourse, the main characters of *Mal de amores* undermine the official rhetoric of the Díaz dictatorship. The new nation is to be articulated or “imagined” by a subversive intelligentsia in alliance with the marginalized, away from the public edifice, within the walls of private speech.

Idealism and chaos, “bullicio de odio desatado” (*Mal de amores* 258),¹³⁵ and the meaning(lessness) of sacrifice, makes Sauri draw the balance when in 1917 the Revolutionary war ends:

En lugar de democracia conseguimos caos y en lugar de
justicia, ajusticiadores. (343)¹³⁶

¹³⁴I refer to the classical novels of Azuela and Martín Luis Guzmán that glorify the Revolution.

¹³⁵“an atmosphere of unleashed hatred” (*L* 258).

¹³⁶“The irony is that instead of democracy, we got chaos, and instead of justice, executioners” (*L* 344).

If Sauri represents the rumor of the Revolution in words, Daniel Cuenca is a “dissident subject” in deeds. When Madero is assassinated by Victoriano Huerta in 1913, Daniel has to flee. He first fought for Madero, and then against his meekness. At home, his father welcomes a “náufrago[que] apestaba a una mezcla de pólvora con infierno”¹³⁷ (256), with wounds and torn clothes. The sad balance of his forbearance is that he had been spending his energy

por mermar el poder de un hombre que no lo tenía, había luchado junto a sus enemigos más débiles, contra los que guerreaban en su nombre, pero contra su nombre se irían más temprano de lo creíble. Entonces, la libertad de prensa, parlamento y palabrerío que nadie había valorado en esos años, volvería a enterrarse bajo los cadáveres de hombres inocentes. (257)¹³⁸

Women also participate in the building of the image of the nation. Emilia Saura and her aunt Milagros are gendered women subjects in full command of their faculties. They are free agents of their desires. Female characters do not fit the stereotyped representation of Parra’s, Bombal’s, or Lynch’s women under patriarchy. Only Silvina, the washerwoman whose son Emilia helps rescue from deportation, or the twenty year old girl who dies trying to give birth to her sixth child, suit the categories of oppressed class and

¹³⁷“a castaway ... [who] reeked of a mixture of gunpowder and hell” (*L* 257).

¹³⁸“in an attempt to lessen the power of a man who had no power. He had fought beside that man’s weakest enemies, against those who fought in his name but would turn against him sooner than one could imagine. Then the freedom of the press, speech, and ordinary talk that no one had valued sufficiently would again be buried beneath the corpses of innocent men” (*L* 257).

gender. Josefa Veitya, in the domestic sphere, Milagros in the political, and Emilia as lover and in the medical profession, are each a unique Subject 'in becoming', with a complex, contradictory and unpredictable nature that makes them genuine and full blooded female creations.

In this long trajectory of feminine writing in Latin America where female characters have learned to listen to their inner voices and desires, and where their incursion into the public sphere has been marked by an active participation in the political scene and the formation of the nation, the fiction of Elena Poniatowska inscribes the culmination of a process of self-awareness and the inclusion of the multiple voices of the social spectrum. Her novels, *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1967), *Tinísima* (1992), and her latest *Paseo de la Reforma* (1996) can be read as a polyphony of plural consciousnesses in Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic novel. Within the tradition of the Latin America novel, Elena Poniatowska introduces the voice of the margins, of the poor, the political underground, the oppressed. She writes in an effort to "explicarnos lo incomprensible" and "para dar testimonio de los desaparecidos por la política y por el hambre." ("Mujer y literatura en América," 471).¹³⁹

The story of Jesusa Palancares, the protagonist in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*, is a tale of the abandonment of the marginalized poor, specially women who have to struggle

¹³⁹"understand the incomprehensible" and "to bear testimony about those who disappear because of politics or hunger." "Literature and Women in Latin America" (1991, 86-87).

not only against perpetual poverty but also against the brutality of the patriarchal—in this case *machista*—order that subjects them to sexual and existential servitude. Tina Modotti in *Tinísima* is an Italian photographer and anarchist who arrives in Mexico in the 1920s and is a protagonist in the artistic and political scene together with characters of the Mexican post-revolutionary scene, such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Leon Trotsky, and her closer friends, the Cuban activist Julio Antonio Mella and the photographer Edward Weston. Her experience brings her to revolutionary activity in the communist party, contacts with Germany and the Soviet Union in the era of Stalinism, and an active participation in the Spanish Civil War as a nurse. The cultural scene viewed through the lenses of her bohemian circle, exchanges in further “tertulias,” and the public happening inserted in press releases reflect vividly the ideological exchange of this period of revolt. The novel reflects the spirit of *building of a nation* after the Revolution of 1910 in the period of cosmic idealism, contradictions, violence, chaos and grandiloquence. *Tinísima* transcends the national boundaries of post-revolutionary *messianism* to encompass the international scene of the decade between the wars. In this scope, Tina Modotti acts as a witness of the interwoven powers and ideologies of a multinational space.

From self-awareness to social commitment: The linking thread in women’s writing

This chapter aimed at tracing the development of the feminine participation in Latin American literature. I selected the authors chronologically and comparatively from

several countries in order to look into the development of recurrent traits that could be read as expressions of a feminine writing.

My research demonstrates that the novels in the 1920s and 1930s are restricted to the interior space of the bourgeois home and garden in the novels of Parra and Bombal. Rosario Castellanos in the 1950s introduces the discourse of class and race in the broader space of the community and rural Mexico. From the 1960s I chose 3 authors who represent different directions in fiction: Valdivieso as a breakthrough in traditional patterns of behavior, Lispector as an example of women's incursion into territories of intellectual inquisitions, and Lynch for the participation of women in the political and in the nation-building activity. This theme reflects the increasing commitment of women writers to the social and political agendas, a new practice that leads to the fiction of Mastretta in the 1990s. The development of the feminine discourse in Latin America was by no means linear and a continuum. The writers lived in societies with different social and cultural components, and each region has its particular literary tradition, but they shared their condition of post-coloniality, the Luso-Spanish heritage, and the patriarchal governing institutions of the Church, the army, and the ideals of democracy. It is possible, however, to see an evolution in women's writing from an introspective self-awareness and a preoccupation with women's intimate sphere to a growing involvement in public activity and a social commitment.

At the end of the preceding chapter and following representative critical writings, I pointed out that the three more recurrent discursive strategies to articulate a feminine voice in Latin America had been the use of intertextuality, different kinds of enunciation,

and the construction of subjectivity. In this chapter I aimed performing a gendered reading of the fiction of seven women writers who have made innovative contributions to the construction of female subjectivity in fiction and have acted as a mediating intercultural agency.

The common thread of these authors is the questioning of the *founding Subject*, the patriarchal source of meaning and a dynamic reinterpretation of myths. Since language is the tool to articulate a distinctive voice and a vehicle of self-definition, I have traced the formation of the feminine Subject through the acts of resistance and transgression of some female characters. Aware of their condition of oppression, these characters have confronted their subjugation with a ‘reverse discourse’, a resistance to the dominant logos to construct their subjectivity. Through different language strategies and a double-voiced discourse women writers have initiated a process of transformation in the once hegemonic reading of enunciation. It is through their written word that women have gained a subject position in the literary canon that opens new readings to the stories told by women and about women inscribed by gender, race and class.

In an attempt to read the prose of women writers in Latin America, I have searched for the expressions of resistance from early texts that have voiced the silenced desires in a patriarchal economy. A constant struggle to formulate and construct independent subjectivity has motivated the works of Parra, Valdivieso, Bombal and Lynch. The novel has evolved into a discourse that questions the historical and cultural patterns of thought where female characters intervene in the public sphere with an independent voice. Through the novels of Castellanos, Mastretta, and Poniatowska a new

awareness for the voice of the marginalized and the involvement of women in the construction of the discourse of the nation broadens the boundaries of women's narrative activity. Clarice Lispector is a pioneer postmodern writer who articulates a counter-discourse that subverts some of the founding texts and myths of the Western tradition.

Transgression as a vehicle to subvert patriarchy and to engender subjectivity appears in multiple forms as in patterns of rebellion and capitulation, as a quest for knowledge and understanding, and in the blurring of the boundaries of forbidden sexuality through the *language of the body*. Bovarism, or existential *ennui*, at the starting point in the novels by Parra, Bombal and Lynch are linked to adultery, or illicit love, as a canalization of freedom and self expression. Transgression is also related to the theme of the fallen woman and the expulsion from paradise, but with significant nuances. If the heroines in the early novels by Parra, Bombal and Lynch capitulate, Valdivieso's rebel character suffers no punishment, and Lispector's GH's expulsion from paradise brings her to a new birth liberated from old value systems. Lispector's reverse discourse of the Faust legend in a postmodern mood is also a transgressive aesthetic act, a counter-discourse of a literary archetype. This over-writing of classical myths is an emancipating form of enunciation and an imprint of feminine subjectivity in the text.

Acts of transgression expressed in intellectual curiosity and in an ethical desire to taste the forbidden fruit of knowledge permeate the works of Lispector and Castellanos, as Lispector disrupts the *rational* system to pursue her quest, and Castellanos violates the rules of her class to reach to the Other race, the mentality of the Chamula Mexican. These paths of engendering women's self-representation are by no means smooth but are part

of a process of trials and downfalls that evolve into a more self-assured feminine voice, and into new channels of social and political commitment in later writers such as Mastretta, Poniatowska, and Valenzuela.

In this critical overview of Latin American women's writing it is possible to trace and compare similarities in language usage and figures of speech. The language of the body as a means of engendering subjectivity can be seen in Bombal's narrator's sensuous encounter with the velvet quality of her skin while bathing in the pond, in Lynch's desperate search for sensations and substitutes to social constraints, and also in Lispector's language saturated with gestation metaphors, images and rhythms that approximate *l'écriture féminine*.

Stories of resistance use common metaphors to represent women's condition under patriarchy. The image of the caged bird in Parra and Valdivieso is reproduced as a visceral incarceration in *La brecha*; the tree representing the masculine protector has overtones of fear and helplessness in Parra and Bombal; masks and lies as a mode of feminine subversion appear as intertext in Parra and Lynch, and the metaphors "burning wave" appear in Bombal and Lynch, as "claws" in Parra and Bombal.

Feminist criticism has also born new voices and interpretations that have encouraged a new reading with a poststructural and dialogic perspective to incorporate the social forces and ideologies that shape the baffled characters in a continent of cultural contradictions that women writers try to understand and unravel through their fiction.

Chapter Three

Elena Poniatowska: "... la voz de los oprimidos"

Cuando desaparecen hijos, esposos, amigos, cuando cientos de hombres se pudren en las mazmorras, cuando los campesinos son asesinados y sus cuerpos ensangrentan los ríos, entonces hay que admitir que ésta es nuestra realidad (al menos la que escogemos voluntariamente) y queremos tratarla en nuestra escritura porque nada más real, más punzante, más reflexivo que este dolor, nada puede sucedernos más formativo o deformativo, constructivo o aniquilante. ¿De qué puede escribirse sino de esta *infamia*? (Mujer y literatura en América Latina, my emphasis)¹

¹*Eco* (Bogotá) 42.5 (1983): 470. Speech delivered at the festival *Horizonte 1982* in Berlin dedicated to Latin America with the attendance of more than 30 authors and 7000 spectators. "When sons, husbands, and friends disappear; when hundreds of men rot in their cells; when peasants are killed and their blood muddies the waters, then we have to admit that this is our reality (at least the one we choose voluntarily), and that we want to bring it into our writing because nothing is more real, more bitter, or more a cause for reflection than this pain. Nothing more formative or de-formative, constructive or destructive can happen to us. What can one write about this infamy?" I would prefer to translate the last sentence as "What can one write about if not about this infamy?" "Literature and Women in Latin America." Trans. Nicolás Wey. Castro Klarén et al. 86. In the footnote, Castro Klarén gives as reference "*Eco (Bogotá)* 3" which is inexact.

The discourse of women in Latin America has been shaped by voices of resistance and by the untiring questioning of the mechanisms behind situations of injustice and repression. A journalist and writer of fiction, Elena Poniatowska (1933)² articulates this *infamy* in her texts, constructed with the voices of the victims of persecution, hunger, natural disasters and despair. The discourses of feminine identity as a voice of resistance and transgression opened the way for the incorporation of the hitherto suppressed voices of the marginalized as voices that challenge the official discourse and the work of Poniatowska is an excellent example. Poniatowska claims that the real poverty of Latin America is *indifference* towards the poor and towards violence. Her writing is a reflection on the reality of those who suffer under oppression, poverty or hunger and who through their testimony break out of their silenced existence.³

Following the path traced by Rosario Castellanos and her concern for the condition of inequality and injustice endured by the Other Mexican, Poniatowska has

²Born in Paris in 1933 to an aristocratic Polish father and a Mexican mother whose family had lost their lands under the Revolution, Elena Poniatowska first moved to her home country Mexico at the age of eight. Beth Jörgensen gives 1932 as her birth date (1994, p. xiii), but I prefer the information given by Elena Poniatowska herself in an interview with Magdalena García Pinto in 1983 where she says: “Nací en París, en 1933, de madre mexicana y padre francés de origen polaco” (1988, 175).

³Poniatowska initiated her career interviewing famous artists and politicians for the journal *Excelsior* in 1954, the year she also published her first book, the children’s short stories *Lilus Kikus*. The well known chronicles *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), *Fuerte es el silencio* (1980), and *Nada, nadie* (1988) report the bitter reality and pain suffered by Mexicans at the students’ massacre in 1968 at Tlatelolco, the stories of the dissidents, kidnapped and those who ‘disappeared’ at the upheavals and repression of the 1970s, and of the victims of the earthquake of September 1985 that devastated the overcrowded capital Mexico City.

learned to listen to the Other, to the *voices of the oppressed*.⁴ Jesusa Palancares, the narrator-protagonist of her novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969) represents these silenced voices of anonymous Mexico and their courage to survive calamities. Jesusa, as an example of “oppressed woman” is constantly exposed to violence and deprivation. Her marginalized existence is marked by ignorance, vice, abuse and poverty. Jesusa Palancares is a woman living in the shanty towns surrounding Mexico City who has been struggling heroically for survival since early childhood. At the age of five she loses her mother and wanders through the school of negative experiences that mark her mobile existence from Oaxaca at the time of Madero’s upheaval, through the episodes of the Mexican Revolution and a life of a nomadic search for means of survival and integration into the workforce of Mexico City. Her journey is marked by a permanent resistance to succumb to oppression, fighting against any source of power that attempts to dwarf her freedom or her sense of personal integrity. In “Testimonios de una escritora: Elena Poniatowska en el micrófono” the author draws a portrait of Jesusa as “mujer oprimida,” as oppressed woman but equipped with a temper to survive:

“Poniatowska’s professional experience as a journalist taught her the art of dialogue. In her daily interviews she met Mexicans of all layers of society, rich and poor, people from the political and intellectual elite as well as the disinherited, the political opponent, the prisoners in jails and the workers of the slums. Through her questioning, she learned of the character, contradictions and hopes of the marginalized people and became acquainted with their situation of injustice. Poniatowska publicly avowed that the *leit-motif* of her writing was “la voz de los oprimidos” created to reproduce “una realidad indignante y dolorosa” (1991, 81). To her, the voice of women writers, such as Rosario Castellanos, Marta Traba, Claribel Alegría or María Luisa Puga are committed to print this “painful and outrageous experience.” It is in this frame of listening to the Other, especially to the *oppressed*, that the work of Poniatowska finds its protagonists and where she interweaves her ideology.

La Jesusa sí es una mujer oprimida, pero no lo es tampoco.
 Es una mujer oprimida porque viene del nivel más bajo de
 la sociedad, pero no está oprimida porque ella se salva sola.
 Ella tiene tal carácter y tal fuerza que quizás nosotros
 seamos más oprimidas que ella en muchas circunstancias.
 (159)⁵

Jesusa is a woman from the margins who can counteract oppression with her acts of defiance and resistance to forces of dominance, as I demonstrate in my reading of her marginal condition. The question also arises of the accessibility of speech and of the written language for the oppressed. In my analysis of the story of Jesusa, I inquire into to what extent her voice is the product of the artist's manipulations and how far it reflects the *reality* of an oppressed existence. Gayatri Spivak in her well-known study "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argues that the uneducated people of the margins, the *subaltern*, are outside of the social narrative as they can only participate in discourse through the *voice-consciousness* (285) of an interlocutor who imposes his criteria and ideology. My interpretation shows that Poniatowska's exchange with her informant Jesusa is based on a *dialogic interaction*, on a tense and fruitful communication based on the practice of

⁵"Jesusa is, but also is not an oppressed woman. She is an oppressed woman because she comes from the lowest level of society, but she is not because she survives alone. Her character and strength are such that maybe we are more oppressed than she in many circumstances."

listening to the Other.⁶ This exercise results in a heteroglossic text that reproduces the voices of the oppressed, mainly women, in their marginalized world.⁷

The texts I have chosen for my analysis are *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* and *Tinísima* because I consider them to be masterpieces in Latin America's fictional production that portray fully constituted female subjects in confrontation with a hostile environment in a social and political frame of oppression and represent a significant segment of Mexican reality. In Poniatowska's literary output these works epitomize the vision of the author on Mexican culture and society told from the perspective and in

⁶ Having been born outside of Mexico, Elena Poniatowska felt a great need to become a part of that society. Since she spoke French with her family, and was educated in English and French private schools, her link to the country were the maids. They play an essential role in her way of perceiving the "Other." In "A Question Mark Engraved on my Eyelids" she writes: "I write in order to belong One way of belonging was to listen, to see faces, to take them into oneself, to observe laps, hands. I liked to spend time in the warm kitchen I absorbed Mexico through the maids" (82; 84). She learned Spanish from these "maids" and through them she first encountered the underprivileged, their idiosyncrasy and language. This close exchange with the Mexican people of the margins helped her assert her roots in her home land and broadened her scope in the manifold Mexican culture. As she further states: "[D]iscovering them [the maids] meant entering into "the other." I have always wanted to lose myself in others, to belong to other people, to be the same as them. It is always the others who are right. Who hold the key to the enigma" (85).

⁷In an interview with Juan Armando Epple in 1990, Poniatowska states that in her works she has tried to identify herself with the voices of women and in this sense she represents a feminist position: "Yo siempre he buscado dar a conocer, en mis obras, las voces de las mujeres, identificándome en forma básica, y muy natural, con esa versión de la realidad. La perspectiva narrativa de todas mis obras, sea la voz de sus protagonistas o la de la autora, es la de una conciencia feminista" (128). [In my works, I have always aimed at making the voices of women known and I have basically identified myself with that version of reality. The narrative perspective in all my works, be it the voice of its protagonists or that of the author, reproduces a feminist consciousness].

dialogue with the oppressed,⁸ a reverse story of the master-narrative and a profound critique of the social circumstances of the nation in the post- revolutionary period. These two novels represent two aspects of the consequences of oppression, Jesusa Palancares, of social, and Tina Modotti of political subjugation. Jesusa's story inserts the word of the marginalized in discourse, Tina's artistic and political activity portrays Mexico as a cosmopolitan center for artistic and ideological encounters.

Literary criticism on the novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* has centered mainly on its genre as a testimonial novel or its characteristics as a picaresque novel, a *Bildungsroman* or an autobiographical text;⁹ on Jesusa's "gender roles" or the four

⁸As I demonstrate in the following discussion, the relationship between an educated journalist and the people in the margins is problematic. But the merit of Poniatowska's text is precisely her genuine effort to reproduce the "voice of the oppressed." Her intention is to transmit the orality of the marginalized in a text documented by the real voice of the interlocutor in *Hasta no verte*. In the case of *Tinísima*, the sources were assembled through laborious research.

⁹See Cynthia Steele (1992), "Testimonio y autor/idad en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* de Elena Poniatowska," and María Inés Lagos (1990), "El testimonio creativo de *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*," and David-William Foster (1984) "Latin American Documentary Narrative" on testimonio; Charles M. Tatum (1977), "Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*," and Edward H. Friedman (1987), "The Marginalized Narrator: *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* and the Eloquence of Repression" on the picaresque aspects of the novel; Lucía Guerra Cunningham (1992) "Los márgenes anticanónicos de la autobiografía de la pobreza en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* de Elena Poniatowska," and Julia A. Kushigian (1987), "Transgresión de la autobiografía y el *Bildungsroman* en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*" on the novel as *Bildungsroman*; and Monique Lemaître (1985), "Jesusa Palancares y la dialéctica de la emancipación femenina," Lisa Davis (1986) "An invitation to understanding among poor women of the America. *The Color Purple* and *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*," and Joel Hancock (1983) "Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*: The remaking of the image of woman" on the subject of gender. (My listing is not chronological, but according to what I consider more pertinent to my discussion).

postures she assumes in her relations to the construction of her gender (Jørgensen 1994, 40),¹⁰ and on Jesusa Palancares's identity and biography. In the first section of this chapter I explore the relevance of a woman from the margins, like Jesusa, as an agent of social change in her insubordination to oppressive circumstances. Her life can be interpreted as the history of resistance to victimization, sexual or economic, an aggressive self-defense against the surrounding violence. She has opposed abuse derived from the patriarchal order, demystified the official discourse of the Mexican Revolution, and replaced her religious upbringing with the Obra Espiritual where she can exercise power over others. She is not the commonplace socially marginalized subject, but has the temper to strive against the hegemonic forces of society. Even though impoverished and living in precarious conditions, Jesusa works hard to earn her living; she does not submit to male abuse and creates a space where she can preserve her freedom, where she is her own master. By telling her (hi)story to Elena Poniatowska, the woman from the margins has emerged from anonymity.

In my analysis of the text, I intend to reconstruct Jesusa Palancares's subject position from three viewpoints: a) Jesusa as a daughter and wife acting as an agent of resistance in her private sphere; b) Jesusa as a social being in her religious community and in her allegiance to the less fortunate in the experience of mothering abandoned children;

¹⁰According to Jørgensen, these four *postures* vary with age and situations. At times, she adopts masculine behavior and rejects feminine roles, as in childhood and adolescence when she behaves like a tomboy, or refuses to make tortillas. As she grows older acting as a "speaking subject," Jesusa *reverses* this attitude, opposes *machismo* and fulfills feminine roles, such as mothering. I examine Jørgensen's argument in detail later in this chapter.

and c) Jesusa's voice from a feminist and dialogical perspective that encompasses her social and ideological frame, in order to indirectly unfold the voice of the author orchestrated with the voices of the margins into a *heteroglossic* discourse.

Jesusa Palancares: The silent woman as an agent of resistance to oppression

Bat-Ami Bar On studies the problematic of attributing agency to socially marginalized groups in her article "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege" (1993). Acting under a situation of oppression, the marginalized oppose two modes of resistance. The first is part of the heritage that precedes marginalization and remains unaffected by the dominant system, as for example *pre-patriarchal practices* and women's culture, their value systems and world view. The second

consists of practices that respond to oppression and show that the socially marginalized subjects are not powerless, that they can set limits on or subvert the oppressive forces, and that they can be creative and go beyond the boundaries set for them by their oppression. (93)

The life of Jesusa Palancares, the protagonist of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*¹¹ reflects this double practice of resistance. In her relationship to other women or to the orphan children she raises, she exerts authority and subverts the forces of oppression. Confronted with brutality in her social surroundings, however, she develops an inner force of rebellion and defense against violence.

Since early childhood, Jesusa responds to crucial chaotic situations with defiance. When her mother dies, the five-year-old girl refuses to accept her fate. In a dramatic act, she jumps into the grave while the attendants are shoveling earth onto the dead body. She remembers :

[M]e aventé dentro del pozo y con mi vestido le tapé la cabeza a mi mamá para que no le cayera tierra en la cara. Nadie se fijó que yo estaba allá dentro Yo no me quería salir. Quería que me taparan allí con mi mamá. (17)¹²

¹¹First published in 1969 by Era. I use the 29th reprint, 1992. Since there is not yet a published translation in English, all translations from the text are mine. "And Here's to You, Jesusa," translated by Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ in *Lives on the Line: The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors*, ed. and introd. Doris Meyer, is the text of the article "Hasta no verte Jesús mío" by Poniatowska, published in *Vuelta* 24 (Nov.1978):5-11. It reproduces a portrait of Jesusa Palancares constructed with dialogues with Poniatowska, the story of making of the novel and the personal relationship author-informer.

¹²"I threw myself into the grave and with my dress I covered my mother's head so that earth would not fall into her face. Nobody noticed that I was down there I did not want to leave. I wanted to be covered there with my mother."

