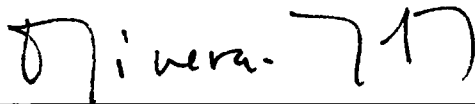


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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Barbara Rebecca Fick entitled "Narrative Transgression and Disembodied Voices: The Reconstruction of Identity in the Novels of Carmen Boullosa." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Modern Foreign Languages.


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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


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**Narrative Transgression and Disembodied Voices: The Reconstruction
of Identity in the Novels of Carmen Boullosa**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Barbara Rebecca Fick
August 2000

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother

Barbara Jane Patchell

who has given me infinite support and love.

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ABSTRACT

Carmen Boullosa (Mexico, 1954) has been a productive and consistent author in the last two decades of the century and her fiction shares many of the concerns of current writing and thought in Mexico and of other literature that can be analyzed on both a regional and global level. This study presents a postmodern-feminist analysis of Boullosa's nine novels published between 1987 and 1998. Boullosa's writing continues and adds to many of the innovations initiated by earlier twentieth-century authors in Latin America and, in this way, interrogates textual representation in the process of identity construction through an ongoing dialogue with the past and its literature. The present study examines the strategies employed by the author in order to engage a more active reader, present plural perspectives, and challenge established social and literary institutions. The disembodied narrative voices in Boullosa's novels are often disconnected, fragmented, and seem to speak from a point elsewhere in order to construct an identity through textual self-representation. By narrating from a point that is elsewhere, the characters embrace and affirm not only their marginalized existence but also their difference, the very Otherness or Alterity that places them on the periphery of traditional representation. These transgressive narrative strategies also serve to reveal and question the repressive systems that caused the disappearance, disintegration, death, or exile of the narrators. In this way, Boullosa opens up textual space for the representation of other perspectives and a plurality of voices formerly marginalized by hegemonic discourses. Her writing presents a revision of the self and

Mexican identity in the twentieth century. This study proposes to add to the understanding of Carmen Boullosa's writing in an effort to situate it within the larger context of literature at the end of the twentieth century and to encourage further investigation of her works.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Carmen Boullosa and Late Twentieth-Century Fiction

Carmen Boullosa (Mexico, 1954), an important figure in contemporary Latin American literature and in Mexican literature in particular, is a poet, dramatist, short story author, literary critic, and novelist. She is a committed and highly productive writer who is actively involved in the arts and literature in Mexico. Boullosa has received national and international literary recognition, including El Premio Villarrutia in 1989 for her novel *Antes*, the German literary Prize Libertur for the German translation of her novel *La Milagrosa* (1993), and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation in 1992 and the Centro Mexicano de Escritores in 1980. Boullosa founded the Editorial workshop *Tres sirenas* in 1983 and entered into the Sistema Nacional de Creadores Artísticos in 1994. She has also been a distinguished visitor at the University of California at San Diego and at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Her writing participates in an ongoing dialogue with the past and its literature. It is a postmodern and feminist interrogation of literary representation in the process of self-construction and may be seen as continuing the projects initiated by earlier twentieth-century authors in Latin America. An examination of Boullosa's works in this context

may permit a greater understanding of Latin American literature at the end of the twentieth century as it moves into the twenty-first century.

Until recently, the discussion of "contemporary" fiction in twentieth-century Latin American literature has most commonly focused on the "New Novels" or the so-called "Boom" in the 1960's, the "Post-Boom" in the 1970's and the more recent commercial phenomenon of popular Latin American female writers in the 1980's. Discussion and criticism of contemporary Latin American fiction has only just begun to focus on the authors and writing of the last two decades of the century. With the identification of new authors and their evolving *oeuvre*, the corpus of works for critical study has expanded and become a fertile area of investigation.¹ Critics are still developing a framework for the examination of the diverse techniques and concerns of the end of the twentieth century. While current theory is provisional, such investigations will lead to a broader analysis of the writing produced within the greater context of the entire twentieth century, a century of intensely dynamic social, political, cultural, industrial, technological and economic changes on regional, national and global levels.

¹ In *The Modern Latin American Novel*, Raymond Leslie Williams discusses writers in South America, Mexico and the Caribbean as participating in postmodern culture and literature. Some of the authors from the second half of the twentieth century that he mentions are: Diamela Eltit, Sylvia Molloy, Ricardo Piglia, Alejandra Pizarnik, Héctor Libertella, Armonía Sommers, Albalucía Angel, R. H. Moreno-Durán, Jorge Enrique Adoum, Cristina Peri Rossi, José Balza, José Emilio Pacheco, Carlos Fuentes, Luis Arturo Ramos, María Luisa Puga, Brianda Domeq, Carmen Boullosa, Ignacio Solares, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Efraín Castillo, Andrés L. Mateo, and Manuel García Cartagena.

In accordance with these changes, the literature of the twentieth century, both internationally and within Latin America, has undergone a number of dramatic transformations. These changes can be attributed to a crisis in the language used to represent the ever-changing world and perceptions of existence. In Latin America, this crisis is compounded by problems of representation that may be traced to the period of contact between autochthonous cultures and the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. During the conquest, European languages were used for the first time to represent an entirely different world, its peoples and its cultures. These languages could not adequately express the "New World" due to a complete lack of the necessary ontological references to represent that world. In the introduction to her book, *The New Narrative of Mexico*, Kathy Taylor observes the imposition of the European world vision on the representation of the American reality. She affirms that:

the conquistadors and chroniclers arrived in the New World with their vision already preconditioned by prevalent mythology and by the literary *topoi* of Renaissance Spain [. . .] they narrated their observations and interpretations of America from the external perspective of the Old World; limited as are all writers, by their own linguistic and cultural experiences. (13)

Taylor follows the thinking of Angel Rosenblat, who noted that the vision of America held by the Spanish conquerors represented a projection of European mentality, a vision that made the reality of America fit into the molds of the words, names and beliefs of Europe (13). Initiated with the conquest and colonization of Latin America, attempts to express the reality of the Americas in the Spanish language have resulted in distorted

figurations and misrepresentation. The inauthentic rendering of Latin America has resulted in a crisis of the language of representation and identity that has led to continued experimentation and innovation in the use of language to express the Latin American existence.

The question of self-representation and identity construction in Latin America is directly related to the language of expression, a language that was imposed during the conquest and colonization of the Americas. The exploration of identity and selfhood is necessarily concerned with the earliest representations in Latin American history, legends, and popular myths. In the twentieth century, Latin American thinkers, philosophers and writers have voiced a preoccupation with the colonial past in the construction of an identity for the present. Leopoldo Zea recognizes this concern in *El Pensamiento Latinoamericano*. He maintains, “Si algo caracteriza al pensamiento en Latinoamérica es su preocupación por captar la llamada esencia de lo americano, tanto en su expresión histórica y cultural, como en su expresión ontológica” (48). Zea further recognizes the resurgence of this theme in Latin American thought during the second half of the century as “un nuevo afán por descubrir y definir su identidad, se volverán a plantear el problema de la existencia o posibilidad de una cultura latinoamericana” (481). According to Zea, the questions of Latin American identity that were posed during the conquest and colonization of the Americas persist in the second half of the twentieth century:

Siempre está patente el problema de la dependencia y la independencia del hombre hispanoamericano. Ilustrados, liberales, conservadores,

positivistas y revolucionarios, no han hecho otra cosa que expresar en diversas épocas y con diverso lenguaje el mismo y siempre latente problema. Siempre está ahí nuestro pasado [. . .] este pasado nuestro aún no se convierte en auténtico pasado, sigue siendo un presente que no se decide a ser historia. (53-54)

Taylor agrees that “[t]he twentieth century has brought about an intensified consciousness of history and our place in it” and asserts that “Latin American literature of the twentieth century reflects this growing interest in history and identity” (17). In addition, Taylor recognizes that many Latin American works “focus not only on history and origin, but also on the language and drama of writing itself. Language is no longer seen as merely a vehicle for the expression of a reality that is independent of it; it is, rather, a fundamental part of that reality” (17).

It is precisely this crisis of language that eventually brought about the complete revision of perception and representation in the Spanish language by Latin American *modernista* authors such as Ruben Darío. While *modernismo* is principally associated with poetry, it stimulated similar innovations in the narrative of authors like José Martí, Manuel Gutierrez Nájera (el Duque Job), José Asunción Silva, as well as the prose of Rúben Darío. By the end of the 1920s, *modernista* innovation had worn itself out, turning into its own literary and linguistic conventions not unlike those that were first rejected by the movement. Out of this renewed crisis in language and representation came the Vanguard movements of the 1930s and 1940s, which continued endeavors to innovate language as a way to represent different perceptions of reality.

Jorge Luis Borges experimented with language and representation in his Ultraista poetry of the late 1920s and 1930s and extended this experimentation with the power of language to represent reality into his short stories. While Borges presented reality on a more “universal” level, or a level not specific to Latin America, he strove to question the manner of perceiving reality and representing it in fiction, a stance that would later contribute to postmodern writing in Latin America and internationally. Taylor recognizes Borges’ influence in the second half of the twentieth century when, as she comments, “[a] new type of novel appears, influenced first by the prose of Borges, in which there is a search for an authentic Latin American language” (17). The late Vanguard movements also corresponded with the early manifestations of Nicolás Guillén’s *mulatez*, the *real maravilloso* of Alejo Carpentier and magical realism of Miguel Ángel Asturias. The narrative of these authors attempted to capture better a reality that had previously been inadequately represented by the Spanish language and the ontological implications of the European culture that created it.

Early twentieth-century Latin American authors were already producing highly experimental novels that would influence later postmodern writing. Following their example, writers of the “Boom” and “Postboom” continued to experiment with different writing strategies in the 1960s and 1970s, when the establishment of international literary prizes promoted increased recognition and commercial success for Latin American fiction. These writers (Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso and Julio Cortázar, to name a few) continued and expanded narrative innovations in their writing. Raymond Leslie Williams affirms that “[t]he writing of the

1960s – both inside and outside the Boom – as well as the writing of Borges, had done much to set the stage for a more experimental postmodern fiction in Latin America” (117). Referring to one author of the Boom, Julio Cortázar, Williams asserts, “no other work of fiction from Latin America had ever extended such an explicit invitation to the reader to participate in the creative process. The engagement of the reader pioneered in *Hopscotch* became a common strategy in postmodern fiction of the late 1960s and 1970s” (59). Authors like Cortázar insisted on a more active role for the reader in both the creation and reading of literary texts. This and other innovations by the authors of the Boom have been continued and intensified by postmodern writers of the last two decades of the century.

During the twentieth century, more female writers began to be published and could be seen as participating in the same literary projects of the modernistas, vanguardistas and Boom authors. María Luisa Bombal, a contemporary of Borges and one of the earliest female voices in twentieth-century Latin American narrative, also experimented with the perception and representation of reality in her writing. Bombal’s fiction employs a stream of conscience and interior monologue in a surrealist-influenced writing style. Her narrative works presented another way of perceiving reality, alternative to the masculine subjectivity that has traditionally dominated in canonical literature. In the second half of the century, writers like Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska, Rosario Castellanos, and Rosario Ferré (among many others) began to be recognized not only for their innovative writing and social themes but also as pioneers for writing about “female” themes. Postboom writers such as Luisa Valenzuela and

Sylvia Molloy (who are also considered postmodern) continued to explore themes of social justice and the feminine. These authors are credited for their contributions and influence on the writing of authors, both male and female, in the last two decades of the twentieth century.²

Latin American women writers of the 1980's such as Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel received increased editorial attention and consequential commercial success. This attracted editorial interest and promoted the commercialization of Latin American women writers, which resulted in something of a Boom in the area of women's writing. Because of their popularity, a greater number of women began to be published to such an extent that women's writing became almost as plentiful and varied (in style and quality) as that of male Latin American writers. It is important to note that because of their recognition in the 1980s and subsequent editorial attention, many of the new writers of the last two decades are women and the fact that they are women may influence their perception and representation of reality in the Spanish language.³ For this reason, feminist literary approaches, as well as postmodern theory which includes feminism, are valuable to the study of Latin American literature of the last two decades.

² While there are more authors that have contributed to the development of narrative fiction in Latin America and especially to that by female authors, I do not propose to present an exhaustive list but only to give a sketch of this development through the mention of *some* important writers. Female authors have become so numerous in the recent decades that it would be impossible to provide a complete list of 'significant authors' without excluding important names and works. See the studies by Gabriella de Beer, Raymond Leslie Williams, and Debra Castillo for mention of these influences on contemporary male and female authors.

³ Other recent female writers from Mexico include: Angeles Mastretta, Sara Sefcovich, María Luisa Puga, Ethel Krauze, Brianda Domecq, Rosa María Britton, Martha Cerda, Sabina Berman, Rosamaría Roffiel and many more.

Women writers, like male writers, participate in a wide range of literary tendencies in form and content. The new optic that they may bring to Latin American literature as female authors with an alternative perspective or, on a broader level, as late twentieth-century writers, has expanded the canon and increased its heterogeneity.⁴

Latin American Postmodernisms (and Feminisms)

The strategies of authors of the late twentieth-century novel in Latin America coincide with characteristics of postmodern writing and thought which may incorporate many other perspectives and theories including those of feminist thought. Postmodern tendencies in recent Latin American writers have received relatively little critical attention, in part due to the diversity of contemporary writing and, in part due to the controversy associated with the term "postmodern."⁵ While much literature has been devoted to the topic and debate of postmodern theory, it is beyond the scope of this study to define or delineate all of these arguments or all of the characteristics associated with the postmodern. Only those aspects that are present in the works of Carmen Boullosa and other Latin American writers will be included here. Specific reference to Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* will be made because this work provides

⁴ See the special issue of *Inti* dedicated to feminist readings of hispanic texts, edited and with an introduction by Cynthia Duncan: "The Configuration of Feminist Criticism and Theoretical Practices in Hispanic Literary Studies." *Inti* 40-41 (1994-1995).

⁵ The term *postmodernism* is still a hotly debated topic. Many critics take issue with the use of the prefix *post-* as it imposes a temporal dependence and impossible chronology. One strong critic of the term and of its theories has been Terry Eagleton who presents the fallacies and contradictions of postmodernism in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. All references to this work, refer to the translation, *Las ilusiones del posmodernismo* (Trans. Marcos Mayer. Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1997). In this study, Eagleton also makes the important distinction between postmodernity (a

an extensive investigation into the theories of postmodernism. Her approach to some forms of postmodern literature as historiographic metafiction is particularly applicable to much of the recent narrative fiction in Latin America.

Postmodern writing works within traditional forms in order to undermine its own defining limits. Hutcheon describes this subversion of traditional genres as a transgression of social and artistic boundaries. She states:

[t]he important contemporary debate about the margins and the boundaries of social and artistic conventions is also the result of a typically postmodern transgressing of previously accepted limits: those of particular arts, of genres, of art itself [. . . in] addition to being 'borderline' inquiries, most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved. (9-11)

The narrative is often metafictional and self-conscious, serving to reveal the subjective bias in all writing and, thus, to expose discourses of authority as instruments of repression and oppression. Hutcheon adds that:

postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past. (23)

As Hutcheon has observed, postmodern writing challenges the historical and narrative continuity and closure of traditional forms such as the novel (12). Postmodern

specific historical period after the fall of modernity) and postmodernism (the cultural manifestations of such conditions), (11-12).

novels are often open and ambiguous, requiring a more engaged reader to participate in creative act of determining possible interpretations. Hutcheon has described the more active role of the reader in postmodern fiction of the 1980s and 1990s as an empowerment or liberation of the reader. She asserts that "Postmodern fiction has often explored, on the thematic level, the issues of freedom and responsibility [. . .] It has problematized these issues by showing how narratorial (and authorial) freedom is, in terms of characters and readers, really another name for power" (206-07). The reader is empowered in that his or her interpretation of the information presented has as much value as any other interpretation in the text. Because recent novels are not limited to the presentation of one perspective but many, the authority and power of the narrative voice are reduced to that of one voice within a text of multiple discourses.

As part of its presentation of new perspectives, postmodern writing frequently returns to the past in order to rework representations that have served to marginalize the identity of others. This tendency has been identified by Hutcheon as historiographic metafiction where "[h]istory is not made obsolete: it is however, being rethought – as a human construct" (16). The "presence of the past" in postmodern literature is not a nostalgic return:

it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society [. . .] Its aesthetic forms and its social formations are problematized by critical reflection. The same is true of the postmodern rethinking of...historical narrative in fiction and poetry: it is always a reworking, never a nostalgic 'return'." (Hutcheon 4)

The techniques of postmodern literature and of historiographic metafiction serve to stress the artificial nature of all textual representation as a literary creation or invention. In this way postmodern writing serves to challenge previously accepted notions of literature in a process which opens up the reader's reception of texts to the possibility of heterogeneous discourses.

Just as theorists argue the validity and concepts of postmodern philosophy, controversy and debate also accompany any discussion of postmodernism as it relates to Latin American literature, thought, and culture. Raymond Leslie Williams observes the critical controversy surrounding postmodern theory in general and affirms that "[a] concept of what exactly constitutes the postmodern in Latin America is just as polemical among critics of Latin American culture [. . .]" (121). In spite of the initial doubts of other critics as to the appropriateness of the term "postmodern" to describe Latin American culture and cultural production, Williams insists on its applicability:

Latin American society and culture have experienced the same crisis of truth that Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Jameson describe as existing in the North Atlantic nations [. . .] The discourse and concepts of First World postmodernism are now circulating in Latin America –*lo indeterminado* (the indeterminate), *la problematización del centro* (the problematization of the center), *la marginalidad* (marginality), *la discontinuidad* (discontinuity), *la simulación* (simulation), and the like [. . .] The same Borges who was cited by the European poststructuralist theorists Barthes, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lyotard also planted the seeds for Latin American postmodern fiction. (121-22)

In Western culture, Jane Flax observes "the breakdown of Enlightenment beliefs under the cumulative pressure of historical events such as the invention of the atomic bomb,

the Holocaust, and the war in Vietnam” (68). Flax, like Eagleton, describes postmodern discourses as “‘deconstructive’ in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimization for contemporary Western culture” (70).⁶

The postmodern condition of the Western world, of the North Atlantic nations has resulted in a crisis of representation and identity, similar to the crisis in Latin America that was initiated with its conquest and colonization. Zea cites similar global historical events and recognizes this crisis:

Nuestra época [the second half of the twentieth century] es una gran época de crítica. Una vez más, han sido puestos en crisis valores que hasta ayer parecían firmes y seguros [. . .] Los problemas que se plantean en nuestros días no son ya los problemas propios de una determinada cultura como sucedió en el pasado. (42-43)

As observed by Zea, “Por primera vez en la historia, esta América y Europa se encontraban en el mismo plano, en la situación de tener que hacer o rehacer su cultura” (482). For this reason, just as Williams has noted, the postmodern discourses can no longer be considered as exclusive or only applicable to the North Atlantic nations and, therefore, its theories are appropriate in the analysis of cultural production in Latin America.

The controversy that surrounds the application of postmodern theories to Latin American literature parallels the debate that accompanies feminist literary approaches in

⁶ See Eagleton, page 11.

the field. Myriam Yvonne Jehenson has described the female presence in Latin American literature with the following words:

a greater reality makes the work of Latin American authors, especially that of the women in the second half of the twentieth century, memorable. It is their greater transgressive and contestatorial nature, and their critical reconsideration of hierarchical oppositions, that make their texts revolutionary, conflictual, and dialectic [. . .] (xi)

Feminist discourses are some of many inclusive and diverse discourses of postmodernism and feminist projects that intersect with the postmodern. Flax affirms that "Feminist theorists enter into and echo postmodern discourses as we have begun to deconstruct notions of reason, knowledge, or the self and to reveal the effects of the gender arrangements that lay beneath their 'neutral' and universalizing facades" (72). She adds that, as a part of this deconstruction, it is also necessary to explore new conceptions of identity that are no longer limited by traditional thought.

[feminism and postmodernism] must take as [their] object of investigation at least one facet of what has become most problematic in our transitional state: how to understand and (re-) constitute the self, gender, knowledge, social relations and culture without resorting to linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic, or binary ways of thinking and being. (68)

Williams confirms the appropriateness of feminist approaches to Latin American literature and recognizes that the "new modernity called postmodernism has involved a new cultural and political force in Latin American writing of the 1980s and 1990s: feminism." He adds that "the rise of women writers and articulation of feminist politics

has been a major phenomena since the 1980s" (158). According to Williams, Latin American postmodern writers are interested in heterogeneous discourses of theory and literature, which implicitly include the once marginalized female voice. Similar to their North Atlantic counterparts, postmodern and feminist discourses in Latin America tend towards a valuing of the margins and a self-conscious awareness of feminist and poststructuralist theory (123). Williams cites the growing awareness in North and Latin American academia of the idea of a postmodern novel in Latin America and he asserts the validity of postmodern and feminist literary theories in the study of late twentieth-century Latin American literature providing that the context of its enunciation is taken into account (117-18).

A Contemporary Latin American Writer of Postmodern and Feminist Fiction

As a contemporary Mexican author, Carmen Boullosa's writing serves as evidence of a postmodern presence in Latin American literature today. Roselyn Costantino has published various studies of Boullosa's plays and in "Postmodernism and Feminism in Mexican Theatre: *Aura y las once mil vírgenes* by Carmen Boullosa," she notes the postmodern tendencies in the form and content of all of Boullosa's works. She describes Boullosa's writing as fragmented and self-reflexive in a way to constitute a questioning of the established genres of "good" literature (55, 57). Like her theatre, Boullosa's novels present plural perspectives through open and discontinuous texts that require active readers and challenge established social and literary institutions. The author employs postmodern discourses that seek to destabilize traditional beliefs

concerning knowledge, power, the self, and language. Her novels undermine traditional ways of perceiving reality, institutions of power, the use of language, and even traditional literary forms. Eight of the nine novels examined in this study return to the personal or the national past, using the postmodern strategies of historiographic metafiction in a revision of past representations. In this way, Boullosa opens up textual space for the representation of other perspectives and a plurality of voices once marginalized by hegemonic discourses. By opening up the text to multiple perspectives, voices and outcomes, Boullosa creates space for a re-vision of the self and Mexican identity in the twentieth century.