This event cuts her childhood abruptly. Her insurgency to oppressive circumstances is further expressed in her antagonism towards her father's mistresses. It is possible to reconstruct Jesusa's subject position from the angle of her relationship to Felipe, her father. To the child Jesusa these women are a threat as they take the father's affection and money, and she develops an aggressive behavior towards them. She throws stones at them or insults them until they leave the house, undisturbed by the passive father. The only woman she approves of as stepmother is Evarista, the jail housekeeper, whom she respects despite her harshness, and even defends her when, in a fit of anger, she hurts Jesusa with a knife. Even though Evarista is far from offering a nurturing environment, the girl is grateful for her teaching of household skills.

In her immediate family of siblings, Jesusa witnesses frequent sexual violence. Her brother Efrén brings home Ignacia, a homeless girl, whom he beats regularly even to the point of making her abort their child. Petra, her older sister is kidnaped at fifteen and returned years later by a "chivalrous" man, Cayetano, who pledges to have saved her from an abusive soldier and that after having saved enough money for the trip, he was bringing her back to her family. Cayetano asks permission to live with Petra, but the 'cavalier' eventually turns into a violent man who one night tries to kill Petra with a knife in her sleep. Jesusa watches these women surrender to their fate of victimization, but she stands up against masculine oppression and confronts men, as in the scene with her drunk brother Efrén:

—Ponte conmigo, ándale, pero a ella no le vuelvas a pegar!

Le dio una cachetada pero no le dio dos. Agarré un leño así de grueso y aunque apenas podía con él, la defendí. Lo apaléeY eso que mi cuñada me pegaba también porque nunca pude aprender a hacer tortillas. (28)¹³

These instances show basic traits and contradictions in Jesusa's character. Already in childhood and adolescence she develops defense mechanisms against harassment and sexual abuse, but she also has an innate sense of loyalty to other women. She opposes male brutality but also refuses traditional female domestic skills. These experiences will shape her temperament, her mistrust of men, her disillusionment about love and her eventual solitude.

The only happy memories of childhood are her times with her father, when he nurtured her, when he combed her hair, made a stuffed squirrel toy for her, or when he took the children fishing, catching turtle eggs or swimming by the sea. The father-daughter relationship is complex and another example of the incongruence in her nature. Emotionally, Jesusa feels very close to him while he fulfills the motherly functions, but she rejects his polygamous behavior, his nomadic character and his lack of authority to impose order in the house. She follows him in the battles of the Mexican Revolution with the other *soldaderas* and with her dear brother Emiliano. But at one point the father

¹³“Come on, deal with me, but don't you ever touch her again! ... He slapped her on the face once but not a second time. I grabbed a log thick like this and even I could hardly hold it, I defended her. I beat him And this I did although my sister in law also used to hit me because I could never learn to make tortillas.”

breaks ties by disavowing his daughter when she fetches him in a new dwelling where he is living with another mistress, who is also the mother of Emiliano's wife. Only with the absurd death of Emiliano over a card game, do father and daughter reconcile and he takes her again under his custody. The tension over the father's mistresses, however, escalates when she scratches the face of Guayabita with the heel of her shoe.

After a new confrontation with her father, Jesusa insists on being sent back home to Salina Cruz. She asks for the protection of General Blanco and hides from her father when he comes to fetch her. Their final departure is told by Jesusa:

A media noche vino a buscarme mi papá con una escolta pero yo no me hice presente, ni me volví siquiera. Me buscaron por todas las casas menos en la del general, y claro no me encontraron. Todavía oí que mi papá gritó: "Jesusa! Jesusa!" Y yo ya estaba para contestare cuando se me trabaron las quijadas, se me hizo un graznido en la garganta y me quedé silencio. (79)¹⁴

This scene marks a crucial moment in Jesusa's development and in the story of her resistance to patriarchy. In an outburst of authority, the father wants to recover the departing "liberated" daughter. At first, Jesusa is firm in her decision to leave, but as she hears his call she hesitates and is about to yield to her remnant filial emotions. Her nature is about to acknowledge the voice of the master, but her body resists *patriarchy*

¹⁴"At midnight my father came to fetch me with guards but I did not show up. They looked for me in all the homes except in the general's, and of course they did not find me. I even heard my father calling "Jesusa!, Jesusa!" And I was about to answer him when my jaws got tied, a high shrill pierced my throat and I remained silent."

physically, she stammers and remains silent. She will never see her father again, and only later she learns that he has been killed by the *zapatistas* in the Revolution. Many years later, when acting as a medium in the religious sect of the *Obra Espiritual*, she communicates with his dead soul and hears him admonish her to abandon her drinking habits and bad company. Jesusa sums up the conflictive relationship to her father:

Allí en la corporación me comencé a volver perra. No era que celara a mi papá, sino que ya no lo quería. Lo quise mucho y él me quiso mucho de chica, pero ya después de grande, se dedicaba a las mujeres y para qué son semejantes visiones. Dicen que nosotras somos putas, pero ¿a poco los hombres no son putos siempre con el animal fuera, a ver a quién se lo meten? (78)¹⁵

So ends the apprenticeship of Jesusa Palancares, and although she never learned to read and write, she is educated by violent circumstances.¹⁶ At age fifteen she is

¹⁵“There in the stock company I became a bitch. I would not say that I jealously watched my father, but rather that I loved him no more. I had loved him very much and he had loved me a lot when I was a child, but when I grew up he spent his time with women and why should one have visions. It is said that we women are whores, but aren’t men also male whores always with the beast out, to see whom they can push it into?”

¹⁶Supposing that the fictional Jesusa was born, like the ‘real’ Josefina Bórquez, in 1900, the child grows up during the turbulent years of the civil war and the fratricidal violence of the Revolution, which started in 1910 and lasted intermittently until 1920. Initially a “revolution” led by Francisco Madero (1873-1913) to depose the liberal Porfirio Díaz, the Revolución Mexicana was a pioneering historical event in Latin America that led to the transformation of social and economic structures. Felipe Palancares, the fictional father of Jesusa, fought at the side of the government and Venustiano Carranza against the rebel *villistas* and *zapatistas* who eventually helped Alvaro Obregón (1880-1928) to his triumph in 1920.

supposed to have reached maturity when General Blanco, now her tutor, gives her in marriage to Officer Pedro Aguilar, two years her senior. She enters in the next stage of her life: marriage without her consent. The General thought it more noble to give her in marriage to “one” man and not to the ship’s crew by sending her “home” as she wished. Her brief married life can be told as the taming of the shrew. Pedro locks her in their home to scorn her for her disdain. He is jealous, and forbids her to talk to other people after he finds out that while he was in the war she had been working in a bar. The *machista* double standard goes without saying. He hits her without cause. Having learned to fight with her father’s mistresses, she also defies Angelita, her husband’s mistress by pinching her face with a hairpin. “Le dejaste la cara como coladera!” (104),¹⁷ comment the wives of the soldiers. Jesusa suffers in childhood, she suffers in marriage but she does not submit without resistance. She opposes the hegemonic forces of power, be it paternal, or that of her husband’s. When she has undergone enough oppression, she rebels against injustice and gathers forces to surpass the boundaries. Jesusa describes how she accumulated strength to challenge Pedro with a pistol:

Cuando Pedro me colmó el plato ya me dije claramente:
 “Me defiando o que me mate de una vez.” Si yo no fuera
 mala me hubiera *dejado* de Pedro hasta que me matara.
 Pero hubo un momento en que seguro Dios me dijo:
 “Defiéndete.” Porque Dios dice: “Ayúdame y yo te
 ayudaré.” Y yo oí que me dijo: “Defiéndete, ya es
 suficiente lo que has recibido. Ahora empieza tú a repartir.”
*Y saqué la pistola. Después dije que no me dejaría y
 cumplí la palabra. Tan no me dejé que aquí estoy. Pero*

¹⁷“You left her like a perforated sink cover.”

¡cuánto sufrí mientras me estuve *dejando*! Yo creo que en el mismo infierno ha de haber un lugar para todas las *dejadas*. ¡Puros tizones en el fundillo! (101, my emphasis)¹⁸

This text synthesizes Jesusa's philosophy of life. The verb "dejarse," in the sense of allowing someone else, in this case the male, to abuse women, appears five times in this quote. Jesusa has the temper to combat "para no dejarse," not to let herself be abused, to defy harassment. But at the bottom line, there is burning conflict, as she admits being "evil" for standing up to her husband (a good wife is supposed to accept his abuse quietly, as her sister Petra or Ignacia humbly did). Ironically she also felt a call from God to resist gender oppression by telling her to defend herself from affront. In the process of *dejarse*, Jesusa goes through an ethical dilemma about good and evil, she experiences a feeling of guilt, and then encouraged by a voice from above, she reaches a determination to defend herself from assault and to fulfill her promise. It is thanks to her act of resistance that she is still alive, even though she suffered while defending herself. And who will go to hell? Not the ones who defend themselves against violence but those who

¹⁸"When I had enough of Pedro I told myself clearly: "I'll defend myself or he should kill me once and for all." If I were not bad I would have let myself be bossed by Pedro until he kills me. But there came a moment when it was surely God who told me: "Defend yourself!" Because God says: "Help yourself and I shall help you." And I heard him tell me: "Defend yourself, you have had enough. And now it is your turn to reply." *And I took the pistol. And then I said that I would not let myself be abused and I kept my word. And because I did not I am still here.* But how much did I suffer while I was *letting myself* [be abused]! I believe that in hell itself there must be a place for all those who *let themselves* [be abused]. Full of half burned logs in the buttocks!"

tolerate violence in their own bodies.¹⁹ In this dispute with her husband she emerges as an independent subject, conscious of her power, defying male privilege, resisting gender oppression, and overcoming her position of subordination. She has learned to defend her integrity by responding with violence against violence. And she has shown determination to guard her personal freedom above all.²⁰ From that day on Pedro will treat her with respect and even comradeship as she joins him in battle, charging his gun. When he falls on the field, she takes over the leadership of the detachment and brings them back to safety. Again, she displays courage in a crucial situation. The experience gained in marriage warns her against future liaisons and she never remarries. Jesusa completes another station of her life with a new share in the school of negativity. The balance of her married life, besides the exceptional moments when Pedro reads novels to her or once cures her wounds, is a harsh lesson in deprivation. With her oral eloquence, again, Jesusa Palancares summarizes this period of her life:

¹⁹Linda A. Bell in *Rethinking Ethics in the Midst of Violence. A Feminist Approach to Freedom* speaks of a feminist ethics that “will not fall victim to the “dogmatism of tolerance,” a dogmatism so fearful of imposing values on others that it strips its adherents of the capacity for moral judgment.” And she further quotes Janice Raymond saying: “When women do not take responsibility for generating and representing their agreed-upon values, they become push-overs for the tyranny of others’ values” (1993, 20). By her valiant act, Jesusa Palancares is resisting the *tyranny* of Pedro, her husband.

²⁰Deborah Shaw in her essay “Jesusa Palancares as Individual Subject in Elena Poniatowka’s *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*” (1996) warns against an oversimplified “essentialist” interpretation of Jesusa’s subjectivity that is often used to serve a specific ‘critical and political agenda’ (193). It is obvious that Jesusa’s ‘freedom’, compared to that of educated First World women, is curtailed by her marginal condition. My argument deals with Jesusa in a framework of poverty and illiteracy.

Pedro tenía cuerpo de hombre, era muy enérgico, muy maldito. Yo lo único que digo es que le costé trabajo porque no podía hacerse de mí. Otras se le iban a los brazos pero conmigo no hubo ofrecida. No me le fui a ofrecer nunca. No nos hablábamos. *Por eso no reconozco cuál es el amor, nunca tuve amor, ni sentí nada*, ni Pedro tampoco. (108)²¹

Jesusa Palancares, at 18 is a widow, alone in the world. The Revolution has taken her father and her husband, alcohol and gambling her other brothers, and her mother and older sister die of shock (“de susto”), from dream premonition or from fear of her threatening husband. All her circumstances point to a fate of marginalized existence: ignorance, vice, violence and poverty. She hardly experiences love or affection, but learns to meet the challenges of oppressive forces, and she manages to create a space for relative self-respect and autonomy.

The death of Pedro marks a vital turning point in Jesusa’s development. She tries to get a widow’s pension and gathers some money to return home to Salina Cruz and Oaxaca, but she is robbed and can only make it to the capital, Mexico City. If before Jesusa encountered cruelty and disaffection, in her peregrination through the urban metropolis she will learn about hunger and desolation. For the first ten months she cannot

²¹“Pedro had a male body, he was very energetic and very wicked. I can only say that I gave him hard work because he could not control me. Other women ran into his arms but I never offered myself to him. Never. We did not speak to each other. *This is why I myself don’t know what love is, I never loved, neither felt anything*, neither did Pedro.”

find work or assistance to reclaim her widow's pension. Before she had lived modestly but never had experienced hunger. In the city, she now has to learn how to survive in extreme circumstances. She wanders from job to job, in households or factories, often changing address from poor neighborhood to shanty town. When Elena Poniatowska met Jesusa she was in her sixties, still working hard but at least living under a roof. Even then, in poor surroundings, Jesusa treasures above all her independence. When she is sick with syphilis, she locks herself in her room to cure her illness with herbs and popular medicine. Her distrust of institutions and power is evident. Detached from family and friends, she announces that she wants to die alone in the hills and be devoured by the crows, like her father or Pedro. The consolation to her burdensome existence is her belief in reincarnation and the idea that she had been a queen in her previous life and that her suffering is due to her guilt and sins of the past. In the religious comradeship of the *Obra Espiritual* she finds a source of strength and power, through her skills as a medium, to influence others. Jesusa Palancares is a lonely being striving for physical survival, but in her inner self, she has the vigor to resist oppression.

Por eso digo yo que a los hombres de hoy no les llama la atención más que aprovecharse. Nadie estima a su mujer ni la cuida Cualquiera día no podré hacer nada y ni modo de decir: "Mi muchacho va a ver por mí." No, hombre, mejor me largo. Cuando ya no pueda más, agarro mi morral y como sé que en el camposanto no hay pozo para mí, me voy al cerro a que me coman los zopilotes Ojalá que los zopilotes también pudieran tragarse la maldad cuando nos

dejan limpios como calacas, pero ésa siempre se queda en la tierra. (314-315)²²

Through the intervention of Poniatowska's language, Jesusa's legacy is a profound knowledge of the heart of man and of the realities of the marginal world. Her voice echoes not only her disillusionment and misery but above all her stubbornness to defy submission. In this aspect, Jesusa represents the image of the poor that Oscar Lewis draws in his well-known work "La cultura de la pobreza" where he states that poverty is "a forma de vida," a way of life (42) and writes:

La cultura de la pobreza es un adaptarse y al mismo tiempo un reaccionar de los pobres a su posición marginal en una sociedad capitalista, estratificada en clases y de alto nivel de individuación. Representa un esfuerzo para combatir la desesperanza y la angustia motivadas por la improbabilidad de triunfar de acuerdo a los valores y los fines de la sociedad circundante. (37)²³

²²"This is why I say that the only thing the men of today care about is to take advantage. Nobody respects nor cares for his womanThe day will come when I won't be able to care for myself but it is hopeless to think: "My boy will provide for me." No, man, I'd better sneak away. When I will have had enough, I will grab my knapsack and since I know that there is no room for me in the cemetery, I will go to the hill to be eaten by the crows. I wish the crows could also devour evil when they leave us clean naked, but it always stays on earth."

²³"The culture of poverty is an adapting oneself to, and at the same time, a reacting on the part of the poor to their marginal position in a capitalist society, stratified in classes and with a high level of individualization. It represents an effort to combat hopelessness and the anguish motivated by the improbability of success according to the values and aims of the surrounding society." Poniatowska worked as an assistant to Oscar Lewis and recognizes his influence on her. In her interview with Magdalena García Pinto she says: "Ahora yo creo que dentro de mí debe haber una influencia por haber trabajado un mes y medio con Oscar Lewis Lo vi trabajar. Vi cómo él se daba a la gente" (*Historias*

Lucía Guerra-Cunningham in “Los márgenes anticanónicos de la autobiografía de la pobreza en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* de Elena Poniatowska” (1992) sees this novel as a transgression of the traditional parameters of autobiography as it introduces “los aspectos silenciados y no valorados de una sub-cultura de la pobreza” (114)²⁴ through the voices of dispossessed women. In this un-conventional novel, the illiterate heroine delivers an *oral* story that reflects her rural upbringing foreign to bourgeois ideology. Lucía Guerra interprets Jesusa’s peregrinations as a rejection of the official culture:

Por lo tanto, su formación se produce en los márgenes enclavados en la *tradición oral de la alteridad de la miseria* y será la *experiencia* y no el símbolo o el concepto elaborado en imágenes, la que la conducirá a rechazar la voz del Padre que posteriormente prolifera en las figuras del esposo, la iglesia católica y el gobierno, Y es precisamente, debido a la ausencia de lo *ideológico normativo*, que su rechazo del padre y del esposo se produce como un acto de rebelión teñido, no por conceptos, sino por la carencia de

íntimas 181). [Now I believe that there must be an influence from Oscar Lewis on me for having worked with him for one and a half months I saw him work. I saw how he gave himself to the people].

²⁴“The silenced and un-appraised aspects of a sub-culture of poverty.” In the article I mentioned above, Oscar Lewis uses this term to describe poverty as “una subcultura con su propia estructura y su propia lógica, como una forma de vida que se transmite a lo largo de la familia de generación en generación” (36). [a sub-culture with its own structure and logic, like a way of life that is transmitted in the family from generation to generation]. Oscar Lewis uses the word “culture” instead of the more precise “subculture” for reasons of brevity.

afecto frente a la imposición de una autoridad masculina que la maltrata. (122, my emphasis)²⁵

In her critique, Lucía Guerra reads Jesusa's acts of resistance to patriarchy as emanating from her personal experience and the *oral tradition of marginal alterity* rather than from concepts derived from abstract prescribed norms. Her approach is in line with my argument that Jesusa's resistance is the result of her oppression and her observations of the violence exerted by the paternal images in a *machista* society: the father, spouse, government and Church. Jesusa cherishes her freedom above all, and prefers loneliness to the submission implied in marriage. She says:

Por eso yo soy sola, porque no me gusta que me gobierne nadie ... Y si no que lo diga Pedro ... (153)²⁶

Or on another occasion, she bluntly rejects marriage:

Como padecí tanto con Pedro dije yo: "Mejor me quedo sola". Dicen que el buey solo bien se lame, ¿y por qué la

²⁵"Therefore her training occurs within the margins pierced on the *oral tradition of the alterity of misery* and it will be the *experience* and not the symbol or the concept elaborated in images what will make her refuse the voice of the Father which proliferate in the images of the husband, the Catholic Church and the Government. And it is precisely due to the absence of the *ideological normative*, that her rejection of the father and the husband is produced as an act of rebellion tinted , not by concepts, but by the lack of affection in the face of a masculine authority that harms her.

²⁶"That is why I am alone, because I don't like anybody to govern me ... And if not, let Pedro tell it."

vaca no? ... Mejor pasar necesidades que aguantar marido.
(173)²⁷

From a feminist perspective: Jesusa's creative space: Mothering and the *Obra Espiritual*.

Poniatowska's portrait of Jesusa allows for multiple readings. Beyond the narrow scope of her personal struggle for survival, Jesusa as a social being expands her creative space in two key experiences: her work as a medium in the religious community and her performance as adoptive mother to desolate children. If in her immediate familiar surroundings Jesusa acts as an agent of resistance against subjugation, on a broader social spectrum Jesusa gains a position of influence vis a vis other marginalized people.

²⁷“As I suffered so much with Pedro, I said: “I’d rather remain single. One says that the lonely ox licks itself well. And why not the cow? “It’s better to undergo hardship than to endure a husband.”

Jesusa's involvement with the religious cult of the *Obra Espiritual*²⁸ originates not so much in an existential disappointment with the Catholic Church but rather in her cultural marginality and a personal need for comfort and security. She joins the sect when she hears the voice of her dead father asking her to change her bad conduct. The *Obra Espiritual*, as a religious community, believes in reincarnation and in the communication with deceased spiritual protectors, prophets, and the dead. Its doctrine is a syncretism of Christian faith, Mesmerism,²⁹ that believes in the spiritual healing powers of the mind derived from heavenly rays, and the indigenous polytheistic religion of the shaman. Jesusa's participation in the *Obra Espiritual* becomes an important element in her life as it empowers her to impress her audience by mediating between her celestial Spiritual Father and the community in the temple. Jesusa tells of miraculous healings of incurable

²⁸Translated as "Spiritual Opus" by Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ, in "And Here's To You, Jesusa." In that essay, Poniatowska explains the doctrine as a sect that attracts the poor because of its healing powers at low expense and also as a road to hope and to a better life in the promise of reincarnation. She writes: "On the other hand, poverty dominates spiritualism, and many inhabitants of the poorer neighborhoods search out spiritualist temples to receive treatment and cures, since the spiritual doctors usually charge between three and five pesos, and sometimes the operations are more effective than those in hospitals and, of course, have a much more uplifting effect ..." (145).

²⁹Religious and healing practice named after the Austrian mystic and physician Franz Mesmer (1734-1815) who invented a method of healing that later developed into modern hypnosis. He believed that the stars influence the health of humans through invisible rays and fluids and that healing was possible through the magnetic power of his hands. His treatment was successful with hysterical patients and he insisted that his cures were a natural phenomenon. He was nevertheless accused of practicing magic and was expelled from Austria. He moved to France and his popularity continued growing, but again conventional medicine saw in him a charlatan. His method based on animal magnetism had psychological and physiological implications later used for therapeutical purposes. (Information drawn from Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970 edition).

illnesses in the poor, as when she was cured from peritonitis and swollen feet, or when with *her spiritual powers* she healed the taxidriver Antonio Pérez from syphilis. For Josefina Bórquez,³⁰ the real person behind the fictional Jesusa, her affiliation with this religious activity is central to her existence, as Elena Poniatowska confirms in an interview with Cynthia Steele: “Probablemente ella quería que yo le diera un énfasis muy grande a lo que ella juzga muy interesante que es el espiritismo Para ella la novela habría sido sólo el espiritismo, la carestía y la mala situación actual” (1989, 94).

The idea that Jesusa’s participation in the *Obra Espiritual* is not a negligible event, but rather an essential emotional support for Jesusa is reinforced by Teresa González-Lee in “Jesusa Palancares, curandera espiritista o la patología de la pobreza” (1990). This essay analyzes the character of Jesusa from a perspective of medical anthropology and clinical psychology and explains her beliefs in spiritual forces and reincarnation as a *psychological defense mechanism* to find personal stability. The author explains Jesusa’s “conversion” as:

cambio en el comportamiento motivado por un *mecanismo de defensa psicológico* de quien necesita de un sistema de apoyo moral y espiritual al llegar a la edad madura y encontrarse sola. El templo provee a través de sus espíritus “protectores” la seguridad emocional y el afecto de su familia que está muerta. (96, my emphasis)³¹

³⁰Cynthia Steele in “Testimonio y autor/idad en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* de Elena Poniatowska” discloses the identity of Jesusa Palancares, which Poniatowska concealed until after Josefina Bórquez (1900-1987) died in 1987 (1992,155).

³¹“a behavioral change motivated by a *mechanism of psychological defense* of someone who needs a moral and spiritual support system when reaching maturity and

Traumatized in her childhood, and also through the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, Jesusa finds in the *Obra* a source of power in helping other marginalized people with alternative medicine. In the *Obra Espiritual* Jesusa has the faculty to cure not only as “curandera” or shamanistic healer with medicinal herbs, but also with spiritual powers transmitted by her supernatural “protectors.”

González-Lee further clarifies this belief in the positive healing effects of spiritualism as a result of the poverty, of a situation of economic impediment to afford professional assistance. In this context, Jesusa’s *mission* as *curandera* empowers her in her community.

Jesusa Palancares, despite her subdued condition, has been capable of forging a creative source of strength to combat the forces of oppression and generate a field of positive influence into other subaltern people. Her participation in the *Obra Espiritual* entrusts her with authority over other members of the community. With her successful curative practices, she becomes an agent of beneficial change and gains an active position as a Speaking Subject in her community. In this creative space, Jesusa builds up her personal strength and constructs a subject position that utters a critique of the religious and medical establishment.³² In the next section, I analyze another source of creativity,

finding herself alone. Through its spiritual “protectors” the temple provides the emotional security and the affection of her dead family.”

³²Bar On is suspicious about granting authority and *epistemic privilege* to marginalized subjects as those trends *idealize* their agency. She argues: “Such a theory does not merely recover the agency of socially marginalized subjects but valorizes it in

her adoptive motherhood, her skills in raising orphan children whom she tries to educate to the best of her knowledge, to prepare them for the adversities of negativism and a marginalized existence.

Jesusa Palancares from a feminist and dialogical perspective

Feminist criticism has dwelt on discussions on Jesusa's gender roles, as her character does not correspond to the stereotypical female/male opposition, but is rather a combination of the two.³³ Beth E. Jörgensen also recognizes a combination of gender

such a way that even if the theory does not essentialize agency, *it always idealizes it, abstracting from the actual lived practices* and generalizing from normatively approved ones" (1993, 92, my emphasis). Even if I agree that a critique has to be cautious when attributing power to members of the periphery for political or other purposes, I would argue that the character Jesusa, even if she has to struggle for survival, is not just another stereotypical woman of the margins. The portrait of Jesusa Palancares, constructed in dialogue with Elena Poniatowska, delivers a character whose *actual lived practices* subvert oppression and display solidarity with the needy.

³³Monique J. Lemaître in "Jesusa Palancares y la dialéctica de la emancipación femenina" (1985) identifies Jesusa with Jung's four feminine types concluding that she has traits from all but does not belong to anyone in particular. Jesusa is neither the "mother type" controlled by the "Great Mother" archetype, nor the "hetaira type" controlled by the "Great Father." Although she speaks of her own sterility and claims that she dislikes children, she raises Perico with sacrifice and the hope for a better future, according to the features of Jung's "mother type." Closer to the "hetaira type," Jesusa identifies with her father and with masculine characteristics, as she describes her preference for masculine independence. As a war companion to Pedro, she also adopts the masculine model. Jesusa possesses features of other jungian archetypes, as the "*anima*-daughter" of the hetaira in her relationship to the protective fathers of the *Obra Espiritual*, and to the "medial woman," as a mediator or "Wise man" that interprets the collective unconscious of her people. Monique Lemaître interprets these features in

roles in Jesusa's personality as the heroine "imitates and assimilates 'masculine' behavior and correspondingly rejects many traditional feminine roles" (1994, 40). These "postures," she adds, can give the impression of a "liberated nature," but Jesusa "as active protagonist and speaking subject" both confronts *macho* behavior and succeeds in her feminine roles. Lemaître and Jörgensen further point out in detail the inner contradictions in Jesusa's gender constituency, and her choice of gender roles to survive in a marginalized society hostile to women.

For my analysis I focus on Jesusa's gender positions from the perspective of her behavior regarding mothering. Jesusa's family life does not follow a stable pattern. Jesusa was deprived of the nurturing experience of a mother, and her relationship to her father was tinged with ambiguous Oedipal attachments. She grows up in a loose family nucleus, where the figure of the mother is replaced by a polygamous father, alternating between an abused sister-in-law Ignacia, sister Petra, the witch-like mistresses of her father, and the aggressive stepmother Evarista. Jesusa as child and adolescent does not experience the advantages of a pre-capitalistic rural family with the emotional support of grandparents and a wide range of relatives. She has no stable nurturing parent figure to transmit to her the traditional values of mothering. As a child, then, she mostly meets negative representations of the mother figure, with the exception of the rare moments when Felipe Palancares cares for his children, or when Evarista teaches her household skills. Jesusa recalls the absence of a permanent lodging:

Jesusa's personality not only as a "product of her culture," but as a sign of rebellion, as a first step towards liberation from oppression.

Mi papá siempre fue muy caminante y andaba por distintas partes. Nunca calentó casa. Mi pobre madre lo soportaba porque era su marido, pero no podía tener más que las garritas que traía puestas y el petate donde se dormían y hasta allí, párele de contar. ¿Para qué quería cosas si de la noche a la mañana mi papá decía: “Nos vamos a tales horas”? (40-41)³⁴

The role of mothering Jesusa has to learn, as in other situations, from unforeseen circumstances. She never bore a child, but she comes in close contact with small children where she has to assume a nurturing responsibility. I would name her experience “collective mothering” to explain her nurturing quality born from a sense of solidarity with the marginalized, an inner force to overcome indifference and to assume a social responsibility towards the dispossessed.

In her book *The Reproduction of Mothering. Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* Nancy Chodorow (1978) argues that:

[T]he contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes. It is neither a product of biology nor of intentional role-training. (7)

³⁴“My father was always a good wanderer and roved from here to there. He never warmed a home. My poor mother endured him because he was her husband, but she could not have more than what she was wearing and the straw sleeping mat where they slept and that was it. Why would she want to have things if my father would suddenly say: “We are leaving in a few hours.”

In the case of Jesusa Palancares her ‘reproduction’ of mothering is the result of social circumstances of extreme necessity. She mothers orphans, children of friends whose mothers are absent. Her learning process begins with the agonizing Refugio Galván, Pedro’s godchild, in whom Jesusa has to perform the rituals of blessing to attract God’s favor for his recovery. Jesusa pours some salt on his tongue and consults the child whether he is ready to leave this world or will wait for Pedro’s return. As the child assents, Jesusa places him in his mother’s arms to die. The intermediary Jesusa does not yet possess the spiritual powers to heal, and when Angel, the child she kept for three years while working at the cardboard factory dies of pneumonia, Jesusa recalls her incapacity:

Yo no lo curé, no, pues ¿cómo lo podía curar si todavía no estaban en mí los poderes? Se nos murió de pulmonía fulminante. Y ya no tuve muchachito. (182)³⁵

The two more significant mothering experiences for Jesusa are connected with Rufino, the homeless child who helps her in her job as a butcher, and Perico who accompanies her, with interruptions, until old age. She meets Rufino soliciting on the road from San Luis de Potosí to Ciudad Valles. As Jesusa asks him whether he has a mother, he replies he has none and is hungry. Out of an impulse of collective responsibility for the poor, Jesusa proposes:

³⁵“I did not cure him because, how could I have done it if I was not yet bestowed with powers? He died of galloping pneumonia. And I had no more child.”

—Si no tienes a nadie quien vea por ti, yo te recojo. ...
 —¿Quieres vivir conmigo? Yo te recojo como hijo, yo te visto, yo te compro lo que necesites, nomás que tenemos que trabajar en la matanza. (239)³⁶

Rufino joins her for two years but then leaves taking some of her belongings.

Jesusa impassively accepts her defeat. Rufino had been a vagabond and would remain one like “esos perros sin dueño y por más que algunos tengan sus padres, nacen también para vagos y ni modo” (239).³⁷

Perico is the youngest son in a family of eight where the father is incapable of providing for or taking care of the sick mother. His indolence characterizes men as Jesusa sees them, cowards and useless. When the mother dies, Jesusa adopts Perico and raises him as her own son. She demands that he learns how to read and write and not to be lazy. Despite her care, she confesses that she did not bring up Perico because she liked him but out of compassion, “¿qué se hacía ese escuincle sin madre y acostumbrado conmigo?” (280).³⁸

³⁶“If you have no one to care for you, I will shelter you.”
 Do you want to live with me? I will shelter you as if you were my child, I’ll dress you, I’ll buy what you need, we just have to work in butchering.

³⁷“Those dogs without master ... even if some have parents, they are born to be tramps.”

³⁸“What could that motherless boy have done who was already accustomed to me?” According to M.A. Morínigo’s *Diccionario manual de americanismos*, “escuincle” comes from Nahuatl and means *dog*; in Mexican usage it means *boy* or *child*.

Jesusa is a strict mother, forcing him to go to school and to learn good social habits.³⁹ In his adolescence Perico rebels and runs away, advised by an aunt who prefers that he earn money. Jesusa's reaction is overwhelming. She is not a person used to express her feelings, and she tries to deny the profound sadness she senses by his departure. She resists distress. However, in an unexpected act of rage, she lets out her repressed frustration by killing her dog Duquesa. Perico ends up in jail, and when he is free he returns to his "mother," but she gives him a cold shoulder welcome. She assumes that if he has come home, it is not out of filial love or retribution but rather out of personal interest. Her mothering efforts have failed. Perico has returned but is penniless, a parasite. No matter how hard Jesusa tries to overcome poverty and the boundaries of oppression, she cannot lead her "son" to a better fate. Stoically, she recapitulates her experience in mothering:

Perico estuvo conmigo mientras me necesitó; pero apenas pudo agarró su camino. Yo nunca he deseado hijos, ¿para qué? Si con trabajos me mantengo yo. Pero al que Dios no le da hijos, el diablo le da cosijos: Perico. A Perico le crié porque no tenía madre. Eso es recoger a un inocente. Pero no lo crié para que me durara toda la vida. Nomás hasta que se formara y se supiera defender Yo le tengo cariño, sí,

³⁹In her 1988 dissertation "Silence in Four Works of Elena Poniatowska: A Socioliterary Approach," Kim L. Smith associates silence, the inability to communicate and to express affection with the condition of poverty. She writes: "The woman [Jesusa] was determined that Perico have the means to transcend the silent world into which poverty cast him" (291).

pero ya sé que él no me buscó porque me quería. (312-313)⁴⁰

In this statement, the narrator Jesusa speaks out her inner contradictions. She claims to never have wanted children, but she takes care of three cast off boys. She loves Perico, despite his ungrateful behavior, but is afraid to admit that she is emotionally hurt. Jesusa has been used to repress her feelings, and in this last episode of her mothering experience, she strives to deny her affliction and frustration at the failure of her attempt at a mother-son relationship.⁴¹

Jesusa Palancares, the voice of the margins, has broken up her silence by telling the story of her life marked by the fate of the oppressed under perpetual poverty and a patriarchal order of sexual abuse. This woman does not surrender to the forces of oppression without a struggle. With her sense of personal freedom and self-dignity she has overcome the barriers of resignation. Through her experiences in social commitment to other deprived people in the *Obra Espiritual*, in bringing up dispossessed children and

⁴⁰“Perico was with me while he needed me; but as soon as he could, he took his own path. I never wished to have children, what for? If with my own work I support myself. But if God doesn’t give you children, the devil gives you bugs [trouble]: Perico. I raised Perico because he had no mother. That’s what you get for picking up an innocent child. But I didn’t raise him to have him all my life. Only until he learns how to survive I do care for him, yes, but I know that he did not fetch me because he loved me.”

⁴¹Deborah Shaw in her article “Jesusa Palancares as Individual Subject in Elena Poniatowska’s *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*” (1996) points out the tension in Jesusa’s character between her strategies of survival and the traditional modes of behavior. She writes: “Jesusa’s inconsistencies are, then, a consequence of her attempt to create an autonomous subject position while remaining within the social codes of her society” (199).

in counteracting the established powers, Jesusa is an example of resistance to the oppressive powers of marginalization.

In “Vida y Muerte de Jesusa” Poniatowska acknowledges her debt to Jesusa:

De la mano de Jesusa entré en contacto con la pobreza, la de a de veras, la del agua que se recoge en cubetas y se lleva cuidando de no tirarla, la de la lavada sobre la tablilla de lámina porque no hay lavadero, la de la luz que se roba por medio de “diablitos”, la de las gallinas que ponen huevos sin cascarón, “nomás la pura tecata”, porque la falta de sol no permite que se calcifiquen. Jesusa pertenece a los millones de hombres y de mujeres que no viven, sobreviven. (42)⁴²

Jesusa’s experience and *Weltanschauung* viewed as a social critique: The ideology of poverty

Elena Poniatowska discovered the *reality of poverty* in her encounter with Jesusa.

⁴²The section “Vida y muerte de Jesusa” in *Luz y luna, las lunitas* (1994) is almost identical to “Hasta no verte Jesús mío” published in *Vuelta* and translated by G. Kolovakos and R. Christ. Therefore I transcribe their version: [Taken by Jesusa’s hand] “I came into contact with poverty, real poverty—the poverty of water drawn in pails and carried carefully so as not to spill a drop, of laundry done on the metal scrubbing board because there is no washing machine, of electricity stolen by rascals, of hens that lay eggs without shells (“just clear membrane”) because the lack of sunlight never lets them harden. Jesusa belongs to the millions of men and women who do not live, who merely survive” (144).

Her life story and world view project a social critique of the public institutions and articulate an ideology of poverty, of the subaltern Mexican culture. The voice of Jesusa Palancares merges with the voice of the author, who acts as *amanuense*, a clerk who reproduces her oral tale, the record of a long silenced voice.⁴³ Poniatowska describes their rapport as a venture that made her finally become a true Mexican, “el sentir que México estaba dentro de mí, y que era el mismo que el de la Jesusa y que con sólo abrir la rendija saldría.”⁴⁴ This feeling meant to her a revelation. In her words:

Descubrirlo fue como tener de pronto, una verdad entre las manos, una lámpara que se enciende bien fuerte y echa su círculo de luz sobre el piso. (1978, 8)⁴⁵

Elena Poniatowska meets Jesusa in jail and later visits her at home every Wednesday for a year. This woman catches her attention because of the “vigor” with which she talks to another woman in the laundry room. From a feminist and dialogic angle, it is enlightening to observe the mutual influence that these encounters have on

⁴³The novelistic production on the Mexican Revolution fills an important chapter of Latin American Literature. But their histories record the male version of the events, told by male authors and portraying mainly male heroes, such as the works by Mariano Azuela, Martín Luis Guzmán, Gregorio López y Fuentes, Agustín Yañez, José Revueltas, and Juan Rulfo, to name the best known. Regarding the fiction written by women, Nellie Campobello’s *Cartucho* and the works of Rosario Castellanos are important forerunners to *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. See Gabriella de Beer’s “La Revolución en la narrativa de Campobello, Castellanos y Poniatowska.”

⁴⁴“The feeling that Mexico, identical to Jesusa’s Mexico, lay within me, and that by the merest cracking of my shell it would emerge.” Trans. Kolovakos and Christ, 147.

⁴⁵“Discovering it was like suddenly holding a truth in your hands, a brightly lit lantern that casts its circle of light on the floor.” Trans. Kolovakos and Christ, 147.

each other. There is affection, but also conflict. When the author asks for a detail, the interlocutor answers: “Usted no entiende nada. Usted no oye.” “Yo sentía que ella me despreciaba. Me decía “Usted es una rota ... A ver, lave el overol!” (1985, 158).⁴⁶ And when she presented her the printed book Jesusa said “No me dé eso, quíteme esa chingadera de ahí que nada más me estorba.” “Usted inventa todo, son puras mentiras, no entendió nada, las cosas no son así” (1985, 160).⁴⁷ But what Poniatowska does is to give her testimonies a book form. These facts illustrate the mutual effect that dialogue has on their subjectivities. By using the ‘operating consciousness’ of Jesusa, feminine language gains a new position, a new form of enunciation, a new *space* from which to speak. Jesusa is unaware of the feminist power struggle with phallogocentrism, but in her authenticity, she inserts the powerful voice of a doubly marginalized person, a woman and moreover a poor woman, into the historical center.

It is in this *contact* with Jesusa and through her encounter with an un-narrated fraction of Mexican life that Poniatowska constructs her novel. Poniatowska’s language, her *word*, in Bakhtin’s terminology,

is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is

⁴⁶“You do not understand anything. You do not listen.” “I felt that she despised me. She used to say: You are a ragged woman ... Let’s see, wash that overall.” My translation. See note 11 in this chapter.

⁴⁷“Don’t give me that. Take away that nonsense that only bothers me.” “You invent everything, they are lies, you understood nothing.”

already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way. (DN 279)

The text of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is an encounter of two minds, two fragments of Mexican culture. There is a double-authorship in this fictional piece, as the *voice* is genuinely Jesusa's⁴⁸ and it is the writer, who edits her oral report.⁴⁹ Poniatowska recognizes her debt in appropriating Jesusa's autobiographical record, and claims to have invented characters and events to give the text a fictional form, but she insists that the voice of the narrator is Jesusa's.⁵⁰

⁴⁸As Poniatowska states in an interview with Magdalena García Pinto: "Yo hice, en base a un relato absolutamente real, una novela" (1988, 181).

⁴⁹Juan Bruce-Novoa in his article "*Hasta no verte Jesús mío*: novela documental" discusses extensively the orality of this novel. Referring to Walter J. Ong's study on *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, Bruce-Novoa compares the impact of orality in today's fiction to the revolutionary force that printing had in the Renaissance as it challenged the authority of the Church and of the elite discourse. He further points out the assets of *Hasta no verte* in the dynamic process emanating from the interaction between author and informant and the resulting text that introduces the language of orality in the literary canon, thus contesting the realistic novel. On the subject of the neglected aspects of orality in the critique of *Hasta no verte* see Richard C. Smith: "¿Quién Quiere Usted Que Sea Bueno?"

⁵⁰In several interviews and writings Poniatowska informs on the process of writing this novel. See her article "Hasta no verte Jesús mío" in *Vuelta* 1978, "Testimonios de una escritora: Elena Poniatowska en micrófono," 1984, "Vida y muerte de Jesusa," (1994), and her interviews with Magdalena García Pinto, 1988, with Cynthia Steele, 1989, and Steele's article "Testimonio y autor/idad en *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, 1992.

At this point it is pertinent to mention that a long list of critiques has been written on the validity of this book as a testimonial novel.⁵¹ It is not the purpose of this dissertation to discuss this topic as I consider *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* a work of fiction and not a documentary testimony in the mode of Rigoberta Menchu's or Domitilia Barros's transcriptions.⁵² My approach to the testimonial aspects of this novel is linked to the ideological *interaction* between author and protagonist to extract Jesusa's vision of her historical and social circumstances. In his chapter "The Margin at the Center" in *Against Literature* (1993), John Beverly refers to this problem when he writes:

What happens in testimonio is not only the conversion of an "other" into an ideological signifier but also the confrontation through the text of one person (the reader and /or interlocutor) with another at the level of a *possible* solidarity and unity (a unity in which differences will be respected). (80, italics in the original)

The question arises as to what degree the text of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is the *conversion* of Jesusa's voice into an *ideological signifier* conceived by the writer and to

⁵¹Besides the works listed in note 9 in this chapter that I use in my discussion, see the essays by Ana-María Amar Sánchez (1992), "La ficción del testimonio," Emil Volek (1993), "Las modalidades del testimonio y *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* de Elena Poniatowska.

⁵²I refer to their testimonies reproduced by their interlocutors in "*Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*," and I, *Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, reproduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, and Domitilia Barros de Chungara's "*Si me permiten hablar ...*": *Testimonio de Domitilia una mujer de las minas de Bolivia*" (1978) transcribed by the Brazilian journalist Moema Viezzer.

what degree the *confrontation* between author and informer alters Jesusa's

Weltanschauung.

In order to reconstruct the *ideology* of the real Jesusa through her utterances and social critique, it is important to first draw a portrait of her imaginary, the cultural background of her orality. Jesusa is a woman who loves the nature of her valley in Southern Mexico. Her poetic popular language expresses her love for climbing trees in her childhood, the feeling of the "living water" of the sea breaking against her body on the beaches of Salina Cruz, the abundance of colorful fruits from the *huertas* in Tehuantepec. Her joyful memories, however, are tinted with the bitter contrast of her present situation in the urban slum. She compares the water of the open sea with that of the local pond, where she would not swim:

aquí en una agua encharcada que está muerta. No, el chiste es bañarse en la playa donde viene la ola que ve uno que se levanta en blanco y lo tapa por entero, resistir el golpe del agua en el cuerpo, vestido o encuerado, para sentir el agua viva. (25)⁵³

A leit-motif present through the entire book is the antithesis between the "antes" y "ahora," the "before" and "now," the sharp and negative divergence of how life was, before the Revolution, as a peasant in her home land, and how her life is now in her sub-proletarian condition in the city. Since the rupture with her father at 15, and again after the

⁵³"here in a stagnated pond with dead water. No. The fun is to bathe at the beach where one sees the wave that rises in white and covers you completely, to resist the gush of water on your body, covered or naked, in order to feel the living water."

death of her military husband, Jesusa dreams of returning to Salina Cruz, but she can never save enough money for the trip. She ends up in Mexico City because, when she is dismissed from the battlefield, the compensation money she receives is robbed with all her belongings at the train station, thus determining her fate to stay in the slums of the capital. In a sharp criticism of the political elite, she accuses President Carranza of denying her pension with the excuse of her young age. She protests:

A mí me dio hartó coraje. Sentí que la muina me subía y hasta se me volvió sudor. A él qué le importaba si yo era joven o vieja. Tenía que pagarme porque no eran haberes de él; era lo que me había dejado el muerto para seguirme manteniendo. Pero Carranza se quedó con mi dinero, maldecido. (136)⁵⁴

According to Jesusa, Carranza and his ruling team were allocating to themselves the salaries rightly due to the widow, since her husband, her father and her brother, were all dead because he had sent them to fight in vain. Her criticism extends to the corruption in the military and the injustice perpetrated by the government towards the underprivileged. Through her comments on the inefficacy of the regime, on the absurdity of the senseless fratricidal killing in the Revolution, and the misery of her struggle for survival, Jesusa Palancares articulates a reverse discourse of the myth of the Mexican Revolution and its promises for social well-being. Of the three famous revolutionary

⁵⁴“It gave me lots of courage. I felt that the rage climbed up in me and covered me with sweat. What did he care if I was young or old. He was obliged to pay me because the earnings were not his; they were what the dead had left me to support me. But Carranza kept my money, damned.”

heroes, Jesusa despises Carranza, as “un malo disfrazado de bueno” (136),⁵⁵ she hates Villa most for his acts of terrorism in the North and calls him “un bandido sin alma,” a soulless bandit who ordered his men to rape women (96). Only Emiliano Zapata meets with her sympathy, as he ‘respected’ the women he imprisoned and returned them to their families, young Jesusa among them, without violence. But even in this instance, her critical tone has a twist of bitterness and irony:

Cuando conocí al general Zapata era delgado, de ojos negros Era muy bueno, palabra. Por la forma en que nos trató no era hombre malo Zapata no tiraba a ser presidente como todos los demás. Él lo que quería era que fuéramos libres *pero nunca seremos libres*, eso lo alego yo, *porque estaremos esclavizados toda la vida*. (78, my emphasis)⁵⁶

Jesusa’s narration of Josefina Borquez’ very personal account of the historical events echoes her profound disillusionment because of the futility of their sacrifice. Her voice is charged with the anger and indignation of the thousands of Mexicans who fought in the hope of freedom and progress, but who ended up dislocated, displaced and *enslaved* as before. She verbalizes the senselessness of the ordeal:

Yo creo que fue una guerra mal entendida porque eso de que se mataran unos con otros, padres contra hijos,

⁵⁵“A wicked fellow disguised as a good man.”

⁵⁶“When I met general Zapata he was slim, with black eyes He was very good, my word. By the way he treated us he was not an evil man Zapata did not aim at being president like all the others. What he wanted is that we would be free *but we shall never be*, that I allege, *because we will remain enslaved for the rest of our lives*.”

hermanos contra hermanos; carrancistas, villistas,
 zapatistas, pues eran puras tarugadas porque éramos los
 mismos pelados y muertos de hambre. Pero ésas son cosas
 que, como dicen, por sabidas se callan. (94)⁵⁷

Jesusa's oral story also criticizes the working conditions in the aftermath of the Revolution. Already in her apprenticeship years, helping in the household of her *madrina*, her rich guardian Felisa, Jesusa is confronted with the abysmal bridge between rich and poor. Even when she is treated with a certain preference and has other servants under her command, Jesusa sleeps on the balcony on a sleeping mat, using a brick as a pillow. She is fed but not paid, nor does she receive clothes. When she gets ill with smallpox, she cures herself with sand and water from the river. As she grows older, Jesusa wanders from job to job. Her observations on the labor situation reflect the cultural and social dimensions of her experience as a subjugated woman of the periphery. With humor, she describes her stress as a servant, who gets up before sunrise when the sky is still "un reguero de estrellas"(48),⁵⁸ and who runs around like a "rata atarantada," a "dumbfounded rat"(244). Nevertheless, even in these extreme conditions of her puzzling existence, Jesusa sets the limits of her tolerance. In a system that does not guarantee any social or medical protection for domestic help, Jesusa leaves her source of income when

⁵⁷"I believe that the war was a blunder because the fact that they killed one another, fathers against sons, brothers against brothers; the people of Carranza, Villa, Zapata they were all fools because we were all penniless and starved. But these are things that, as one says, are too well known to be spoken of."