The engagement of the reader and other writing strategies pioneered by the writers of the “Boom” were not only common in the fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, but have been continued and intensified in postmodern Latin American literature of the 1980s and 1990s. Carmen Boullosa’s writing continues the literary projects initiated by such authors as Borges, Cortázar, Fuentes, and Donoso and requires an active reader engaged in reading as a political process for rethinking his or her own reality. In *Rayuela*, for example, Cortázar expresses his anti-novelistic theory through the character, Morelli, a fictional author, who like Cortázar, challenges traditional concepts of writing and reading literature. Morelli proposes a text that is capable of insinuating other values and that collaborates in a manifestation or revelation of humanity, if such an inclusive project is possible. For Morelli, the traditional novel fails in this attempt, precisely because it limits the reader to a single point of view or the specific parameters

laid out in the work by its author. Cortázar, through Morelli, suggests the possibility of another kind of text:

Intentar en cambio un texto que no agarre al lector pero que lo vuelva obligadamente cómplice al murmurarle, por debajo del desarrollo convencional, otros rumbos más esotéricos [. . .] Provocar, asumir un texto desaliñado, desanudado, incongruente, minuciosamente antinovelístico (aunque no antinovelístico) [. . .] Como todas las criaturas de elección del Occidente, la novela se contenta con un orden cerrado. Resueltamente en contra, buscar también aquí la apertura y para eso cortar de raíz toda construcción sistemática de caracteres y situaciones. Método: la ironía, la autocrítica incesante, la incongruencia, la imaginación al servicio de nadie. (559-60)

According to this theory, language as a representation of a singular optic of truth and reality is condemned as a false or incomplete construction that masks reality and humanity in its very attempt to be a totalizing representation. Morelli practices the theory that he proposes and in the very act of writing tries to unwrite or destroy:

Por la práctica el viejo [Morelli] se muestra y nos muestra la salida. ¿Para qué sirve un escritor si no para destruir la literatura? Y nosotros, que no queremos ser lectores-hembra, ¿para qué servimos si no para ayudar en lo posible a esa destrucción? (614)

Carmen Boullosa's theory of writing and reading corresponds in every way to the theory that the non-fictional author Morelli proposes and practices. In her article, "La destrucción en la escritura," Boullosa has described her ideas about writing novels with the following words:

La verdad es que el novelista no construye, el novelista es un destructor [. . .] los cuerpos que aparecen en la novela cobran forma y reflejan en

activo los cuerpos del mundo, destrozándolos al darles su propia voluntad, nutriéndose de ellos, de su carne y su sangre, dejándolos inertes obligados a repensarse a sí mismos, a re-facturarse, a volver a hacerse. (217)

In her writing, Boullosa destroys the concept of a totalizing representation of reality as a monolithic truth by traditional narrative, which is a construction of hegemonic powers in society. Boullosa continues the literary undertaking proposed by Morelli that strives to “describir, como él dice, para ganarse el derecho (y ganárselo a todos) de entrar de nuevo con el buen pie en la casa del hombre” (613).

While all of Boullosa's writing would serve as examples of postmodern and feminist manifestations in contemporary literature, her novels will come under specific examination here, as the entire body of works written by Boullosa is too large and dynamic to be addressed adequately within the scope of a single study. Boullosa has written nine novels between 1987 and 1998, and to date they have not received a great deal of critical attention. Two of Boullosa's novels, *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Duerme*, have been included in broader analyses by Carrie C. Chorba, Virginia E. Bell, Laura E. Pirott Quintero and Roselyn Costantino. Their research includes Boullosa's works along with the narrative of other authors and focuses on the re-writing of the past and the concept of mestizaje in the Mexican novel, postnational historiographic fiction in the Americas and articulations of alterity and pluricultural identities. No single published work has been dedicated exclusively to Boullosa, nor have all of her novels been studied together. Carmen Boullosa has been a productive and consistent author in the last two decades and is one of many recent women writers. For this reason her

writing should be analyzed as an example of current writing and thought in Mexico and of postmodern writing that can be analyzed on a regional and global level.

Although it is the sixth novel written by Boullosa, *La Milagrosa* (1993) is the first text to be discussed as introduction to the analysis of her other novels in Chapter Two. In this text, the author employs a fragmented, ambiguous, and self-reflexive discourse that parodies classic detective fiction in order to subvert traditional writing and to challenge dominant institutions of Mexican society. With this discourse, the author deconstructs the authority of her own narrative and through this deconstruction, she opens a space for a plurality of alternative narratives. Through the analysis of narrative structure and the content of the novel, the necessity of an active, all-questioning reader becomes evident in order to unmask the hidden realities. *La Milagrosa* is an example of an open text which creates an opening for dialogue with the past and a representation of other voices. Boullosa's other novels employ similar narrative strategies to create an open work and, thus, allow opportunities for the expression of marginalized discourses, particularly in the articulation of the personal and historical past.

The structural aspects of the novels discussed in Chapter Three, *Mejor desaparece* (1987), *Antes* (1989), and *Treinta años* (1998), subvert traditional narrative forms in order to reinvent, dream and remember into existence the past of the narrator. *Mejor desaparece*, Boullosa's first novel, consists of a series of short discontinuous, impressionistic and almost surreal memories from the childhood of the narrator. The discourse of the novel disintegrates into disconnected parts that reproduce the conditions

of the narrators who disappear at the end of the novel. *Antes*, Boullosa's second novel, employs a similar structure as well as metafictional self-reference to the process of invention and dreams in the relation of the narrator's childhood memories. These novels are not lineal; rather, they are discontinuous and upon maturation from adolescent to adult, the narrators disappear. *Treinta años* is Boullosa's most recent novel and it returns to the theme of a childhood past. While the narrator at the end of this novel does not disappear, she finds her existence as an adult to be meaningless and can only reconstruct her identity through the recreation of her childhood. All three novels play against the traditional Bildungsroman or novel of formation as the child never becomes an adult with a clear sense of identity and integration into society. In this sense, the narrators of these novels speak from a point that is elsewhere, from the margins of traditional self-representation. The return to a personal past through memory, dreams or invention forms an integral part of the postmodern dialogue with history and allows for a revision and redefinition of the past as part of the individual's present identity. The return to the past in these novels and the invention of childhood privileges the voice of the female in the construction of her own identity and even the marginalized language of children in the representation of their reality. In these novels, the narrative voice literally and figuratively invents itself into existence. The narrator's very existence in the present depends upon her ability to create and open textual space for the representation of a personal past.

Chapter Four centers on the function of the content and structure of *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991), *El médico de los piratas* (1993), and *Duerme* (1994) in the

reconstruction of a historical and colonial past, which serves to demythify and deconstruct colonial history, myths and legends. *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas* present parodies of traditional pirate tales and legends and, like *Antes* and *Mejor desaparece*, they subvert the traditional literary conventions of the Bildungsroman. Boullosa experiments with postmodern parody and recycling of texts in both of these novels, which bear striking resemblance to one another, and which rework past versions of the same story. In *Duerme* and *Son vacas, somos puercos* the author employs multiple and shifting narrative voices. The narrator-protagonist of *Duerme* changes gender identification and public identity and in *Son vacas, somos puercos* the narrative voice shifts between different characters. These novels represent a plurality of voices that transcend gender, race, nationality and class, while at the same time, they reveal systems of domination based on hierarchies that are determined by the body. Through the metafictional telling and retelling of the same and different stories set within a colonial past, self-referentiality and reference to authentic historical texts, these novels serve to deconstruct and subvert traditional history. They rework past representations of the colonial past into a plural and inclusive vision. The revision of the colonial past presented in these works permits a new perspective on mestizo identity in present day Mexico.

Chapter Five continues to examine the importance of the past in the formation of the postmodern present and the importance of a revision of the past to recuperate the heterogeneous discourses that have traditionally been excluded from the history and literary representation. Here, *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* (1992) and *Cielos de Tierra*

(1996), like the novels of the previous chapter, transgress temporal and literary norms using a narrative discourse that is fragmented and multiple. Through the postmodern transgression of time, genre, and history that is achieved by such characteristics as pastiche, multiple narrators, fragmentation, and ambiguity, Boullosa attempts to reconcile the Mexican present with its past. Zea has described this reconciliation between past and present, as necessary for the realization of Latin American identity in the second half of the twentieth century. Both *Llanto* and *Cielos de Tierra* present ambiguous and multiple narrators, simultaneous time periods and the incorporation and deconstruction of traditional literary and historical forms (normally associated with official history), such as Spanish and indigenous chronicles of the conquest, historical documents or testimonials. The use of a pastiche of multiple forms of writing breaks with the traditional concept of the novel and presents multiple perspectives in a palimpsest form. In both novels, the content and narrative structure of the novel transgress traditional temporal logic in a way that better captures the reality of the Mexican present which is inextricably intertwined with the events of its history. These novels open a new dialogue between the past, the present and the future, constituting a re-examination of the relations between reality, fiction and history. In this way, problems such as auto-definition in the representation of Mexican reality, which were initiated with colonialism and have continued into Mexico's present, are examined and presented. Resolution is suggested through the tolerance of heterogeneous representations of reality and identity.

Carmen Boullosa's fiction broadens the possibilities for textual representation of identities that have been marginalized in writing of the past. Her works reveal the repressive nature of social, cultural, and political institutions that have systematically excluded others from representation and from self-representation on the basis of sex, gender, race, class or nationality. The narrative voices and characters of her novels portray women, children and men who are repressed by social structures that are based on domination which result in the isolation of the self. All of the narrative voices (with the exception of Delmira in *Treinta años*) have disappeared from a limiting world that did not permit their authentic existence. Their discourse is generated from a point beyond the possible and traditional spaces of enunciation and, in this way, they appropriate new spaces of representation that serve to reveal the very systems that caused their disappearance, disintegration, death, or exile. The plurality of narrative voices in Boullosa's works presents multiple perspectives and emphasizes the subjective nature of all writing. Plural voices and multiple subjectivity also serve to recreate the sense of a simultaneous coexistence of different time periods, a convergence of times that is characteristic of postmodern literature. The past in Boullosa's writing is integral to the representation of the present and future. This convergence of time participates in the postmodern project of reconciliation with the historical and personal past, also relevant to Zea's conception of an assimilation of the colonial past. The theme of past and present coexisting simultaneously is evident in Boullosa's works and is particularly relevant to the reality of Mexico in the twentieth century and to the Mexican concept of cyclical time.

As a recent and relatively young author, Carmen Boullosa will, no doubt, continue to develop as a writer and contribute to the overall literary production of Latin America in the twenty first century. Her works encourage readers to re-examine their relationship to not just contemporary literature, but also to all writing and literature of the past. This study and others like it will aid in formulating new approaches to Latin American fiction, particularly its most recent narrative forms. Hopefully the exploration of developing critical approaches to literature will contribute to the expansion and transformation of the literary canon into new and more inclusive concept.

CHAPTER 2

CARMEN BOULLOSA AND THE OPEN TEXT: *La Milagrosa*

La Milagrosa (1993): Detective Fiction Parodied

Although *La Milagrosa* (The Miraculous One) is the sixth novel written by Boullosa, it is the first text to be discussed in this study in order to provide an introduction to the analysis of her other works. This novel parodies the detective genre and at first glance, seems different from Boullosa's other works, which often deal with the memory of a personal past or the collective memory of an historical past.⁷ However, a closer examination of the text reveals that it shares many of the same concerns present in all of the novels that will be discussed in later chapters. In this work, the author employs a fragmented, ambiguous, and self-reflexive discourse in order to challenge and destabilize traditional writing and the dominant discourses of Mexican society. Traditional literary conventions are transgressed not only by the discontinuity and hybridity of the work, but also by the parodic effects of its form.

⁷ While common uses of the term parody refer to the imitation of texts in order to mock or ridicule the source text or its ideological foundations, my use of the term will correspond to the description proposed by Linda Hutcheon and Margaret A. Rose, where parody is a repetition with difference and constitutes an ironic "transcontextualization" or inversion that creates a critical distance between the background text and the new incorporating text. While parody's irony may be humorous, it is not necessarily so and its effect is derived from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing' between complexity and difference (Hutcheon 32). For further reading see: Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Techniques of Twentieth-Century Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1985 and Rose, Margaret A. *Parody//Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction*. London: Croom Helm, 1979.

La Milagrosa opens with the narrator's description of the dead body of a man who holds various papers and a cassette tape in his arms. The narrator comments that the cadaver "parecía gritar 'no vayan a arrebatar-me lo único que tengo, la explicación de mi muerte'" (11). This interpretation on the part of the narrator leads the reader to expect an explanation of the man's death. The dramatic opening of the novel is followed by an apparent transcription of the content of the papers and cassette tape in a patchwork of assorted writing forms. The first document that is presented by the narrator is a note that describes the purpose of the papers and cassette tape in the following words:

De manera no muy clara, explican cómo 'opera' la Milagrosa, cuál es el 'mecanismo' de su don. Para el seguimiento y conocimiento del caso los considero poco útiles, habría de hacerse a un lado la cursilería de la Milagrosa, sus reflexiones en círculos concéntricos, que no llevan a ningún lado. (11)

The reader is left to assume that this note was written by the dead man who may have been a detective investigating the miracles performed by "la Milagrosa." While the narrator has already led the reader to expect an explanation of the man's death, the inclusion of the above note, in addition to the title of the novel, builds the reader's expectations for an explanation and the story of the miracles performed by the religious miracle worker. In fact, by beginning the novel this way, the author invokes certain conventions of the detective novel, normally narrated from the male perspective by the detective who solves the mystery for the reader. In her article, "Detective Fiction in

Mexico as Ideological Statement," Cynthia Duncan has given the following description of the traditional detective genre:

Despite difficulties posed by the nature of the mystery or crime, the detective is ultimately able to use logic and reason to unravel the most perplexing problems, and he is therefore capable of discovering truths that are hidden from others. The detective story demands closure, and it incorporates this need into its structure. In the final part of a detective story or novel, the detective is given an opportunity to explain how he solved the mystery. No loose ends are left dangling, and no doubt is allowed in the mind of the reader [. . .] The story ends only when the mystery has been satisfactorily and thoroughly explained. (211)

The opening scene and the transcription of the detective's note on the first page establish the reader's anticipation of these literary conventions in the novel that he or she is about to read.

Contrary to the initial expectations of the reader, *La Milagrosa* does not solve the mystery of the detective's murder and it does not explain how *la Milagrosa's* special powers work. The discontinuous and ambiguous narrative structure, one of the most outstanding aspects of this text, serves to undermine the totalizing notions of reason, logic, and truth that normally operate in the detective novel. These concepts do not function within the world of *La Milagrosa*. The narrative is broken into discordant fragments that are presented in a non-lineal fashion and do not achieve closure at the end of the work. The reader's mind is only filled with greater doubt and, appropriately, the last line of the novel is an unanswered question which emphasizes its open nature and contradicts the usual conventions of the detective genre that it parodies.

La Milagrosa consists of an apparent transcription of the stack of papers and cassette tape that were found in the arms of the dead man at the opening of the novel. These papers are a composite of diverse types of writing: an informal note, diaries or journals and interior monologues, a transcription of the cassette tape and various documents that the narrator has chosen to call "las hojas de los suplicantes." After the transcription of the papers and cassette tape from the dead man, the apparent transcriber and compiler appears to have added four more fragments to the novel. The additional sections continue the disjointed style of the previous parts of the text and are also divided into different types of writing. They include *las libretas de agradecimientos*, interior monologue, and what appears to be a newspaper article clipping.

The division into various writing forms impedes the lineal narration of one single story and corresponds to the disparate discourses of the different narrative voices of these sections. These segments are only interrelated in that they represent individual connections to the life of "la Milagrosa." The resulting novel is a collection of narrative fragments associated with both traditional and popular discourses. The detective's note and audio recordings identify with patriarchal discourse of law, order and logic. The diaries and interior monologues are typically characteristic of women's writing, traditionally limited to interior and private spaces of representation. *Las hojas de los suplicantes* and *las libretas de agradecimientos* correspond both to popular or mass culture and to the patriarchal institution of the Catholic Church. Lastly, the newspaper article is a discourse of political commentary alternately associated with discourses of power and with criticism and revolution in Latin America. Each discourse is granted

the same narrative authority and is legitimized within a structure that does not permit the privileging of one voice over the others.

The plural and fragmented narrative also demonstrates that there is not just one single truth or version of a story, but various. This is further emphasized by the metafictional self-reference of the narrator, who later reveals herself to be la Milagrosa's seamstress at the end of the novel. The narrative sections within this work are constructed by a prejudiced narrator, who filters and sometimes interprets the information of the text before sharing it with the reader. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator draws attention to her active role in the organization and presentation of the documents. She says: "Lo he armado de manera que parezca más comprensible, según convino a mi criterio [. . .]" (11). In another part, she comments her decision to include the different papers that she found on the dead man at the start of the novel: "Dudé mucho si incluirlos aquí, dejarlos para el final o simplemente no incorporarlos al cuerpo de esta historia [. . .]" (26). In addition to these comments, and throughout the novel, the reader can see the constant intervention of the narrator, evident in the titles that the narrator has given to each section. Even within the sections and fragments of the novel, the narrator adds titles or explanatory notes. An example of this influence is the section that transcribes the *hojas de los suplicantes* where parts are included with the titles "La batalla de pañuelito" (45) and "Pesadilla de la Milagrosa" (49). These titles lead the reader to question if they were given by "la Milagrosa", herself or added by the narrator. Other questions are also raised: With what authority does the narrator impose such titles? And how does she know that this narrative fragment was actually a

nightmare that “la Milagrosa” had? Are these sections authentic from the perspective of “la Milagrosa?” Or, are they inventions on the part of the narrator? These intrusions are continuous reminders of the active role of the narrator in the organization and filtration of the text that arrives in the hands of the reader.

With these self-reflexive and metafictional comments, the narrator installs and then subverts the legitimacy of her own discourse by revealing it as an artificial construction determined by the subjectivity or bias of her particular perspective. The ambiguity and doubt with respect to the faithful and accurate transcription of the *hojas de los suplicantes* highlights the narrator’s intervention in the presentation of the information in the text that the reader reads. In fact, the reliability of her faithful compilation of all of the documents in the novel is put into question. At the end of the novel, the reader becomes aware of the identity of the narrator as another character within the text and her role as a character-narrator confirms the subjectivity of the narrative discourse as a whole. It is not only this narrator who imposes her will on the text but, within many of the fragments of the novel, the different narrative voices are also the voices of other characters who show their own subjectivity towards the material that they narrate.

By including in the complete transcription the note that was presumably written by the dead man at the beginning of the novel, the narrator gives voice to the prejudices that are contained in this brief note and reflects the perspective of the dead man, thus permitting the imposition of his will in the presentation of the papers about “la

Milagrosa.”⁸ With this note, the dead body influences the reception of the papers and the information about “la Milagrosa.” The note imposes a certain prejudice or doubt on the part of its author towards the powers of “la Milagrosa” by using quotation marks on the words “opera” and “mecanismo”. It also imposes a prejudice upon the transcribed papers that will follow, describing them as unclear and “poco útiles.” By describing “la Milagrosa’s” reflections as “cursilería” and “círculos concéntricos,” the author of the note imposes yet another prejudice upon the representation of “la Milagrosa” and, before it begins, her story is framed by doubt and a judgement of frivolity.

Through this constant intervention of the self-conscious narrator who claims to have compiled the documents and through the various narrative voices of each section, traditional conceptions of narrative discourse are deconstructed and revealed to be subjective or prejudiced constructions that may privilege certain representations of reality while hiding others. The reader must remain cognizant and even suspicious of the narrator’s bias within each fragment and within the entire work, thus deconstructing the authority of any one perspective. Each version must be read critically, and the reader must actively question the legitimacy of the narrator’s words in order to construct his or her own version and to accept the plural representation of perspectives as the actual story.

The final sections of the novel are not part of the papers found on the corpse but are added later and they continue the same irregular narrative structure of the first

⁸ Refer to page 26 of this chapter to reread the transcription of this note as quoted from page 11 in the text.

sections. These final sections include a compilation of *las libretas de agradecimientos*, taken by chance, according to the narrator. This section, which is read before the narrator reveals her identity, makes the reader question the identity of the narrator and her relation to "la Milagrosa" in order to have had access to these books. Also included is the "Finale en Boca de la Milagrosa" in the form of an interior monologue. At the foot of the last page of this section, appears the date, January of 1994, and the location, the city of Mexico in the neighborhood of Santa Fe – the same neighborhood where "la Milagrosa" lived. This segment seems impossible according to previous sections where "la Milagrosa" had already disappeared, and its unexplained presence disconcerts the reader and contradicts the logic that is typical of classical detective works.

Afterwards, yet another section follows, entitled "Agrego," which is a type of monologue directed at "la Milagrosa" and narrated in the first person by "la Milagrosa's" seamstress. Upon reading this section, the reader may conclude that this woman is the principal narrator and compiler of the entire novel. Her work as a seamstress who sews together pieces of fabric is indeed like that of the narrator who compiles the fragments of the novel in order to create a story or patchworked quilt of multiple stories and perspectives. The fact that she confesses to having robbed the *libretas de agradecimientos* supports this possibility. Contradicting the "Finale" before it, the "Agrego" affirms the disappearance of "la Milagrosa." It suggests that "la Milagrosa" has escaped to the world of dreams and unreality, and asks that she return to the real world. This section establishes that "la Milagrosa" and the narrator are interdependent, one representing dreams and impossibilities and the other representing

and living the perspective of a painful reality. It is important to recognize that this narrator remains almost anonymous for most of the novel. This fact avoids the privileging or legitimization of her discourse over the others that are included in the compilation of texts related to the life of "la Milagrosa."

In addition to undermining the authority of her own discourse by exposing it as an artificial creation determined by the bias of her perspective, the narrator further delegitimizes the narrative discourse by casting doubt upon the very story that she tells. In her self-reflexive comments about the text, she expresses uncertainty about the information in her own narration and about certain sections contained in her presentation of the information. In her initial description of the dead man, the narrator makes a reference to the papers as an explanation of his death and thus, builds the reader's expectations for a clarification of the mystery of the dead body. The note that the dead man holds says that the papers should explain the powers of "la Milagrosa" and because of this, the reader also expects an explanation of her powers in addition to the circumstances of the man's death. But after the compilation and transcription of all of the papers that the dead man had, the narrator and the reader find even more doubts and inconclusiveness. The narrator comments:

Los papeles son muy claros, pero yo quedé después de leerlos con algunas dudas. ¿Fue el taxista quien llegó por la Milagrosa?, ¿se subió con ella al avión?, si no, ¿por qué no esperó a Jiménez?, ¿o alguien vino por la Milagrosa para desaparecerla? [. . .] ¿Era realmente el muerto el detective? (93-4)

In this manner, the mystery of the dead man and the story of "la Milagrosa" remain unsolved, ambiguous and open to many possibilities. No one, not even the narrator, knows exactly what happened to "la Milagrosa," to the detective, or to the taxi driver who drove them to the airport in order to escape the corrupt forces of the government. The seamstress also presents doubts about the special powers of "la Milagrosa" when she reveals that her first miracle was actually false. Directing her comments to "la Milagrosa," the seamstress says that she was never cured of her illness by "la Milagrosa," because, as she says, "yo no estuve enferma, y que el primer milagro que me concediste tampoco lo fue" (110). Thus, the ambiguity of the narrative structure and form is extended to an ambiguity about the very existence of the central figure of the novel and her special powers, and this compounds the reader's doubt about the information presented in the text. The reader can no longer place confidence in the narrator as an unquestionable source of truth.

The narrator is not the omniscient detective that imparts the solution to the case or to the mystery at the end of the story. The detective does not have the last word or reveal the final truth in *La Milagrosa* because he is presumed dead and even his death is left unexplained. The only thing similar to an explanation at the end of the novel is found in the "Agrego," in the voice of a woman and undeniably from a woman's perspective. Still, this explanation only creates more doubt and ambiguity, thus serving to further dismantle the notions of objective truth and certainty. The discordant and incoherent discourses in the narrative structure create fissures and contradictions in the

information that is presented by the novel and in this way parody the totalizing explanation normally proposed by detective fiction.