⁵⁸"A sprinkling of stars."

she feels exploited or is mistreated, such as when the mistress of the house gives foul meat to the servants after having eaten filet, or when her feet are swollen from rheumatism caused by the cold floors she has to wash without shoes. She says:

Así duré, entiendo yo, como medio año o más hasta que me dieron las riumas porque los zapatos que traía del norte me los quitaba todo el día para que no se me acabaran Como todos los días se lavaban el zaguán y el patio, las mojadas me hicieron mal. Y la española Pepita ordenó que me fuera porque *enferma no me podía tener* en su casa. (141, my emphasis)⁵⁹

These few examples mirror a broad picture of the *reality of poverty*, of the strategies for survival in an environment where hunger is a daily threat and when labor legislation is still in the making and only benefits the higher layers of society. Jesusa joined all unions in the factories where she worked, be it of carpenters, hairdressers, or cardboard industries. She recalls the disorder in the parades on the 1st of May, the pressure to choose between becoming a member or being hungry and unemployed, and the ever higher share they had to pay in spite of their low salaries. With her sarcastic comment, she recounts why she dropped her affiliation:

—No—les digo—, yo busco quien me mantenga, no a quien mantener. ... Con el Sindicato fregaron tanto al que puede como al que no puede. ¡No es chiste! ¡Ni siquiera le ayudan a uno! Al contrario, lo arruinan. Y no nomás

⁵⁹“So I lasted, as I understand, like half a year or more until I got rheumatism because I did not wear the shoes I had brought from the North so that they would last As the halls and patio were washed daily, the wetting made me ill. And the Spanish Pepita told me to leave because *she could not keep a sick person* in her house.”

arruinan a dos o tres; arruinan a todos los que se dejan, a todos los necesitados que no tienen más remedio que apechugar Total: un desmadre. Y luego los discursos. (235)⁶⁰

Confronted with this situation of injustice, Jesusa's autobiographical narrative renders an image of "combatividad e independencia,"⁶¹ a resistance to be exploited, be it by men in her immediate surroundings, by the institutions of the estate and the workforce, or in her refusal to comply with the established version of truth. In her critique of the establishment, Jesusa's language is formed in the clash of the centrifugal forces of her rebellious narrative in conflict with the monologic account of truth of the centripetal voices of the official rhetoric. In a dialogic exchange with the voice of Jesusa, Elena Poniatowska structures her narrative that encompasses plural voices from a wide range of ideologies and *social languages* that she incorporates in a heteroglossic discourse. This text reproduces the voices of the official History of the political elite in conflict with the voices of the margins, and an image of the institutions viewed critically from a

⁶⁰—"No—I tell them. I look for someone to support me and not one to support With the Union they have upset those who have and those who don't have. It's not funny! They don't even help you! On the contrary, they ruin you. And not only do they ruin two or three; they ruin all those who let themselves[be ruined], all those needy who have no other way out than to give in In sum: a mess. And then the speeches."

⁶¹In her already mentioned article in *Vuelta* (1978, 11), Poniatowska claims that in drafting Jesusa's character, she "tried to emphasize Jesusa's personal qualities, to stress what distinguishes her from the traditional figure of the Mexican woman: her rebelliousness, her independence Her combativeness." Trans. Kolovakos and Christ, 155. These features are also key to the essay by Lisa Davis who sees Jesusa's "resilient character, her courage and recklessness, and her taste of freedom" as a result of her experience through the Mexican revolution (1986, 231).

deconstructive perspective by *subaltern*⁶² women and workers. These elements are in accordance with Bakhtin's concept of the novel as "a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (DN 262).

It is at this significant intersection between the availability of a written language for the oppressed, and the necessity of an artistic hand to transform the *fable* into a novel that the creative mind of the writing author intervenes. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Spivak in "Can the subaltern Speak?" is reluctant to grant the privilege of the word to the silenced subjects in the margins, to those illiterate peasants erased by the "epistemic violence" (283) of Western thought. Spivak brings into the discussion Foucault and Deleuze's 'naive' view that "the oppressed, if given the chance ... and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics ... *can speak and know their conditions*" (283). She argues that this possibility applies to the First World and not to colonized subjects. Due to the basic cultural differences between 'sender' and 'receiver', she asks:

How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (285)

Spivak further points out that the historian who transcribes the 'insurgency' of a subject into 'text for knowledge' has to suspend his 'own consciousness' in favor of the

⁶²I use this term in Gayatri C. Spivak's sense of the binary opposition elite-subaltern exposed in "Can the Subaltern speak?" (1988), where the subaltern is seen as "a *deviation* from an *ideal*—the people or subaltern—which is itself defined as a difference from the elite" (285).

‘insurgent-consciousness’, and that the resulting narrative can only meet with the ‘sanctions’ of the *dominant groups*. In the case of women’s insurgence, she contends, there is the *ideologically* constructed additional subordination to male domination that makes her speech even less accessible. She writes:

If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (287)

This debate, which is applicable to the marginalized in Latin America as well as in India, does not fully address the situation in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* due to the artistic intervention of Elena Poniatowska. The ‘author’ does not transcribe, as the historiographer, the voice of the marginalized subject in an “essentializing language” (Spivak 27), but rather builds up her narrative in *dialogic interaction* with her subaltern subject, Jesusa Palancares. The writer acts in empathy, *solidarity* and tension with the “sender” in a dynamic process of exchange that brings Jesusa out of her silence to project an autonomous character, a fully engendered Subject.⁶³ As I mentioned before, it was first through the household maids and definitely through the real Josefina Borquez that Poniatowska became acquainted with the culture of poverty. It was “de la mano de Jesusa,” “taken by Jesusa’s hand” that she “came into contact with poverty, with real poverty” (“Vida y muerte de Jesusa” 144). Through the writing skills of Poniatowska the

⁶³For Edward H. Friedman the “un-analytical mind” of Jesusa finds a locus of identity and expression in Poniatowska’s editing of her “shrewd perception” of the environment. He writes: “The oral history removes the barrier of silence, creating a voice and a new identity for Jesusa” (1987, 184).

subaltern *speaks* and articulates her condition of marginality. The resulting fictional novel, even if *sanctioned* by certain readers of a dominant elite, has found a massive response and a reading audience that brought the book to its 32nd reprint by 1996. The ‘receivers’ of Jesusa’s *insurgency* are thousands of Latin American, cosmopolitan⁶⁴ and academic readers⁶⁵ who have produced a significant critical arsenal with respect to her story.

To proceed with the discussion of the *authority* of Jesusa’s voice, it is relevant to bring up Susan S. Lanser’s premise regarding the *discursive authority* of a text as related not to an established center, but to *specific reading communities* (1992, 8). In this context, Jesusa, the voice of the margins, gains authority in her interaction with the reading audience.⁶⁶ As I pointed out in my Introduction (8), Lanser regards voice as a *trope of identity and power* (1992,3) and suggests a reading of the “narrative voice as a

⁶⁴Jørgensen states that the novel has been translated into French, Polish, German, Dutch, and Italian. Interestingly enough, the English translation has been delayed (1994, 142, n. 3).

⁶⁵C.J. Ekland in her dissertation “The Multiple Languages of *Tinísima*” (1997) gives a detailed bibliography on Poniatowska. In the section on “Doctoral Dissertations on Elena Poniatowska” (251-252) she lists eleven works written between 1973 and 1993. Among these, two are related to my topic: W.Z. Woodrich “When the Center No Longer Holds: A Study of the Female Voice in Latin American Testimonial Literature,” and F.M. Santucci “Women in Mexico: An Analysis of Female Characterization in the Fiction of Elena Poniatowska.”

⁶⁶Poniatowska also believes in the relevance of a ‘feminine public’ to grant authority to literature written by women. In an interview with Gabriela Ovando she says: “Por otro lado está la enorme importancia del público femenino que compra libros y asiste a las aulas y a las conferencias cada vez más en todos los países, y especialmente en América Latina” (“Elena Poniatowska: El periodismo en la piel,” 85).

critical locus of ideology” (1992, 15). If we consider ideology as a ‘lived relation’⁶⁷ rather than an abstract set of ideals, it is possible to speak of Jesusa’s ‘ideology’ as her response to her social circumstances and to the dominant hierarchies of society. Listening to her stories and her exchange with multiple sectors of Mexican society, her oral history projects an ideology of the subaltern Mexican woman, her nature-loving imaginary, her self-defense against violence, her belief in determinism and her pessimistic view of the fate of the poor. Her verbal expression merges with Poniatowska’s voice. In a relationship of mutual tension, the writer intervenes with her own focus to select and organize the information in a structured language, to bridge the deficiencies of the ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Spivak, 25) of the Other. If one presupposes that every utterance is loaded with ideology, the oral discourse of Jesusa is subordinated to Poniatowska’s value system. As already mentioned in this discussion, Jesusa first rejects the written text because it is ‘full of lies’ and does not reproduce her version. To her, the most relevant stories are her participation in the *Obra Espiritual* and life’s scarcity. There is an obvious tension⁶⁸ between the writer and the informer, as Poniatowska wants to write a readable

⁶⁷ A “lived relation” is particular to one who lives these experiences, as opposed to Althusser’s “imaginary relation” on the level of the fantasmatic. In his book *Ideology. An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton discusses at length the multiple meanings of ideology. He opposes the concept of ideology linked to ‘lived relations’ to the concept of ‘empirical representations’ (1991, 30) and argues that the first are not subjected to the binary concepts of true and false. The basic definition of ideology as “the general process of production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life” (28) is further developed into six variations according to its cultural, political, social or ethical connotations.

⁶⁸ This tension is referred to by Elizabeth Starcevic in her article “Elena Poniatowska: Witness for the People” as “the boundaries between character and author” (77). Nina M. Scott, in “The Fragmented Narrative Voice of Elena Poniatowska,” while

novel and has little understanding of the spiritual cause. She tells Cynthia Steel in an interview:

Probablemente ella quería que yo le diera un énfasis muy grande a lo que ella juzga muy interesante que es el espiritismo, y yo le di muy poco espacio porque era una cosa que yo no entendía. (1989, 94) ⁶⁹

To further illustrate this ideological dissent, it is relevant to contrast the dual importance of the *Obra Espiritual* in both narrators. Jesusa insists on the fundamental importance of this religious institution in her life. I have already mentioned the social and emotional significance that it has to her as a means of authority and empowerment and as a ‘psychological mechanism of defense’. Poniatowska, with her sophisticated and intellectual background, distrusts—as do most of academics—the superstitious elements of the *Obra*. This experience becomes Jesusa’s exclusive *locus*, a space that belongs only to her and her fellow believers. This is, again, a locus of resistance and a private place

praising the “vitality” of Jesusa’s narrative that “convince[s] the reader of the absolute reliability of her transcriber,” (413) concludes that “the ambiguity between fact and fiction still undermines the effectiveness of Jesusa’s testimonial” (414). These conflictive opinions about the authenticity of Jesusa prove that there is a hors-de-texte struggle between author and fictional character. In the process of reconstructing the voice of Jesusa, Poniatowska keeps a certain coherence in the *Weltanschauung* and the attitudes of her protagonist, but Jesusa refuses to recognize herself in the fictional character. This tension where the real and the fictional Jesusa compete for a voice, produce an “ambiguous” authenticity that I find not less effective for being mediated than a more documentary reproduction of a marginal character.

⁶⁹“Probably she wanted me to emphasize spiritualism as she judges it to be most interesting, and I gave very little room because it was something I did not quite understand.” And she adds that she also followed the advice of her friend Guillermo Haro not to dwell on this topic that was of no interest to the reader (94).

where neither her (conflictive) friend Elena Poniatowska nor those who read her language can trespass. The Spiritual Opus is a non-readable *locus of meaning* for the literate, and therefore it is also a “non-appropriable” element of Jesusa’s orality. Certain aspects of the *Obra*’s faith, such as reincarnation, are incomprehensible to the agnostic and also to the Judeo-Christian monotheistic tradition that believes in an after-life and redemption. In my view, reincarnation can only be accepted as a projection of hope for the suffering poor.

To return to the initial question of authority of the voice of the marginalized, and to what extent the reader may detach the voice of the informer from the ideological framework of the author, I find that the fictional character of Jesusa Palancares, invested with the analytical and artistic mind of Elena Poniatowska and in a dynamic, mutually enriching and tense dialogical exchange, reproduces an autonomous *subaltern* woman. Her speech echoes her ideology expressed in her picturesque language and in her social critique. The multiple voices that the author orchestrates in her/their text compose an unheard, revealing and vibrant narrative of an extraordinary and combative woman of the margins who refuses to succumb to the oppressive forces of the subculture of poverty.⁷⁰

To push this argument to a more radical conclusion, and if one agrees with Eagleton’s statement that “ideology is a matter of ‘discourse’ rather than of ‘language’”

⁷⁰Lucille Kerr discusses the theme of authority in *Hasta no verte* within the framework of testimonial literature and writes: “Jesusa is a figure of counter-authority, and, like that of a good many other testimonial subjects, her voice comes from below, as it were, to overturn some of the stories about which, her narration would propose, it is precisely the marginal subject who knows, and can thus tell, who is lying and who is telling the truth” (1991, 386). Bell Gale Chevigny also refers to the authority that emerges from Jesusa’s marginal position: “Jesusa gains prodigious authority from a range of activities on which society confers no authority” (1985, 55).

(*Ideology*, 223),⁷¹ one can conclude that *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* reproduces the ideology, the *Weltanschauung* of Jesusa Palancares integrated in the *language* of Elena Poniatowska.

***Tinísima* as an example of a polyphonic novel that portrays Mexico as a cosmopolitan center for artistic and ideological encounters**

Twenty three years after the appearance of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*, Elena Poniatowska publishes *Tinísima*, a multi-generic, polyphonic novel that marks a milestone in the development of the feminine voice in the fiction of Latin American women writers. A biographical novel on the life of the photographer and devoted member of the Communist Party Tina Modotti (1896-1942), this masterpiece assembles voices from the media, personal letters, documents, photographs, and the plural languages of the characters of the artistic and political scene in the turmoil of the 1920s in Mexico and the 1930s in an effervescent Europe. The narrative integrates *multiple consciousnesses* that interact in a polyphonic text in the spirit of Bakhtin's theories as discussed in *Problems of*

⁷¹The whole sentence reads: "Ideology is a matter of 'discourse' rather than of 'language' —of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of signification as such. It represents the points where power impacts upon certain utterances and inscribes itself tacitly within them the concept of ideology aims to disclose something of the relation between an utterance and its material conditions of possibility, when those possibilities are viewed in the light of certain power-struggles central to the reproduction (or also, for some theories, contestation) of a whole form of social life" (223).

Dostoevsky's Poetics when referring to the “basic structural feature of Dostoevsky’s works”:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voice is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky’s novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. (6, italics in the original)

In order to appreciate the polyphonic quality in *Tinísima* I find it useful to trace a parallel between the voices of the two heroines, Jesusa Palancares and Tina Modotti, as a means for depicting the evolution in Poniatowska’s writing. The women protagonists originate in different social backgrounds and perform in unrelated spheres of activity, but there is a common link in their view to see and share with the subaltern culture of the poor. In contrast with Jesusa, the motherless woman from the margins, Tina Modotti is the daughter of an Italian anti-fascist worker who emigrated to the United States. Poniatowska’s source for her narrative is not a direct contact with the interlocutor, but a result of ten years of research, of reading about Modotti and interviewing people who had met her.⁷² As she reveals in an interview with Magdalena García Pinto in 1988, at the

⁷²Poniatowska never met Tina neither did she choose her personally, as she only learned about her through her reading of Mildred Konstantin’s *Fragile Life* when she was asked to write a film script on her. See García Pinto 188-189.

time when *Tinísima* was still in the making, this novel is far more elaborate than the previous one:

Aquí tengo mil páginas de entrevistas con personas que las conocieron. En fin, es un trabajo muy amplio y mucho más complejo porque la Jesusa era *una sola voz* y nunca fui a comprobar si las anécdotas eran ciertas. Lo de Modotti es más complejo porque intervienen *muchas personas*. El trabajo de *reconstrucción* es mucho más serio. (*Historias íntimas* 189)⁷³

This fragment discloses that the author is conscious of the existence of *plural voices* in the later novel in contrast with the *only one voice* of Jesusa's. Poniatowska's *reconstruction* expands from Jesusa's peripheral world to the metropolitan intellectual and political milieu. While Jesusa's public sphere is the underworld of the Mexican Revolution, the urban workforce, or the religious community of the Obra Espiritual, Tina's activity interacts with the artistic, post-revolutionary Mexico of the 1920s, with the Communist Stalinist era in Moscow, and with the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. The circle of her political career closes, when after the defeat of the Republicans in Spain and Tina's disappointment at the Stalin-Hitler Pact, the life-long anti-fascist returns to Mexico City via New York, to die of a heart attack in a taxi on her way home in 1942.

⁷³“Here I have a thousand pages of interviews with people who knew her. After all, it is a very broad work and much more complex as Jesusa was *one voice only* and I never checked whether the anecdotes were true. The case of Modotti is more complex because *many persons* intervene. The work of *reconstruction* is much more serious.”

If the portrait of Jesusa represents a courageous woman of the margins and her ideology derives from her experience in her strategies of survival, Poniatowska's delineation of Tina Modotti is one of a perceptive artist with an aesthetic eye that reorients her focus to capture scenes of human indignity and to expose poverty. A former partner and student of the artistic photographer Edward Weston, Tina nurtures her creativity in contact with the suffering and oppressed people.

In 1929, at the height of her fame as an artist, when her works were in demand by international periodicals and local rich patrons, Tina's consciousness experiences the counter position between her two mentors, Weston, the master, and Xavier Guerrero, the socializer. A plurality of consciousnesses interact in the following text that depicts her inner conflict regarding the publication of her photos in the Soviet magazine *Puti Mopra*, an agency of the International Red Aid:

Tina sabe que a Weston le disgustarían estas fotos; no las ha compuesto con suficiente cuidado, se les ve la premura, y ¿que diría el gobierno mexicano de la publicada en *AIZ*,⁷⁴ esa de los mendigos borrachos? Seguramente la tacharán de extranjera perniciosa. Ya se lo advirtió Xavier antes de irse, esa mirada fija en lacras nacionales como la mujer tirada en la banqueta, hinchada de pulque, vomitada en su embriaguez, ofende a México. Tampoco le gustaría a Edward. “¿Por qué tomar eso? ¿Qué estás tratando de probar? En realidad me parece una falta de respeto al individuo.” Le respondería que también la pobreza es una falta de respeto a los campesinos, sus camisas y sus

⁷⁴It refers to the left-wing journal *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* of Berlin. Sarah M. Lowe in her book *Tina Modotti. Photographs* tells of the “remarkable statistics” of Modotti's photographs that appeared in Mexican and international political and artistic periodicals in Berlin, Paris, New York, and Mexico City (34).

pantalones rotos, y que ella sabe que allá en la sierra los maltratan, les quitan sus tierras y que eso también quisiera retratarlo. Su sangre, su mierda, sus heridas, sus rostros reventados a culatazos. Tina se ha propuesto alejarse del esteticismo, del arte por el arte, pero desea a la vez *eleva*r la realidad a la altura del arte. (252, my emphasis)⁷⁵

If in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* Poniatowska aimed at portraying the *reality of poverty*, in *Tinísima* the author seeks to *heighten* such *reality* through the sensitive spirit of the protagonist to an aesthetic category of art. In this text the mind of Tina Modotti interacts with the teachings of the master Edward Weston, with the socialist discourse of the painter Xavier Guerrero who made her discover the *other side* of the fence of Mexican reality, and with the official rhetoric alien to the reality of the dispossessed. Tina finds strength in her new beliefs, in her *ideology* elaborated with the political instruction from the Communist Party, but above all her commitment derives from her personal encounter with the *reality* of the poor. A new form of enunciation emerges in *Tinísima*, a

⁷⁵“Tina knows that Weston would not like these photographs; she has not composed them with sufficient care, one notices the haste, and what would the Mexican regime say about the one published in *AIZ*, that one of the drunken beggars? They would surely point her out as a pernicious foreigner. Before leaving, Xavier had already warned her that her gaze so fixed on the national flaws like the woman stretched out on the sidewalk, swollen up with pulque [fermented juice of the maguey plant], who had vomited her intoxication, offends Mexico. It would not please Edward either. “Why choose that? What are you trying to prove? In fact, I find it a lack of respect for the individual.” I would answer him that poverty is a lack of respect towards the peasants, their torn shirts and pants, and that she knows that there in the sierra they mistreat them, they rob them of their lands and she would also like to portray that. Their blood, their excrement, their wounds, their faces blown with a rifle butt. Tina has made up her mind to distance herself from aestheticism, from art for art’s sake, but at the same time she wishes to *elevate* reality to the level of art.”

more elaborated text than *Hasta no verte* where the dialogical interaction occurred mainly between writer and informer, or between Jesusa and another character. Enunciation in *Tinísima* expands into multiple levels of exchange, personal, public, and pluri-cultural. The text quoted above reveals Tina's position in society, in her surroundings, where she will emerge as an autonomous subject. There is an encounter of the centripetal voices of the master narrative (Weston, Guerrero, or the government), with the unofficial centrifugal discourse of Tina evolving into an independent, *autonomous* voice, in alliance with the discourse of the subaltern. The author does not perceive a situation in a *monologic*, unilateral way, but she rather dramatizes a situation of conflicting social forces. Poniatowska's *ritornello*, her leit-motif of inscribing oppressive conditions in her work, is also present in *Tinísima* through the camera eye, the activity of Tina and her hope and choices to construct a better *reality* for the dispossessed.

The conjunction of a plurality of voices can also be analyzed from a generic angle where journalism, the discourse of the law and political power intertwine with the voice of the protagonist in numerous instances.⁷⁶ The brilliant scenes of the courtroom episode interlace the voices of the press,⁷⁷ the judges and the public with Tina's verbalization of

⁷⁶It is worth noting the correspondence of Poniatowska's writing with Bakhtin's above quoted concept of the polyphonic novel as "*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses*" when she orchestrates heterogeneous voices and genres in one event.

⁷⁷Also in this aspect one can find a reference in Bakhtin's PDP where he writes that Dostoevsky "almost never appeals to history as such, and treats every social and political question on the plane of the present day." He further suggests that Dostoevsky's "passion for journalism" helps him reach a "subtle understanding of the newspaper page as a living reflection of the contradictions of contemporary society in the cross-section of

the assassination of her companion, the Cuban revolutionary, Julio Antonio Mella. The press is integrated in the novel as an active fictional participant through the utterances of Luz Ardizana, Tina's friend who reads the *Excelsior* and *El Universal* at daybreak. The official press misconstrues the occurrence, vilifies and violates the intimacy of Tina through the publication of photographs, her private correspondence, the personal diary of Julio, and her political activity that elaborates into a suspense serial story in the newspapers. These texts interact with declarations in favor of Mella, or Diego Rivera's defense of the artistic quality of the nude photographs of Tina presented in the press as pornographic. The communist papers *El Machete*⁷⁸ and *La Hoz y el Martillo* also intervene accusing the Cuban government of Machado of the crime, but it is obvious that their voices are weak next to the power of the official organs. At the cross-examination in the courtroom Tina faces biased judges and witnesses who contradict and distort her version by trying to involve her in the killing. This nightmarish experience can be read as Tina's loss of innocence, her passage from the haven of her private life into the public hostility and official corruption. The subsequent transformation in her character is told by Poniatowska through Tina's gaze reflected in her supportive friend Luz Ardizana:

a single day" (1984, 29). Poniatowska, who also is a zealous journalist, uses press releases to incorporate "history" and a "reflection" of the present social reality into the narrative.

⁷⁸*El Machete* was the communist periodical where Tina and Julio Antonio Mella worked together. According to Christiane Barckhausen-Canale's biography *Verdad y leyenda de Tina Modotti*, this magazine was founded in 1924 with the purpose of socializing art and making it available to the broad public. Artists like Siqueiros, Orozco, Diego Rivera, Xavier Guerrero and also Weston and Modotti supported and published in this magazine (1989, 95).

Mira a Luz largamente, pero más que a Luz, parece descubrir a una nueva Tina reflejada en los ojos de su amiga, como si adquiriese una visión de sí misma que antes no tenía, como si otra mujer que viviera dentro de su piel súbitamente le fuera revelada. Algo le pasa; su corazón late en su contra. En los ojos de su amiga, Tina percibe un escalofrío. Luz se levanta precipitadamente y sale. De nada le sirve permanecer en el juzgado mientras quién sabe qué fuerzas oscuras se confabulan contra Tina. Tiene que fomentar alguna acción, precipitarla. Jirones de pláticas la sobresaltan y la confunden. (67)⁷⁹

In this dynamic dialogic exchange with a woman addressee, the protagonist encounters her new self, the Tina defamed and weakened by the overwhelming power of the institutions, the law, and the press. Although no words are said, her interlocutor Luz grasps Tina's inner conflict, her introspective consciousness. She can read her silence, and in an impulse of solidarity, she wants to overcome their impotence and act.⁸⁰ In her confrontation with the master-narrative, Tina ends up disarmed, but recomforted by Luz.

⁷⁹“She gazes at Luz for a long time, but rather than seeing Luz, she seems to discover a new Tina reflected in the eyes of her friend, as if she would acquire a vision of herself that she did not have before, as if another woman who had lived inside her skin would suddenly be revealed. Something is happening to her; her heart is pounding. In her friend's eyes, Tina perceives a shiver. Luz stands up abruptly and exits. There is no use in staying here at the court while who knows what dark forces confabulate against Tina. She must foster some action, to act quickly. Shreds of talks shake and confuse her.”

⁸⁰By opposing two female addressees in a critical situation, Poniatowska exercises a practice of feminist dialogics by which an association with a female addressee may challenge patriarchy, and also contribute to the formation of a subject position. See Lynne Pearce *Reading Dialogics* 105.