Reader Empowered: The Engaged Postmodern Reader

The classical detective novel that is parodied in *La Milagrosa* has been described by Duncan as “a type of literature which strives to maintain the status quo, and to promote the illusion of social harmony and stability [. . . and that] sought to uphold the established order that taught citizens to have faith in their legal system [. . .]” (197-203). In her article, Duncan discusses the appropriation of this genre by Mexican authors in the twentieth century and notes that early detective works imitated the foreign models:

but some in subtle ways, [they] allowed expressions of doubt about the effectiveness of laws in a society like Mexico's, where an inbred respect and admiration for the law was not a part of the national culture. While imitative on the surface, these stories began a mild subversion of the ideological foundation of the genre, since they called into question some of the basic premises upon which classical detective fiction rests; maxims such as ‘crime never pays,’ and ‘justice is always done’ were not always true in Mexican stories, as they were in the original models. (203)

In recent fiction, Duncan has observed increased experimental approaches to detective fiction by Mexican authors that continue this subversion of the ideology of classic detective models. As Duncan notes,

Mexican writers sometimes use detective fiction as a way to show that the notions of law and order in Mexico do not correspond to those found

in European and North American texts. Some openly question political situations and make explicit social commentary; others indirectly reveal a contempt for authority, a lack of faith in the concept of justice, or a corruption of the legal system. (210)

La Milagrosa participates in this form of detective writing in Mexico by parodying the traditional detective novel. The delegitimization and consequential opening in the narration of this novel can be situated within a context of subversive detective fiction in Mexico, and are also precisely what constitutes its postmodern character. Through parody, the author transgresses literary conventions and dominant institutions in Mexican society.

The novel, which is open and ambiguous, undermines its own authority through metafictional self-reference and multiple narrative voices, which expose the text as an artificial construction, created and manipulated by a subjective or biased agent. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon describes the transgression of traditional literary forms in postmodern literature and affirms, “Make believe or illusionist conventions of art are often bared in order to challenge the institutions in which they find a home – and a meaning” (9). This structure challenges the notion of classical detective fiction where a single objective narrator, the detective, conveys truth, logic, and reason to the passive reader who learns to trust the decisions and laws of political figures and institutions. Hutcheon has described this characteristic of postmodern fiction as a “contesting of the unified and coherent subject . . . [as] a more general questioning of *any* totalizing or homogenizing system. Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate neat attempts at unifying coherence (formal or thematic)” (12). The novel

demands an active reader to participate with the author in the deconstruction of the authority of the narrative of the text and of narratorial authority in general. The reader is challenged to be more active in reading the literary work and such a reading of the texts exposes its undermining of dominant institutional structures. Since, as Duncan has noted, classical detective fiction “cannot be divorced from the ideological structure which produced it” (201), this novel also presents an interrogation of the genre as an agent of dominant ideological formation, questioning the very ideologies on which it is based. In recognizing the subversion of dominant ideologies in the form and content of the text, readers learn to look more critically at their own reality — to read their reality as actively as they must read the text.

The postmodern form and content of *La Milagrosa* transgresses traditional literary genres and writing in order to challenge readers to participate more actively in the process of reading the text which leads to a more engaged reading of their historical reality. The questions and mysteries are left open to multiple possibilities and in *La Milagrosa*, as in the other novels written by Boullosa, the reader must interpret and speculate to fill in the gaps left by the discontinuous structure of the novel. Readers are free to form their own conclusion from the novel or even to accept the possibility of no conclusion. The interrogation of reality and authoritative representations of that reality results in the challenging and destabilization of traditional institutions that rely on the passive reader (of texts and of life). As an open postmodern text, *La Milagrosa* creates a space for an empowered active reader to question previous representations of past and present realities in Mexico.

By sharing in the creation of the text and by questioning its very representation, readers actively participate in an interrogation of themselves, of textual representation, and of their relation to others. This process permits the reconstruction of the reader's identity in relation to the reality in which he or she exists. In her article, "La destrucción en la escritura," Boullosa speaks about the destructive process in writing and she recognizes the effect that such writing has on the reader:

Si es cierto que la escritura es destrucción, la lectura muestra otra cara de los libros. Por mi parte, me reconstruyo leyendo, me vuelvo a hacer, cada vez, en la vitalidad de los autores que nos ha precedido [. . .] Aunque la escritura sea destrucción, necesite de la destrucción para volverse viva." (219-20)

Thus, according to Boullosa, reading can be a process in which the readers examine and reconstruct their own concept of self, based on the reconstruction of the representation of the reality in which they exist.

Reading as Political: The Reader as Citizen

La Milagrosa, as its title would indicate, proposes to tell the story of "la Milagrosa," a religious miracle-worker in Mexico City. Latin American literary critic, Raymond Leslie Williams, has also noted a political theme in the novel, which poses criticism:

of political practices in postmodern Mexico that represent[s] the crisis of authority in Mexican society, the crisis of a world with little transcendence and little truth. [The novel] contain[s] a multiplicity of differing discourses—popular, political, ecclesiastical—in unresolved

contradiction. The concerns are predominantly ontological in a world with characters suffering identity crises. (149)

While the principal focus of this novel is centered on the figure of “la Milagrosa,” her mysterious powers, and interaction with a detective who is investigating her miracles, the sub-themes of political intrigue, corruption, and the crisis of the elections of 1994 unfold in the periphery of her story. In her article about destructive processes in writing, Boullosa describes the content of *La Milagrosa*:

[La novela es] sobre una mujer que tiene la aptitud de conseguir los deseos ajenos durante sus sueños, y que se ve envuelta en la difícil sucesión presidencial mexicana de 1994 [. . .] Hay en ella un retrato de mi Ciudad, la de hoy día, una elucubración sobre la próxima sucesión presidencial, cuento cómo suelen ser las elecciones en México (no tuve ni qué fantasear ni qué destruir para conseguir esa parte de *La Milagrosa*), entre otras cosas. (219)

Until the last few pages of the novel, political themes remain secondary to the figure of “la Milagrosa” and receive relatively little textual space in comparison. However, as the author suggests, these events affect “la Milagrosa” and are a part of her story.

As Boullosa has said above, the story of la Milagrosa is entangled with the events of the 1994 presidential elections which are examined by Jorge G. Castañeda, a Mexican historian and political scientist. Castañeda summarizes the following occurrences preceding and during the elections of 1994:

los acontecimientos devastadores del año [1994]—Chiapas, el desafío de Manuel Camacho, el asesinato de Colosio, los secuestros de Ruiz Massieu—hubieran bastado para demoler al gobierno; todos juntos muy

probablemente habrían derrumbado al sistema político que nos rige desde 1929. (22)

Castañeda attributes the prevention of political collapse in 1994 to the ratification of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which strengthened the outgoing government during that year. That political crisis and its detrimental socio-economic effects on the people of Mexico are brought to the foreground as a major theme in *La Milagrosa*, at the end of the novel.

The title of the novel, the first few pages of the novel, and the textual space dedicated to "la Milagrosa," create the reader's expectation of an explanation of the miraculous abilities and life of this figure, as well as the mysterious dead body with which the novel opens. The greater part of the novel appears to have as a central focus the figure of "la Milagrosa." Political matters and events such as the conflict between the government and unions occur in the background and appear to be of minor significance. However, the author chooses to end the novel with a section of journalistic political commentary, which increases the impact of this section, as well as the importance of the political theme in relation to the rest of the novel. As Boullosa has said, the social, historical, and political realities of Mexico also form an important part of "la Milagrosa's" story. The last section of the novel is in the form of a newspaper article, entitled "¿DE LUTO POR MORALES?" (111). This final section comments on the death of the fictional presidential candidate Morales and on two real political parties in Mexico. The article clipping highlights the corruptness of the political system and the socio-economic conditions of the fictitious Mexico in the novel,

which according to the author, is a reflection of the conditions of the contemporary Mexico of the reader's reality. This article attributes the critical situation of the country to the "necias decisiones del régimen saliente [de la elección]," and continues to describe conditions of poverty, unemployment and sub-employment as the real reasons for which the country should be in mourning (112).

In place of a totalizing explanation of "la Milagrosa" and of the dead man, *La Milagrosa* renders a heterogeneous and ambiguous reflection of Mexican reality that is open to multiple interpretations. Like the novel, reality is not what traditional representations make it appear to be on the surface. This work, its "fachada," appears to be a detective novel about "la Milagrosa". When the active reader goes beyond this surface, he or she unmask the open work that lies beneath, a plurality of doors and windows that permit multiple representations and interpretations of fictional and non-fictional realities. Boullosa ends her novel with the journalist's observation: "...desgraciadamente, ni milagros ni milagrosos podrán auxiliarnos en las próximas elecciones" (113). In this way, it is communicated to the reader that the people of Mexico cannot remain passive, awaiting miracles to save them. The author criticizes the passive reader of superficial representations and surface realities and parallels the act of reading a literary text to the act of reading one's own historical reality.

Boullosa's criticism is similar to Castañeda's observation of the political events surrounding the ratification of NAFTA. Like Boullosa, the Mexican historian and political scientist laments the passive acceptance by Mexico's population of an historical reality dictated by the corrupt and powerful institution of the Mexican

government. He cites the lack of debate and passive acceptance of NAFTA in Mexico and describes the process of its ratification in the United States as (perhaps ironically) a lesson for Mexican citizens. According to Castañeda, political decisions in Mexico have never produced such open and plural debates, with substantive arguments on both sides, as the debate in the United States had done. He observes that the future of the Mexican nation has never involved its citizens in democratic discussions and decisions:

No obstante, el contenido didáctico para el país fue patente. Millones de mexicanos percibieron que las decisiones importantes suelen tomarse de manera aleatoria: con presiones de todos los bandos, con insultos y argumentos, con cambios de votos, de recursos y de posiciones. Esto es lo propio de un proceso cuya conclusión se desconoce: las apuestas se cruzan, los intereses se contraponen, pero nadie sabe de antemano qué va a pasar. Para un país acostumbrado al "presidencialazo", al dedo, y a las verdades inamovibles del *tlatoani*, el efecto no puede ser más que benéfico. (25)

The lesson that Castañeda describes is similar to the one proposed by Boullosa for the reader and indeed for Mexican citizens. The postmodern reader cannot rely on the narrator as the only authoritative source of true information and explanations. This reader not only questions narrative authority and traditional representation, but also the very possibility of truth or complete explanations. Such an interrogation leads to a tolerance or acceptance of heterogeneity and even ambiguity. Like the reader, the Mexican people cannot passively accept the information and totalizing actions of the government as objective truths and actions taken in the best interests of all the Mexican people.

The Personal as Political

Writing in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s has not only been characterized by postmodern tendencies but also as a literature which now includes and recognizes a greater number of female writers. In analyzing the postmodern characteristics in the writing of Boullosa, it is also important to recognize her as a recent female writer. Postmodern theory rejects monolithic representations based on occidental and patriarchal discourses as exclusive and marginalizing. Postmodern thought and aesthetics proposes a heterogeneity of voices that include dominant representations of the past with those that were formerly excluded and marginalized, including the female voice. A critic of postmodernism, Josep Picó notes the “...compromiso ideológico entre la postmodernidad y las minorías en política, sexo y lenguaje” (39-40). Because Boullosa is a female writer of postmodern literature, it is valuable to analyze just how the female voice is included in her works within the postmodern and feminist context. Roselyn Costantino notes that the feminism practiced by Boullosa corresponds to these tendencies and comments:

Feminism, as Boullosa employs the term, signals movements that acknowledge and act to change the interpersonal, societal, and institutional relations which are based on sexism as a system of domination. These relations result in the suppression and repression of individual subjects -- *both* male and female. (56)

The plural narrative voices that represent diverse perspectives in *La Milagrosa* achieve a more inclusive yet heterogeneous representation of its characters and

the world in which they exist, a world that reflects the reality of present day Mexico.

Through parody of the detective novel, *La Milagrosa* also deconstructs the male perspective, normally privileged by that genre. However, in accordance with postmodern and feminist practice, Boullosa does not eliminate the masculine perspective from her narrative; rather, she includes it as another among many equally privileged discourses. The inclusion of the masculine perspective is evident in the note of the dead man and in the transcription of the oral diary of the detective narrated in the first person. These sections present the image of woman from the masculine perspective. In the note, this image is represented as mysterious but trite. In the transcription of the detective's oral diary, "la Milagrosa" is represented as an ideal image, physically and spiritually beautiful. She is also mysterious, inexplicable, and unreachable by all reason or logic on the part of the detective. These representations correspond to the traditional image of woman according to the logic of the master narratives. Craig Owens explains the use of this image in traditional patriarchal discourse, where women have been excluded as subjects of their own representation. Within the writing of traditional discourses, women are:

a figure for—representation of—the unrepresentable (Nature, Truth, the Sublime, etc) This prohibition [of woman in traditional discourses] bears primarily on the woman as subject, and rarely as the object of representation for there is certainly no shortage of images of women.
(59)

By including this traditional masculine representation of women among the collection of narrative fragments, Boullosa achieves the delegitimization of the power of this single image but she does not eliminate it. It is incorporated as one other image among the rest of the representations offered by various narrations and perspectives.

This novel juxtaposes the representation of woman as object with the representation of woman as subject and subverts both discourses as subjective and artificial constructions. Various sections are narrated in interior monologue and in the first person, in a style that is intimate and personal. The intimate writing of the diaries and interior monologues is included within the postmodern hybridity of the novel and is a characteristic of feminine writing which Jean Franco has described as traditionally limited to private spaces (*Las conspiradoras*, 131). The intimate and private writing of the novel, writing that centers on the perspective of “la Milagrosa,” the seamstress, and even the oral diaries of the detective, would seem to foreground the historical and political content of the novel. However, it is this personal writing and the stories of individuals that serve as vehicles for the novel’s political themes and that at the same time mask the political content that is intertwined with the personal experiences of the characters of the novel.

In one of the final sections of the novel, the feminine and feminist character of Boullosa’s writing becomes more evident. The “Agrego” is an extremely intimate monologue directed at “la Milagrosa.” This intimacy is evident when the narrator says: “También porque al escribirte mojo mi pluma en la tinta azul de mi vagina, [. . .]” (106). Here the narrator-character is a feminine subject who writes with the “flujo azul que

exuda de mi cuerpo, [. . .] con el que escribo, lo pienso veo hundirse entre mis piernas la pluma para tomar con qué escribir, con qué recargarse [. . .]" (107). Thus, the narrator makes a postmodern self-reference to her own very subjective and personal act of creating the text or story, emphasizing once again its nature as an artificial construction manipulated by a biased subject. This reference also presents the female as an active subject in the act of creation and uses the female body for self-expression. In this manner, the narrator expresses herself literally through the use of her feminine body and the reality that it lives. This intimate and corporal expression stemming from her condition and experience as a woman is an example of what Franco describes as the type of feminine expression that fights for control of public spaces, using "simbólicamente la misma fuente de la inferioridad femenina" (91-92). The sex of the woman has been marked as a symbol of the inferiority of women within the master narratives of the patriarchal tradition, and in this way, has been an instrument for the exclusion of women as subjects from these discourses of power. Here, Boullosa employs the symbol of feminine sexuality figuratively and literally in order to present a woman as subject of her own narration. The narrator and the author herself take control of the narrative space permitting the representation of a woman and of female discourse by a woman as an active subject.

The questioning of the narrator is both a postmodern and feminist subversion of the traditional genre of the novel and of the hegemonic discourses of the occidental patriarchy. It constitutes a postmodern and feminist interrogation and deconstruction of the authority of representation but it is also a strong questioning and challenging of the

traditional institutions that determine and form part of this legitimizing operation. Instead of providing an explanation of “la Milagrosa’s” powers and of what happened to her and the detective, the novel reveals the manipulation of legitimizing narratives to conserve the institutions of power within Mexican society. In *Feminist Fiction*, Anne Cranny-Francis has noted the reworking of the detective genre by female writers in order to expose the ideological foundations of the form and construct an active (feminist) reading position in their texts:

Feminist writers have attempted to use the conventions of traditional detective fiction to construct a feminist reading position in their texts, which may then become the locus for debate on the nature of their society. In this way feminist writers work to challenge the interpellation of the individual within bourgeois patriarchal ideologies, to introduce contradiction and complexity which involves the reader in a renegotiation of her/his own subject position and works toward the production of the feminist subject. (144)

Boullosa practices postmodern and feminist writing strategies, which engage a more active and questioning reader to resist totalizing discourses and search out the ambiguity, heterogeneity and plurality in all representations of reality.

Through the fragmented, self-referent ambiguous narrative in *La Milagrosa*, Boullosa achieves the deconstruction of the master narratives that legitimize binary systems, marginalizing and excluding all others that are different. She also proposes tolerance of narrative plurality that is capable of better representing heterogeneous realities different from those of traditional powers. The use of a variety of writing forms and the incorporation of popular writing within the traditional genre of the novel

exemplifies the postmodern rupture with conventional forms and permits a plurality of heterogeneous representations. While the narrative delegitimizes the perspectives that are traditionally legitimate and exclusive, it also includes these narratives and others with its own voice in a plurality of differing representations without any hierarchy of value. In this manner, the structure of *La Milagrosa* and the manner in which the reader must read it complements the subversive content of the novel. The reader cannot read passively and must continue questioning, negotiating the possible meanings and accepting the ambiguity that permits plural narratives and multiple interpretations. The reader must recognize the subjectivity that directs all narrative as well as its constructed nature based on such a subjectivity that is meant to legitimize its own position of privilege, excluding and marginalizing all others.

Through the compilation of a story about a woman with the magical power to grant the wishes of others in her dreams, *La Milagrosa* portrays Mexico's contemporary political reality. The content of this novel differs from the content of Boullosa's other works of fiction, but the narrative strategies of fragmentation, discontinuity, ambiguity, multiple and self-conscious narrators, and contradiction are common to all of the author's novels. The delegitimization of traditional textual representation that requires a more active reader and that permits a plurality of voices and alternate perspectives is a characteristic that is also shared by all of Boullosa's works. In her novels that return to the past, she continues to show a concern for the representation of heterogeneous realities that have been excluded from conventional literary and historical texts. As seen in the following chapters, Boullosa uses postmodern (and feminist) strategies to

deconstruct the authority of traditional narrative discourses and, thus, create new spaces for the representation of voices that have been marginalized by or repressed from textual representation.

CHAPTER 3

RETURN TO THE PERSONAL PAST: *MEJOR DESAPARECE*, *ANTES*, AND *TREINTA AÑOS*

Reconstruction of the Childhood Past as Construction of Identity

Postmodern theory and art seek to problematize our relation to the past through critical reflection which permits a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in light of the present (Hutcheon 19-20). With the exception of *La Milagrosa*, Boullosa novels usually deal with some aspect of the past and return to previous times through a reinvention or memory of that past. In the three novels of this chapter, *Mejor desaparece* (1987), *Antes* (1989), and *Treinta Años* (1998), the past is represented as a very personal memory subject to the affective filter of the narrator. The narrators' choice to reconstruct the childhood past is an attempt at self-representation and identity construction. Like all of Boullosa's other novels, these three works transgress established literary definitions. They cross the borders that have distinguished novel, biography, autobiography, memoirs, Bildungsroman and other genres. Often the author parodies traditional literary forms and employs narrative structures associated with those forms in a process that subverts them. This challenging of traditional structures and literary genres is a part of a greater postmodern and feminist interrogation of past representations of reality in fiction and in history that have privileged certain discourses

while marginalizing others. As seen in the analysis of *La Milagrosa*, Boullosa opens a space in textual representation that permits additional possibilities of agency for the postmodern subject; that is, a subject or subjects which are active in their own self-representation and no longer limited to the restrictive and marginalizing spaces of hegemonic discourses. Her novels participate in what Teresa de Lauretis has described in *Technologies of Gender* as an “ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective – a view from elsewhere” (25).

In the three novels of this chapter, the narrative voices relate their childhood past in a retrospective narrative from a point that is not only temporally and spatially outside the time and space that they narrate, but that is also, in some cases, impossible. In *Mejor desaparece*, multiple narrators recount impressions of their childhood and of the disappearance of family members or even of themselves. These disappearances would logically preclude the narration of those events but instead, they place the narrators in a space that is “elsewhere” and permits the telling of their past. Similarly, the narrator of *Antes* dies at the end of the novel. This narrator tells of her childhood from a dark place and is “divorciada de su mundo para siempre” (11). Delmira, the retrospective narrator of *Treinta Años*, tells of her childhood home and memories, thirty years after having fled her country to live in Europe. While this narrator has not died or disappeared, she also narrates from a temporal and spatial location that is as distant from the world of her childhood as the spaces of the narrators in *Mejor desaparece* and *Antes*. All three novels treat the theme of childhood and are narrated from a point that is elsewhere.

According to Lauretis, this view from elsewhere may not be recognizable in a text

“precisely, as a representation.” As the critic explains:

For that ‘elsewhere’ is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations [. . .] spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge aparati. (25)

Speaking from the spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, the narrators of these novels present alternative discourses and self-representations. María Caminero-

Santangelo expands on de Lauretis’s model by adding that:

The ‘elsewhere,’ the space for our transformative practices, is to be found within hegemonic discourses themselves. In other words, any counternarrative must strategically begin with the space opened by existing discourse and must work to reveal the fundamental assumptions and ‘givens’ which are simultaneously revealed and obscured by such discourse. (103)

It is precisely by speaking from the margins of traditional discourse that Boullosa presents the representation of a different view, which, while not easily recognizable, occasions the appropriation of discursive space for self-representation by subjects that have conventionally been excluded from traditional representational practices.

Mejor desaparece: Disconnected Origins and Fragmented Identities

The narrators of the novels discussed in this chapter return to the personal past of childhood memory. This return permits an examination and interrogation of that past and enables the narrators to approximate a more authentic self-representation or rendering of personal identity. The concern with identity and the absent past is best expressed in *Mejor desaparece*, Boullosa's first novel, which consists largely of a series of short discontinuous and impressionistic memories from the childhood of the narrators, who interject commentaries on their adult lives. The multiple narrators of the novel express anxiety and an identity crisis when faced with absent origins or an incomplete past. As children, the narrators were orphaned by their mother and ambiguously disowned by their father who is credited with bringing "eso" to their home. The presence of the undefined "eso" also results in scandal, isolation, and withdrawal from social relations for the family.

In one segment, the father's identity has been forgotten and this effects the recognition of the children in public as is described by the narrator: "Hay otras razones por las que no nos gusta salir a la calle. Nos dicen, por ejemplo: / '--¿Acaso son ustedes las hijas del que ya olvidamos su nombre?'" (23). In another episode, the girls meet their mother's friends on the street and the narrator describes their comments:

y nos dicen:

-- Su madre era una mujer extraordinaria. Lamentablemente no quedan de ella ni sus cenizas.

Las miramos con scorna; sabemos que se equivocan. No pedimos explicación y seguimos nuestro camino discutiendo entre nosotras qué es lo que nos queda de ella.

Dice una:

--Queda, pero desmembrada. Por eso no podemos rehacer nuestra vida.

Dice Magnolia:

--No es cierto. Lo único que queda de ella es su muerte, y con ella basta para sellarnos a todos. De este modo ella no desaparecerá hasta que todos hayamos muerto. (29)

The concern with what remains of their mother, physically and in memory, is evident in the above lines. Even more poignant is the need for her remains as connection with the past and origins that can permit them to construct their identity, to "rehacer" their lives.

Origin and identity are further put into question by a letter that is read by a lawyer and, according to the narrator, is from their father ("La carta de papá"):

Así son las cosas. Declaro por lo tanto que mis hijos legítimos ya no lo serán tanto, y más aún, que ya no lo serán en absoluto. Se atenderán a la vergüenza de llevar mi apellido sin que yo los considere como hijos; me avergonzaré de ellos; procuraré destruirlos pero no tanto como para que se me pueda acusar de querer hacerlo. No tanto. (37)

With this letter, the father denies the legitimate identity of his children but does not completely destroy their links to him by leaving them to carry his last name. The result for the children is an incomplete identity that is cut off from its past. Later in the novel the narrative voice affirms the problem of no past with the following words: "Sin pasado; ¿en qué momento? [. . .] Que nosotras empezamos la lucha y que él sólo contestó a nuestra declaración de guerra. Miente; fue más oscuro su llamado pero más irreversible [. . .] Así fue cómo nos quedamos sin pasado" (55). After describing an

interview with her father that was published in a magazine, the narrator complains that he did not mention the existence of her and her sisters when he spoke of his family and home. She reiterates the need for links to a past in order to exist: "Ninguna mención de nosotras, ni siquiera una alusión a nuestra existencia [. . .] ¿Había terminado todo? No podemos, no podemos vivir sin el pasado. No tenemos explicación si no es por él, sólo a él, a él nos parecemos." (65). This apparent denial of paternity appears to be somewhat explained by the very brief episode that recreates a conversation between the father and a police detective. The detective describes the "noche del suicidio," which occurred after a mugging and the probable rape of the father's wife (who is the implied mother of the narrator). The father of the narrator and the detective decide that instead of filing the report of this incident and of the woman's death, that it would be better to eliminate her birth certificate from the records (77). By effectively erasing her existence and past from the present, the father also erases the legitimacy, origins and past of his children with this woman. The destruction of their past in this episode is paralleled in a short rhyme that the narrator includes in the text:

*No tienen, no han tenido nunca. Nacieron
de una hoja; su cuerpo es un vestigio;
son ruinas de un pasado que nunca fue
presente ni futuro. Nada lo desmentirá
nunca. (25)*

The theme of an absent past is constant throughout *Mejor desaparece* and the above lines that identify the children as ruins from a nonexistent past emphasize its negative effect on the children's present. Upon the destruction of the birth certificate of their

mother, their origins are and their roots are eliminated. They no longer have a past with which to identify or define themselves and their existence in the present is a precarious as their identity. The fragments of the novel serve to illustrate the ruins that remain of their past as the fractured vestiges of identity that they are left with. This discontinuous recollection of pieces of memory, constitutes an attempt to construct a self-representation from the margins of traditional discourse.

The need to clarify, explain, and put the past into a coherent order as a part of a greater process of identity construction is evident in the deceptive titles and recurring themes of various sections of the novel. The four parts of the novel are prefaced with a section entitled "Explicación" that describes an episode where the father brings "eso" into the house. Paradoxically, this section provides explanation through absence of explanation: it describes what was not done and what was not said and "eso" is never identified or defined. The first section of the first part is called "Eso" and leads the reader to expect an explanation of just what "eso" is. Again "eso" is described and defined by what it is not. Other sections throughout the novel are named "Aclaración," "Retrato de familia," "Nosotras," "El caballero," and "El señor." The section entitled "Yo" is an attempt on the part of the narrator to present a clear definition of her identity. The section ends with the lines:

Sé olerme.

Y me gusta. Soy entre todas la de más clara identidad, porque Azucena pulcramente ejecuta la música de otros, Fucsia recita con mesura parlamentos que no tienen nada que ver con su vida, el alma de casa cuida las vidas de los que la rodean. Les he confesado mi secreto, ¿ahora les gusto, como a mí misma? (63-64)

In spite of the expectations created by the title and even by the narrator's own words, this segment actually does little to present a clear identity of the narrator. Even though she uses names to describe her sisters, it is still not possible to determine her name or which sister she is. Her identity remains ambiguous and ephemeral. These sections show an attempt or desire to explain, clarify, and even identify but, in fact, do not necessarily provide an explanation or clearer impression of the events or characters (in the expected or traditional manner). The ambiguity that is created by the narrative of *Mejor desaparece* is similar to the doubt caused by the unanswered questions that remain after reading *La Milagrosa*. The open nature of the text that is characteristic of Boullosa's writing not only empowers readers by permitting multiple interpretations, but it also creates new strategies and spaces of textual representation.

This novel presents a fragmented narrative voice that is undetermined, multiple and even uncertain of its own identity. As seen in the analysis of *La Milagrosa* in the previous chapter and in novels of this chapter, the form and the content often complement one another and are interdependent in Boullosa's writing. The narrative structure of this novel represents an alternate and fragmented vision of the world. Such a vision has traditionally been excluded from representation in literature and history, which once subscribed to a "universal" logic in content and form. In an interview with Kristin Ibsen, Boullosa has described the structure of this novel as necessary for representing a fragmentary vision:

Era un mundo en el que la organización totalitaria era imposible, no podía ser, no podía caber en un mundo así porque está destrozado todo. Está destrozado su mundo afectivo, su mundo real [. . .] Y en el caso de *Mejor desaparece*, [. . .] fondo y forma son lo mismo: la forma no está divorciada de lo que está contando, son, en ese sentido, como poemas todas mis novelas. (59)

In the novel, the narrators invoke memory in an attempt to re-constitute a present identity. The articulations of memory in *Mejor desaparece* are frustrated efforts that result in an incomplete vision of the narrator's past and present identity.

In this text, the narrative voice shifts between different characters that retell bits of their childhood memories and sometimes identify themselves by name. The narrative is told in a combination of the past tense, a present tense that recreates a past moment, and a present tense that refers to the moment of enunciation but that frames the narration of events in the past (told either in the past or the present tense). The first part of the novel consists of eighteen segments of childhood impressions and includes short self-referential interjections, which appear to be directed towards the reader. The only reference to the identity of the narrator seems to occur in the third section, where the "yo" corresponds to Dalia, one of at least three sisters (13). The second part of the novel consists of five segments, all of which narrate very brief impressions of a childhood past. No reference is made to the identity of the narrative voice in these sections. The third part of the novel contains ten parts and one reference to the narrator, where the "yo" corresponds to Acacia, another daughter of "papá" (73). The fourth part of the novel is comprised of three segments in which the narrators are adults and describe episodes of the present or more recent past. In the first segment the narrator

identifies herself as "Berta" (83-84), one of many adult motherless children. In the second segment the narrator is a woman who is confined to her room. She does not identify herself and her circumstances and her relations to others are not defined. She narrates her impressions in the present tense and as they occur to her. The third segment is narrated by an adult male, who is locked out of his home, with his children and wife inside and unaware of his presence. The intertwining of the past and present tenses in the narration, as well as in the instances of enunciation in the narrative, emphasizes the inherent unbreakable interrelation between the past and the present. Although the identity of the narrative voices is incoherent and problematized, the narrative discourse still expresses a need to recollect and put into order the dispersed memories of childhood.

The narrator expresses anxiety and a desire to recollect the memories of an absent or incomplete past in order to construct a coherent, organized identity. These attempts to reconstruct memory fail because the very past that she wishes to narrate is inexpressible. The narrative discourse is frustrated in its attempt to retell and pull together the dispersed pieces of the past. The result of this attempt is a fragmented identity that is reflected in the form of the novel. The cause of this frustration seems to be centered on the appearance of "eso," to which the narrator also attributes the progressive deterioration, isolation, and marginalization of the family and characters. "Eso" seems to hover over all of the characters and permeate their very existence or non-existence by the end of the novel. Boullosa describes the novel as a novel of terror and the protagonist as:

el mal, no la familia, no el ámbito doméstico, o el padre ni la madre, el personaje principal es el mal, la esencia del mal, que se apodera de unos niños, que entra en una casa y que destruye sus vidas; niños y adultos, porque al final son adultos y no se sabe bien cómo es que corre el tiempo. El personaje protagónico es eso, es el mal. (Ibsen 56-57)

It is reasonable to determine from this quote, that “el mal” (evil) is a possible definition of “eso.” Just as the fragmented structure serves to represent a fragmentary vision, the narrative structure which seems to fall apart represents this progressive destruction of the character’s world and reality that coincides with the arrival of “eso” to the house.

The discontinuous structure of the text exemplifies the inexpressible nature of the narrator’s memories, which are impossible to narrate in a coherent manner. The inability to articulate the past effects the narrator’s identity and constitution of self in the present. The language used in the narration of these memories is that of a child or that which would represent a child’s perception of reality. While the segments of the novel may not present a complete picture of the past, it is evident that the narrators have all experienced a childhood trauma related to their family that is difficult or even impossible to articulate. They were orphaned at a young age, disowned by their father, and may have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse, as well as neglect and abandonment. These experiences may have resulted in an instability in the narrators who are unable to express and explore the past within the confines of traditional representational spaces.

The discursive progress of the novel is as frustrated as the retelling of the past. It is a discourse of absence or of negative presence that explains what is not done and

what is not said. This explanation through negation recreates the feeling of void experienced by the orphaned narrators who were denied love and recognition from their father and who lost their mother. This deprivation corresponds to the loss of logic in their childhood and finally to the resulting absence of a past that would permit self-definition in the present. The fragmentary impressions that make up memory are not able to provide a complete picture of the past, but rather can only present gaps and ambiguity. The gaps created by the discontinuous narrative add to the sense of absence in the memories of childhood. This absence slowly eats away at the presence of these characters and leads to their own disappearance as well as to that of their father. Because their past is inexpressible, the narrators and characters never fully develop an identity for themselves or for the reader. They disintegrate and disappear at the end of the novel. In the last part of the novel, one of the narrators (Berta) describes characters who feel themselves evaporating into shadows, "sombras que nunca podrán añorar a seres con cuerpo, ya no digo con alma como los que no somos uno de ellos" (83-85). The novel ends as another narrator, a husband and father, describes himself as he shrinks into nothingness and oblivion (105).

The lack of a traditional narrative structure and character development complements the overall process of disintegration in the lives of the narrators and characters. The novel erodes into dispersed, momentary, incomplete and fading glimpses of the characters and of their pasts. The disintegration of the narrative and the characters is intensified by the choice of language, which describes images of rotting, decay, and putrefaction. One of the narrators identifies "eso" as the source and cause of

the isolation and marginalization of the characters. The sense of disconnectedness that results contributes to the erosion of their ties to the past. This is particularly true for the young girls, who find themselves cut off from their origins and identity.

There is no sense of community or humanity in this novel. Like the disconnected structure of the narrative fragments, the characters are disconnected and isolated. This sensation is emphasized by descriptions of the spaces that enclose the characters. The characters are shut in, shut out, or shut off from each other and the community. In the first parts of the novel, the children are shut into a closet and locked into other small spaces. They are also symbolically restricted by different situations such as when the narrator comments: "Creíamos enloquecer entre esos dos muros de burla, [. . .]"(16) and "Quedábamos maniatados, sólo podíamos atenarnos a las consecuencias de decisiones tomadas por otro" (35).

The adults in the last part of the novel also experience different forms of confinement or marginalization. One segment is narrated by a woman who is shut into her room. Even though the woman says that she chooses to stay alone in her room, it is not clear whether she is closed in by choice or against her will because her very sanity and connection to reality is put into question by the ambiguous nature of the text. On the one hand, the description would indicate that she is the privileged wife of an "hacendado" and that she is in her bedroom with many servants to bring her coffee, do her nails, and brush her hair. The noisy people outside the room may be her own children or more of the servants going about their daily tasks. However, this interpretation is put into question by the striking resemblance of her situation to that of

a person in an insane asylum. The servants could just as easily be interpreted as nurses who attend to the personal hygiene and physical needs of a confined patient. The doubt increases when the narrator comments that the rich velvet curtains that were on her windows when she first arrived as a new bride are no longer there. There is no indication as to whether a servant removed them for some reason (without her knowledge or consent) or that she is not actually in her own room. She mentions a husband but it is unclear whether he is real or imagined. Her very existence, sanity and identity are ambiguous and vague. In another segment, the narrator is a father (and husband) who returns home from work and has forgotten his keys. He is locked out of the house and is unable to draw the attention of his wife and children who are closed inside. It is unclear if this father is the same father of the children in the first part of the novel but it is a striking similarity that he is also shut off from his wife and children. This narrator is physically shut off and disconnected from his family and the result of this disconnection is his shrinkage and final disappearance.

On another level, the description of claustrophobic spaces and situations (oddly comforting and threatening at the same time) also exemplifies the frustration and problems that the narrators have in attempting to articulate childhood memories in order to formulate a present identity. The threatening and claustrophobic atmosphere in the novel is comparable to that in Gothic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. M. H. Abrams notes the use of the Gothic mode in recent authors as a strategy to reveal the “results of the suppression of female sexuality in a patriarchal society,” and to challenge “the sexual hierarchy and values of a male-dominated culture” (79). Because

Boullosa has acknowledged the influences of early female Gothic writers such as Anne Radcliffe and Rebecca West, it is appropriate to examine the gothic characteristics in her novels and their functions.⁹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar offer the following description of this female Gothic fiction in their influential study, *Madwoman in the Attic*:

Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as social surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors – such patterns recurred throughout this tradition along with obsessive depiction of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia (xi)

Being closed in, out, and off from each other, and consequently, from their origins and identity appears to be the very condition that results in the disappearance of the characters. The multiple discourses of *Mejor desaparece* cannot exist within the limiting confines of traditional literary structures. Instead the narrators make an attempt at self-representation from the spaces that are elsewhere or nowhere, in the margins of conventional forms. The narrators' existence relies on links to their origins and their identity is represented in memory or, more specifically, in the gaps that those memories leave. In the first part of the novel the narrator recreates a domestic scene with the following words:

Fingimos para no enfurecerla. Nos tomamos el desayuno que prepara a diario y en cuanto ordena salir rumbo a la escuela nos dispersamos como esporas en los lugares más recónditos de la casa. Pero estas esporas hace

⁹ Boullosa mentions these influences in her own article, "La destrucción en la escritura" and in an interview with Kristine Ibsen, "Entrevista a Carmen Boullosa: Mexico D. F. , 22 de junio de 1994."

mucho que se pudrieron. Cada una de ellas trata de abrirse lugar en los húmedos rincones, en los deformes espacios que hay entre el librero y el libro, entre la pared y la cómoda, entre la silla y el escritorio. (19)

This passage suggests the need for a space in which to exist as well as the dispersed, restrictive, and isolated spaces that the characters eventually do find. It also reflects the decay of such an existence that can only lead to disintegration. They cannot find space for the representation of a complete identity because they are unable to express the past due to some form of trauma. The actual trauma is never clearly described but rather inferred, as it is present in the gaps and voids of the narrative discourse. The trauma, symbolized by the restricted spaces, disintegration, and absence, represents an obstacle to memory and self-actualization within hegemonic discourses while at the same time representing the “points elsewhere” in the novel that provide an alternate identity and view to the narrator. The only identity possible is fragmented and incomplete, which is precisely the identity that the text provides through its form and content.

Antes: Destined to Disappear

Antes and *Mejor desaparece* are works that play against the traditional novel of formation through the discontinuous narration of a child’s development into an adult. However, unlike the conventional Bildungsroman, the narrators of these novels disappear upon maturation from adolescent to adult. Boullosa’s second novel, *Antes* (1989), employs a fragmented structure in the narration of childhood memories that are plagued with fear and dread. This novel, like *Mejor desaparece*, might also be

characterized as Gothic fiction because of the dark, brooding atmosphere of terror and fantastic descriptions that occur within the story.

The narrator's fear is a constant theme in the novel. The narrator experiences this fear in the here and now when she says: "Pero no hay nadie aquí conmigo. Nadie, aparte del miedo, del temor, del terror [. . .]" (11). This element of fear is also present in the past that she narrates: "Oía en la noche los pasos que entonces me asustaban pero creía inofensivos [. . .]"(14). The "pasos" continue to occur throughout the narrative and the fear that they inspire predominates in every episodic memory of her childhood, from birth to death. As Boullosa has commented in an interview, the narrator is destined from birth to die before reaching adulthood:

desde que nació, está condenada a morir porque desde nació sabe que van a venir por ella, esos pasos, que se la van a llevar a ese mundo donde no se tiene cuerpo, que es el mundo de fantasmas [. . .] a ella la persiguen los pasos para llevarla a ese mundo de los sin cuerpos y se la llevan. (61)

What is it that destines the narrator to die or disappear at the end of the novel? Why is it that she does not live, grow, and mature into an adult? It is the suppression of self-representation by the dominant institutions in a patriarchal society which imposes socio-cultural constructed representations on the subject. The gothic characteristics of the novel symbolize the destiny of a subject that does not conform to the hegemonic constructs of representation. The narrator cannot exist in the world without conforming to certain roles and relations that are dictated by dominant social institutions according to sex, gender, class, ethnicity, and race. *Antes* and *Mejor desaparece* narrate the

stories of children in order to present non-gendered (or socially defined) subjects and to expose the identity and relations that are imposed on individuals as they mature and are indoctrinated by the dominant knowledge-power apparatus in order to integrate into society.

In *Antes*, the fragmented structure of the narrative serves to imitate the episodic nature of the traditional Bildungsroman and to enhance the gothic characteristics of the novel. M. H. Abrams identifies the Bildungsroman as a novel of formation, whose primary theme is "the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world" (132). *Antes*, like *Mejor desaparece*, recounts the childhood of its narrator, who never reaches maturity and never recognizes his or her own identity and role in the world. At the end of the novel, the narrator wants to end her story but is unable to do so and, in one of many self-reflexive comments within the narrative, she says:

no puedo terminar de hablarles aquí, porque no tendrían sentido todas las palabras que les he ido diciendo, no puedo terminar porque parecería que no quise contarles cómo fue que llegué yo aquí y para comunicárselo ha sido toda la plática, para decirles cómo fue que llegué yo, qué me llamó y desde cuándo; y si no puedo adivinar que me llamó (de hecho no sé qué), sí cómo o en qué momentos o por lo menos qué efecto tenía en mi blanda carne el llamado, cómo sentía que mi saliva astillaba, que mi sudor dejaba de serlo, que mi sangre se hacía piedra en mis venas. (101)

The narrator and protagonist of *Antes* does not know her own identity or how she came to be where she is, how she disappeared or died with the occurrence of her first

menstruation. The disappearance of the narrators in *Mejor desaparece* and the death of the narrator at maturity, constitute an inversion of the traditional Bildungsroman as defined above. By parodying this form these works emphasize the impossibility for the characters to exist authentically within the constructed identities and roles imposed upon them by the dominant social institutions.

The narrator of *Antes* makes references to episodes at school and in her childhood that document her own indoctrination into social roles and relations that are determined by pre-existing constructs. She narrates her daily arrival at school when she and her classmates filed into the building,

mientras alguien, a quien no veíamos, rezaba en voz alta, decía cosas que nunca entendí, y luego saludo a la bandera, mexicanos al grito y algo así como *como remellos cuyos aliños un viento helado marchita en flor* [. . .] Palabras indescifrables, tanto o más religiosas que aquellas con que había empezado el día. (15)

In various episodes, the narrator tells of classroom instruction on the lives of the Saints, and of the editions of "*Vidas ejemplares*" that she read in her home. The narrator describes different situations in her life by comparing them to the experiences of the Saints that she read or learned about, using the religious rhetoric of martyrdom to interpret and explain different occurrences (22, 43). She refers to her studies as "planes de estudio maquinados por burócratas [. . .]"(23) and "lo que ellos llamaban 'estudios' y que no era más que aturdirme, olvidarme de mí [. . .]" (24). Even in the games that she plays, she rehearses the prescribed roles that she is to grow into as an adult: "Subidas en tacones de Esther, recitábamos en nuestros loas hegemónicas como pudorosas

imaginaciones del poder que representábamos en nuestros respectivos reinos” (47). She describes her school motto with the following words:

El lema de mi escuela era *serviam* (el himno decía: *serviam, forever serviam, though life may lead us far away*). Hasta el cansancio nos repitieron que *serviam* quería decir servir, emplearse en la gloria y veneración de Dios y estar al servicio del prójimo.

La palabra venía escrita en la parte inferior del escudo de la escuela que convivía con nosotras diariamente en las blusas blancas y los suéteres grises del uniforme; verde y dorado, bordado grueso como un bulto, sobrepuesto como un segundo corazón de bondad flexible. (60)

The narrator’s attention to the word “servir,” above and the description of how this word was embroidered onto the uniforms just as it was impressed into her education emphasize the role of the school motto as a tool of indoctrination into the dominant ideology of the institutions of power. The doctrine behind this motto is revealed during a student contest where students are to draw an illustration that best exemplifies its meaning. Most of the participants conform to this interpretation:

Dibujé a una niña lavando los platos, con el lema *serviam* encerrado en un globo cuya orilla aproximaba a los labios daba a entender que era *serviam* una palabra que la niña decía mientras ejecutaba la ‘cristiana’ acción, dibujo igual de absurdo que todos los que llegaron al concurso, si pensamos que cuál lavar platos en mi casa habiendo una mujer cuyo trabajo era hacerlo y que no me hubiera permitido interrumpirla, cuál “ayudar” a los niños de la *barranca* para los que nuestra sola presencia era una ofensa, cuál *serviam*, cuál ‘servir’ si entre nosotros nos encargábamos de que el país entero nos sirviera. (63)

While the narrator also submits an interpretation in accordance with the traditional reading of the motto, she also expresses criticism and nonconformity with the ideology that created it.

In spite of her disappearance, this narrator does form a discordant and genderless identity that exists and finds a voice outside of conventional literary representation. Like its predecessor, *Antes* constitutes a strategic occupation of textual space, which permits the construction of the narrator's identity and, indeed, her very existence. Christopher Domínguez Michael has noted Boullosa's return to a childhood past in this novel and describes its importance by saying: "Pues Carmen Boullosa sabe, con Borges, que no hay otros paraísos que los paraísos perdidos [...] Pero [...] Boullosa no recurre a la nostalgia. En *Antes*, persiste la idea de que sólo la invención de la infancia puede salvarnos" (inside jacket of *Antes*). Here, Boullosa's narrator describes the process of creating and relating her personal history as the invention of herself or as an act of bringing herself into existence: "me inventaré por esta noche que sí puedo conseguir interlocutores desde mi oscuridad" (14). It is clear that her existence depends on her ability to create a personal past that she can retell and thereby relive. In a metafictional comment directed to her readers, the narrator says:

No imaginé, al decidirme a contarles esto y a inventarlos a ustedes para que fuera posible hablar, para que teniendo interlocutor tuviera yo palabras, la dicha que mis recuerdos me iban a regalar. Si exagero un ápice el esplendor de mi júbilo, podría decir que vivo de nuevo. (45)

The narrator has to bring herself and her memories into existence through her own invention because as a subject, she has been denied representational space in past narratives.