Charlotte Jeanne Ekland dedicates an entire section of her dissertation on *The Multiple Languages of Tinísima* (1997) to the trial scene. She views the Courtroom as the “center of the patriarchal establishment” where Tina is seen as “a woman who has transgressed the rules of propriety”(71). Guided by the theories of Bakhtin and Kristeva on the constitution of the subject through language, Ekland proposes a reading where the semiotic challenges the symbolic through acts of *jouissance* or ‘joy of living’. She writes:

If the “subject in process” contains within it the idea of the subject on trial, then the courtroom where Tina was literally put on trial seems a particularly appropriate place to start exploring the interaction of conflicting forces that constitute her identity. (65)

In her analysis she opposes the symbolic imposition of order associated with the official discourse, the linear *time* and narrative, and the semiotic, irregular and recurrent *underlying structures* where Tina’s consciousness unfolds. She selects passages where *patriarchal power structure* and the language of the courtroom contrast with Tina’s memories of joyful moments with the absent Mella and her emotional space. Ekland concludes that “[i]n order to exist [Tina] must bridge the gap between the conflicting realms, not in an act of transcendence, but rather through an uneasy integration of opposing forces that continually threatens to collapse” (73).⁸¹

⁸¹Eckland’s work is enlightening in her observation of the importance of the male’s gaze for self-search and self-fulfilment in Tina’s development. Also worthwhile reading is the chapter dealing with the integration of the non-fiction photographic texts into the heteroglossia of the novel. Although Ekland does not refer to Beth E. Jörgensen’s article “*Tinísima*: Elena Poniatowska’s Tina Modotti” published in 1993, these two elements are already mentioned in Jörgensen when she writes: “The focus falls on Tina

Tinísima can also be read as a portrait of Mexico's nation-building spirit of the 1920s when it was the center of messianic nationalism, the chosen center for the dissemination of international communism and a vibrant cosmopolitan center for artistic and ideological encounters. Real characters of the political and artistic elite participate in exchanges with Tina's world, Diego Rivera, Vasconcellos, Eisenstein, Sandino, among many others. After her expulsion for her suspect participation in an attempt against elected President Ortiz Rubio, Tina goes into exile to Berlin and Moscow in the Stalinist era. Another facet of twentieth century history irrupts in the novel, and Tina's total submission to the system contrasts with her previous independence in Mexico. Her photographing feels technically inadequate in advanced Berlin, and she eventually renounces her art by a symbolic gesture of throwing her camera into the Muscovy river. Poniatowska presents other aspects of oppression, not just of the poverty in America, but also of the hermetic Soviet apparatus in the 1930s. Tina's basically humanitarian temperament flourishes again in Spain where she acts as the nurse Maria in Madrid's headquarters of the International Brigades.

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to study *Tinísima* in depth, but only to present it as a polyphonic novel that encompasses critical moments in the history of Mexico and Europe. If Tina starts as the bohemian artist well versed in the joie de vivre, her encounter with Guerrero awakens her to have a social cause. Her commitment to the

primarily as the object of the male gaze, or in an attitude of waiting on or waiting for a man ..." (30). And later she writes: "One of the keys to go farther in the analysis may be to read the novel beside Tina Modotti's photographs, through her camera's lens, as it were" (32).

International Communist Party engulfs her, and after her expulsion from Mexico she has no way out. She can no longer choose. In her unconditional devotion to the Party, Tina the politician is consistent with her ideals and, if compared to her last companion Vittorio Vidale who is more pragmatic after defeat, Tina identifies thoroughly with her convictions. In the end her disillusionment about her truth, about the failure of the system she believes in, in spite of her commitment and sacrifice, also affects her health. She feels useless. In her last period in Mexico she can no longer reconstruct her path. Even though the protagonist dies in the novel, in Poniatowska's text the autonomous character Tina Modotti remains unfinalized as her story is an open book that offers multiple readings.⁸² Through her self-consciousness and *field of vision*⁸³ that encompasses her social milieu, the events of the times, clashing ideologies and communicating personages, the character of Tina Modotti reproduces the voice and vision of a woman author conscious of the fields of power interacting in the development of her independent characters. *Tinísima* as

⁸²The photograph heading the last chapter shows four roses taken by Tina Modotti. The subtitle reads "... *tal vez tu corazón oye crecer la rosa ...*" [*maybe your heart hears the rose grow*] a verse taken from Pablo Neruda's poem "Tina Modotti ha muerto" (partly quoted in the novel, 659, and published in *Tercera Residencia* 84-85). The open, flourishing petals of the picture juxtaposed to the intertext of Neruda's poem can be read as an 'open book' of Tina's biography. The poem tells of the *new* rose growing from yesterday's—Tina as she was still alive—and how "tu suave silencio se llena de raíces," [your soft silence is becoming full of roots] that will multiply and flourish. This elegy also helped stop the vindictive and ironic reaction of the press to her sudden death. Not mentioned in the novel is Pablo Neruda's participation in Tina's wake where he comforted Vittorio Vidale. See Neruda's *Confieso que he vivido* 353-335.

⁸³In describing Dostoevsky's gift for "hearing and understanding all voices simultaneously" in the creation of a polyphonic text, Bakhtin uses this term in reference to all the aspects that 'enter' the *field of vision of the character himself* where the author no longer has a 'surplus' of information (1984, 48).

a polyphonic novel encloses multiple dialogic relationships where voices of characters, ideologies, historical events, fragments from the press and photographic reproductions recreate History in a text with a plural level of consciousnesses that interlace to produce a fully orchestrated polyphonic masterpiece.

The fiction of Elena Poniatowska inscribes discourse of the margins into the literary canon. Her writing reproduces the voices of the anonymous Mexicans in a counter- discourse of the official narrative of 20th century Mexico in two different ways: The journeys of Jesusa Palancares focus on domesticity and the struggle for survival, and the space of Tina Modotti, who moves in the artistic and political communities, offer a new reading of the parameters of power, a de-legitimization of arbitrary law, and a de-mystification of the Mexican revolution. Jesusa may be an oppressed woman exposed to violence, vice and poverty, but she is also an agent of resistance who opposes abuse and creates a space for personal empowerment through spiritual practices and by mothering orphans. She is a combative woman who refuses to remarry, resists gender oppression and, relatively speaking, overcomes her position of subordination. Tina Modotti also represents women's oppression and the courage to struggle in a wider ideological range. Both women characters embody Poniatowska's conflictive interaction with the Mexican official account and her own vocation to inscribe a painful reality, the untold suffering of women on the periphery. Jesusa's oral story and Tina's exemplary existence in adherence to her cause interwoven with the multiple social languages that interact in Poniatowska's texts, project an ideology of the subaltern and of the dissident Mexican woman. This

narrative where the voice of the oppressed breaks up its legendary silence and articulates its marginality gains authority in its exchange with a large reading community. The voice of the author integrates with the voices of the margins in a discourse that reproduces another side of the Mexican reality, the *Weltanschauung* of the oppressed. Following these parameters of resistance and transgression, the writings of Luisa Valenzuela that I analyze in the next chapter, verbalize women's condition of subordination in Argentina's repressive system under the military dictatorship.

Chapter Four

Luisa Valenzuela: “La mala palabra”

... I believe in the existence of a feminine language, even though it may not yet have been completely defined¹

Al escribir sobre la cosa política, más bien sobre el horror,
de las muertes provocadas, de las desapariciones, es
realmente un querer saber por qué esta crueldad, por qué

¹Luisa Valenzuela. “The Word, That Milk Cow,” 96. Trans. Doris Meyer. There is no Spanish version available from this essay. Since Valenzuela often reads her papers for an English-speaking audience, several of her works are published in English only. Other essays that have no Spanish version are: “The Other Face of the Phallus,” “The Writer, the Crisis, and a Form of Representation” and “The Five Days That Changed My Paper.” Her essay “Writing with the Body” was first published in English in 1991, and its Spanish version “Escribir con el cuerpo” in 1993. The 1986 Fall edition of *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, dedicated entirely to Luisa Valenzuela, publishes translations of several essays, and *World Literature Today* 69.4 1995 prints “The Mask and the Word,” a translation of “La máscara y la palabra” published one year later in the collection *La palabra en vilo: narrativa de Luisa Valenzuela*. Therefore, in the instances when no Spanish text is available, I quote Valenzuela’s texts in the original English version. A list of English translations of her work is published in the above mentioned edition of *World Literature Today*.

este horror, y asumirlo y reconocerlo. Esta es la función del escritor como *nombrador*.²

Allí donde el cuerpo está escribiendo en libertad escribe la metáfora. O, para decirlo de otra forma, se accede al orden de lo simbólico y esa es la búsqueda y esa es la lucha. Lucha más que nada contra las propias barreras de censura interna que suelen parecernos infranqueables, sobre todo a nosotras mujeres, que hemos recibido tanta orden negativa, tantas limitaciones.³

Luisa Valenzuela (born in Buenos Aires, 1938) writes fully aware of and committed to her task of articulating a feminine speech that would unravel feminine subjectivity and create a language that “charters” the feminine gaze at the reverse of the phallic order.⁴ Her language is born out of the necessity to utter the unrepresented desires

²“When writing about the political matter, or better said about the horror, about the provoked deaths, the disappearances, it is really a will to know the reason behind this cruelty, behind this horror, and to assume it and admit it. This is the function of the writer as *namer*.” “Entrevista con Luisa Valenzuela en New York, noviembre de 1982 y junio de 1983.” In Magdalena García Pinto. *Historias íntimas. Conversaciones con diez escritoras latinoamericanas*, 232.

³“Wherever the body is writing freely, the metaphor writes. Or, to say it differently, one reaches the symbolic order and that is the search and the struggle. A struggle above all against one’s own barriers of internal censorship that seem unsurmountable, specially to us women, who have received so many negative commands, so many limitations.” Luisa Valenzuela: “Escribir con el cuerpo,” 40. (My translation. This fragment is not translated in the English version of the essay “Writing with the Body”).

⁴I use this term to paraphrase Valenzuela’s essay “The other face of the phallus” mentioned in Chapter One, and as a prelude to the analysis of her theory on the formation of the feminine language at the ‘reverse’ of phallogocentrism and the patriarchal assumption of the superiority of the phallus as a ‘universal signifier’.

of female eroticism as well as an ineluctable urge to speak out fears, to decipher the horror caused by human cruelty under the political repression in Argentina in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

My approach to Valenzuela focuses on her theoretical essays that construct a feminist⁵ poetics and on her fiction read as a political narrative that deploys the feminist technique of subversion, of destabilizing patriarchal paradigms in order to say something else, something beyond, or in a hidden subtext as a means of articulating the censored political reality. Reading Valenzuela's text as *The Language of the Ineffable* I see her writing as a search for what is hidden, for the event that resists being narrated, the unutterable in the voices of fear, of what is censored, of the unspeakable.

Valenzuela's fiction marks a culminating point in the trajectory of the search for a feminine voice in Latin American women's writing. The language of her texts is a clear statement of resistance to patriarchy represented both in an erotic male-female confrontation and in the *perverse power*⁶ of the authoritarian military regime. The writer

⁵In an interview with Adriana J. Berguero and a team of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1992 Valenzuela clearly states that although many consider her as 'feminist', she does not follow any directives. Her ideology is to be faithful to her text. She also claims that even if she agrees with many 'feminist' ideas, she does "not know exactly where feminism begins and ends" (99). Therefore, I use the word 'feminist' to describe her poetics not in a militant sense of feminism, but rather to associate her thoughts with feminist theories relevant to my research.

⁶In her essay "The Five Days that Changed my Paper" she discusses the 'suffocating circle' of values, theory and the writer, while commenting on the arrival of George Bush in Buenos Aires and the March of the Mothers on the Plaza Mayo. She writes: "Values interest me there where they are least available: in political issues. I want

as a *nombrador*, in her function of *naming* the unspeakable political reality must overcome her self-censorship, her fear of transgressing the barriers of the forbidden word. In this effort to discover and verbalize the mechanisms behind the abuse of power, Luisa Valenzuela unveils the concealed truths under the mask of official language. Her text can often be read as a double-voiced discourse, from Bakhtin's perspective where two voices compete dialogically for hegemony. Looked at from a master-slave perspective, Valenzuela's text stratifies the voices of power and those of resistance, and by giving voice to those silenced by gender dominance or political repression, her narrative cracks fissures in the monologic speech of power, inscribing a feminine text in the Symbolic order that obliquely delegitimizes patriarchal authority.

A significant contribution of Valenzuela's fiction to the discussion of the specificity of feminine language is her belief that empowerment comes through language and that *self-representation* can be achieved through the articulation of the intricacies of power relations. It is with the power of the word that the writer of fiction may overcome the mighty political power, as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo challenged the official discourse with their silent moral power. The power of the writer is her voice to recapture the censored image, to preserve this memory from imposed forgetfulness through the language of the ineffable, of what *resists being verbalized*.⁷

to *decode the perverse discourse* of those in power. Probably that is why I write" (1991, 8, my emphasis).

⁷In "Writing with the Body" Valenzuela writes: "But I don't believe in the ineffable. The struggle of every person who writes, of every true writer, is primarily against the demon of that *which resists being put into words*" (Sternburg II 1991, 193) .

In “The writer, the Crisis, and a Form of Representation,” a conference paper presented to an international audience of prominent writers, Valenzuela describes her creative act as a confrontation of *the madness of power* with the *madness* of the written word:

I want to know what this madness of power is all about,
and I write a book, trying to get under the skin of those who
covet power, who have it, or who believe in it. I give them
power over words, and suddenly, *with language* they begin
overwhelming even I who created them. It is exciting and
terrifying at the same time. *It is language that conveys
power, and those who manage to freeze it master others*
.... The *madness of power* resides in its idea that it can
control fiction, that is to say, the *imaginary expression of
desire*. The *madness of fiction* is to believe that it doesn't.
(82, my emphasis)

Valenzuela's theoretical discourse: “I believe in the existence of a feminine language”

Valenzuela's aesthetics believes in the existence of a feminine language that will emerge when women surmount the barriers of self-censorship, the borders marked by society that have determined what they are supposed to do with their bodies, and say with their mouths. In her essay “The Other Face of the Phallus” (1986) Valenzuela writes that by censoring women's speech and desires, men have “mapped” womanhood (242).

Expanding on Lacan's theories of the symbolic phallus seen as the "great signifier,"⁸ she posits that women have to "reorganize their territory," "reinvent or restructure their language" by freeing "desires that cannot be confessed," allowing "this obscure discourse coming from the depths of the guts" to be spelled out. The result is a language that destabilizes phallogentric signifiers. According to Valenzuela, many women writers in Latin America are overcoming the "barriers of repulsion" as a means of searching for knowledge (one may refer to Lispector or Peri Rossi), of what lies beyond the boundaries of decorum, of what has sealed "the mouth of a woman ... ever since the notion of 'lady' was invented by men" (245).⁹ The fact of accepting what is "disgusting" and of overcoming the stigma of "shame" can have expiatory effects and lead to "cosmic" knowledge. The liberation of imposed silence is also articulated in an earlier text on feminine language in which Valenzuela encourages gendered writing to be aware of the feminine body and desires:

To measure our words we will use our own scales. And we will be conscious of our bodies when it comes to the body of our writing. It will be—and is now becoming—a way of defending our own dark desires, our fantasies, including our

⁸Elia Geoffrey Kantaris in her book *The Subversive Psyche* carefully lists the points of encounter and of incompatibility between Lacan's theories and Valenzuela's reading of Lacan and Irigaray in her essays "The Other Face of the Phallus" and "Mis brujas favoritas." See pages 36-42 in her chapter "Madness, Exile, and the Lacanian Mirage."

⁹An important new study of the language of the body in relation to Latin American writers is Amy Kaminsky's *Reading the Body Politic. Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* where she offers a gendered reading of works by Valenzuela, Rossi, Traba and Garro, among others.

erotic fantasies which are so different from men's. Our phantoms as well. Especially those not thought to be "feminine."¹⁰

Two essays often mentioned in the critique of her works "Mis brujas favoritas" [1988, "My favorite witches"] and "La mala palabra" [1989, "Dirty Words"] further encourage the deconstruction of patriarchal restrictions of the voice. At the origins of a feasible feminine language is the questioning of the phallic representation of woman in the dichotomy "puta/santa," whore/saint, "one of the many veils we must begin to tear" ("Mis brujas" 88), a fundamental masculine myth that needs to be decoded. Valenzuela privileges the witch as an image of the woman writer, and of herself as an author, as the witch represents the one who threatens through her mouth, who is not afraid of pronouncing the forbidden word,¹¹ the "malas palabras," or the *dirty words* sealed off from a 'ladies' mouth. The process of constructing a language entails a transgression that would reveal women's unheard voices and *hidden desires*:

¹⁰"The Word. That Milk Cow" (1983, 97). Valenzuela's aesthetic project brings to mind Julia Kristeva's description of the then newest generation of feminism, where the struggle is no longer concerned with political, economic or professional demands, but with "sexual equality," the sexual difference and their relationship to the symbolic order. See "Woman's Time," *Signs* 7.1:21.

¹¹Z. Nelly Martínez in her enlightening study of the works of Valenzuela, *El silencio que habla*, begins her exposition with this essay where the image of the witch is a metaphor of the voices of subversion and liberation. See the Preface and Introduction, pages 11-15 and 28-30. Stephen Hart in *White Ink* uses "Mis brujas favoritas" as a theoretical background for analyzing Valenzuela's novel *El gato eficaz* as an example of 'lenguaje hémblico' (1991, 116-124). On "La mala palabra" see Castillo's discussion on censorship and male domination (1992, 98).

Hace tanto, ya, que venimos lentamente escribiendo, cada vez con más furia, con más autorreconocimiento. Mujeres en la dura tarea de construir con un material signado por el otro. Construir no partiendo de la nada, que sería más fácil, sino transgrediendo las barreras de la censura, rompiendo los cánones en busca de esa voz propia contra la cual nada pueden ni el jabón ni la sal gema, ni el miedo a la castración, ni el llanto. (“La mala palabra” 491)¹²

These essays written in the 1980s deal with the problematics of enunciation. At this point, Valenzuela was more concerned with the articulation of a “lenguaje hémblico” or a specific female’s language chartered in a newly organized *territory* (“Mis brujas” 90-91). Her fiction, in particular the experimental novel *El gato eficaz* (1972) reveals an effort to surpass the barriers of decorum and appropriate new avenues of expression.

In *Pequeño Manifiesto* (1986) Valenzuela declares that the writer is not only a “literary animal” but also a political being who may not remain undisturbed by events. Literature does not pretend to solve problems, but rather to shake ideas and keep them in motion. The writer needs then a clear ideology to focus on the problems. And this is a dangerous task not because they are opposing censorship, but because they cannot permit themselves the comfort of passivity. She says:

¹² “It is a slow and untiring task of appropriation. A transformation of that language consisting of “dirty” words that was forbidden to us for centuries, and of the daily language that we should handle very carefully, with respect and fascination because in some way it doesn’t belong to us. We are now tearing down and rebuilding: it is an arduous task. Dirtying those washed mouths, taking possession of the punishment, with no room for self-pity.” Translated by Cynthia Ventura in “Dirty Words,” *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 6.3:13. Although this is not an exact translation of the passage quoted above, I find it transmits the key ideas exposed in Valenzuela’s text.

Escribimos para descubrir, para develar, pero también para
señalar aquello que por comodidad preferimos olvidar.
(82)¹³

As early as 1981 in an interview with Sharon Magnarelli published as “Censorship and the Female Writer”¹⁴ Valenzuela speaks of the censorship of the reader who refuses to read the atrocities of the military regime as “a very strong Freudian negation” by which people, in order “to avoid the pain of confronting a reality that is not at all pleasant (people are disappearing or tortured or dead) ... just refuse[s] to recognize or acknowledge that reality” (204). Censorship becomes more serious when the government tries to impose “a mode of thought” to “prevent” people from thinking or “force them to negate reality.” Valenzuela points out that “self-censorship” is just another form of the “Freudian negation of reality” and adds: “You cannot see things because you do not allow yourself to see them; you are blindfolded” (206).¹⁵

Her critical essays in the 1990s deal more intensely with the barriers imposed on language by the censorship and fear of articulating a political reality of repression and disbelief. “Writing with the body” is not a replica of Cixous’s statement in “Le rire de la

¹³“We write in order to discover, to disclose, and also to point out that which we would much rather forget.” Trans. Lori Carlson. “Little Manifesto,” *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 6.3 (Fall 1986): 20-21.

¹⁴Appendix to Sharon Magnarelli. *Reflections/Refractions. Reading Luisa Valenzuela* 203-219.

¹⁵In the Presentation of the 1991 edition of *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (1975) she refers to the black humor and grotesque elements in her stories as “masks” to “evade censorship.” She writes that in a situation of terror the barriers of internal, official, and even the reader’s censorship ‘crop out’ as it happened in the era of the dictatorship when the Argentines rolled down the ‘toboggan of silencing’ (6).

Méduse” : “Ecris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre” (43)¹⁶ but rather a total commitment to one’s writing, to take risks and to overcome fear, as she experienced it when, at her return to Buenos Aires, she sat in the cafés to listen to the people and to write about the ‘strange things’ happening in her country, a country being demolished by terrorism. She then felt as if she were performing “guerrilla exercises”:

Donde pongo la palabra pongo mi cuerpo Pienso que
debemos seguir escribiendo sobre los horrores para que no
se pierda la memoria y vuelva a repetirse la historia.
 (“Escribir con el cuerpo” 39).¹⁷

¹⁶Sharon Magnarelli in her article “Luisa Valenzuela: Cuerpos que escriben (metonímicamente hablando) y la metáfora peligrosa” points out that the *écriture féminine* and Valenzuela’s writing share the purpose of finding a new territory where language would inscribe women’s desires and experiences, but she adds that in Valenzuela’s concept of “writing with the body” there is also the inscription of violence in the bodies of the characters. For the discussion Magnarelli considers Diana Fuss and Adrienne Rich’s concepts of the differences between a universal and an abstract body and *my own body*, the self-referential body of *my immediate experience*. See Díaz and Lagos 56-61. In her recent dissertation submitted at Cornell University under the supervision of Debra Castillo, Jennifer Joan Mohlenhof also associates Valenzuela’s writing to French feminism. She maintains that Valenzuela’s theory of language “By incorporating the physical and exhorting women to liberate their writing, reflects a vision of body-writing similar to that described in *l’écriture féminine*.” See *Reading for Bodies: Literature from Argentina’s Dirty War (1976-1983)*, 82. In her bibliography Mohlenhof only refers to “The Other Face of the Phallus” and “The Word, That Milk Cow” which are earlier theoretical works by Valenzuela and she does not mention her more recent works where Valenzuela distances herself from *l’écriture féminine*.

¹⁷“I put my body where my words are I think we must continue writing about the horrors so that memory isn’t lost and history won’t repeat itself.” Trans. Cynthia Ventura and Janet Sternburg, 198. Fernando Ainsa in his brilliant analysis of the role that fear plays in some works by Valenzuela associates her effort to preserve the memory of the outrages under the Dictatorship to Walter Benjamin’s ‘culture of remembering’ in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt*. 688. In an interview with Gwendolín Díaz Valenzuela further discusses the trope of “writing with the body” and speaks of an “integration” between mind and body to liberate discourse: “Mientras se escribe con la cabeza domina el logos

In a more recent essay “So-called Latin American Writing” (1993) Valenzuela describes the process of writing as “the struggle to say what resists being said” (212). The writer faces inner dark forces and phantoms as in a journey comparable to Columbus’s voyage that brings her to a world of amazement she did not expect to reach, a new reality beyond her understanding, where her former knowledge is no support but rather “a putrid rainforest” that she has to overcome:

For writing is not an exorcism or a catharsis as much as it is an acknowledgment, a recognition. A moment of facing and often discovering for the first time (and it is freaking) not only the inner inhabitants but the obscure knowledge. A monster of loc Elliot Ness? Appearing at the least expected instances of writing and disappearing the minute we try to capture it with a stroke of the signifier. (217)

In Valenzuela’s fictional arsenal, as in the works of many new Latin American writers, the ingredients of their fabulations are the “contradictions and perversions and invasions and inversions and investments” (218) that the writer faces daily and which she attempts to understand through her writing. In this sense Latin American writing is a *literatura de denuncia* (218) and language “un arma de doble filo,” a *double edged weapon* (219).

Luisa Valenzuela, together with a new generation of women writing in Latin America today, are conscious of the importance of creating new avenues of feminine

sobre el eros cuando se está escribiendo con el cuerpo está todo integrado, eros y logos actúan ambos en equilibrio” Díaz y Lagos 41.

awareness, the need of creating a symbolic contract where feminine subjectivity will have gained equal power to masculine speech. But her project is not one aiming solely at gender confrontation, or verbalization of political abuse of power. Rather, it is one of internalization of women's uncharted lands to emerge with an equalizing feminine Symbolic.