Speaking from the margins of traditional discourses of power, the narrator of this novel is able to actively portray herself through the recreation of her childhood past. Boullosa has described the theme of childhood in her first novels with the following words:

aún cuando mis dos primeras novelas tratan de niños, ninguna de las dos son novelas tradicionales con narradores-niños y con un mundo tradicional de niños, sino de ahí una apuesta distinta que no tiene nada que ver con una novela rosa o con una novela en que los protagonistas sean mamás, papás o mujeres de una manera o de otra convencionales, y que vayan enfocadas en lectores mujeres [. . .] (Ibsen 53)

Boullosa chooses to tell unconventional stories of childhood memories in order to represent the subject and to reveal the discomfort and ultimate destruction caused by the limitations of hierarchical systems of domination that are often based on sex, gender, race and class. Teresa de Lauretis speaks of the problem of representation and self-representation for the gendered subject in *Technologies of Gender* where she describes gender as:

the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category [. . .] gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity [. . .] a position within a class, and therefore also a position vis-à-vis other pre-constituted classes. (I am using the term *class* advisedly, although here I do not mean *social* class(es), because I want to retain Marx's

understanding of class as a group of individuals bound together by social determinants and interests—including, very pointedly, ideology—which are neither freely chosen nor arbitrarily set.) So gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation; in other words, it represents an individual for a class. (4-5)

While the question of gender refers to relations assigned to a subject according to his or her sex, the relations are actually a layering of constructs which determine relations and representation based on sex, gender, class, race, ethnicity, identity and other factors. A child must learn these sets of social relations and identity constructs, which simultaneously determine and are determined by these relations. This is why, as Boulosa explains, “las niñas de *Mejor desaparece* y la niña de *Antes*, que incluso desaparece cuando sobreviene su primera menstruación, porque es su definición sexual: son niños pero son andróginos [. . .]” (Ibsen 56). The androgynous child-narrators present voices from the margins that have not yet found representation within traditional narratives.

Conventional roles and relations determined by controlling social institutions have tended to favor certain perspectives and portrayals of the subject while marginalizing others (often but not limited to female self-representation). Craig Owens has noted:

It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged—not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women. (59)

Boullosa performs this postmodern operation in her novels through what de Lauretis has described as a feminist “rewriting, as well as rereading, of the dominant forms of Western culture; a rewriting which effectively inscribes the presence of a different, and gendered social subject” (ix). Thus, the author tests the boundaries of representation through an incomplete “view from elsewhere,” or in the words of the narrator of *Antes*, “yo sí tengo forma dentro de la no-forma, o eso trato de comprobar con la narración de esto [. . .]” (87).

The characters in *Mejor desaparece* are enclosed, excluded, and marginalized, which represents an overall disconnectedness or lack of community that is created by the prescribed roles in society. In *Antes*, the narrator also expresses a sense of disconnectedness from her parents, sisters, and schoolmates. The narrator begins to recount her childhood with a memory of her birth. She vacillates between recognizing and denying the identity of her mother by referring to her with phrases like “Se llamaba Esther” and “¿Cuánto tiempo tardé en darme cuenta de que ella no era mi mamá? Siempre lo supe, pero hasta el día en el que ellos llegaron por mí, todo funcionó como si ella lo fuera” (12). The narrator cannot express the word “mamá” and is terrified of the sound of unknown footsteps that always follow her. She expresses frustration at her inability to express the word: “Tengo tanto miedo y no hallo cómo gritar mamá. Es un grito que no puedo emitir porque esa palabra no la tengo” (13). She also experiences a similar problem of legitimacy and recognition with her father which she reveals in the description of him driving her and her sisters to school. She observes that “y era

enormemente feliz con las que él entonces miraba en toda extensión como sus legítimas hijas. Y todas lo éramos.” In the next paragraph, the narrator contradicts this description as she describes her feelings upon arriving at the school: “un enorme alivio porque había podido llegar a mi lugar a pesar de las amenazas del señor ese que decía no ser mi papá [. .]” (15). These comments on the part of the narrator of *Antes* show that she, like the narrators of *Mejor desaparece*, is disconnected from her parents, particularly from her mother, and thus from her origin and identity. Boullosa explains that the disconnectedness between this narrator and her parents results in her final disappearance:

yo creo, porque nunca tiene tampoco contacto corporal con la madre, el cuerpo de la madre, el cuerpo de mujer de la madre es [. .] también nunca tiene acceso a él. Entonces primero se llevan a la madre, y luego se la llevan a ella. Tal vez todo se hubiera [. .]y hubiera desaparecido si su mamá sí hubiera sido su mamá, o sea, si la hubiera abrazado más, el hechizo pudo desaparecer si la madre y la hija hubieran acercado sus cuerpos, no digo una aventura sexual pero sí una aventura amorosa de abrazarse, nunca en la novela se abrazan. (Ibsen 61)

This narrator does not only manifest anxiety and detached relations with her parents but also with her peers.

In one episode, the narrator’s classmate, Enela, also hears the mysterious and frightening steps and asks the narrator about them. Instead of admitting to hearing the steps as well, she runs from Enela leaving her to face and deal with the terror of the footsteps alone. The next day Enela hears the footsteps in class and urinates out of fear at her desk. She is sent to the nurse and never returns to school again. After this

incident, the narrator blames herself: “sí yo había *vendido* a Enela, pero ¿por qué había *necesitado* yo venderla?” and afterwards describes the lesson of the day from the lives of the Saints:

Vamos, pensaba, seré cobarde. Entregué a Enela, renegué a Enela. . .No necesitaba comprarme con la carne de los mártires, como lo hacían mis compañeras, para saber cuán poca cosa era [. . .] Y sentí más miedo que nunca y los pasos se alimentaban de mi miedo, cebándose con él, de él creciendo, de él engrandeciéndose, volviéndose un monumento de la remordida carne de cañón en que no sabía que me había convertido. (21)

Enela's disappearance seals the narrator's fate of disconnectedness because Enela and her appeal to the narrator presented an opportunity to connect and to unite in the face of their fear.

Even the sisters of the narrator slowly disappear from her life and she becomes more isolated from them as they mature into women and begin to wear brassieres. After her sister gets her first brassier, the narrator comments: “Ahí acabaron nuestras tardes juntas, sin que yo comprendiera por qué [. . .] lo que yo debía estar lamentando era la *desaparición* de las niñas que fueron mis hermanas” (77-78). In her interview with Ibsen, Boullosa recognized that sexuality is repressed in both *Antes* and *Mejor desaparece*. The influence of Catholicism in these novels and others like *La Milagrosa* is important as it prohibits the character's access to their own bodies and eroticism. Boullosa adds that the male figures in the novels also repress sexuality and the sexuality that does exist in the novel is perverse (60). This environment of repression created by dominant patriarchal institutions is precisely what inhibits the authentic existence of the

characters in these novels and is what Boullosa's narrators try to escape by narrating from the margins of these discourses.

Antes is an attempt on the part of the narrator to escape the oblivion of non-existence to which she has been limited by predetermined social structures and values. It reveals the institutions that construct identity in such a way as to limit contact and community between individual subjects and to restrict their very humanity. It is this characteristic of Boullosa's novels that may be examined as feminist. As noted previously, feminism in Boullosa's works attempts to recognize and change relations that are based on sexism as a system of domination. Costantino has observed that such a system results in the suppression and repression of individual subjects, regardless of sex, gender, race, or class.¹⁰ Just as the narrators in *Mejor desaparece* demonstrate the condition of disconnectedness and isolation, *Antes* illustrates the impossibility of existence within a system of socially prescribed identities and roles. Such systems based on hierarchies of domination pose predetermined barriers to communication and community that do not permit authentic existence or self-representation.

In *Antes*, the narrator's very existence depends upon her ability to invent and tell of a past, thereby returning to and reliving that past. The narrator of *Antes* describes the process of relating her personal history as the invention of herself or as bringing herself into existence. In order to create her own textual representation, she must also invent a

¹⁰ See Chapter 2, where Costantino is quoted from her article, "Postmodernism and Feminism in Mexican Theatre: *Aura y las once mil vírgenes* by Carmen Boullosa." *Latin American Theatre Review* 28.2 (1995): 55-71.

reader: “me inventaré por esta noche que sí puedo conseguir interlocutores desde mi oscuridad” (14). The narrator’s invention of interlocutors or witnesses is necessary for her appropriation of representational space as proof of her existence in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Without the interlocutor, the narrator’s history and the narrator, herself, do not exist. The narrator’s act of reaching out to the reader is also a manifestation of her need to connect with others, a need that is expressed in the following words:

¿Cómo querría yo que fueras? ¡Querría que fueras lo que fueras!
Bastaría un poco de sustancia cálida, un poco de masa ni siquiera
ardiente para tocar, para rozar [. . .] con rozar de vez en cuando en esta
soledad me basaría, rozar un poco, acariciar sin lastimar ni arrañar, ni
quedarme nada nada nada en las manos [. . .] nada [. . .] una huella [. . .]
(11)

The text of this novel is the narrator’s attempt to connect with the reader in order to form a dialogic relationship, which would permit her to exist. Throughout the novel, the narrator makes repeated metafictional self-references which stress her dependence on the reader in order to exist. The readers are also reminded that the narrative voice is not of their world, but that she narrates from a point that is elsewhere. Not only does it remind the reader that the narrator’s identity is a constructed self-representation but also that the narrator is constructing the very identity of her readers when she says, “Vamos, si insisto puede ser que aparezcas...”(11). By reaching out and forming a connection with the reader who permits the narrator to retell her past, she is able to carve out a

space for self-representation that permits a recognizable and more authentic rendering of her identity. She expresses this goal when she comments:

los recuerdos que no elegí para que toman su turno, fieros, sin cara, se acercan a mí por la espalda a burlarse de la soledad en que habito, de la opacidad, de la tristeza. No me importan sus burlas, porque pronto, si ustedes me tienen paciencia, se convertirán en sonrisas bondadosas.

Así, el encierro que padezco me resulta *cómodo*. ¡Nunca lo hubiera creído! Cómodo, cálido, propicio. Sólo aquí puedo hilvanar con tanto placer mi historia sin que los recuerdos sean interrumpidos al convocarlos porque no *pasa* aquí nada más que su presencia. (45)

The “sonrisas bondadosas” result from the dialogic relationship that the narrator forms with her reader, thus permitting her existence through the invention and narration of her past and a connection and an appropriation of textual space from outside of the margins.

Treinta años: Return to the Land of Childhood

Treinta años is one of Boullosa's more recent novels and was written almost a decade after *Mejor desaparece* and *Antes*. This novel returns to the theme of childhood in a retelling and reconstruction of the personal past. In her article, “La destrucción en la escritura,” Boullosa describes her earlier novels of childhood. She says: “*Mejor desaparece*, *Antes*, *Poemas de infancia*, consumieron mi propia imaginación sobre la infancia, y el recuerdo de una ciudad que ya no existe, la ciudad de México en los primeros años sesentas y fines de los cincuentas” (217). Almost a decade later, Boullosa demonstrates a continued interest in the imagination and the narration of childhood memories. The reconstruction of the past in this novel not only constitutes

self-representation on the part of the narrator but also documents an historical moment from a personal perspective which is also a point elsewhere, exiled from the authoritative representations of social and political histories of a nation.

The title, *Treinta años*, refers to the thirty years between 1967 and 1997 that have passed since the main character and narrator, Delmira, left Mexico as an adolescent. Paradoxically, the main body of the text deals with a six year period in Delmira's life – her memories of her childhood and adolescence in Mexico, from when she was eight years old in 1961 until she left at the age of fourteen in 1967 – not with the thirty years in Europe. Speaking of her inability to write about this period of exile, the narrator and fictional author explains:

No puedo parar ahora con lentitud en mis treinta años de vida europea, porque estos treinta años no me detienen, me expulsan, me quieren extraer de sí.[. . .] Los primeros años vine buscando un mundo fiel a las leyes de la física, está aquí rodeándome, aunque no pueda decir que lo tengo [. . .] (253-4)

Only a few pages at the beginning and end of the novel refer to the temporal and spatial location of the narrator, which frames the discourse of memory with the phrases: “Mi larga estancia europea había llegado a su fin. Treinta años, Delmira, treinta años” (16). The last lines of the novel echo this sentiment with “Treinta años, Delmira treinta años guardará el silencio” (259). The inconsistency between the title and content of the novel emphasizes the importance of the narrator's childhood in her own self-representation. She refers to the distance from her past during the thirty years: “Falté a la verdad para reencontrar mi pasado, mi infancia. Esto fue mi vida, la única a la que

pude serle fiel” (255). According to the narrator, her life story ends with the passing of her childhood, a childhood that she reminds us is a memory and invention, and one that she continues to reinvent and retell as a fictional author (256). The reminder that her past is a fictional creation also serves to emphasize her active role in the construction of the narrative.

Like *Mejor desaparece* and *Antes*, the structure of *Treinta años* novel is episodic and, by ending the narrative before adulthood, and denying the importance of adult identity, it also parodies the traditional Bildungsroman. Like the novel of formation, this novel presents the events of childhood that led up to the protagonist’s development as the adult who narrates the story. However, unlike the traditional genre, Boullosa’s narrator does not have a clear sense or recognition of her adult identity and role in the world. She sums up her adult life as follows:

Encontré a mi padre y lo perdí. Inspirada por Lope, fingí ser diversas, creí ser una y otra persona, mostré con decisión predilecciones que fui cambiando, opté por gestos y gustos de los que después deserté. Me enamoré una y otra vez. Fingí ser plebeya, pasé por ser de la corte. . . me vestí de hombre por amor a una mujer. Volví a mi padre, volví a perderlo [. . .] Es todo lo que puedo decir aquí, porque mi cuento termina en Agustini. (254)

The narrator feels dislocated from her origins and revisits her past in an attempt to reconnect. Like the narrators of *Mejor desaparece* and *Antes*, the narrator here, experiences estranged family relations as a child and becomes disconnected from her past in a way that problematizes the question of her own identity. For her, the only possible form of self-representation is through the telling of her childhood. This also

permits an examination of the events that led to her present exile from her past and home, the same events that inhibit a more complete self-knowledge.

The episodes that Delmira relates from her childhood include various scenes that chronicle her indoctrination into the ruling class ideology and into ideologies of protest. The narrator includes the intercalated bedtime stories of her grandmother, which often present nationalistic family history that supports the patriarchal and racist class system in Mexico. Delmira also recounts Sunday afternoon lunches at the local parish with the nuns and village priest. These lunches are followed by trips to the countryside with the priest and her mother to give the sacrament to the peasants. In another episode, Delmira is enrolled in the local school instead of being sent to the finishing school for young ladies in the capital. She does not receive the conventional education of a woman of the ruling class and, after she is exposed to "el maestro" and his revolutionary "onda" ideas, she begins to recognize the injustice of the prescribed roles and hierarchies of the society in which she lives. As a young idealist she participates in the organization of a local demonstration and writes a poem that she distributes to the protesters. This activity and the signed poem lead to her arrest and mistreatment by government forces.

Delmira chronicles the operation of what Louis Althusser has described as the "State Ideological Aparati" on her formation. According to Althusser, these aparati include religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade-union, communications institutions and function to educate in a way that ensures "subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'" and trains subjects to submit to and reproduce the ruling ideology (133-43). The narration of Delmira's childhood demonstrates the

agency of these institutions (both in support of the dominant social structures and in revolution against them) in her formation as an adult. The return to childhood is a return to and a valuing of the subject at a point just before ideological aparati have acted upon it. This novel returns to that point in Delmira's life and then chronicles the character's formation as a gendered subject and as a citizen of a particular social, economic and racial class. The narration of her past, particularly of the adolescent years, reveals the distinct ideological influences that operate on Delmira's formation. Her grandmother, the priest, and her teacher all simultaneously represent and subvert the institutions of the traditional patriarchal society in Mexico.

Delmira's grandmother safeguards the gates to the house and tells stories of the past that explain the power structures and behavior in their town, Agustini. She is a member of the landowning class and just as she is guardian of the home, she is guardian of traditional beliefs and social hierarchies for her family. Delmira describes one incident when she attempted to break free of these conventions but was thwarted by her grandmother. She had just returned from participating in a demonstration and was undressing to prepare for bed:

Me avergoncé frente a Dulce, de mí misma y del papel que me tocaba representar. Las dos hacíamos una persona completa, las dos éramos fragmentadas mitades ella tenía de su lado la complicidad y el calor de la abuela que la obligaba a una esclavitud [. . .] Después de correr y fatigarme y aventurarme por los mares procelosos de la manifestación, aquí estaba yo, frente a la nana a quien había esclavizado toda mi vida.

-- Déjalo, Dulce—acerté a decir, en mi confusión que era mucha-
-. Ya es muy tarde, te prometeo que yo recojo.

La abuela oyó mi promesa.

-- ¡Qué recoges ni qué ocho cuartos! Vete poniendo ya la pijama, y no has dicho si quieres tu taza de chocolate [. . .]

Dulce salió de mi cuarto y yo me desvestí, dejando respetuosamente el calzón en el piso, el pantalón en el piso, la blusa india en el piso, los dos huaraches de suela de llanta botados sin orden ni concierto [. . .] (224-5)

Hence, order is reestablished and each is returned to her role as they settle in to listen to the grandmother's nightly storytelling. In the tale that follows, the grandmother explains to Delmira how order is kept through violence and the killing of those who threaten the established order:

no había manera de atrapar un alushe. Tuvimos entonces que organizar una limpia de indios. Al amanecer del día domingo, cuando comenzaba a clarear, los hombres del pueblo se reunieron con todas sus armas en el centro de la plaza. De ahí salieron silenciosos a la carretera, se pararon en las afueras de Agustini, y cada que veían a un indio venir, le disparaban. Mataron unas decenas, hasta que alguno que consiguió escapar de la ráfaga avisó y no llegaron más. Los cadáveres quedaron apilados todo el día, una cerca que sirvió para que los alushes regresaran a sus forma de barro y dejaran sus triquiñuelas. Murieron cientos tal vez, ..cuando amaneció no quedaba un cadáver, y ya hablar de alushes traviesos o ladrones era cosa del pasado.

Así termina las historias de Agustini, Delmira. Aquí la gente mata. No lo has visto aún, porque eres muy niña, pero aquí los dueños de las fincas, si se ven amenazas, matan. (230-31)

The following day, the soldiers come and arrest Delmira for her participation in the demonstration held the day before. The lesson of her grandmother's story is too late for Delmira who has already tried to break out of the molds of tradition.

In spite of her grandmother's efforts to pass on the values of the ruling class and to reinforce the social hierarchy of the oligarchy, Delmira's exposure to the influences

of the village priest and her non-conventional education have changed her so that she is unable to conform and integrate into the social order of the town. She is influenced by the contradictory Catholicism of the village priest (who also has a long running sexual affair with her mother). The priest who caters to the leading citizens of Augustini represents, on the one hand, the traditional institution of the Catholic Church that is allied to the wealthy landowners and powerful leaders. On the other hand, the priest shows a process of transition to the opposing practices and beliefs of liberation theology and in this way represents a new alliance with the *campesinos* and marginalized people of society. Another force that acts on Delmira's formation is her teacher who introduces Delmira to Rock-n-Roll, grass roots organizing and revolutionary thought. External factors, such as the rise of the petroleum industry result in the intervention of the military in the region. As a result of her activity and very visible involvement in the demonstration, Delmira is perceived as posing a threat to the established institutions of power. She has not conformed to or become integrated into the social order that is based on and permits the domination and exploitation of many for the wealth of a few and, because of this, she is exiled from the society of her childhood.

By returning to her childhood and recounting her experiences with these events, the narrator reveals the process of her formation and constructs a representation of herself as a subject within a specific context. This context is the town of Agustini, Mexico, during the 50s and 60s and, by recreating her adolescence, Delmira also allows for a re-examination and re-evaluation of those events that shaped her and led to her final exile from her past and from herself. In *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics*,

Cinema, de Lauretis affirms the importance of these events in the process of self-representation and identifies: "one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world" (159). In this way, Boullosa uses a narrator who narrates from a point that is temporally and spatially elsewhere to examine issues of nation in the construction of self-representation. As in *La Milagrosa* and *Cielos de la Tierra*, the author focuses on the very personal story of the narrator or protagonist in order to provide a glimpse into social, political, and historical realities in Mexico.

Appropriation of Textual Space for Self-Representation from the Margins

The return to a personal past through memory, dreams or invention forms an integral part of the postmodern dialogue with history and allows for a revision and redefinition of the past as part of the individual's present identity. The personal past is particularly important to the postmodern subject who is confronted with an epistemological break with all previous forms of representations of the past. For the female subject, the construction of identity through self-representation is achieved by appropriating a textual space for self-representation. The return to the past in these novels, to a point before the female subject has been integrated into the established order of society, permits the narrator to reinvent or to give voice to the construction of her own identity from outside of conventional representation. The return to the personal past in these novels and especially in *Treinta años* may parallel a similar return to the national past in Boullosa's other fiction. By examining issues of the personal past and

identity, individuals may then turn to explore and re-evaluate the possible identities of the nation. This process is particularly important for those who have been misrepresented or excluded from official history and representations of national identity, as the novels to be examined in the following chapter suggest.

CHAPTER 4

RETURN TO THE PAST AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE COLONIZED OTHER IN *SON VACAS, SOMOS PUERCOS*

Return to the Colonial Past

Son vacas, somos puercos (1991) returns to the seventeenth century period of the colony as a legacy to the conquest of the Americas. The novel explores on different levels the identity of the body in relation to society. This work parodies pirate tales and imitates the style and description in the chronicles of the conquest.¹¹ Like the novels of the previous chapters, *Son vacas, somos puercos* explores the construction of identity as a function of the individual's relation to others and as a function of position within society. In this novel, Boullosa reveals interpersonal, societal, and institutional relations as systems of domination where the individual's position is determined by a hierarchy of value based on the categories of sex, gender, race, class, religion, nationality or other factors that have been used to identify or label the body. The author examines how these categories form part of and operate within a system of social control where individual subjects are suppressed, repressed and marginalized from

¹¹ Tzvetan Todorov summarizes numerous scenes of brutality that are described in a number of chronicles. The descriptions of brutality towards the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas are echoed in *Son vacas, somos puercos* both in the narration of the pirates actions and of the conquest of the lands in and around the caribbean. To read these descriptions see: *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. New York:Harper & Row Publishers, 1984.

representation.¹² The author explores the question of identity construction on a thematic level through various characters whose identity or roles shift, and on a structural level through an unstable and shifting narrative voice. The narrator of this novel, like the narrator of *Antes*, narrates from a point that is elsewhere in order to appropriate a space for textual representation of the colonized Other, which has been eclipsed and alienated by traditional portrayals of the Latin American colonial past and identity.