This selection of theoretical reflections places Valenzuela at the center of the feminist criticism with a language of resistance and transgression. The feminist view that subjectivity is constructed through a practice of subversion to the patriarchal logos merges in her voice as a bridge to the Symbolic.

Valenzuela's strategy for constructing a feminine language from a standpoint of defiance and transformation of the logos echoes Luce Irigaray's concepts of shaking the patriarchal model, *désancrer le phallocentrisme, le phallocratisme* (*Ce sexe* 77). In her discussion of the creation of a *féminine* space in discourse, Irigaray proposes a different mode of enunciation, not based on a subject-object binary opposition, but on the elaboration of a language that breaks away, that "disturbs" the univocal phallocratic conception of truth. She writes:

Ce qui suppose que les femmes ne se veulent pas simplement les égales des hommes dans le savoir. Qu'elles ne prétendent pas rivaliser avec eux en construisant une logique du féminin que prendrait encore comme modèle l'onto-théo-logique mais qu'elles essaient plutôt de déprendre cette question de l'économie du logos. Qu'elles ne la posent donc, pas sous la forme: "La femme, qu'est-ce que c'est?" Mais que, répétant-interprétant la façon dont, à

l'intérieur du discours, le féminin se trouve déterminé: comme manque, défaut, ou comme mime et reproduction inversée du sujet, elles signifient qu'à cette logique un *excès, dérangement* est possible du côté du féminin. (*Ce sexe* 75-76)

In a narrower and non-political spectrum, Hélène Cixous in *La Jeune née* associates the concept of "writing the body" with *jouissance*, with liberation from censorship and breathing down syntax and logic:

By writing herself [the verb "to write" is being used transitively], woman will return to that body, that has been more than confiscated from her ... In censuring the body, one censures at the same time breathing [le *souffle*] and speech.¹⁸

But, even if Valenzuela's aesthetics reflects an awareness of French Feminist discourse and views language as the starting point for a reconstruction of the logos, it is important to read her feminism as emerging from the social and political urgency to name violence and unmask power. Laura García-Moreno analyzes Valenzuela's "female subject" in the light of French Feminist theories, and postulates that although both perspectives see language "as the locus of resistance and potential social transformation," the French discussion concentrates on the semiotic and cultural aspects of gender, while Valenzuela's aim is one of ethical commitment. She writes:

¹⁸In Susan Rubin Suleiman. "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," *The Female Body in Western Culture*, 17.

The goal behind Valenzuela's urge not to speak in terms of petrified essences ... has more to do with the wish to move out of a system of linguistic, erotic, and political relations in which both men and women are caught, with the need to move out of the state of blankness related to the terror imposed on a whole community.¹⁹

Cambio de armas [Other Weapons] as an example of feminine writing: The silent song against oppression

Guided by the theoretical framework of Valenzuela's poetics, this chapter explores the relevance of her writings as a reflection of the feminine voice in Latin America in its confrontation with power and of her narrative strategies to inscribe the language of the ineffable, the untold *rumor*, the whisper of women's experience beyond perplexity. For my analysis I have chosen her collection of short stories *Cambio de armas* (1982)²⁰ as an example of Valenzuela's writing project to articulate women's voice in its resistance to social and political repression.²¹ The collection has five stories with women

¹⁹“Other Weapons, Other Words: Literary and Political Reconsiderations in Luisa Valenzuela's *Other Weapons*,” 17.

²⁰Hanover, NH, 1982. Rptd. 1987. All quotations from the text are taken from this edition and abbreviated as *CA. Other Weapons*. Trans. Deborah Bonner (1985). All translations of the citations from the Spanish text are from this edition and referred to as *OW*.

²¹Her first fictional works *Hay que sonreír* (1966) and *Los heréticos* (1967, published together in one volume as *Clara. Thirteen short Stories and a Novel*, 1976) are

protagonists in different situations of struggle to gain a place in the balance of power, to search in their own consciousness, to construct their subjectivity, to learn to express their fears and desires, and to survive in a political situation of cruelty and victimization. My reading is not chronological, but I rather order my selection according to the increasing presence of the political power in the text. I approach each story from a different angle to examine Valenzuela's language: "Ceremonias de rechazo" as the breakthrough with male domination, "De noche soy tu caballo" as the language that reveals the forbidden Eros, "La palabra asesino" as the locus where the writer as *nombrador* assumes the responsibility of naming the unutterable. In the story "Cambio de armas," I examine gender and power relations in the light of Kristeva's theories on abjection, and in the short novella "Cuarta versión" I inquire into Valenzuela's narrative strategies to decode the language of the unsayable in a political atmosphere of oppression.

stories of trial and transgression. The experimental novel *El gato eficaz* (1972) marks a breakthrough in her writing as it is a playful exercise in the limits of the readable. Her literary vocation to record the silent atrocities being committed by the military Junta in Argentina began while working at the journal *Crisis*. Though not politically involved, she heard the reports about the persecuted, tortured and *desaparecidos*. "La política nos la han impuesto," she says in the interview with García Pinto, "porque llega un momento en que no se puede uno desprender de eso, el horror fue tan grande que callarlo es lo peor" (232). [Politics have been imposed on us because the moment comes where one can no longer rid oneself of it, the horror was so overwhelming that the worst was to silence it]. Her books *Aquí pasan cosas raras* [1975; *Strange Things Happen Here*, 1979], *Como en la guerra* [1977; *He Who Searches*, 1977], *Cola de lagartija* [1983; *Lizard's Tail*, 1983] reflect her pledge to name the unspeakable. At her return to Argentina after ten years of absence she published *Novela negra con argentinos* (1990), *Realidad nacional desde la cama* [1990, *Bedside Manners* 1995], and *Simetrías* (1993) which deal with the problematic of passivity, power, and repression from various angles.

Literary criticism on *Cambio de armas* has shifted from an enthusiastic reaction to her innovations in language (Araujo 1986, Magnarelli 1988) and her explorations of feminine identity (Lagos 1987), to a poststructuralist reading of gender and subjectivity (García-Moreno 1991, Castillo 1992), to a Lacanian position and the master-slave perspective (Díaz 1993), and it has also been read as an example of gynocentric writing (Muñoz 1991). Recent criticism deals more with the problematic of power and domination (Martínez 1994, Feal 1996), by focusing on Foucault's theories of the body as a locus of power (Morello-Frosch 1996, Mohlenhof 1997), of Eros as a path to knowledge (Bertelloni 1992), and of writing as a vehicle for the recuperation of 'suppressed' memory (Berguero 1993, Ainsa 1995).²²

Laura García-Moreno in "Other Weapons, Other Words: Literary and Political Reconsiderations in Luisa Valenzuela's *Other Weapons*" (1991) points out that from a Latin American feminist perspective, Valenzuela's key contribution is her stress on the socio-political character of gender, which entails the awareness of the need to dismantle male constructions of the feminine, the link between gender, language, and relations of oppression, and the female "re-appropriation of difference from the perspective of the oppressed subject"(11-12). The link with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* that views feminist subjectivity as culturally constructed is evident. What are women then to do,

²²Doctoral Dissertations on Valenzuela have proliferated in the past years. The MLA CD-ROM database lists nine PhD theses on her work between 1993 and 1997. The themes are related to writing under the dictatorship and gender-related topics. See L.J. Hopkins 1993; J.P. Gómez 1993; A.F. Fitts 1995; and C.N. Cogdell 1997.

asks García-Moreno, once they have reached the “public sphere of language and political action, once they hold weapons in their hands” in order to avoid repeating the authoritarian power structure? Women characters in *C4* resist the dominant forms of power and, to different degrees, assume their role as a subject in the political and social scene.

Gwendolin Díaz’s article “De Hegel a Lacan: El discurso del deseo en *Cambio de armas* de Luisa Valenzuela” (1993) rearranges the stories according to the awakening of self-consciousness (“concientización”), or progressive participation of female characters in the realm of the symbolic, and analyzes them under the lenses of Lacan and from a master-slave angle.

Díaz reads *Cambio de armas* from the Lacanian perspective of language as the source of subjectivity. Language validates the masculine as the possessor of the phallus as signifier, power and the word. Women are relegated to a condition of lack and dependency. The stories also reflect men’s and women’s struggle for recognition and the master-slave dialectic elaborated by Hegel and reinterpreted by Kojève and Lacan. To conclude, Díaz sees Valenzuela’s achievement in this collection as an answer to the classical question “What does woman want?” (Freud’s “Was will das Weib?”) and she answers:

[Valenzuela] [s]ugiere que hace falta un discurso que desarrolle una metáfora alternativa que no se base en el dominio y la sumisión a que nos condena Hegel, ni que se estructure según el orden fálico que describe Lacan. En el transcurrir de sus cuentos, la autora crea, deshace y recrea la palabra, se mofa del discurso establecido y ensaya nuevas

posibilidades lingüísticas. Comienza a esbozar un espacio discursivo fresco, aún por crear, pero lejos de la opresión y la violencia de la metáfora fálica. (737)²³

Although not referring to the entire collection but only to the short story CA, Willy O. Muñoz in “Del fallogocentrismo a la escritura ginocéntrica: *Cambio de armas* de Luisa Valenzuela,”²⁴ links the birth of language to the deconstruction of phallogocentrism which is then replaced by a gynocentric feeling (“el sentir ginocéntrico,” 130) originating in the knowledge of one’s own body and jouissance. These ideas are in accordance with Cixous’s “affirmation of difference” through a language that would explore the potentialities of feminine “libidinal economy” and Muñoz points out that Valenzuela’s project to modulate meaning by expressing feminine desire is in line with Irigaray’s view that women do not need to invent a new language but should rather question the masculine logos. He writes:

... [E]n “Cambio de armas” no se articula un lenguaje nuevo, sino que se cambia el valor del signo para darle una orientación ginocéntrica. (133)²⁵

²³“Valenzuela suggests that what is needed is a discourse that would develop a metaphor neither based on the domination and submission to which Hegel has condemned us, nor structured according to the phallic order described by Lacan. Through her stories, the author creates, undoes and recreates the word, she mocks the established discourse and tries new linguistic possibilities. She begins to sketch a fresh discursive space, one still to be created but far from the oppression and violence of the phallic metaphor.”

²⁴*Antipodas. Journal of Hispanic Studies of the U of Auckland and La Trobe*. U Auckland, New Zealand 3 (July 1991): 125-134.

²⁵ “In “Other Weapons” there is no articulation of a new language but rather a change in the value of the sign towards a gynocentric orientation.” As I pointed out in

These selected critical essays²⁶ on the book *Cambio de armas* analyze the question of gender and of power seen from the angle of the master-slave dialectic, as well as the creation of a gynocentric language emerging from the resistance to phallogocentrism and from the uncoding of women's sexuality. My interpretation will be guided by Valenzuela's poetics exposed above to show to what degree her fiction reflects her theoretical writings. I intend to read her narrative in the context of power relations and with a dialogic²⁷ approach that reads the text in the social and political context as a double voice between a subverting gendered voice and authoritarianism. Valenzuela's language is born in the confrontation between the power of censorship and the voice of the author as an agency of liberation from oppression in a dictatorship. The woman author as the *nombrador* of a silenced reality fabricates her text in a dialogical interaction between the *madness of power* and the *madness of fiction*. There is an intertwining of the private with

Chapter One, gynocriticism refers to what Elaine's Showalter views as the *difference* in women's writings produced in a man-dominated culture.

²⁶Besides the books by Magnarelli (1988), Cordones-Cook (1991), Martínez (1994), and Díaz y Lagos (1994), there are two important journals that have dedicated an entire issue to a critique of the work of Valenzuela: *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1986) and *World Literature Today* 69.4 (1995).

²⁷Most studies of the work of Valenzuela listed above follow a poststructuralist approach. The works of Bakhtin are sometimes mentioned but do not constitute a central theoretical approach, as in the book by Z. Nelly Martínez *El silencio que habla* (1994, 35 and 46-47 n.35) and Juanamaria Cordones-Cook (1991). There are, however, two enlightening essays that read Valenzuela from a Bakhtinian perspective: D. Emily Hicks: "Valenzuela: The Imaginary Body" (1991) on the grotesque in Valenzuela's *Cola de Lagartija*, and Ksenija Bilbija: "El gran teatro del mundo (argentino): *Realidad nacional desde la cama* de Luisa Valenzuela" (Díaz y Lagos 1996) on transgression and the carnivalesque.

the public discourse, the sexual with the political, and the concrete individual suffering with the abstract rhetoric of authoritarianism.²⁸

“Rituals of Rejection” : “a fire burning its own flames”

“Ceremonias de rechazo” [“Rituals of Rejection”], the third story in the collection, portrays a woman in the process of liberation from male domination. Each of the four sections is a step towards the reconstitution of the self that I would describe as anxiety, unconscious internalization of her situation, rituals of purification, and final rupture and restoration. Amanda’s initial deadly wait reaches a point of exhaustion that *prompts her anxiety into motion*: “Pone su ansiedad en movimiento” (87). This initial act can be interpreted as Valenzuela’s strategy of ‘writing with the body’ which pervades throughout the entire story. It is a sensation of danger but where she feels “exultante, traspasada de vitalidad, de una fuerza inexplicable que quizá esté en relación con el haber

²⁸The period of repression and state terrorism in Argentina known as the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” lasted from 1976 to 1983, also called the ‘guerra sucia’ or ‘dirty war’ aimed at the elimination of all opposition, persecution, kidnapping, torture, paramilitary interventions in factories, universities, and private homes, and exile. See Masiello’s “La Argentina durante el proceso: Las múltiples resistencias de la cultura” (1987). The result was that thousands of political opponents were persecuted and “disappeared,” (the so-called *desaparecidos*), a number that varies between six and thirty thousand. After the reestablishment of democracy under Raúl Alfonsín, a National Commission for the Disappearance of Persons, CONADEP, was appointed to research the crimes of the Dictatorship. The report was published as *Nunca más* [Never Again]. For a journalistic documentation of the events starting in 1966 with the first military regime, see *20 años de historia política argentina 1966-1986*. Ed. Raúl Aníbal Rossini.

accedido a una forma de conocimiento ” (“Escribir con el cuerpo” 35).²⁹ This empowering anxiety makes the protagonist aware of her condition: Amanda feels a strong sexual attraction to Coyote (note the beastly denomination that connotes brutality), but their relationship is tinted with ambiguity. This dichotomy originates in the conflict between his dubious conduct with her “dark desires,” the inconfessable eroticism that a woman with *decorum* cannot spell out. When she asks herself “Who is this man?, ” she can only answer:

[A]llí en la interna penumbra donde las respuestas cobran la imperiosa vaguedad del deseo: poco me importa quién es cuando bien sé qué significa para mí y cómo me estimula. Cuando estoy con él *lo inconfesable* en mí acata plenamente y a mis zonas de tinieblas les crece alas y puedo sentirme angelical aunque se trate de todo lo contrario. (88, my emphasis)³⁰

The ambivalence in the erotic level is also evident in the political context as the enigmatic Coyote is a “conspirador clandestino,” and is involved in dangerous affairs. The

²⁹ “immensely vital, filled with an inexplicable strength that may come from my having reached some kind of understanding ” (“Writing with the body” 192).

³⁰ “In the inner twilight where answers take on the overriding vagueness of desire, she only manages to reply: what do I care about who he is, anyway, when I know full well what he means to me and how he excites me. When I’m with him, the *unconfessable* in me runs wild -my darkest desires grow wings, and I can feel angelic, even though it’s just the opposite.” “Other Weapons.” Trans. Deborah Bonner, 82. See Note 20 in this chapter.

political subtext is not explicit but can be read under the surface of his secrecy. The second episode begins with Amanda's acknowledgment of her curse:

Una puede decirse *maldito el momento* en que este tipo se cruzó por mi vida o puede en cambio decirse ese momento también fue mío, como todos los otros, y no agregar nada de nada. (90, my emphasis)³¹

After their encounter and sudden departure, Amanda's anxiety turns into anger, *furia*. "Basta de torturas," enough torture, she tells herself as a rupture with male domination. The master-slave dialectic reverses directions. Her new awareness and this furious vitality will invest her with power to liberate herself from her erotic attraction towards Coyote and at the same time from her subservient dependency to patriarchy:

Lograr por fin desconcertarlo al Coyote, sacarlo de su cómodo manejo. Ya no dueño él de la situación, dueña ella aunque más no sea para destruirla: si no se puede controlar más vale retirarse a tiempo ¿Controlar? ¿Qué parámetro es éste? (93)³²

³¹ "I could curse the day that man walked into my life. But then again, I could also say that day was mine, like all the rest, and that's all" (OW 84).

³² "If only she could baffle the Coyote, snap him out of his comfortable control. Even if only to destroy it: if you can't control it, you might as well back out in time. Control? What terms are these?" (OW 87).

A ride home in a taxi is a metaphoric journey that brings Amanda to her next station: the ritual of purification. On her route towards the Symbolic³³ this woman detaches herself from her face representing her past identity. She takes a bath with aromatic herbs and tears off the cosmetics of her submission to male power in order to liberate herself, to purify her body and to attain her own symbolic language. She says:

Soy un fuego que se quema a sí mismo, dice el rostro
blanco frente al demencial espejo. (95)³⁴

The image of fire, of the new face that replaces the old, symbols of destruction and rebirth, are associated with the witch that conjures her magical powers and wants to tear off the veils. Valenzuela is using her Word on two levels: to deconstruct the phallic

³³Anika Lemaire in her study entitled *Jacques Lacan* points out the function of language as a vehicle of self-definition when she writes: "Language is thus a precondition for the *act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct entity*" (54). Since language is acquired in a social context, it also generates values and cultural impositions. The Symbolic order, then, refers to an order of symbols and signifiers that interpret reality and regulate meaning. I use the capitalized term Symbolic as the locus of language, signification, and culture that has been traditionally phallogocentric, and where women writers are now aiming at inscribing their experiences and particular vision. Feminists have opted for different positions towards the Symbolic. Among the French feminists, Cixous and Irigaray claim that women have their own Symbolic while Kristeva in "Women's Time" prefers to aim at a position of "sexual equality" where women participate in the production of language on an equal basis with the male counterparts. By capitalizing *Symbolic*, I point to the feminist project of challenging the univocality of the system and of sharing from within in the process of signification. See also *A Glossary of Feminist Theory*, ed. Sonya Andermahr et al. 269-270.

³⁴"I'm a fire burning its own flames, the white face says, facing the insane mirror" (OW 88).

order and to free the feminine from patriarchal domination in a *ritual of rejection*, as one can read in this playful parody of the Grand Signifier:

Al Gran Bonete se le ha perdido un pajarito
 A la gran boneta aquí presente se le ha perdido un pajarito
 que mucho le encantaba, y todo por su propia culpa y su
 ahuyentamiento. A causa de sospechas nunca formuladas
 pero cada vez más palpables y asfixiantes. En cuyo caso el
rechazo formaría parte de la valentía y no de esa
 repugnante sensación: la de haber rechazado por no ser
 rechazada, un gesto de cobarde. (97)³⁵

Amanda's admission of her complacency to her subordinate condition (note the capitals for Him and the small letters for her, the other, the lack—or as Irigaray's image of a 'mime and inverted reproduction of the subject')³⁶ gives her courage to defeat patriarchy. She emerges as a newborn after having gone through the period of gestation and cleansing. The last episode is a final statement of emancipation and the demarcation of her newly acquired territory: Amanda takes the red rose, a gift from Coyote and a symbol of *his* power, and throws it in the muddy waters of the Río de la Plata:

³⁵“Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepers. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers how many pickled peppers did Peter Piper pick? Peter pickle pecker. She loved his, and it's no longer there. She drove him away, because of suspicions never uttered but increasingly palpable and suffocating. In that case, rejection would be a form of bravery, rather than that repulsive feeling of rejecting so as not to be rejected, a cowardly gesture” (OW 90). Even though the first lines are a pleasant wordplay, they do not translate the meaning. Gran Bonete is a colloquial phrase for “big shot or an important, influential person (Simon & Schuster's International Spanish Dictionary). Therefore, I prefer a translation that transmits the meaning as The Grand Boss has lost his bird. The grand woman boss standing here has lost a bird whom she very much liked.”

³⁶As quoted above “Le féminin se trouve déterminé: comme manque, défaut, ou comme mime et reproduction inversée du sujet ...” (*Ce sexe* 76).

Amanda siente que esa rosa cargada por el Coyote es como un arma que le hace correr mil riesgos. (99)³⁷

The protagonist *reconstructs* her Self by erasing the *huella del Coyote*, his *trace* (100). The Rituals end with a dance and a song, and the mirror returns her *her* image. The voice of Amanda has emerged as a feminine language in a dialogical confrontation with her obscure desires, it has surmounted the barriers of self-censorship and has evolved into a double-voiced discourse of acknowledgment as she has verbalized her eroticism, has insinuated the political repression and, through a *ritual of rejection*, has entered the threshold of the Symbolic.³⁸

“I’m Your Horse in the Night” : “They cannot deprive me of my dreams”

Writing about women’s narrative under Dictatorship, Mary Beth Tierny-Tello sees a close correlation “between the patriarchal sexual economy and authoritarian practices” in the prose of women writers in the Southern Cone (1996, 6). Although not referring to the work of Valenzuela, Tierny-Tello reads those narratives not only as

³⁷“Amanda feels that the rose the Coyote held is like a weapon which makes her run a thousand risks” (*OW* 92).

³⁸Gwendolin Díaz also interprets the closing scene as the protagonist’s entering the symbolic order (1993, 732). Marta Morello-Frosch reads this story as a reconstitution of Amanda’s subjectivity (1995, 692).

“allegories of sexual politics”(17)³⁹ but also as “active attempts at symbolic transformation” (13). “De noche soy tu caballo” (“I’m Your Horse in the Night”) reveals the forbidden Eros of desire and jouissance in an overt situation of political repression. If in “Ceremonias de rechazo” the political threat is latent, in this story it is overtly present in the text. Beto, the lover, who is as mysterious and hermetic as Coyote, is persecuted by the military regime and also lives underground. The two sides of the Guerra Sucia are represented in these stories, the executioner and the victim. In this text Eros is not repressed by social constructions of patriarchy but rather by the *perverse power* of the military system that the author wants to decode. The military repression has invaded the private sphere of the home, Beto is presumed to have been drowned, the girl speaks from jail, but one space is still unattainable for the police: the realm of dreams and jouissance, that cannot be taken away even by physical force or torture:

Mi única, verdadera posesión era un sueño y a uno no se lo despoja así no más de un sueño. (108)⁴⁰

³⁹For an expansion of this subject, see Catherine Davies “The Sexual Representation of Politics in Contemporary Hispanic Feminist Narrative” where she discusses Frederic Jameson’s statement in “Third-World in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” that “all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical and should be read as national allegories” (Condé and Hart 107). Referring to Valenzuela’s “Cuarta versión” and “Cambio de armas” and to works by Allende and Montero, Davies writes: “In these fictions, the experiences of the female protagonists and their intimate relationships with men tell the reader something about the immediate political situation and crises of the countries in which the stories are set But at the same time the personal dramas function as allegories of the inner workings of patriarchy and of gender conflict expressed from a feminist point of view” (Condé and Hart 108).

⁴⁰“My only true possession was a dream and they can’t deprive me of my dreams just like that” (OW 100).

In this text Valenzuela puts into words the horror of the *cosa política*, of what resists being narrated by fixing it in a text that edges between dream and reality, Eros against the monologic power of authoritarianism.⁴¹

Beto, si es cierto que te han matado o donde andes, de noche soy tu caballo y podés venir a habitarme cuando quieras aunque yo esté entre rejas. Beto, en la cárcel sé muy bien que te soñé aquella noche, sólo fue un sueño. (109)⁴²

“The Word ‘Killer’” : “scraping and scraping until I find the living flesh”

Women’s voice as *nombradora*, in the function of *naming* spells out the unsayable in “La palabra asesino,” [“The Word ‘Killer’”] the word banned by a system that believes it is the bearer of “truth.” This story brings us closer to facing the cruelty and selfrighteousness of the authoritarian regime. Not called by its name, the *asesino* who has

⁴¹Sharon Magnarelli also sees the correlation between the sexual and the political in the book *Cambio de armas*. She writes: “The text is openly and visibly an erotic text, but as we shall see, the manifest text functions principally as a metaphor or synecdoche and thus the shield behind which the subtext, the political, is partially hidden” (*Reflections* 191).