Son vacas, somos puercos: Colonized Territories, Colonized Bodies

The main character of *Son vacas, somos puercos* is Smeeks (also known as Esquemelín or El Trepanador), a picaresque character of humble origin, who before being indentured as a servant in the West Indies drifted from master to master and had the good fortune of being taught to read and write by one of them. Smeeks is also the principal narrator and, in the first half of the novel, he tells of his passage to the Americas, the cruel abuse that he received from his master in Tortuga, his relationship with the freed slave Negro Miel, and his apprenticeship with a Dr. Pineau. The brutal treatment of indigenous, African and indentured slaves is described with great detail in various episodes. The second half of the novel recounts Smeeks' entrance into the "Fraternidad de los Hermanos de la Costa," a brotherhood of pirates and filibusters.

¹² In her analysis of Boullosa's theatre, Roselyn Costantino has observed similar characteristics. See "Postmodernism and Feminism in Mexican Theatre: *Aura y las once mil vírgenes* by Carmen Boullosa." *Latin American Theatre Review* 28.2 (1995): 55-71.

This part of the novel also portrays the activities of the pirates and provides considerable detail in the narration of their vicious attacks on cities and ships, including episodes of gratuitous rape, abominable torture, starvation, and bloody massacres. The narrator provides a graphic accounting of exploitation, beatings, battle and torture as witnessed, experienced, or even acted out by the narrator and his companions.

The extreme brutality of some sections within the narrative is a prominent feature of the work.¹³ To some extent, it may be even more shocking because of the reader's expectations about literature written by women. In the past, writing by women has not depicted this material as explicitly as male-centered writing has done; therefore the traditionally conditioned reader may be disconcerted by the unexpected content of the novel. In her article, "La destrucción en la escritura," Boullosa explains her choice to write about this particular content as a conscious decision to write about "la piratería en el Mar Caribe durante el siglo XVII, haciendo uso de los filibusteros, del momento histórico, de su comunidad utópica donde estábamos prohibidas las mujeres [. . .]" (218). Boullosa makes a point to observe that women were prohibited from this particular community. Perhaps she also recognizes that women were prohibited not only from participating in these activities but from writing about them as well. Her

¹³ The violence in *Son vacas, somos puercos* has been especially noted and, to some extent, criticized in the editorial reviews of the English translation, *They're Cows, We're Pigs*. Margaret Mifflin of *Entertainment Weekly* comments the following: "Disappointingly, her narrative thread frays mid-book, and Smeeks' story devolves into a numbing and plotless collection of stomach-churning debaucheries." Allen Lincoln of the *New York Times Book Review* also focuses on this aspect in his description of the book: "Although there is nothing magical about her style, Boullosa's vivid and visceral descriptions provide hallucinatory images of the pirates' raping and pillaging, their battles in the jungle and at sea, and their post-looting orgies." Refer to the online book reviews at <<http://www.amazon.com>> for these and other comments about the novel.

decision to write about this material is, on a certain level, an act of subversion in itself because she enters into a territory that was traditionally restricted to men.

While the content of *Son vacas, somos puercos* is similar to that of traditional pirate stories, tales of adventure, and earlier accounts of the conquest, the way in which the author constructs the novel and uses scenes of atrocity differs greatly from past texts written by men, which she parodies. In the same article mentioned above, Boullosa has described the content of her novel as, “una aventura espiritual que no querría repetir por ningún motivo, donde la destrucción del cuerpo era la ley de la historia” (219). She has also described the content of the work in an interview with Kristen Ibsen, where she calls it an historical novel about the tragedy of the colony and the events that followed the discovery of the Americas (57). The relation between the destruction of the body and the process of colonization through domination is precisely what Boullosa portrays in *Son vacas, somos puercos*. She presents another vision of the American colonies as a legacy to the conquest and colonization of the New World that was based on the domination and colonization of bodies. Under the social, economic, and political systems that directed the colonization of the Americas, the access of the individual to his or her body was as much a question of control and power as was the access to land and riches in the conquering and destruction of the Americas.

Modernity: Conquest and Colonization of the Other

While Boullosa returns to the seventeenth century in *Son vacas, and somos puercos*, it is important to note that the practices of brutality, destruction, and

domination that she describes in this work of fiction date back to the initial European conquest of the region. Her use of language and anecdotes that strongly resemble the content and style of the chronicles of the conquest serves to remind the reader that the society of her fictional world is a product of the colonization of the Americas. For this reason it is important to examine the processes of conquest and colonization as systems of domination, in order to understand these same social structures at work a century later in Boullosa's rewriting of pirate tales and legends. Tzvetan Todorov identifies the conquest and colonization of America as the occurrence that heralds and establishes present identity and that marks the beginning of the modern era (5). Similarly, Enrique Dussel hypothesizes that Latin America, since 1492, is a constitutive moment of modernity:

La Modernidad se originó en las ciudades europeas medievales, libres, centros de enorme creatividad. Pero 'nació' cuando Europa pudo confrontarse con 'el Otro' y controlarlo, vencerlo, violentarlo; cuando pudo definirse como un 'ego' descubridor, conquistador, colonizador de la Alteridad constitutiva de la misma Modernidad. De todas maneras, ese Otro no fue 'des-cubierto' como Otro, sino fue 'en-cubierto' como 'lo Mismo' que Europa ya era desde siempre. De manera que 1492 será el momento concreto del 'nacimiento' de la Modernidad como concepto, el momento concreto del 'origen' de un 'mito' de violencia sacrificial muy particular y, al mismo tiempo, un proceso de 'en-cubrimiento' de lo no-europeo. (8)

Todorov defines the "Other" in broad terms as "specific social groups to which *we* do not belong." He adds that these groups of Others can be subdivisions within or interior to society, such as the other sex, the other economic class, or the other ethnicity. The Other can also be any group that is exterior to society, on a different cultural, moral, and

historical plane, having languages and customs that are so distinct that it may be considered to be of another species (4).

By describing the conquest as Europe's confrontation with the Other, Dussel refers to the Other as that which is exterior to European or Western society. In his discussion of the phenomenology of the conquering "T", he states that "Una vez reconocidos los territorios, geográficamente, [el yo] se pasaba al control de los cuerpos, de las personas [. . .]" (40). In *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Boullosa deals with this particular mentality of domination and control that drove the conquest and colonization of the Americas. While Dussel describes the discovery, conquest, and colonization as an eclipsing (*encubrimiento*) of the Other in terms of their exclusion from European society, Boullosa recognizes the alienation and *encubrimiento* of Others both in relationship to their position vis-à-vis the conquerors and other members within the newly colonized society. By returning to the colonial past, Boullosa is able to examine the position and experience of the Other, including women, children, American Indians, African Slaves and impoverished Europeans, within the patriarchal social structures of the colony.¹⁴

¹⁴ When I use the term *Other*, in this and the following chapters, I am referring to a broader definition that combines the Other that is exterior to society, as in a different culture or nation, and the Other that is interior to society, as in the Other sex, different gender identities, races, and social classes, etc. I employ both Todorov's broader definition of Other in combination with Dussel's concept of the colonized Other, but I propose that the same alienation that occurs from the denial of Otherness and Alterity in the colony occurs for the Other that is interior to society (and sometimes the Other can be both interior and exterior). See: Dussel, Enrique. *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995 and Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984.

The Colonized Other

Son vacas, somos puercos returns to the time of conquest and colonization when the hierarchical power structures of society were determined by the definition of the body, in terms of sex, gender, race, class, religion, and nationality. The position of a person within this society and in relation to others lay on a continuum between the two extremes of victim/victimizer, slave/master, owned/owner, depending on the combination of these factors that defined his or her body within the social system. The principal characters in this novel, Lolonés, Ella, Negro Miel, and especially the narrator Smeeks, exemplify this power structure and positionality based on the conditions of the body within the society.

Lolonés, the leader of the pirates and filibusters (also known as J. David Nau or L'Olonnais) is the son of a French merchant, "un pequeño comerciante" from Sables d'Olonne. The narrator Smeeks describes Lolonés as a child, "vago cuando niño, y de tan largas piernas y cuerpo tan ligero que a veces desaparecía de casa por varios días" (13). From this description, Lolonés can be identified as from a lower to middle class with limited economic power or potential and as a thin young adolescent with limited physical strength. Like the narrator, a colonizer from Martinique contracted the young Lolonés to work for three years in the West Indies. His master who had greater economic and physical power was brutal and beat Lolonés. Shortly after arriving in Martinique, he escaped with some buccaneers from Santo Domingo who were selling furs in Martinique. The narrator Smeeks observes that Lolonés was attracted by the free life that they lived, "sin esposa ni hijos, [. . .] en compañía de otro bucanero que los

socorre si enferman y con quien comparten todo [. . .]" (13). However, Lolonés does not find this shared equality and because he is a boy and weaker than the buccaneers, he finds himself with the least power in their group. He is taken advantage of and forced to be the servant of the leader of the buccaneers. In this role, he is so mistreated that he becomes too ill to work. His master smashes his skull with the butt of his musket, leaving the boy for dead with two dogs as his only company. The dogs nurse and care for him and he recuperates and grows into a strong young man by eating the raw meat that the dogs hunt for him and themselves. Ironically, Lolonés' position of power lies beneath that of the dogs, but the dogs show more mercy than his fellow humans have shown. Later, he is found by other buccaneers and, because he is recognized for his own brutality and fearless killing, he becomes the leader of a group of filibusters. Lolonés's relations to others have been determined by the conditions of his body: because he was a poor and weak young boy, he became an indentured servant and then a buccaneer slave, victimized by others in both cases; as a strong adult man, he became a filibuster and victimizer of others.

Another character who demonstrates social position and power as determined by the body in a colonial and patriarchal society is "Ella," a young adolescent female dressed as a boy whom Smeeks befriends on the ship to the Americas. After revealing that she has the body of a woman, Ella makes reference to her life before she had disguised herself as a boy in order to get contracted to work in the New World:

A mí me han tocado más hombres que todos los que viajan en el navío.
Pero eso se acabó, quiero que lo sepas. Por eso voy a cambiar de tierras.

Y prefiero pasar por hombre, aunque los hombres sean seres que desprecio, que seguir siendo una puta. Se acabó. (20)

For this character, the changing of lands corresponds to a change in gender identity and a shift in the social role and position that her body is afforded by the change to the clothing of a young boy. She alters her status from that of a prostitute to that of an indentured or enslaved servant boy and this constitutes an increase in her social power. As it did for many who sought better opportunities in the New World, the new lands represent a chance to change her position within a patriarchal hierarchy and, thus, the level of power and control over her body. She has higher hopes still for the utopic New World of opportunity. Smeeks quotes her as saying:

‘en las tierras a que vamos, he oído decir que no hay lo tuyo y lo mío, sino que todo es nuestro, y que nadie pide el quién vive, ahí no se cierran las puertas con cerrojos y cadenas, porque todos son hermanos de todos. Lo oí decir. Y que la única ley es la lealtad a los hermanos, para serlo no se puede ser débil, o cobarde, o mujer. A siéndolo, veré cómo formo parte de esa vida, que es la vida mejor’. (21 narrator’s quotes)

Similar to the expectations that Lolónés has of bucaneer life, Ella anticipates a utopic life in the Americas. In her description, she employs a rhetoric that bears a striking resemblance to the emancipatory ideals of Enlightenment philosophy initiated by the projects of modernity in Europe.¹⁵ The desire for utopia seems to be created by and to result from dissatisfaction with a socio-economic system that requires the domination of

¹⁵ This utopian description also resembles communist descriptions of a society where all are equal because no individual owns property; all goods belong to the community, as is denoted by the possessive pronoun “nuestro”.

others through ownership, and that nurtured the modernist projects of the conquest. In such a system, the body becomes a commodified object and individual subjects are either owners or slaves who must sell their bodies.

As another adolescent male on the ship, Ella is an equal to Smeeks and receives no special treatment or notice from him. Only in retrospect, after he knows that she is a female, does he notice anything “feminine” about the boy he had befriended. He comments:

Era más característico por sus rasgos hermosos, aunque, *la verdad sea dicha, puede que yo no hubiera reparado en esto antes de lo que voy a contar*. Como muchos de nosotros, aún no tenía forma alguna de pelo cubriéndole la cara, pero mejor que el de ninguno de nosotros era el tono sonrosado de su piel que se adivinara suave en extremo. Aquella tarde, *no pensaba yo en esto*, por supuesto, y tampoco pensaba en nada [. . .] *Debí pensar*, si no en lo peculiar que era el muchacho, en algo, en lo que fuera, para que el “golpe” no cayera artero y eficaz en un ser desprevenido, en mí, el pobre Smeeks de cabo a rabo distraído cuando sucedió lo que relataré; *debí pensar* en lo extraño que era que él se me aproximara tanto, él, que parecía rehuir, hasta donde se lo permitían nuestras condiciones de hacinamiento, cualquier cercanía del joven *debió* inquietarme, *pero ni lo vi*, y también debió extrañarme el que empezara a hablar conmigo, y, más todavía, el tono de su voz. (18-19) (my emphasis)

Only after touching her breast, does Smeeks recognize what he can, in retrospect, see as feminine traits. These characteristics remained unnoticed by Smeeks until he became aware of the fact that she was a woman. The recognition of her sex changes the way in which Smeeks views her and, thus, changes their relation and her position or role in society. After revealing her sex to Smeeks, she becomes the Other for him, an idealized unreachable object of desire who is his obsession for the remainder of the

novel, even though Ella disappears as a character in the text after the ship docks in Tortuga. She becomes categorized according to her sex and, as a woman, she can only be subordinated and subjugated as an object of male desire. She recognizes the change in her relationship with Smeeks and cuts all ties with him.

Women are excluded from the greater opportunities and utopias of the New World where the ideals of modernity do not apply to them. Because the acknowledgement of her sex results in her objectification through the imposition of an unwanted gender identity and role, Ella chooses to deny her own sex in order to assume a different gender role that offers her more power in the social hierarchy. There is no space in the social order of the period for her to exist as an active female subject in control of her own body. The suppression of her own sex in favor of the sexual identity and roles permitted to men constitutes her internalization of patriarchal ideology and values and her choice to participate in a system that subordinates women. The very act that grants her power over her body is the rejection of her body and the repression of an authentic identity. The denial of her female body and the resulting alienation from her own identity is reinforced by the fact that her character is never given a name, other than the generic pronoun "Ella".

Negro Miel is a freed slave from Africa and his history chronicles multiple social positions determined by nationality (tribe), race, and knowledge. Negro Miel was born into a tribe of healers identified by the strip of leather and cloth sewn onto their chests. Recognized by this marking of the body, he travels to other villages and works among other tribes as a healer. Another tribe captures the village where Negro

Miel works and because they do not recognize his body markings, he loses his distinction and special value as healer. With this loss of identity, Negro Miel's social value and power is reduced to that of a slave, recognized only for the value of his flesh in trade:

junto con los demás varones, ignorando mi sangre, fui tomado prisionero en prenda de la derrota. Pensé verme libre de inmediato, distinguido por la banda que me cruzaba el pecho, en la que cualquiera sabía yo guardaba remedios para todos útiles. Lo que no imaginé es que caería en mando de ingleses, vendido como los demás por los de la aldea victoriosa que actuó como si fuese de bárbaros. (37-38)

Negro Miel is sold to European slavers and held captive on an English ship, which is later captured by French pirates. Because Negro Miel happens to have also been taught to read and write French as a child, he is able to communicate with the French pirates and to demonstrate his knowledge of medicine. This increases his social value and power and he is freed and initiated into the fraternity of pirates as a healer. Negro Miel chooses to live on the island of Tortuga and forms a relationship with Smeeks, the governor's abused indentured servant. In this relationship, Negro Miel gives solace, medical attention, and food to Smeeks. He fills the role of mentor, father, and lover to the young boy. In Africa, Negro Miel marked his body as a sign of his medicinal knowledge, social value, and nationality to other tribes. This identity gives him certain freedom and power among other tribes who respect his knowledge of the healing arts. Later his skin color identifies him as slave to the English slave traders and once again his knowledge as healer and ability to speak French elevate him from the position of

slave to that of a free man and member of the brotherhood of French pirates. On the island of Tortuga, his knowledge determines his power and relations to others. In this society, Negro Miel is a free man who has more power than Smeeks, a young enslaved white boy.

Smeeks was born into poverty and forced into the streets by the lack of food and space in the shack where he was born. Like the traditional picaresque character, he becomes a servant in order to provide himself with food and shelter. Smeeks has numerous masters and while serving one of them (a clergyman), he is taught to read and write but he is also used sexually. Like Lolonés, he decides to look for a better life in the New World and is contracted to be an indentured servant in the colonies. Smeeks' contract is bought by the Governor of Tortuga, who overworks, starves, and beats him. During this time he is befriended by Negro Miel, who teaches him the curative properties of herbs, cares for him, and tells him stories of his African past:

curándome la espalda herida por palos, dándome a hurtadillas porciones extra de alimentos, carne ahumada, pan de cazabe, frutas y plantas que él conocía de Tortuga, a las cuales, tal vez, debo mi exagerada altura, o restaurando mis agotados miembros con pócimas que me administraba y me enseñaba a preparar y recetar con tiempo arrancado a mi trabajo, a espaldas de mi amo, ayudado por mis hábiles mentiras [. . .]. (36)

Smeeks steals away from his owner, the governor, and risks more beatings in order to visit and spend time with Negro Miel, becoming his protégé and lover.

In his relationship with Negro Miel, Smeeks is not more dominant or powerful but he does gain some control of his body in order to give it willingly to Negro Miel in

exchange for care, food, love, and knowledge. Smeeks' free will is evident when he chooses to risk punishment from his master in order to be with Negro Miel. Smeeks has a similar relationship with Dr. Pineau, a European trained surgeon who is also a filibuster and abolitionist. Pineau purchases Smeeks after Negro Miel's death, when his owner's mistreatment nearly kills him. Because he is against slavery and a friend of Negro Miel, the doctor buys Smeeks in order to save his life, to bring him back to health, to teach him, and ultimately, to give him his freedom. Dr. Pineau gives surgical and scientific knowledge to Smeeks and also becomes his lover. As mentor and lover, Dr. Pineau replaces Negro Miel. Both Negro Miel and Dr. Pineau teach Smeeks about the brotherhood of pirates and filibusters as a utopian escape from the limited roles of the repressive colonial system.

Utopia, Dystopia and Alienation¹⁶

The opportunities of the New World and of the colonies existed only for a few privileged colonizers and were just as elitist and exclusive as the ideals of modernity, constituted on the basis of the domination and exploitation of Others. In *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Boullosa shows how the patriarchal hierarchy of the colony objectified

¹⁶ M. H. Abrams describes the use of the term "dystopia" to describe a 'bad place' that is represented in recent works of fiction, which portray "a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected in some disastrous future culmination" (218). While *Son vacas, somos puercos* deals with an historical time period, it is important to recognize the future utopias that the New World represented for the Europeans of that era. The alienating effects of the colony may be viewed as the disastrous culmination of modernity in the Americas.

and commodified the Other in the bodies of Indians, Africans, children of the European poor, and women, for the profit of the elite European colonizer.¹⁷ Smeeks, Lolonés, and Ella travel to the Americas in search of better opportunities and the control of their own bodies and destinies. Negro Miel, who in his own words was born “donde la tierra alcanza su perfección” and where no one suffered poverty or hunger, has no need to seek this utopia (36-7). Instead, he embarks for the New World as an African slave. Each of these characters is enslaved and exploited as the Other within patriarchal European and colonial society and denied all control over their own bodies. Because of their limitations to the role of the Other in the colony, each of these characters seeks an alternate utopia of freedom and opportunity. Lolonés, Negro Miel, Smeeks, and Ella (as is seen later in *Duerme*) join the brotherhood of pirates and filibusters in order to escape the controlling social order of the colony.

As a surgeon to the pirates, Smeeks leads a different life, no longer confined to the role of a dominated slave within colonial society; with them, he hopes to gain control of his body and identity:

Entendí que desde que había dejado Europa yo vivía como mujer, repitiendo la rutina del mismo rincón protegido para dormir diario y casi a las mismas horas. ¡Son tantos quienes viven como mujeres, encerrados tras los muros de un convento, de un cuartel, de una casa, de un taller, escondidos tras las faldas repetidas de un lugar que los protegé con su constante estar ahí.[. . .] Dejé de ser Smeeks para convertirme en el Hermano de la Cofradía de la Costa [. . .]. (79)

¹⁷ While it is recognized that many colonizers were not of the European elite, the very fact that they became the “colonizers” in the Americas raised their status and position of power to the upper echelon of colonial society, especially in relation to the colonized Other and those who were dominated, disenfranchised, and exploited for the profit of the colonists.

As a member of the fraternity of pirates he finds that he has not escaped a social system of domination, but rather, that he has just exchanged one system for another in which his role has reversed from that of victim to victimizer. He is no longer an object to be subjugated by others, but rather, he has become a subject who acts upon others:

Yo ya no era yo, ahora El Trepanador era *el dueño* de mis actos [. . .] No podía yo reconstruirme al regreso del asalto de Maracaibo. Yo ya no era nadie sino el puño que blandiera la espada chorreando sangre, el ojo apuntando, el dedo apretando el gatillo, aunque no fuera yo quien disparara y usara la espada, yo era los cuerpos que habían matado a veces con razón cuando se oponían a que les arrebatáramos sus trabajos y posesiones, a veces sin razón alguna, nada más por gusto de verlos morir, de oír sus cuerpos caer, de salpicarnos con su sangre española, y yo era los cuerpos que había curado [. . .]. (105-06)

Smeeke becomes aware of his own indoctrination and incorporation into the very system of domination and commodification of bodies that he had hoped to escape, first, by coming to America and then, by joining the pirates. The destructive and brutal world of the pirates is no different than the cruel marginalizing hierarchies of power within the colony. The projects of modernity, as described by Dussel, in constituting the "I" who conquers, colonizes, and controls the Other, coincided with the exclusive ideals of equality, liberation, and opportunity that not only inspired and justified the conquest of the Americas, but also the rebellious actions of pirates and filibusters. Their resistance to colonial order in the name of individual freedom constituted their internalization of the same utopic values of the colony that were inspired by modern

European thought. Paradoxically, the social order of the pirates is based on the same limiting system of repression and domination that defines the colony.