⁴²“Beto, you know now, if it’s true that they killed you, or wherever you may be, Beto, I’m your horse in the night and you can inhabit me whenever you wish, even if I’m behind bars. Beto, now that I’m in jail I know that I dreamed of you that night; it was just a dream” (*OW* 101).

lived in the streets and dealt with drugs and the underworld of crime, is an image of the anonymous *killer*, a representation of any tyrannical system. “La palabra asesino” deals with the question of enunciation, of the capacity to acknowledge, internalize and spell out the Word, the external political reality that is hidden from the public. The nameless protagonist experiences an epiphanic revelation when she says:

Y el asombro al percibir que la palabra ha sido por fin reconocida en ella, que ha *enunciado interiormente* la palabra asesino. (73, my emphasis)⁴³

This woman starts constructing her symbolic language by *transgrediendo las barreras de la censura*. The story illustrates the skill of the writer to unravel, to scratch the external surface in order to find the *hidden* reality of repression. In “Escribir con el cuerpo” Valenzuela says:

Voy a contrapelo Con la puntita de los dedos, apenas con muchísimo respeto y nada de pudor, con el ánimo de *escarbar y escarbar hasta encontrar la carne viva*. (40, my emphasis)⁴⁴

⁴³“And the astonishment of realizing she has finally acknowledged that word to herself: in her thoughts, she has uttered the word killer ” (OW 69). The literal translation for *enunciado interiormente* is not ‘acknowledged’ but *internally enunciated*, which is closer to my reading as *enunciation*.

⁴⁴ “I go against the grain ... With the tips of my fingers, just barely and with much respect and no modesty, in the mood of *scraping and scraping until I find* the living flesh.” My translation since “Writing with the Body ” has omitted this fragment.

The author scratches until she can find the *living flesh* of the alien body.

Valenzuela's discourse runs against the current of official rhetoric. Through a process of awakening that reaches the obscure layers of the unconscious, the protagonist (amalgamated with the author) internalizes the horror that she cannot verbalize:

Sabe que está viviendo una experiencia de intensidad tal
que no puede ser descrita Abandonada está hasta por su
propio reino, el del lenguaje. (82)⁴⁵

The moment has come when women narrators have absorbed their situation and are able to pronounce the forbidden word, the accusation of the authority of repression. The protagonist has identified fear and is capable of emitting the scream: "Killer," she shouts, and feels like a newborn. Through the articulation of the ineffable, the nameless woman protagonist *nombra*, gives a name to her criminal lover. By naming atrocity, she defies the master, and by this act of language she again crosses the border into the Symbolic order.⁴⁶

⁴⁵"She knows she's experiencing something too intense to be described She's even banished from her own kingdom, language" (*OW* 77).

⁴⁶Díaz reads this story as the "interdependencia del lenguaje y el sexo en la formación del sujeto." [The interdependence of language and sex in the formation of the subject] (1993, 732). Martínez reads it as an allegory of the writer's toil with language (1994, 175).

“Other Weapons” : “the repulsive gift”

As the presence of the political nightmare fills in the blank pages of the text, the process of debasement becomes more explicit. If the nameless lover of the assassin feels humiliated for her sexual servilism to a murderer, Laura, the protagonist of the short story “Cambio de armas” is a victim of abjection. Luisa Valenzuela says in an interview that the key to “Cambio de armas” is “la dialéctica entre dominadores y dominados ... el tema del poder.”⁴⁷ The master-slave dialectic reaches a high point of vilification as the fictional space is a euphemized torture chamber and the female body becomes the locus of power and degradation. This story, which Valenzuela called her best work,⁴⁸ blends the patriarchal *libidinal economy* with the discourse of the dictatorship in a text that can be read in the light of Julia Kristeva’s theory of power and abjection. In *Powers of Horror*.

⁴⁷ “The dialectic between dominators and dominated ... the theme of power” (Mull and Angulo 351).

⁴⁸ “Cambio de armas” is the story that has received the largest critical attention among Valenzuela’s works. Besides important sections in books like Magnarelli’s *Reflections/ Refractions* (1988) , Cordones-Cook’s *Poética de la transgresión en la novelística de Luisa Valenzuela* (1991), Castillo’s chapter in *Talking Back* (1992), Muñoz’ *El personaje femenino en la narrativa de escritoras hispanoamericanas*, there are other valuable articles such as Bertolini’s “Eros como *iter* cognoscitivo: *Cambio de armas* de Luisa Valenzuela” (1992); Díaz “Politics of the Body in Luisa Valenzuela’s ‘Cambio de armas’” (1995); Hicks’ “Beyond the Subject: From the Territorialized to the Deterritorialized Text” (1991); Lagos’ “ Sujeto, sexualidad y literatura en “Cambio de armas y *Novela negra con argentinos* de Luisa Valenzuela” (1996); Morello-Frosch ““Other Weapons’: When Metaphors Become Real” (1986); and the essays mentioned in this chapter.

An essay on Abjection (1982) Kristeva outlines the subterranean emotions behind the violent condition. She writes:

L'abjection, elle, est immorale, ténébreuse, louvoyante et louche: une terreur qui se dissimule, une haine qui sourit, une passion pour un corps lorsqu'elle le troque au lieu de l'embraser, un endetté qui vous vend, un ami qui vous poignarde ... (12)

Abjection is a situation beyond reasonable grasp which occurs when a master with a 'superego' believes he has the right to exert power on those who think differently. The wretched is associated with the perverse and the ambiguity of corruption, as "il n'abandonne ni n'assume un interdit," "it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition," and "[i]l tue au nom de la vie," (*Pouvoirs* 23) "it kills in the name of life" (*Powers of Horror* 15). At the origins of abjection Kristeva finds

ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre le traître, le menteur, le criminel à bonne conscience, le violeur sans vergogne, le tueur qui prétend sauver. (12)

In an ambiguous relationship of attraction and repulsion between the astray master and his victimized object, *jouissance* plays an important role. Kristeva writes that

la jouissance seule fait exister l'abject comme tel. On ne le connaît pas, on ne le désire pas, on en jouit. Violemment et avec douleur. (17)

In the story “Cambio de armas ” (CA) Valenzuela’s subtle language weaves the image of the abject in Laura’s deprived spirit and in her latent resistance. Described in the opening sentence as incapable of amazement: “No le asombra para nada el hecho de estar sin memoria,” (113)⁴⁹ Laura personifies the resignation and debasement characteristic of the abject.⁵⁰ Deprived of memory through drugs, she lives in a nebulous aura, in a “zero” condition of existence, and in an “absolute present from which all memory has been erased” (Ainsa 1995, 688). Her husband and torturer keeps her locked up and comes regularly to perform the “love” act, an ambiguous embrace and a mixture of love and hatred, sentiment and violence. The only reference to her past is their wedding picture, where she has a “mirada difusa,” “absent expression,” and he a triumphant look. Even though she cannot spell out her discomfort, there is uncertainty in their embrace. There is a double plane of signification in their relationship, he always acts “como si ya conociera los viejos tiempos de ella” (118)⁵¹, but she suspects in him “algo agazapado dispuesto a saltar ante el más mínimo temblor” (117).⁵² The first time she looks at herself in the

⁴⁹ “She doesn’t find it the least bit surprising that she has no memory” (OW105).

⁵⁰This mood coincides with Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary definition of the abject as “sunk to a low condition,” “cast down in spirit,” or “showing utter resignation.” This is an additional viewpoint on the abject, not directly related to Kristeva’s usage.

⁵¹“As if he already knew [her good old times]” (OW 110).

⁵²“Something’s crouching, ready to pounce at the slightest tremble of her voice” (OW 109).

mirror, she sees “una espalda azotada,” “una cicatriz espesa,” (119)⁵³ but her memory is blocked.

Roque’s attitude towards Laura is also sinister and a case of horror. In the scene “Los espejos” [“The Mirrors”] Laura is lying “boca arriba,” *face up* as Cortázar’s Aztec on his way to the sacrificial temple.⁵⁴ Laura’s sacrificial temple is her bed, under the mirrors Roque has placed on the ceiling to enlarge his narcissistic pleasure *ad infinitum*. Laura accepts the ritual of being mapped by him, her body lies fragmented, under his inscribing. In this violent scene of sex and rape, her reaction is ambiguous, partly of physical delight and also of total rejection of the “don repoussant” (*Pouvoirs* 17), the “repulsive gift” (*Powers* 9), “todo un estremecimiento deleitoso, tan al borde del dolor” (123).⁵⁵ While he shouts “Abrió los ojos, puta!,”⁵⁶ she screams a dissonant “No”:

un *no* que parece estallar el espejo del techo, que multiplica y mutila y destroza la imagen de él, casi como un balazo aunque él no lo perciba y tanto su imagen como el espejo sigan allí. (124)⁵⁷

⁵³“A beaten back.” “A thick scar” (*OW* 110).

⁵⁴There are many points of cross-references between Cortázar and Valenzuela. For an interesting comparative approach see Joseph Tyler “Tales of Repression and “Desaparecidos” in Valenzuela and Cortázar” (1991).

⁵⁵“A deep shudder of delight, right at the edge of pain” (*OW* 115).

⁵⁶“Open your eyes, you bitch!” (*OW* 115).

⁵⁷“A *no* that seems to shatter the mirror on the ceiling, that multiplies and maims and destroys his image, almost like a bullet shot although he doesn’t perceive it and both his image and the mirror stay there” (*OW* 115).

This text reflects Kristeva's description of the master, the "superego" who needs an "abject." But the victim, even when powerless, can emit a forceful "no" that shakes his privileged position, as in Kristeva's observation:

[d]e cet exil, l'abject ne cesse de défier son maître.(10)

Laura's "No" in Valenzuela's story has been interpreted as the "crucial point of loss [where] resistance starts" (Panjabi 1993, 90). In the explosion of the mirrors I find a powerful parallel to Kristeva's elaboration of the violence and distress comprised in the jouissance of the abject victim:

Et, comme dans la jouissance où l'objet dit "*a*" du désir éclate avec le miroir brisé où le moi cède son image pour se mirer dans l'autre, l'abject n'a rien d'objectif ni même d'objectal. Il est simplement une frontière, un *don repoussant* [my emphasis] que l'autre, devenu *alter ego*, laisse tomber pour que "je" ne disparaisse pas en lui mais trouve, dans cette aliénation sublime, une existence déchue.
(17)

In another context the scene of "The Mirrors" can also be read from Irigaray's perspective of desire and language, where women are denied subjectivity and can only perceive themselves in fractions. In *Ce sexe qui n'est pas un*, Luce Irigaray writes:

Le rejet, l'exclusion, d'un imaginaire féminin met certes la femme en position de ne s'éprouver que fragmentairement, dans les marges peu structurées d'une idéologie dominante,

comme déchets, ou excès, d'un miroir investi par le "sujet" (masculin) pour s'y refléter, s'y redoubler lui-même. Le rôle de la "féminité" est d'ailleurs prescrit par cette spécula(risa)tion masculine et ne correspond que bien peu au désir de la femme, que ne se récupérerait qu'en secret, en cachette, de façon inquiète et coupable. (29)

The *jouissance* that the victim experiences as a mixture of "condemnation and yearning" is a significant aspect of Kristeva's study on abjection. This is evident in other episodes of "Cambio de armas." Trying to understand the sentiment called "love" Laura yearns for Roque's proximity but also revolts, a desire coupled with violence:

Por momentos ella sospecha que podría tratarse del sentimiento llamado amor. Sentimiento por demás indefinido que le va creciendo como un calor interno de poca duración y que en sublimes oportunidades se enciende en llamaradas. Nada indica sin embargo que se trate en verdad de amor, ni aún las ganas que a veces le asaltan ganas de que él llegue de una vez y la acaricie. Es ésta su única forma de saberse viva: cuando la mano de él la acaricia o su voz la conmina: movete, puta. (125)⁵⁸

⁵⁸“At times she suspects it could be what they call love. An indefinite feeling that grows like a short-lived heat source inside her, and which, on sublime occasions, flares up in flames. But nothing points out that it's really a question of love, not even the need that suddenly comes over her, the need for him to caress her. It's the only way she can feel that she's alive: when his hand caresses her or his voice threatens: move, slut” (*OW* 117).

Kristeva explains *jouissance* in the abject as a desire, fundamental for its existence, a passion where the *repulsive gift* that the alter ego bestows is a sign of self-recognition. She writes:

Une jouissance donc dans laquelle le sujet s'engloutit mais dans laquelle l'Autre, en revanche, l'empêche de sombrer en la lui rendant répugnante. On comprend ainsi pourquoi tant de victimes de l'abject en sont les victimes fascinées sinon dociles et consentantes. (17)

But from this “frightened body” a wave of “revolt against” (10) arises, through ambiguity and discomfort, and circumscribes a space that the victim senses as her own, but which is made possible only through the designation of the *alter ego*, of the ‘Other’ that has inhabited that space. This territory could be transposed to Valenzuela’s “pozo oscuro,” the black pit, the place *du refoulement originaire* (18), of “primal repression,” “prior to the springing forth of the ego, of its objects and representations” (*Powers* 11).

Kristeva depicts this limit of the unconscious-conscious as:

Ici ... la conscience n'a pas pris ses droits pour transformer en signifiants les démarcations fluides des territoires encore instables où un “je” en formation n'arrête pas de s'ériger. Nous ne sommes plus dans l'orbe de l'inconscient mais à cette limite du *refoulement originaire* que a trouvé néanmoins une marque intrinsèquement corporelle et déjà signifiante, symptôme et signe: la répugnance, l'écoeurement, l'abjection. (18)

In Laura’s “pozo oscuro,” her individual space, is the source from where her feminine subjectivity will come forth. “Un oscuro, inalcanzable fondo ... animal aquietado

... ella no quiere azuzarlo por miedo al zarpazo.”⁵⁹ Fear holds her back from action. But her fright explodes in uncontrollable “aullidos” at the sight of the whip. She begins to howl: “se pone a gritar desesperada, a aullar como si fueran a destriparla o a violarla con ese mismo cabo del talero.”⁶⁰ The whip reminds us of her “espalda azotada,” “a beaten back,” and the “cicatriz,” (*CA* 119), “a thick scar” (*OW* 110) from the beginning, a silenced sign of her past. From the “dark well of her memory” a scream comes out, a memory of a pain forgotten, of an encounter with terror. Laura’s newly gained territory, her rediscovery of her self comes through her body, from her womb, from an ambiguity between desire for pleasure and a profound repulsion against perversion. Her language will be born out of pain, victimization, abjection, first as an animalistic “aullido,” and then as resistance.

When in “La revelación” [“The Revelation”] Roque returns to her the memory of her revolutionary past, she resists listening to his version of the story, “y el dedo de ella y la gotita se vuelven una unidad ... y él insistiendo, eras ... peor que una puta, te agarraron cuando me estabas apuntando ...” (144).⁶¹ He reminds her that he has taken her under his

⁵⁹“That dark, unattainable bottom in her ... like a soothed animal ... and she doesn’t want to urge it on for fear of its claws” (*OW* 121).

⁶⁰“She ... starts to scream desperately, howling as if she were going to be ripped apart or raped with the grip of this weapon” (*OW* 122).

⁶¹“And her finger and the droplet become a single unit, a single sense of comfort, and he insists, you are shit, scum, worse than a slut, they caught you when you were aiming at me” (*OW* 134).

“protection”⁶² so that no other torturer should rape her: “ya te iba a obligar yo a quererme, a depender de mí como una recién nacida, yo también tengo mis armas” (144-145).⁶³ She listens without response, and subsides to her condition of abject. She begs him to stay: “Nunca hablás tanto. Vení, vamos a dormir. Acostate conmigo” (145).⁶⁴ In this sight of extreme humiliation, Laura proves to be in a state of ‘primal repression’ deprived of self esteem, a crashed subjectivity, which can also be related to Kristeva’s theory:

L’abjection de soi serait la forme culminante de cette expérience du sujet auquel est dévoilé que tous ses objects ne reposent que sur la *perte* inaugurale fondant son être propre. (12)

In the last scene Laura is still the victim of abjection who yearns for her torturer. She is afraid of regaining her freedom. In the end, however, when Roque turns on his heels, she begins to liberate herself from his dominance, “es como si por dentro se le

⁶²In her article “Luisa Valenzuela: Cuerpos que escriben (metonímicamente hablando) y la metáfora peligrosa” Sharon Magnarelli writes that there are two modes of “writing with the body” in the work of Valenzuela which can also be seen in “Cambio de armas.” First, in the positive sense of writing oneself in a text, and the movements and communicative gestures of one’s body; and second, in the negative sense of the bodies that are written metaphorically, “inscribed with the graphic signs of violence and aggression” (Díaz y Lagos 56, my translation) as in the case of Laura’s back and body that has been “re-written” by the whip of Roque.

⁶³“I’d force you to love me, to depend on me like a newborn baby, I’ve got my weapons, too” (134-135).

⁶⁴“You never talk so much. Come on, let’s go to sleep. Come to bed with me” (OW 135).

disipara un poco la niebla. Empieza a entender algunas cosas” (145-146).⁶⁵ The fog that encompassed her at the opening of the story begins to dissolve. She takes the weapon in her hand. It is her first act of volition. She is crossing the bridge to recover her lost subject position, to step into the Symbolic.

This denouement has originated many different interpretations. The ‘cambio de armas’, the ‘change of weapons’, has been read as an *appropriation* of language (Castillo 1992, 132), as a mutation of the sign towards a *gynocentric orientation* (Muñoz 1991,133), or as an “allegory of the military violation of Argentina” that from a feminist point of view represents the reconstruction of the self, the recognition of sexual abuse, and the awareness of the political reality (Davies 1991, 114). Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal goes beyond the celebration of the feminine agency or political reorientation by reading it as “suggestive of the possibilities and obstacles for feminine liberation under the specific social and psychological conditions that enslave many women” (1996,171).⁶⁶

⁶⁵“She ... feels like the fog is beginning to clear. She starts to understand a few things” (135).

⁶⁶In the already mentioned interview with Mull and Angulo, Valenzuela insists on the ambiguity of the ending and protests at the suggestion raised at a symposium that the protagonist could have committed suicide with the weapon. Valenzuela is quoted as saying: “El final es ambiguo pero sólo en este sentido: la mujer apunta al torturador, y no sabemos si ella dispara el arma o no. Pero no se suicida” (1986, 351). “The ending is ambiguous but only in this sense: the woman aims at the torturer, and we do not know whether she shoots the weapon or not. But she does not commit suicide.”

In postmodern practice, the author, by not providing closure to the story, opens a possibility for the reader to participate in the aesthetic experience of writing the text.⁶⁷ By leaving an open end, Valenzuela does not give a *punto final*⁶⁸ to the story but invites her readers to continue the dialogue, to disseminate the word to keep the *collective memory alive*, as she said, and avoid that *that* history be repeated.⁶⁹ The “cambio de armas” represents the liberation from the male gaze and domination and it is also a *sign* of hope that the horror of authoritarian dictatorship, no matter how appalling and lasting, comes one day to an end.

At this point, it is again relevant to mention Susan Lanser’s view that the feminine voice can gain *discursive authority* by incorporating the reading audience. In the competition for language hegemony between the author and the dominant official discourse, the unresolved outcome of “Other Weapons” interrelates with the *specific receiving communities* (Lanser 1992, 6) of the readers. In this exchange, the peripheral narrative on the *powers of horror* of the military reveals the forbidden text and acts as a *critical locus to ideology* (Lanser 15).

⁶⁷Gwendolin Díaz also sees this ending as the ability of the author to include the reader, and elaborates on the question ‘What does woman want?’ on the distribution of power? (1993, 736).

⁶⁸I use this expression to paraphrase the Argentinian law of the *punto final* under the democratic government of Alfonsín who was under pressure to put an end to the accusations against the military dictatorship as the price to pay to preserve the emerging democracy. This law is now under review for a possible derogation. In this sense, “Cambio de armas” is still relevant in the political debate of today.

⁶⁹From “Escribir con el cuerpo” 36-7 and 39.

All the stories in the collection, but in particular this one, are a characterization of the feminine on the threshold of the Symbolic, women who, to different degrees, are aware of their condition as a “lack” and of their confrontation with the dominating phallogocentric order. These characters want to turn to themselves and listen to the language of their bodies, their fears and desires and map them “on the other face of the phallus,” to create a language that expresses the silenced cavities of their consciousness.

“Fourth Version” : The language of the ineffable

The last story in my analysis and the first in the collection “Cuarta versión,” [“Fourth Version”] is a tale of what cannot be narrated, an example of the language of the ineffable. In this text three versions of the unsayable compete: In the “first version,” an anonymous narrator tries to make sense of and reconstruct the bits and pieces of a half-torn and interrupted chronicle, written in italics. The “second version” fluently tells a banal love story between the actress Bella and a foreign Ambassador. The “tercera instancia” (CA 4) or “third version” is woven by the author who overwrites the chronicle and identifies herself with Bella, and the “Fourth Version,” I suggest, is the one told and retold by the reader. Valenzuela’s fictional strategies are an attempt to cross the boundaries of fear and self-censorship, to imprint in a text which retains *la memoria congelada de los hechos para que esta cadena de acontecimientos no se olvide ni*

repita (3).⁷⁰ The author-narrator performs the role of the witch of “Mis brujas favoritas” who threatens with her speech, and the protagonist Bella is not only the erotic *witch* who *fascinates* the Ambassador (15) but also the witch who challenges the military authoritarianism with her deeds. In the novella “Fourth Version” the erotic and political components that have been present throughout *Other Weapons* reach a symbiosis, and the text can be read at two levels: First, as a story of transgression, and compared with the previous stories of the collection where the women protagonists are more concerned with breaking away from patriarchal sexual oppression and in finding avenues to articulate their repressed desires; and second, as a political narrative where Bella, as Laura in “Cambio de armas,” represents the female subject who has to survive in a situation of unimaginable perversity. In a metafictional comment, the author-narrator explains her creative challenge:

*Lo que más me preocupa de esta historia es aquello que se está escamoteando, lo que no logra ser narrado. ¿Una forma del pudor, de la promesa? Lo escamoteado no es el sexo, no es el deseo como suele ocurrir en otros casos. Aquí se trata de algo que hierve con vida propia, hormigueando por los pisos altos y los subsuelos de la residencia. Los asilados políticos. De ellos se trata aunque estas páginas que ahora recorro y a veces reproduzco sólo los menciona de pasada, como al descuido. (21)*⁷¹

⁷⁰ “a frozen memory of the facts so the chain of events won’t be forgotten or repeated” (OW 3).

⁷¹ “What bothers me most about this story is what’s being disregarded, what isn’t being told. A form of modesty, of promise? But sex isn’t what’s being concealed; it isn’t desire, as is usually the case. It’s something that has a life all of its own, rustling

In an interview with Fernando Burgos and M. J. Fenwick (1993) Valenzuela tells of the difficulties she had in writing this story which was first a three hundred page novel. She wanted to find a narrative strategy that would spell out the reality of repression.⁷² After discarding her failed manuscript, she had to “reinvent” a structure that would express the intangible, that would say what cannot be said, a language that would capture what resists being told, what she calls the language of the ineffable:

[E]s decir sea que no se puede decir porque está prohibido, porque está censurado, porque no hay palabras [Es] indagar imaginativamente en aquello que se oculta o que se niega a ser dicho. (Burgos y Fenwick 169)⁷³

through the upstairs floors and the basements of the residence. The political refugees. That's what it is, although in the pages I am now looking through and sometimes bring to light, they are only mentioned in passing, offhandedly” (OW 20).

⁷²In that interview with Burgos and Fenwick, Valenzuela further describes her creative process and tells that when rereading the manuscript she sensed that she was leaving something unsaid: “Había algo mal en la raíz ... había algo que no estaba dicho. Creo que todo trabajo de escritura es una persecución de lo inefable” (168). [There was something missing at the roots ... something that was left unsaid. I believe that all craftsmanship of writing is a pursuit of the ineffable]. “Toda búsqueda del escritor es llegar a describir aquello que no se puede decir puesto que si estás diciendo lo que se puede decir para qué lo vas a decir, si ya está dicho. Entonces lo que una busca es siempre tratar de ir un paso más allá de decir aquello que supuestamente no se puede decir.” [The quest of the writer is to inscribe what cannot be said, because if you are saying what can be said, what are you going to say it if it has already been said. What one aims at, then, is to always try to go one step further in order to say what is supposedly unsayable. My translation].

⁷³“It means to say what one cannot say because it is forbidden, censured, or because there are no words To search with the imagination that which hides itself, that which resists being told.”

“Cuarta versión” is then also a narration of the unutterable, the indescribable, the voice of fear, of what is censured, of the unsayable. The text pervades the atmosphere of political oppression at the time of the military dictatorship in the Argentina of the Dirty War.