Upon entering the world of the pirates, Smeeke has become incorporated in to a social order based on the domination of the Other. He participates in the violent process that, according to Dussel, "incluye dialécticamente al Otro como 'lo Mismo'. El Otro en su distinción [. . .] es negado como Otro y es obligado, subsumido, alienado a incorporarse a la Totalidad dominadora como cosa, como instrumento, como oprimido, como encomendado [. . .]" (41). Using the terms proposed by Dussel, it is possible to see this attempt to escape the role of dominated Other as another form of assimilation into the system created by and constitutive of modernity. By becoming a part of a social system that denies the Alterity of the Other (both interior and exterior to society), Smeeke denies his own Alterity in a process that is self-alienating. Smeeke expresses this alienation throughout the narration of the novel, particularly during scenes that describe the pirates' cruelty:

Participaba así del mejor sueño de los dos buenos hombres, con los codos manchados de la sangre que escurría de mis manos [. . .]. No, no lograba reconstruirme. Pero sentía en mi cuerpo tal satisfacción que casi lo embotaba el gusto de la aventura, el placer de ser filibustero. ¿Me había perdido? Pero al preguntármelo yo sabía que lo que había perdido era mi cuerpo, que yo había sido sólo un esclavo, un engagé y que al dejar de serlo yo era el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo [. . .]. (105-6)

As a slave, Smeeke did not own his own body. As a pirate he does not gain control over his body but feels disconnected from it and alienated from himself.

Alienated Bodies and Alterity

Even though he was a slave and the dominated Other within colonial society, Smeeks was most free in his relationships with Negro Miel and Dr. Pineau. As he comments, he prefers sexual relations with men but, as a pirate, he submits to the limited gendered identities of patriarchal society and he learns to use the bodies of women. The only loving relationships in his life are those with Negro Miel and Dr. Pineau. Smeeks comes close to embracing his own Otherness and Alterity in his homosexual experiences with these men. However, by joining the pirates to escape colonial Otherness, he denies his homosexual identity and becomes alienated from himself. Although Smeeks, like the other characters of the novel, may increase his power in the colonial society, he does not truly escape the system that is based on domination and alienation. In her interview with Ibsen, Boullosa mentions that Smeeks loses the chance to discover the Other, to open himself to relations with the other, and to enjoy his own body:

como ocurre también en *Son vacas, somos puercos*, en que todos— incluso lo dice el epígrafe del libro, y es como la voz cantante de toda la novela: ‘soy el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo’—todos han perdido su cuerpo, su sexualidad es una abominación, es literalmente un pecado, en el verdadero sentido de la palabra “pecado”. En el sentido en que atenta contra su propia identidad y contra sus propias personas, y su sexualidad no es sino su horca y su cruz, su cadalso – pero no lo que debiera ser la sexualidad. Para descubrir al otro y para gozar y para disfrutar, esto no pasa. (61)

Just as Ella denies her female body and Otherness in order to improve her position within the social order, Smeeks denies his homosexuality in order to incorporate

himself into the machista society of the pirates, who form a paradoxical extension of the colonial system.

According to Boullosa, Smeeks would have been better off if he had never joined the pirates and never become part of such a system that disenfranchises the self from its body:

Y el no poder acceder al cuerpo los condenan a esa vida horrible. Horrible; ahora, es la misma tragedia que vive Smeeks. Si Esquemelin o Smeeks, cómo se llame el narrador de *Son vacas, somos puercos*, se hubiera atrevido a realmente sólo hacer una historia amorosa con los varones, por los que es obvio que siente predilección—digamos, la que tuvo con el médico, la que tuvo con el Negro Miel—todo hubiera sido diferente, que él nunca hubiera entrado al mundo de la rapiña, de los filibusteros, y se hubiera quedado asumiendo el mundo amoroso con los hombres. Pero no lo puede asumir tampoco, y para él también tiene un recuerdo de infamia, porque él es niño violado. Él cuenta que el monje que lo educó lo usaba. Entonces es un personaje que tampoco puede acceder a cuerpo y . . . en el Mar Caribe en el Siglo XVII en medio de la posibilidad de aventura, se incorpora a la pesadilla de los filibusteros, que es la violencia, que es otra manera de vivir afuera del cuerpo, y de escapar, de escapar de su propio cuerpo, [. . .]. (62)

The only options open to Smeeks are to live as the victimized Other within the colonial patriarchal society or to become the abuser of others. He does not have the option to live as a homosexual within colonial society and he chooses to incorporate himself into the system of domination, denying and alienating his body, which does not fit into the limited roles of that society. Because of this, he narrates from outside of his body and is enslaved in a system of domination. The textual reconstruction of his identity or self-representation is through narration from a point elsewhere, beyond the margins of traditional colonial discourses.

Smeeks: The Disembodied Narrative Voice From Elsewhere

This sense of alienation from the body is evident in the manner in which Smeeks refers to himself and in his descriptions of other characters. To describe himself, Smeeks vacillates between the use of the third person pronoun "él" and the first person pronoun "yo" as well as in the use of various proper names in reference to himself: Smeeks, Esquemelin, Alejandro Oliverio Esquemelin, Jean Smeeks, or el Trepanador. Smeeks comments on his multiple names by saying "Al empezar a contar mi historia, dejé asentado tener los ojos y los oídos de Smeeks, El Trepanador o Esquemelin, según fuera el nombre con que me designaran" (93). Similarly, the narrator refers to the character Lolonés with multiple names (J. David Nau, Lolonés, or L'Olonnais) and he also creates ambiguity in the identity of Negro Miel when he says:

No fue bautizado como Negro Miel sino como Negro Piedra. Atado a la noria por una larga tira blanca de tela enrollada al cuello, da vueltas noche y día [. . .]. Esta verdad destruye la veracidad de mi historia, de la que yo he ido contando. Pero no debemos fijarnos en esta apariencia, porque ambas son la misma, sólo que, en lugar de avanzar por su eje horizontal, la he cruzado de pronto hacia arriba, vertical, y he hallado esto. Créanlo. También es cierto Negro Piedra girando en la noria. Cuando lo descubieron con dotes los suyos y los franceses, lo ataron a la noria para que no se les escapase, y ahí pasa Negro Piedra la vida, atado como mula para que la fiera que es él no huya [. . .]. (64)

The narrator Smeeks also makes direct reference to his need to find himself or to reconstruct his own identity: "Smeeks usa el primer tiempo del viaje, un tiempo tan diferente al tiempo en tierra firme, mucho más largo y monótono, para tratar de

alcanzarse a sí mismo [. . .]"(16). In another section he says, "Esquemelin trata de reunirse a sí mismo, de hacerse la idea de que es él el muchacho que mira con paciencia la madera en que remata la bodega donde duermen a bordo del navío los muchachos [. . .]" (17). Later in the novel he again observes: "No podía yo reconstruirme [. . .] No, no lograba reconstruirme"(106). Smeeks attempts to find a space for himself within the limits of patriarchal and colonial society. First, he seeks greater opportunity, liberation, and equality in the New World. Then, he seeks the same utopic community in the brotherhood of pirates. Each attempt fails because these "myths of modernity," as described by Dussel, only exist for the privileged within patriarchal Western society. As a boy from impoverished origins, and later as a homosexual, there is no equality or liberation for Smeeks as he fails to find a space for an authentic existence in the colony.

Because he cannot find or reconstruct himself within the limited roles determined by the patriarchal and colonial hierarchies, Smeeks reconstructs his identity through a disembodied narrative voice, similar to that of *Antes* and *Mejor desaparece*. Through the disembodied voice of Smeeks' narrative, Boullosa presents an alternate version of past pirate tales, legends, and colonial history. Cynthia Thompkins has also noted Boullosa's deconstruction of the subject as a strategy in his or her reconstruction:

Boullosa deconstruye la noción del sujeto unificado mediante el desplazamiento pronominal de las personas discursivas. Sin embargo, Boullosa agrega el recurso de la 'tachadura' derrideana, que surge de desestabilizar la representación mimética del cuerpo por medio de la abyección, ya que a pesar de ser irreconocible por haber sido torturado, vejado, o canibalizado, el sujeto se reconstituye a partir de una voz descarnada. (157)

Because the social system in which Smeeks operates does not permit him to fulfill the role and identity of anything but a victimizer or victim, Smeeks must examine himself in these two roles as determined by the relationships of power within colonial hierarchies. This examination leads to a deconstruction of power relations which shows how they repress and oppress other ways of being or other constructions of identity. By the end of the novel, the reader realizes that Smeeks, like Boullosa's other narrators, narrates from a time and space that is elsewhere. He has chosen to exist beyond or outside of the binary oppositions of colonized/colonizer. In this way, his voice comes from the margins and represents those who did not conform to the dominant hierarchies of the colony and who, for that reason, have remained unrepresented or excluded as voices from the colonial past. He narrates from a point that is spatially and temporally impossible because, as Boullosa has also observed, Smeeks is like the narrator of *Antes*, who no longer has a body and narrates from an undefined time and space:

Allá él. Aunque también al final, como él no tiene cuerpo, su voz está contada muchos años después de que eso haya ocurrido: parece que tampoco muere. La muerte es privilegio de los que tienen cuerpo. Porque ¿desde dónde nos cuenta Esquemelin? Parece que también desde un territorio similar al de la narradora de *Antes* ¿no? (62)

Smeeks the narrator comments on the here and now of his enunciation when he says: "Y yo quiero contar aún, para no dejarlo con vida, cómo fue el merecido fin del cruel L'Olonnais y tampoco quiero dejarme en esos mares revueltos, quiero regresarme a Europa, desde donde hoy cuento (si aún estoy en algún sitio) estas historias" (118). He

also refers to the impossible time of his narration, “porque ocurrió cuando ya nos habíamos disuelto, cuando Esquemelin había muerto hacía treinta años, [. . .]” (121). By narrating from a point beyond colonial history and legends, Smeeks expands the possible visions and representations we can have of the past and its subjects.

Smeeks is also able to incorporate another representation of the colonial and pirate past through the vision and memory of Negro Miel. Poisoned and dying, Negro Miel asked Smeeks to remember him and to tell his story to future generations so that he might live on in memory:

Mi sangre queda trunca. Yo no sembré la tierra con otra de mi stirpe. No di a nadie la sangre del conocimiento, pero a tí te he enseñado todo lo que se puede aprender. Negro Miel te pide, ésta es su última voluntad, que siempre lo recuerdes [. . .]. ¡Légame tu sangre a mí, que desparramé mi simiente entre Hermanos y en burdeles de Port Royal, sin reparar en que llegaría mi muerte! (43-44)

Negro Miel never had natural children because he preferred sexual relations with men or with the prostitutes of the brothels whom he helped to not become pregnant. In his sexual relations with Smeeks, Negro Miel’s semen is deposited into Smeeks body but it is through the love, knowledge, and memory that he gives to Smeeks that Negro Miel lives on through Smeeks and through his narration. Smeeks describes himself as “el libro escrito por Negro Miel,” and in narrating *Son vacas, somos puercos*, he fulfills his promise:

Y le hice un juramento al que aún soy fiel y que me permite narrar a ustedes mi historia: *Te recordaré siempre, y de tener hijos a ellos les hablaré de ti y ellos a sus hijos, pero si no tengo descendencia, te*

prometo, Negro Miel, que yo venceré a la muerte en nombre de tu memoria, y yo mismo, con estos ojos que te ven morir, estos oídos que te escuchan y este corazón que te ama, te recordaré siempre. (44)

By remembering and narrating the story of Negro Miel, Smeeks is like a son who permits Negro Miel's legacy and lineage to continue through him, presenting a new version and voice the tales and legends of pirates and the colonial past. The legacy that Smeeks continues for Negro Miel also constitutes alternate lines of kinship that lie outside traditional lineage as defined by patriarchal and Western societies.

Carrie C. Chorba observes the new intention Boullosa gives to this version of Smeeks' tale through the character of Negro Miel and Smeeks' promise to tell his history:

Negro Miel is one of the few aspects of the novel which is completely fictitious. What this promise of remembrance and reverence for the character of Negro Miel serves to do, then, is to question those past versions and, in turn, enshrine the new, the literary creation we are reading [. . .]. Hence Smeeks' innovations on Exquemelin's text: [. . .] he serves as a receptacle for all the lost wisdom of those subjugated in the creation of America; and the discourse which is America. (306)

The novel opens with the epigraph, "El esclavo" a poem from Eugenio Montejo's *Alfabeto del mundo*: "Ser el esclavo que perdió su cuerpo/para que lo habiten las palabras." Pineau and Negro Miel refer to Smeeks as the book left by Negro Miel, his memory and his knowledge. Through Smeeks, Negro Miel achieves immortality and representation that had previously been repressed. Smeeks is indeed the slave who lost his body only to be inhabited by words. Through the alienation of himself he learns to

exist in the margins and to articulate the discourses of the colonial past that had been repressed beforehand. In narrating *Son vacas, somos puercos*, he is able to reconstruct his own self-representation or identity as well as that of Negro Miel, Lolonés, Henry Morgan, and others.

CHAPTER 5

TEXTUAL ORIGINALITY AND AUTHORITY IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE COLONIAL PAST: *SON VACAS, SOMOS PUERCOS, EL MÉDICO DE LOS PIRATAS, AND DUERME*

Revision of the Colonial Past

Like *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991), *El Médico de los piratas* (1993) and *Duerme* (1994) return to the period of the Latin American colonies during the seventeenth century. While the previous chapter focused on the way in which *Son vacas, somos puercos* explores the identity of the body in relation to society, this chapter proposes to examine the construction of identity and its representation in the same novel and in *El médico de los piratas* and *Duerme*.¹⁸ The three novels parody pirate tales and chronicles of the conquest in order to present an interrogation of textual representation of the subject, textual originality and narrative authority. Through the metafictional telling and retelling of the same and different stories set within a colonial past, self-reference, and allusion to authentic historical texts, these novels serve to undermine traditional monolithic representations of history and present a new pluralistic and heterogeneous vision of the colonial past.

¹⁸ While I have dedicated all of Chapter 4 to the analysis of the reconstruction of identity through a return to the colonial past and its legacy in *Son vacas, somos puercos*, I have also chosen to include this work in Chapter 5. This novel participates with the novels of this chapter in the parodic rewriting and recycling of texts.

***Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El Médico de los Piratas*: Postmodern Parody and Recycling of Texts**

In *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas*, Boullosa experiments with the postmodern parody and recycling of texts. Just as she explores individual identity and textual self-representation, she also explores textual identity through questions of authority and originality. Boullosa frequently uses metafictional self-reference in her works in such a way that the narrative discourse undermines its own legitimacy as well as that of other texts. This strategy raises the reader's suspicion of discursive bias in all forms of narrative writing, including that of fiction and history. *Son vacas, somos puercos* exemplifies the use of this strategy and, along with *El médico de los piratas*, serves to parody past works and traditional literary forms. In all three novels of this chapter, Boullosa uses parody and self-conscious narrative to challenge established literary forms of representation and the systems on which they are based and serve to support. Both *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas* are parodic versions of the book, *De Americaensche Zee Roovers* by A.O. Exquemelin, published in 1678 in Amsterdam, and shortly after translated into German, Spanish, English and French.¹⁹ The striking similarity between the two versions written by Boullosa seems to represent experimentation with a postmodern recycling of texts that

¹⁹ Carrie C. Chorba presents a detailed study of this dialogic relationship between Boullosa's novel and its primary hypotext or antecedent texts. For further reading see: "The Actualization of a Distant Past: Carmen Boullosa's Historiographic Metafiction." *INTI: Revista de Literatura Hispánica* 42 (1995): 301-14.

demonstrates the impossibility of creating an original work or the idea that all writing is a form of re-writing past texts.

The use of metafiction and of a self-conscious narrator serves to draw attention to the suppression of identities through the manipulation of texts and representation. The narrator of *Son vacas, somos puercos*, makes repeated references to the narration of his story with phrases such as: “lo que voy a contar” (18), “lo que relataré” (19), “según la voy contando” (64), “he de compartir con el lector” (65), “desde donde hoy cuento (si aún estoy en algún sitio) estas historias” (118), and “ahora que escribo estas páginas con los ojos, los oídos y el corazón de J. Smeeks” (138). These metafictional references to the telling of his tale serve to remind the reader that the narrator is presenting his own subjective perspective in retelling the adventures of the pirates and buccaneers in the Caribbean. Smeeks also tells briefly of his relationship to the English pirate, Henry Morgan:

Fui también compañero de Henry Morgan, el más famoso de los ingleses en el mar Caribe, según supe de primera fuente, hijo de un labrador rico [. . .], se empleó en el puerto en algunos navíos destinados para la isla de Barbados, con los cuales determinó ir en servicio de quién después le vendió. Eso fue lo que supe, pero muchos años después de darlo como un hecho, Henry Morgan nos obligó (al editor y a mí) añadir un párrafo al libro: ‘Esquemelin se ha equivocado en lo que concierne a los orígenes de Sir Henry Morgan – hubo de agregarse a la edición inglesa -- . Éste es el hijo de un gentil hombre de la antigua nobleza, el condado de Monmouth, y él nunca ha sido servidor de nadie, salvo de su Majestad, el rey de Inglaterra’. (15)

This brief anecdote at the beginning of the novel serves to remind the reader from the start that all writing is a subjective version that is contrived by those in power to reflect their perspective and to support their position of power within the society.

In an article, Boullosa has commented on her decision to rewrite another version of Esquemelin's tale of pirates in the Caribbean. She said that one of her intentions was to destroy the earlier version: "me propuse destruir el libro de Esquemelin, desentrañar en él el espejo del alma de mi aventura personal" (218). Carrie C. Chorba observes that the choice to rewrite the content of the other work "literally beckons the reader to do a study of its sources and references – in short, to delve into its hypertextuality [. . .] In this playful challenge to her readers to explore the work's hypertextual relationships, Boullosa shifts emphasis from the author-text relationship to one between reader and text"(303). Speaking of *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Chorba observes that while Boullosa adopts both the structure and plot echoing many scenes of *Los piratas de América*, these echoes are only on the anecdotal level. While entire scenes are virtually transcribed, the discourse is re-worded and the anecdotal echoes serve to mark difference, not similarity (304-305). Chorba also observes that this novel "does not simply re-tell Esquemelin's memoirs for it often re-works the narrative material through alterations which function towards such goals as changes in characterization, or a radical twist in the narrative perspective" (304). Chorba observes modifications through the change to a first person narrative that shares in responsibility for the atrocities of the pirates, the presentation of the Indians as rightful owners of the lands and as valiant and courageous, and the addition of the character Negro Miel. According

to Chorba, Negro Miel represents racial tolerance and, in narrating his memory, Smeeks narrates the real vision of a utopian America (306). Boullosa re-writes the tales of adventure with the clear purpose of deconstructing the discourse of past versions through the difference in her own narrative. Past versions and translations of legends and history are recognized as new inventions, dependent upon the perspective and biased narrator.

If the version presented in *Son vacas, somos puercos* serves as an example of a postmodern reworking of past narratives that deconstructs authority in textual representation, then the addition of yet another version by the same author brings further attention to the question of originality and subjectivity in writing. *El médico de los piratas* repeats much of the content and many of the same episodes from *Son vacas, somos puercos*. Even though much of the text is an identical repetition of its antecedent, Boullosa reworks the discourse of the narrative by suppressing details of certain episodes (the incident between Ella and Smeeks on the ship and his subsequent obsession with her) and by adding greater elaboration to other episodes (the childhood of Lolónés, greater description of other characters, and a closed ending). It is not changes that the author makes in the second text but, rather, it is the extreme similarity between the two novels that serves to emphasize their difference. This play of difference and similarity serves to draw attention to the creative process and decision to suppress or to represent certain perspectives in the narrative discourse.

The self-consciousness of the narrators in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas* serves to draw increased attention to the text as an artificial

construction that is influenced by the perspective of a subjective or biased narrator. This technique serves to undermine the authority of the narrative discourse of the novel and, in doing so, it delegitimizes the authority of textual representation in general. As a result, the reader is reminded that no text can be accepted as an absolute authority in its presentation of content. Boullosa's readers are reminded again, that they must view all narrative discourses with suspicion and take an active role in the interpretation of meaning and creation of the text.

Like the narrators in *La Milagrosa*, *Antes*, and Boullosa's other works, the narrators of these parodic recyclings of pirate tales speak directly to their readers as interlocutors and comment on the act of creating the narrative. In *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas*, Smeeks is a self-conscious narrator. His metafictional self-reference is repeated and intensified by the narrator of *Duerme*. The self-consciousness of her narration complements the intertextual structure of the novel, which participates in the interrogation of literary and historical representation. The parodic recycling and metafictional retelling of the same or related tales in the novels of this chapter not only undermine the authority of past texts, but also propose alternate or additional versions of the same story with as much (or as little) authority as the texts that they parody.

Duerme: Identity and Textual Constructions

Duerme (1994) is set in colonial Mexico and narrates the life of Claire Fluercy, who in an intertextual reference reveals herself to be the character "Ella" from *Son*

vacas, somos puercos. Themes of identity and representation are interwoven throughout the structure and content of this novel, which like Boullosa's other works, constitutes a postmodern revisiting of the past. By deconstructing the making of history and legends as a self-reinforcing manipulation by society's institutions of power, Boullosa is also able to present a revision of the colonial past that recuperates marginalized discourses. In *Duerme*, Boullosa explores questions of gender and identity within the colonial patriarchy. As Jane Flax affirms:

Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience. In turn the experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race. (69-70)

According to Flax, gender not only constitutes a social relation, but also a relation of domination (83). Flax observes the following purpose in postmodern and feminist discourses:

to recover and explore the aspects of social relations that have been suppressed, unarticulated or denied within dominant male viewpoints [...] to recover and write the histories of women and [their] activities into the accounts and stories that cultures tell about themselves. (87)

Boullosa opens up representational space to voices that have been traditionally excluded as Other because of their sex, gender, race or class. By creating textual space for voices that have been marginalized from traditional discourses, Boullosa proposes a

representation that includes and embraces the many forms of Alterity and radically expands the possibilities for Mexican identity in the present.

In *Duerme*, Boullosa uses the strategy of telling and retelling the same history or fiction according to the prejudices of different perspectives or powers. The repetition of the same story within the novel is similar to the repetition of *Son vacas, somos puercos* in *El médico de los piratas*. It also functions to demythify the processes that create history and the construction of identity as social roles that are simultaneously represented and reinforced by historical texts. By repeating the narration of the same events at different points in the text, Boullosa emphasizes the existence of different and often contradictory perspectives.

In one instance, the narrator-protagonist, Claire, comments that “suceden tres cosas. Las tres las vivo al mismo tiempo, pero ¿cómo puedo contármelas?” She states: “Aunque parezca inverosímil artificio, me ocurren en el mismo lugar y momento tres diversos sucesos. Pero no es artificio, es la verdad” (51). She then tells the three versions, which correspond on the anecdotal level. In all three versions, the events narrated occurred after Claire, disguised as the Count Urquiza, had survived a hanging and burial. After being pulled out of the count’s grave and dressed as an indigenous woman, Claire walks past a lake with the count’s servants to his house. When she arrives at the house, Claire goes to bed and falls asleep. However, each version bears small transformations that denote a change of focus or the exclusion of elements presented in the other two versions. For example, two versions begin with the phrase, “Miramos la extensión del lago en su mayor parte seco, en silencio [. . .]” (51 y 52), and

they relate the arrival of a man. In one version, the man is described as an “emisario blanco” who arrives on foot. Claire, the narrator, expresses an attitude of shame and unhappiness upon seeing herself dressed as an indigenous woman. Because of her embarrassment, she is unable to express these feelings and thoughts. Everyone else ignores her, provoking her “silencio circunspecto” (52).