In “Cuarta versión” the central theme is the political persecution of the opponents of the military regime. It is the story of dissidents who are trying to hide and those who help the ones in danger, the story of the fear of been imprisoned, tortured, or eliminated by dark forces, for reasons one cannot discern, only suspect. Bella awakens to the horrors of power when she becomes involved in *subversive* activity by helping friends seek asylum at Pedro’s embassy. The language Valenzuela uses to recreate the political atmosphere runs parallel with the erotic and can be read on both levels:

¿En qué pellejo se mete una cuando encuentra a alguien que logra estimularla? En el pellejo de la atracción, el siempre alerta, el de los poros ansiosos y las fibras vibrantes. Una está dormida y de golpe viene otro que le despierta toda su capacidad inventiva, que le despierta a una hasta los más remotos rinconcitos donde se agazapa y *la hoja está desgarrada en este punto y nunca sabremos qué se agazapa, qué se despierta en los remotos rincones de Bella. Porque ésta parece ser la historia de lo que no se dice.* (22)⁷⁴

⁷⁴“What skin do you put on when you find someone who manages to excite you? The skin of attraction, always alert, avid pores and vibrating fibers. There you are, sleeping, and someone comes along and gets your imagination going, waking it up even in its darkest corner where it crouches and *the page is torn right there and we’ll never know what was crouching, what awakens in the darkest corners of Bella. This seems to be a story about what is left unsaid* (OW 21).

As an example of the language of the “ineffable,” this text articulates the indescribable, that which is silenced in public life and also in the text. Beneath the mask of the initial erotic stimulation between Bella and Pedro in their first encounter, the text is telling something else. The words in italics are not only the metafiction written by the narrator trying to justify her incongruencies, but they also tell the political subtext of Bella’s initiation into her political activity.

Maria-Inés Lagos Pope in her article “Mujer y política en *Cambio de armas* de Luisa Valenzuela” (1987) reads this metafictional ‘dialogic relationship’⁷⁵ between the anonymous narrator who is trying to reconstruct Bella’s story and the character Bella whose writings have omitted the relevant facts about her political activity. Lagos-Pope writes:

A través de estos reproches se establece una relación dialógica entre la narradora y su personaje donde se revela la frustración de ésta cuando descubre que los testimonios que ha dejado Bella se centran en la historia de siempre, en el amor y no en sus actividades comprometidas. (74)⁷⁶

⁷⁵This “dialogic relationship,” Lagos-Pope adds, is an example of what Elaine Showalter calls “double-voicing,” a distinction in the feminine voice of the narrator, that is “energetic” and “affirmative of her female independence” who protests against Bella’s submission to her feelings (174).

⁷⁶ “It is through these reproaches that a dialogic relationship is established between the narrator and her character. It reveals the frustration of the narrator as she realizes that the testimonies that Bella has left are centered in the eternal story, the love story, and not in her risky activities.” Sharon Magnarelli, in an elucidating essay “Luisa Valenzuela: From *Hay que sonreír* to *Cambio de armas*,” (1984) sees a “multiplicity of readings” in Valenzuela and specifically “five distinct possible readings,” in “Fourth version”: There is

From the perspective of the reader, and inspired by Wolfgang Iser's theories, Becky Boling's "'Cuarta versión': Implicit Subjects/Complicit Readings" (1993) also sees the link with Showalter's "double-voiced discourse," but she reads the love story as the "dominant" voice, and the "muted" voice in the "silences within the text," the political factors and "the problematic of gender" (111).

The preceding essays agree, from different focuses, on the relevance of reading the political narrative as a *double voiced discourse* under Showalter's lenses of the dominant and the mute voices whereby women's voices are inscribed on the mute side. I would argue that even though both stories, the erotic and the political, interact in two planes there is no "dialogical" double-voicing as I do not consider Bella's courageous intervention as 'mute.' I would rather say that the *double-voice* dynamic is to be found in the "Fourth Version" in the conflict between the dominant monologic discursive system of authoritarian dictatorship in dialogic interaction with the centrifugal voices of dissidence, the images of collective suffering that the author tries to capture to evade forgetfulness. In my opinion, the love story of Pedro and Bella is only a mask to cover the hidden reality of the *desaparecidos*, those who have been tortured and the victims of the

a love story that can be "articulated openly;" a political story, hidden beneath; a detective story, where "the reader has to fill this void, this blank space, the unmentionable which pervades the text," a modern fairy tale, the Sleeping Beauty "re-examined in the light of 20th century politics and feminism," where her "awakening paradoxically leads to her death;" and the fifth story is the story of writing, the "discourse which watches and analyzes itself as it writes" (12-13).

state terror of the “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” in a country where the word is silenced by censure and anxiety. Valenzuela orchestrates the monologic version of the truth of the official discourse of repression with the voices from the underground, the voices of eroticism, the ideologies of action and of passivity in an artistic text, but her *double-voiced discourse* is one that leaves a *loophole*, one that leaves the *final meaning* open to new utterances in a text of *unfinalizability*, in Bakhtin’s dialogic terminology.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin explains his concept of the ‘word with a loophole’:

A loophole is the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one’s words This potential other meaning, that is, the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow. Judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does not present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period. (233)

The open ending of “Other Weapons” leaves such a *loophole* open when Laura holds the weapon and aims at the Colonel, an outcome with the *potential other meaning* for change. In the “Fourth Version” the weapon is shot killing Bella but her Word remains in the *language of the ineffable*, the *penultimate version* told by the reader and by history in perpetual change.

This language of the “ineffable” is also a variation on Valenzuela’s feminine technique of subversion, of destabilizing the patriarchal paradigms in order to say something else, something beyond or, in this case, underneath the text as a way of

expressing the censured political reality. This concept recalls Irigaray's "This sex which is not one," where she says that one must be attentive in order to hear the "other meaning":

Il faudrait l'écouter d'une autre oreille comme *un "autre sens" toujours en train de se tiser, de s'embrasser avec les mots, mais aussi de s'en défaire* pour ne pas s'y fixer, s'y figer. (*Ce sexe* 28)

The "other meaning" in "Cuarta versión" is the language of the unsayable, "*su historia de muerte*" (23). When the military commando breaks into the residence of the ambassador and fires at Bella, Pedro holds her in her descent while whispering in her ear: "Cuando mi tío Ramón conoció a una actriz llamada Bella ..." And the story ends. "The rest is silence." The silence of the silenced.

But the Word remains alive. The madness of fiction has frozen the image of the perverse *madness of power* in a story of perplexity that inscribes a text of pain and fear, of awe and disbelief, at the reverse side of the phallic order in the double voice of a woman writer who speaks up to the Center and in a reorganized territory unmask power to reach into the Symbolic.

Conclusion

Ser escritora en México es aún una ardua conquista; la sanción pública y social pesa sobre los hombros femeninos y hasta hace poco tiempo parecían contarse con los dedos de las manos aquellos que creen que la mente, la creatividad de la mujer es intrínsecamente valiosa y por lo tanto forma parte esencial de nuestra civilización. Es más, sin ella, la nuestra, no puede llamarse civilización. Elena Poniatowska: “Ser un escritor en México”¹

The history of Latin America has been narrated by men. The Conquest, the wars of independence, social turmoil, revolutions, civil wars, and other upheavals: all were told in the male voice from the male perspective. The genres typical of Latin American Literature have mapped men's domain: the epics of the Araucaria, gaucho literature, folklore, the saga of the Mexican Revolution, the historical fiction and the so called novels of the land. The literary canon was a list of male names, with a few women poets inserted.

¹(1993, 20). “To be a woman writer in Mexico is still an arduous conquest; the public and the social sanction weighs on women's shoulders, and until very recently it seemed that one could count with the fingers those who believe that women's mind and creativity is intrinsically valuable and therefore an essential part of our civilization. It is even more: without it, ours cannot be called civilization.” Inaugural speech at the conference *Literatura Mexicana/ Mexican Literature* at the University of Pennsylvania in November 1992.

This systematic absence of the feminine voice in literature made a well known Chilean writer only fifteen years ago respond to the question about the status of Latin American women writers in literature with the categorical: “They do not exist.”²

This situation has changed dramatically in the past several decades. Now there exists a substantial, influential body of women writers who have succeeded in making their voices heard in the public space. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the heroic women in the shanty towns, the protectors of those persecuted under military dictatorships: they are all women whose activities are being recorded in the testimonial and fictional space of Latin American women writers. These new voices are questioning and reinterpreting the traditionally heroic “macho” events, such as the Mexican Revolution, the Law and Order ideals supporting authoritarian institutions, and the constrictive social conventions of patriarchy from the feminine perspective. The achievements and maturity reached by authors of the level of Elena Poniatowska in Mexico and Luisa Valenzuela in Argentina have resulted from a long and painstaking struggle to speak and be heard with a distinctive feminine voice and an uninterrupted effort to find means of expression to channel women’s uncharted experiences in literature. May it suffice to remember Rosario Castellanos’s sensation of intrusion, of ‘smuggling’ new writings into men’s circles, or Amado Alonso’s condescending

²From a conversation with Jorge Edwards in Santiago de Chile in 1983.

introductory comments on the poetic and intuitive merits, “la obligada expresión de una visión poética y orgánicamente intuitiva” (20) of María Luisa Bombal’s *La última niebla*.³

In this dissertation I have traced the evolution of Latin American women writers’ participation in discourse within the framework of a dialogical approach to language and of feminist criticism. Language as a means of inscribing women’s perspective is central to the understanding of Latin American literature. In the context of Latin American women’s narrative, I propose the use of the term “voice” as a trans-individual expression of the cultural, social and political circumstances. I interpret the feminine voice as the result of a dialogical interaction between the forces of patriarchy, the monological voice that has dominated within literature, and the submerged and silenced voices of the Other—of women or the marginalized—those previously excluded from the territory of the Word.

Literary critique of Latin American women writers to date has privileged the poststructuralist interpretation. Bakhtinian methodology in this area has been largely neglected, except for sporadic examples. I have found that a dialogic approach is a pertinent method for Latin American fiction today because it expands the critical focus into the social and cultural spheres, to include the ethnical categories of class and race. Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s concept of language as a *social phenomenon* that encompasses a plurality of social voices and as a locus of ideology provides the basis of my textual analysis. As I discuss in my Introduction, Bakhtin’s dialogic perception of language

³I refer to Castellanos’s *Sobre la cultura femenina* and Alonso’s introduction to the 1962 Nascimento edition of *La última niebla*.

includes multiple consciousnesses in tension with an official narrative and is particularly enlightening for the reading of women's fiction because it incorporates the voices of the marginalized, among them women's voices, and the diverse social ideologies of *heteroglossia* in a polyphonic social discourse. Bakhtin's dynamic concept of the utterance as *unit of speech communication* ("The Problem of Speech Genres," 91) that includes the participation of an addressee opens the possibility of reading the feminine voice as a *sphere of communication* that includes women's interaction with their community. His important contribution to the theory of language, the notion of the *double-voiced discourse* where two speakers interact dialogically competing for hegemony is a useful tool for identifying women's voice in a text. The *active* double-voiced speech is a locus of resistance where the feminine voice can inscribe its own perspective. This concept, further developed by feminist criticism, has been associated with the master-slave dynamic to produce what Elaine Showalter has called the *wild zone* or the "muted" spaces in women's writing. The fact that Bakhtin's ideas were engendered in a context of a totalitarian state—where he had been ostracized and exiled for his opinions—offers a comparative basis for developing a parallel with women's fictional and theoretical writing that finds its strength in its resistance to abuse. I find that the strength of Bakhtin's dialogic thinking is to open possibilities to Otherness.

Bakhtin's theory of language in its dynamic and polyphonic aspects allowed me to read Teresa de la Parra's *Ifigenia* under the lense of a double-voice's *hidden polemic*, María Luisa Bombal's *La última niebla* as a construction of the protagonist's subjectivity in a dialogic exchange with a female addressee, and Marta Lynch's *La señora Ordoñez*

with Bakhtin's concept of *sociological stylistics* (DN 300) in mind, where the dialogical interaction occurs in the tension between the character and multiple ideologies in the social context. I have read Rosario Castellanos's *Balún Canán* as an example of *heteroglossia* in the coexistence of plural languages—feudal, marginalized and Indian—that reflects the “socio-ideological contradictions” (DN 291) in Mexico past and present, and *Oficio de Tinieblas* as an example of *Hybridization* that combines the *social languages* of two cultural visions, of the dominant and the muted one. This concept of Hybridization has also guided my reading of Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* where two cultures, the “two linguistic consciousnesses” (DN 359), that of the author and that of the illiterate interlocutor, interact in the text. And finally, my analysis of Luisa Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas* has focused on the master-slave perspective of the dialogical confrontation between the voices of power and those of resistance in a social and political context of repression.

Feminist dialogic theories in their effort to integrate the voices of the periphery into a discourse that challenges monologism and vertical patterns of dominance, and that acknowledges the voice as a site of resistance are an innovative extension of Bakhtin's dialogism. Dale M. Bauer's view of “narrative as inherently multivocal” (1991, 4) is applicable to the fiction of Latin American women writers as it encompasses what Patricia Yaeger has called “the silent signatures of the oppressed” (Bauer 240). By adding a “gender” perspective to Bakhtin's theories, feminist dialogics proposes an invigorating exchange between the *centrifugal* forces of resistance and the *centripetal* of the official discourse, a *polyphonic* text that includes the social and cultural voices of the margins

and particularly of women as speaking subjects. My analysis of Parra's *Ifigenia* makes use of Bauer's theory of *failed community* where the heroine *fails* to impose her subject position in her struggle against the centripetal, dominating forces of society.

My discussion has also referred to theories of selected French feminists, and of Michel Foucault, Régine Robin and Marc Angenot, and Gayatri Spivak. Foucault in his deconstructive approach to the *founding subject* as a source of meaning, Chris Weedon in her interpretation of Foucault's concept of *reverse discourse* as a mode of resistance and a space where to inscribe an alternative knowledge and view, and Robin and Angenot's observations on the social and ideological production of discourse as the outcome of a selective process further enhance Bakhtin's theories on heteroglossia, "messiness," and the plural character of discourse. The text as a mirror of the *Zeitgeist*, of the spirit of the times, opens possibilities for including multiple ideologies and cultures, new visions on class, race and gender. This theoretical discussion has proven particularly useful in my reading of the novels by Castellanos, Mastretta, and Poniatowska because these authors have questioned the monological version of truth and have privileged peripheral and dissident voices, introducing a plurality of languages in discourse. Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" orients my discussion on the validity of the marginal voice. My analysis shows that, contrary to Spivak's reservation in conceding the word to illiterate marginal subjects, the voice of the oppressed can be heard when directed in a dialogical exchange with a writer who, through an act of empathy with the "subaltern," can attempt to reproduce the silenced condition and articulate its marginal existence in a text that reproduces the ideology of the subaltern integrated in the language of the artist.

The feminine voice in Latin America is alive and broadly represented through a community of writers who have explored the multiple layers of feminine experiences, who have gradually developed a means of challenging patriarchy in their social surroundings of the home and later on in the public space. Women's fictions have engaged in the construction of the female as a speaking subject in an effort to inquire into women's forbidden desires and erotic territories, and in order to overcome barriers of class and gender. Beyond the themes related to the feminine condition, Latin American women writers have explored the limits of human knowledge, and the sources of social injustice and of political persecution. These authors have approached language as a means of understanding puzzling social realities of repression, censorship, and violence. Their fiction shows that these authors and critics are acquainted with the theoretical discourses of the Anglo-American and French traditions, but that their writing asserts a fundamental preoccupation with the situation of women in society, with the social contradictions they encounter and that their texts derive from an ethical urgency to transcribe unrecorded events in a social and political reality marked by fear and oppression. Female voices become an instrument for destabilizing inherited values and parameters of behavior, for questioning the repressive authority of class and gender constructions, for articulating the reality of poverty, and for fixing in the collective memory the unspeakable experiences under military dictatorship.

My reading of a feminine voice has surveyed the Latin American literary debate through critical writings by forerunners of feminist critiques such as Parra, Ocampo,

Castellanos and Lispector who were already preoccupied with the cultural construction of gender and the textual representation of women's experiences in a confrontation with repressive forces of domination. The concept of "double-negativity" used by Castro-Klarén in "La Crítica Literaria Feminista y la escritora en América latina" (1985) had already been explored by Rosario Castellanos in the 1950s in her writings on the existence of a women's culture. My analysis shows that Castellanos is also ahead of her time in associating women with those marginalized by class and race, and in the idea of linking feminine language to female power. These reflections, written and read in different regions of the continent, find repercussion in international conferences organized at first in the framework of North American academia, where writers and critics meet and discuss topics related to the specificity of women's writing, to the validity of applying critical parameters from the North to Latin American texts by women, and to issues related to the cultural identity in the context of women's writings. My research on the new emerging theoretical voices has also drawn on essays and manifestos presented at the conferences starting at Chapman College in 1982 followed by crucial encounters at Amherst College, and in Costa Rica, Minneapolis, and Santiago de Chile. I have also used related essays published in literary journals.

A relevant concern in my research has been to appraise the problematic of borrowing parameters of Anglo-American and French critical standards to read Latin American texts. Sara Castro-Klarén's "The Novelness of a Possible Poetics for Women" (1989) admits the necessity of interacting with inherited patterns of thought in the North,

but she also points to the differentiating elements of race and the *double-marginality* experienced by Latin American women. My review of critical writings has shown a will to formulate a Latin American theory that would reflect our condition of subordination in the private and the public spheres and above all our cultural diversities. In this context, the critical writings by Elena Poniatowska and Luisa Valenzuela are examples of an independent critical voice, a transgression of master-narratives, and a clear allegiance to the marginalized by social, economic, or political causes. Poniatowska's strategies of using intertextuality and enunciation to formulate a *counter-discourse* to the official story and insert the oral *voices of the oppressed* into the text. Valenzuela's belief in the feminine voice and her elaborated poetics on the production of language resulting from the conflict with the repressive power of patriarchy are present in her writings.

My survey of the theoretical writings by Latin American women writers has shown that they have been preoccupied with the inscription of their particular gendered visions in discourse, that language has been an important space of self-definition, that the writers find theory useful as a "tool of interpretation," and that a fundamental aim of writing is "to interpret the changing times" (Valenzuela's "The Five Days ...") from their perspective and to reproduce their visions of reality. In this theoretical area, my thesis attempts to formulate a Latin American feminist poetics based on the writings of selected authors, particularly Castellanos, Lispector, Poniatowska and Valenzuela. Their theoretical essays constitute an important groundwork for construct a feminist theory with a Latin American specificity.

The works of Parra, Bombal, Lynch and Valdivieso show a clear effort to narrate an independent female subject in confrontation with social restrictions imposed through the institution of marriage. These early novels locate the heroines in the space of the home where, after a period of trial and rebellion, three return to the norm and submit to patriarchy. Only the nameless protagonist in *La brecha* (1961) breaks away from social patterns of behavior and asserts her independence. This novel is a landmark in the feminine voice of resistance and transgression to patriarchal domination. Clarice Lispector reproduces women's search for knowledge in an experimental language. My reading shows how the heroine of *The Passion According to G.H.* can be read in a comparative parallel with Cixous's theories on *l'écriture féminine* and also as a postmodern female Faust. The text appropriates a male archetype for the search of truth and knowledge and reverses its significance into a negating: "What I am not I am" (Lispector 172). In an intertext of the expulsion from Paradise, the heroine confronts the Eve myth with a twist, not with repentance for her sin, but with the boldness to disavow consecrated values, inherited aesthetic criteria and a search for a new definition of her Self. This act of transgression marks another step forward in the path of engendering women as speaking subjects in narrative.

The analysis of Rosario Castellanos focuses on her contribution to the development of the feminine narrative where she represents a pivotal point. Her approximation to the Other Mexican, to the one excluded from the central discourse, and her view of writing as a means to understanding *alterity*, the conditions of the Indians in the Chiapas region, and the reasons behind social injustice bring up unique perspectives

in fiction. Her inclusion of the marginalized opens up new areas of class and race rapprochement and lead the way for writers such as Elena Poniatowska, who insert the *voices of the oppressed* into a multi-linguaged text. The heroines of Marta Lynch and Angeles Mastretta represent the expansion from the home space into the public nation-building activity, thus transgressing a territory formerly reserved to men. My interpretation has shown that the path for engendering subjectivity has by no means been smooth and easy, but rather a process of unveiling silenced desires, of trial and failure, and a strategy of resistance to, and transgression of, inherited representations of Woman that has gradually constructed a recognizable feminine perspective in the narrative by women writers in Latin America. This search, hesitant at first, has been marked by a questioning of historical and cultural patterns, a constant struggle to articulate an independent Self-image, and an awareness of new social forces and ideologies that interact with peoples of heterogeneous races and social classes in a continent inhabited by cultural contradictions that the fictional characters strive to decipher and comprehend.

Within this Latin American narrative process, the two major authors I have selected, Poniatowska and Valenzuela, mark a culmination in the literary tradition of the feminine voice that had developed from isolated and reluctant acts of resistance to, and subversion of, the patriarchal norms of behavior into a questioning voice that gains autonomy and challenges univocal criteria of institutional power. Elena Poniatowska follows in the footsteps of Rosario Castellanos and Marta Traba in reproducing the voices of the Other, the marginalized. She is aware of her task of articulating the reality of the dispossessed and the *infamy* of poverty and of political repression when she writes: "I

feel I am not alone in trying to give their voice to those who don't have it" ("A Question Mark Engraved on My Eyelids" 95). Castro-Klaren's notion that women in Latin America suffer from a "double-negativity" for being women and *mestizas* helps understand that Poniatowska's undertaking is even more demanding. By associating the literature of women with the voice of the oppressed, Poniatowska is acting as an intercultural agency incorporating the plurality of the 'social languages' of the Mexican fabric in the text. Jesusa Palancares, the voice of the margins, breaks up the silence of her anonymous existence and enters the fictional world with her oral story, her nature-loving imaginary and her social critique. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is an encounter of two fragments of Mexican culture, as *Tinísima* is a microcosm of the artistic and political activities in the Mexico of post-revolutionary furor. The protagonists of Poniatowska are not stereotypical women of the periphery, but combative characters who subvert oppression and create limited spaces to exert power, such as Jesusa in her experience of mothering and of the *Obra Espiritual* and Tina Modotti in her commitment to the cause during the Spanish Civil War. In the narrative of Poniatowska the subaltern is given a voice that gains authority in her interaction with the reading audiences, a text that opens up insights and perspectives to incorporate plural levels of consciousnesses, a text that recreates history from the angle of the periphery, a reverse discourse of the Mexican master-narratives.

The fiction of Luisa Valenzuela states clearly that the voice of women exists. Her belief in a feminine language that is to be inscribed at the other face of the phallic order, a language that spells out the dark zones of our desires and fears is evidenced in her texts.

Her prose articulates women's repressed desires and uncovers the motivations behind the cruelty of state terrorism. Valenzuela's fiction assumes the responsibility of the writer to keep the collective memory alive, a task for which she has to overcome the fear of censorship and persecution. Her innovative insight into the concept of "escribir con el cuerpo" ("writing with the body") as an energy to overcome fear to write about the horrors of state terrorism surpasses the parameters of French Feminism. Language in the texts of Valenzuela is a clear statement of resistance to patriarchy, her 'writing with the body' is an ethical commitment to write on the blank page of the Symbolic order the atrocities and pain suffered by men and women living in a place where *strange things happen*.⁴ My analysis of her short stories in *Cambio de armas* demonstrates how her theoretical writings are reflected in her works and how her language results from the confrontation between the mechanisms of repressive power and the voice of the author as a liberating agent. Valenzuela, the woman writer, has become the *nombradora* of a masked and hidden reality. Her text blends the private space of the female body with the public discourse, the sexual and the political strata, the concrete individual victimization of the abject with the abstract rhetoric of the authoritarian regime. The voice of women is being written in *la mala palabra*, the "dirty words" that transgress the barriers of the forbidden text, words that step *beyond the mirror* of binary structures of knowledge, into *the other face* of the Symbolic order where women are no longer the object of the male gaze, but the ones who see as the looking subject. In the text of many Latin American

⁴I paraphrase the English title of Valenzuela's book *Aquí pasan cosas raras*.

women writers, the Word is a space for women's self-representation, a new territory to map their self-defined image, to sing with their own voice.

Under this feminist perspective, this dissertation proposes a model for reading the fiction of Latin American women writers built on their theoretical reflections and public pronouncements. The works of other authors whom I did not include in my thesis, such as Elena Garro, Marta Traba, Griselda Gámbaro, Lucía Guerra's fiction, Diamela Eltit, Reina Roffé, and Cristina Peri Rossi, could benefit from such a method as their pursuit as writers is also to spell out experiences that resist to be narrated, and their quest takes place in the language of the ineffable.

Poniatowska's statement in the epigraph to this conclusion asserts that women's voices have just begun to be heard. The initial shrieks of Castellanos, Lispector, and Valenzuela have carried their echoes. Narration is no longer the exclusive dominion of the male voice, and Latin American critics and writers have a vast field to incorporate into the literary canon. This is the new Conquest that lies ahead.

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