In the second version, the man (presumably the Count) arrives, mounted on a horse and disguised in Claire’s clothing as a French pirate. Claire recognizes her own clothing that was taken from her before she was abducted and drugged in order to take the count’s place for his hanging. She comments that this pirate costume corresponds to her past identity, which was taken from her along with the pirate’s clothing. Her tone in narrating this version expresses ire because the man had appropriated her identity by taking her clothing. As she narrates, she comments what she felt: “Lo miro con envidia, yo querría ser él [the man dressed with the costume and identity of a pirate]” (52). Because she is staring so openly at him, the man takes notice of her and lifts her onto the horse where he rapes her aided by his Indian servants. Afterwards, he lowers her from the horse and, as she describes it, “Espolea el caballo y veo cómo se va, con la identidad que yo había hecho para mí” (53-4). Even though it deals with most of the same events, the third version of the story does not correspond to the first two because there is no mention of the man who arrives either on foot or on horseback. In this version, one of the indigenous servants, Cosme, makes the water of the lake obey his will and rise until it arrives at their feet and lifts the half-constructed boats from the ground. (55).

These three versions of the same historical occurrence are told by the same narrator who affirms that all of the events of the three stories occurred at the same time and in the same place, representing three simultaneous but distinct perspectives: 1) that of the dominant patriarchal institutions where the behavior of the white man is seen as noble (especially because the voices of marginalized others are silenced and cannot contradict this perspective); 2) the experience of women in general and indigenous women in particular within a society that is determined by these dominant and marginalizing institutions; and 3) the indigenous cosmovision of a magical-real world. In accordance with postmodernism, these three perspectives are seen as simultaneous and united as part of the same reality, none having more validity than the others. This plurality of perspectives and the metafictional self-reference of the narrator when she says, “¿Cómo puedo contármelas?,” highlight the postmodern concern with the representation of a reality that is plural and diverse.

Later, when Claire comments on these simultaneous events to her literary friend, Pedro de Ocejá (who is linked to and depends upon the dominant hierarchy), he accepts the first version because it corresponds to his own perspective. He reacts to the second version initially by forgiving the man who raped Claire and by excusing his actions. Then he chooses to deny what happened altogether, saying “Tu cabeza estaría confundida [. . .]” (88). He employs a similar technique to discount the third perspective when he says: “¿quién iba a verlo hacer nada siquiera parecido a un maleficio que contraviniera ley alguna de la naturaleza? Sólo alguien recién salido de ataúd, llena de tierra del cementerio en la cabeza [. . .]” (89). Pedro values certain

versions of the story while excluding others. He gives authority to the version that corresponds to the interests of the dominant institutions, those in which the white man is the principal actor and is represented as good-natured and magnanimous, without committing atrocities against other marginalized peoples. He rejects the feminine and indigenous voices that express the suffering of the colonial Other from the abuses and injustices of the white man. Pedro also rejects the logic of the magical-real, which often represents the cosmovision of other cultures of the Americas and differs from that of western tradition.

Even though he contributes to the marginalization of feminine and indigenous voices from historical representation, he is also conscious of repressive power that is exercised in writing: "Escribir historias sí sirve, no digo que no pero sirve demasiado, es una manera de conquistar y vencer [. . .]" (77). The use of textual representation to include or exclude certain perspectives, in an exercise of social control that maintains the hierarchy of power has also been noted by Dussel as a part of the process of colonization and domination of Others. Dussel describes the tools of colonization as erotic, pedagogic, cultural, political, and economic domination that result in a covering over and negation of the Other (49-50). These processes include the denial of and exclusion of Others and their Alterity from dominant discourses of representation and may be seen as continuing well after colonization. Just as Boullosa experiments with a postmodern recycling of the same story and parody in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas*, the author presents three versions of the same story within a single text. The repetition on the anecdotal level of the same episode serves to

emphasize the suppression of certain details and the addition of others that coincide with a shift in perspective and can result in the negation of other representations.

In another episode that describes Claire's participation as leader of the Viceroy's soldiers in a battle against a tribe of rebellious Indians, Boullosa employs the narrative techniques of metafiction and repetition. As in the previous example, these strategies serve to reveal the processes of creating history, of giving preference to certain perspectives and, at the same time, actively excluding others. In the following example, multiple versions or perspectives of the same event are included in the narrative, but not all are presented through the eyes of Claire. The first version is described by Claire as a vague dream from which she had just awakened. In the dream, she is a soldier at the service of the Viceroy and she directs a group of soldiers beyond the city limits to hunt a monster that has been terrorizing the nearby towns and tearing out the hearts of children. Upon awakening, Claire cannot explain her wounds or her convalescence and these are clues that perhaps she had not been dreaming. Because of these clues, she says: "he tenido que convencerme de que parte de este sueño es verdad" (96). Since what really happened is still unclear, however, Claire cites a second version of the same battle: "lo repitiré como lo cuenta Mariano Baso, uno de los hombres que formaban parte de la brigada que yo formé y de la cual fui parte: [. . .]"(96). The text that follows is in the form of a chronicle of the conquest, in which the soldier, Baso, explains how they formed the squadron of the best soldiers in order to hunt and bring back the head of the Indian chief, Yaguey, to the Viceroy with the promise of liberty

and compensation.²⁰ The Viceroy compensated everyone generously, gave freedom to the prisoners who had been part of the army, and “recomendó que no saliera de nosotros [los soldados] la historia del comportamiento de Clara Flor [Claire], y con celo, me parece, no hemos querido hablarla ni con nuestras mujeres o hijos, no con nuestros criados y amigos [. . .]” (96-99).

A little later during Claire’s convalescence, the Viceroy and Mariano Baso (the same soldier-chronicler cited above) appear in her room with the head of Yuguey, the Indian chief. The head is accompanied by a strange book of drawings that represent the events of the battle. At the end of the book of drawings, there are some phrases indicating that the rebellious Indians threaten to kill all Spaniards if their demand for the head of Claire in exchange for that of their chief is not met (109-11). This book presents a third representation of the events of the battle, but from the perspective of the conquered Indians. After presenting the head of Yuguey and the “libro extraño,” the Viceroy orders silence, “que nadie lo sepa, que nadie, mucho menos, lo escriba. Hay que olvidarlo [. . .]” (110).

With this story repeated in three different versions in the same text, including Claire’s testimony, the soldier’s chronicle, and the book of drawings as intertextual elements, Boullosa again emphasizes the multiplicity of perspectives for one historical event and the change of focus that each represents. This presentation is in accordance with the skepticism of New Historicism within postmodernism, in which history is seen

²⁰ This version follows the model of the chronicles of the conquest, like those by Hernán Cortéz, Bernal Díaz, Cabeza de la Vaca and others.

as “ a tangled skein of dispersed narratives, none of which was necessarily more significant than any other [. . .]” (Eagleton 197). Also in the narration of the plot, each version reveals the direct intervention of the Viceroy in the creation and representation of history, demonstrating how the dominant power of the colony determines the content of the history, or which perspective will be valued as the historical truth. Eagleton signals this perception of history as part of the postmodern projection of New Historicism, in which it is seen that “all knowledge of the past was skewed by the interests and desires of the present [of its representation . . .]. There was no single determinable truth to any particular narrative or event, just a conflict of interpretations whose outcome was finally determined by power rather than truth” (197).

Throughout the novel, there are other examples of intertextuality with Christian and Greco-Roman myths, including meta-textual works of theatre and poetry. The inclusion of these pieces and of their very creation within the plot of the novel demonstrates the biased subjectivity of the author in all writing and serves to blur the borders between genres. This intertextuality includes self-referential commentaries about the creation of the metafictional episodes and about the invention of the novel as a whole. Eagleton describes these strategies as part of the postmodern form which is ironic and stresses its own character as a constructed artifice by drawing “attention to its own 'intertextual' nature, its parodic recyclings of other works which are themselves no more than such recyclings. Part of what it parodies is past history [. . .]” (202). In this way, the structure of the novel presents the theme of representation in a history that is nothing more than a prejudiced and artificial creation. With each retelling, it is evident

that identity is often determined by textual representation or its repression and by the privileging of certain perspectives in discourses of history.

The analysis of the structural elements of *Duerme* is interwoven with some of its principal themes. These themes constitute the postmodern questioning of the concepts of history and of identity, limited according to language, race, sex, nationality, and gender by the perspectives that are privileged in historical representation. A principal theme is the very demythification of history and the erasure of the limits between fiction and history. This theme is exposed through the examination of the metafictional structure of the novel which underscores the presence in fiction and history of different and biased perspectives that privilege and exclude different identities in accordance with the dominant discourse of society. The two examples already mentioned demonstrate how some perspectives have been eliminated from official history or invalidated by dominant powers. The effect on identity is seen even more clearly with the following example, where the perspectives of Claire and others are excluded from official history. In a conversation between Pedro, Claire, and the Indian woman “de las manos tibias” (a character without a name for the majority of the novel), they say:

[Pedro]—[. . .] Ha decidido que Claire no aparezca en ningún documento [. . .]

[Claire]--Como si así pudiera borrarne [. . .]

[la india]--Sí, y a ti te borra, que nada sabrá nadie de ti nunca [. . .] (127).

The exclusion of Claire and the perspective of the marginalized Others from official representations of the past serves to negate their existence and, as a consequence, deny their identity, which is tied to the past.

Duerme presents an exploration of the shifting gender roles of its protagonist and challenges the imposition of limited roles based on sexual identity that are determined by patriarchal hierarchies of the colony. In her article, "Escritura, historia y género en veinte años de novela mexicana escrita por mujeres," Ana Rosa Domenella observes this theme within the postmodern and feminist tendencies of *Duerme*. She also notes that the play of identity and gender in the protagonist results in the questioning of the roles that are forced on individuals (particularly on women) according to their sex. Domenella adds that this interrogation also undermines the institutions that create fixed categories of homogenous identities, including the absolute concepts of masculinity and femininity (16-17). In *Son vacas, somos puercos*, *El médico de los piratas*, and *Duerme*, Boullosa deconstructs traditional textual representation of the subject as an artificial and biased construction determined by the limiting categories of language, sex, gender, race, nationality and social status.

The content and structure of *Duerme* complement one another by creating a palimpsestic effect in the novel that corresponds to the layered identity of the protagonist and narrator. A principal theme of the novel is the identity and textual self-representation of the protagonist, Claire Fleurcy, who constitutes the intersection between many identities, superimposed or transformed, with a simple change of costume. She is the principal narrator and protagonist of *Duerme*, a character whose hybrid identity is composed of the many roles she plays, according to the disguise or mask that she wears. Throughout the course of the novel, Claire is the son of a French prostitute, a French and Lutheran pirate, a Spanish American count, an indigenous

woman, a French woman and courtesan in the Viceroy's court, and a soldier in the Viceroy's army. All of these roles combine to form the hybrid character of Claire, a product of all of the identities of her past. Claire serves as a symbol that captures the mestizo identity of the Mexican people, an identity that is constituted by a history of influences that are equally heterogeneous. Tomás Granados Salinas affirms this idea and touches upon the theme of a suppressed indigenous identity when he observes "la de las manos tibias [es como] un símbolo de una confusa herencia prehispánica latente, que da el título a la novela: la Claire inmortal, mexicana al fin, o tal vez sólo mestiza, aguarda la ocasión de su próxima vigilia" (60). For Granados Salinas, the novel explores Mexico's national roots in search of a "mestizo" identity (58).

Claire's identity as a symbol of Mexico's mestizo roots is accentuated in the last two chapters of the novel by a shift in the principal narrator, from Claire to Pedro. In the first seven chapters of the novel, the principal narrator is also the protagonist, Claire. In the last two chapters, Claire shifts from being the active subject of the narration to the object of the text that is narrated by her friend Pedro. Claire is trapped within her body, which has been induced into an eternal sleep as a result of the magic that originally saved her from hanging at the opening of the novel. As if to emphasize this transition in the text, Pedro narrates the last two chapters while he carries the inert body of Claire to a cave outside of the city. This metalepsis, or change in narrators, highlights a shift in perspective in the novel which serves to remind the reader of the bias that lies behind each narrative discourse and that is determined by point of view.

Similarly, Pedro's self-conscious comments destroy any concept whatsoever of a history that is not subjective or essentially an artificial creation determined by the prejudice of perspective. This is achieved when he comments:

Lo más que puedo hacer, a menos que suceda un milagro [. . .] es contar como *hubiera* terminado la vida de Claire, de haber regresado ella a México, según me convenga mi seso y conjetura. [. . .] En lo que acaece, está aquí: [. . .]. (134-5)

The last chapter that follows this comment is Pedro's representation of what would have happened if the aged Pedro had been able to return Claire's body to the city before he died. It is clear however that Pedro was unable to complete this task and that Claire's body remains magically asleep just outside of Mexico City, or on the periphery of the center. If Claire represents Mexico's hybrid identity, it is symbolic that her body rests somewhere on the outskirts of the city, just as the mestizo has existed in the margins of textual representation in the histories and works of fiction that have been published by the powerful editorial houses of Mexico City. In *La otra voz*, Paz observes the failed utopias that were initiated by Modernity with the colonization of the Americas and consequential projects of liberation and equality. Referring to end of the twentieth century, he describes a resurrection of buried, forgotten and repressed realities:

Vivimos una vuelta de los tiempos: no una revolución sino, en el antiguo y más profundo sentido de la palabra, una revuelta. Un regreso al origen que es, asimismo, un volver al principio [. . .] un recommenzo. Resurrección de realidades enterradas, reaparición de lo olvidado y lo reprimido que, como otras veces en la historia, puede desembocar en una regeneración. Las vueltas al origen son casi siempre revueltas: renovaciones, renacimientos. (126)

This resurrection corresponds to the recovery of suppressed or denied voices of Others that is described by Flax as a part of postmodern and feminist discourses. Pedro expresses a faith in the dormant identity that is symbolized by Claire when he leaves the future of the Mexican nation in her hands, saying: "Claire sabrá" (146). All that remains is to awaken the voices of a hybrid Mexican identity from the margins, symbolically resting in Claire's body on the outskirts of the Federal District.

Duerme, along with Boullosa's other novels is an attempt to open up and create new textual spaces for the representation of marginalized and heterogeneous voices. In this novel the author utilizes words in order to destroy and then construct hybrid and layered identities for Mexicans who have been marginalized since their colonialization by Spain. Through metafiction, intertextuality, parody and recycling of texts, Boullosa proposes a dialogue with the past which questions traditional textual representations and attempts to create space for the voices that were marginalized and erased from those texts. Not only do the novels of this chapter parody previous renderings of pirate legends and the colonial past, but like *Antes* and *Mejor desaparece*, they also serve to parody the Bildungsroman or novel of formation, where the subject develops into maturity and assumes an identity that permits integration into the established social order. The narrators and characters of Boullosa's works do not ultimately become a part of the world in which they move. In their attempts to become a part of the social order of the colony, they become alienated from themselves and disappear at the end of the novel in a process that might better be described as de-formation or disintegration

rather than development. In each of the novels, the narrator-protagonist (Smeeks in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El medico de los piratas* and Claire in *Duerme*) speaks from a space that is beyond the time and space of the novel, or from the margins that are not normally represented in traditional literature.

The Past Reworked in a Revision of National History and Identity

Through the novels discussed in this chapter, *Son vacas, somos puercos*, *El médico de los piratas*, and *Duerme*, Carmen Boullosa creates a discourse that subverts the authority of traditional history and fiction as well as the concept of truth as represented by that writing. With this destruction, she erases the limits imposed on individual identity by historical subjectivity and the lack of representation of suppressed and repressed subjects. The reconstruction of an historical and colonial past serves to demythify and deconstruct colonial history, myths and legends. Linda Hutcheon has described this return in postmodern writing as historiographic metafiction, where history is being re-thought as a human construct. Hutcheon has identified the revisiting of history in postmodern thought as the presence of the past and describes this concept as a critical revisiting and ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society. For her, postmodern art forms present a critical reflection and reworking of historical narrative in fiction (4). Boullosa, also affirms that “El pasado nos da el presente, el presente como lo vemos hoy es lo que nos da la forma que tenemos” (218). In an interview, Boullosa comments on her own ideas about literature: “creo que la literatura es un diálogo muy profundo con la sociedad; es una revisión crítica de nuestra

actitud como comunidad y como individuos, [. . .] “ (Ibsen 54). In her novels, Boullosa returns to the period of conquest and colonization in order to initiate a dialogue with the social institutions of that period that have continued to determine hierarchies of power in present day Mexico. By reworking the relation of the present to the past, she proposes a revision of national history and identity.

CHAPTER 6

THE PRESENCE OF THE COLONIAL PAST IN LLANTO: NOVELAS IMPOSIBLES AND CIELOS DE LA TIERRA

Assimilation of the Colonial Past

Son vacas, somos puercos, *El médico de los piratas*, and *Duerme* return to the seventeenth century to explore the construction of identity as it is determined by the body's position within the colonial order, a system based on the domination of Others. These novels also question writing forms that attempt to portray the past and its subjects and, through this interrogation, they reveal the suppression of Others from textual representation. Like the novels of the previous chapters, *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra* focus on the theme of the conquest and colonization of Mexico, reworking previous exclusive representations into texts that are open in their presentation of multiple perspectives. While these works share the revision of Mexico's history with *Son vacas, somos puercos*, *El médico de los piratas*, and *Duerme*, they also bring the past into present and even future time periods. *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra* not only re-evaluate historical representation from a present or future perspective, but they also reveal the significance of the past in defining many aspects of contemporary life in Mexico.²¹ Boullosa employs a

²¹ The importance of a sense of history in Mexico is evidenced by the great attention and value that is given to historical figures and events through monuments, the preservation of historical sites, and

simultaneous narrative structure to unite the past and present in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and the past, present, and future *Cielos de la tierra*. In doing so, the author transgresses traditional literary norms and temporal logic to portray the multiple layers of history and reality that constitute the conception of identity in the present. This process corresponds to the reconciliation with the colonial past that is proposed by Leopoldo Zea in *El pensamiento latinoamericano*.²²

Leopoldo Zea observes the importance of the colonial past for the realization of Latin American identity in the second half of the twentieth century:

Nosotros los hispanoamericanos hemos sido, por nuestro pasado, conquistadores y conquistados, coloniales, ilustrados, liberales, conservadores y revolucionarios [. . .] ¿los problemas que planteó la Conquista, la Colonia, la Independencia y los que se han seguido planteando en Hispanoamérica son problemas resueltos en forma tal que ya no se tiene la necesidad de volverlos a plantear? [. . .] La respuesta a estas preguntas tiene que ser negativa. (53)

Zea describes past attitudes towards colonial history as attempts to mask, cover or deny the first reality of *Spanish America*, the colony, a reality that still has not been assimilated. According to Zea, the inherited colonial past has continued to be an issue

museums. It is difficult to walk the streets of a Mexican city and not get a strong impression of the importance of the nation's history to its citizens at all levels in society.

²² All citations from this work refer to the third edition that was published in 1976. As noted in the prologue by the author, parts of this book are re-published from a previous work, *Dos etapas del pensamiento en Hispanoamérica*. Additional chapters and revisions were added in the second and third editions and the third edition expresses ideas that were written between 1949 and 1976. While the ideas included in this book refer to the entire twentieth century up to those dates and correspond generationally to authors that precede Boullosa, Zea's principal concerns remain applicable in the last decades of the century and are reflected in the writing of many recent Latin American authors.

that Latin Americans argue about, affirm, or deny, demonstrating that the conquest and the colony have remained problematic for the construction of identity and self-representation (52-53). He acknowledges the urgent need in Latin America to effect this assimilation in order to no longer feel threatened by the past (63). Through a dialogue with the past, the novels of the previous chapter and the two novels of this chapter, *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* (1992) and *Cielos de Tierra* (1996) are an attempt to reconcile national identity in the present with the legacy of the conquest and the colony.

In *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la Tierra*, Boullosa applies the strategies of historiographic metafiction to transgress temporal and literary norms through a narrative that is self-conscious, plural, and simultaneous. Multiple, self-interrupting narrators synchronize the past with the present, thus assimilating the Mexican past into its present as a possible reconciliation. The fragmented structure of both novels combines diverse narrative components into collage and palimpsest styles that serve to incorporate and deconstruct traditional literary and historical forms. These novels manipulate and experiment with established literary norms that are no longer seen as adequate in the expression of reality, history or identity. *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra* open a new dialogue between the past, the present and the future, constituting a re-examination of the relations between reality, fiction and history. The content of the two novels transgresses time barriers and traditional temporal logic in an active revision and reworking of history that permits a dialogue and possible reconciliation with the colonial past. This postmodern convergence of multiple

time periods renders a better reflection of the reality of the Mexican present, which is inextricably intertwined with the events of its history.

Moctezuma's Presence of the Past in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* ²³

Llanto: Novelas imposibles (1992) is a novel that, according to Boullosa, attempts to tell the story of the sixteenth century Aztec Emperor, Moctezuma. The novel, which is characterized by postmodern hybridity in a collage of multiple and fragmented narratives, re-examines the problematic representation of Mexican history and its impact on contemporary Mexican identity. In her study of historiographic metafiction in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, Carrie C. Chorba observes that the use of historical subjects, such as Moctezuma, has enabled Boullosa to "create upon historical basis, to surpass historiography with her imagination, to continue history's intertextual discourse, and to enshrine a new version—one which is grounded in past documents; but has a decidedly new perspective or optic" (302). Boullosa's historiographic metafiction serves to question and rework previous representations of the colonial past in novels that are decidedly open in the presentation of multiple, heterogeneous and often contradictory discourses. The structural, stylistic, and thematic features of *Llanto* create space for a dialogue with the past which allows readers to question and re-evaluate history and former truths as

²³ Linda Hutcheon uses the term *presence of the past* to describe the postmodern "re-evaluation of and dialogue with the past in light of the present." See *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989. 12-20.

well as their relation with the past, permitting an opportunity for reconciliation with that past.

The open and plural nature of this novel is precisely what creates the interrogative nature of postmodern texts, which according to Catherine Belsey, invite “the reader to produce answers to the questions it implicitly or explicitly raises” (91). The concepts of truth and history are called into question and, as Hutcheon points out, this strategy “leads to the acknowledgement, not of truth, but of truths in the plural, truths that are socially, ideologically, and historically conditioned” (18). *Llanto*, like Boullosa’s other novels, reveals the nature of official Mexican history as a hegemonic discourse that has excluded the voices of others in the interests of the dominant institutions of power. Through the juxtaposition of diverse and sometimes inconsistent or even antagonistic discourses, this work undermines traditional representations of Mexican history and fiction by displacing them from an exclusive center to an inclusive heterogeneity.

As the title *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* would indicate, the task of representing voices and memories that have been marginalized by former historical representations is not easily achieved. One of the novel’s implied authors comments on the impossibility of this project with the following words:

Sin embargo, no escapa a mi entendimiento de escritor el que esta novela sea imposible. [. . .] ¡La novela que yo quiero escribir es una mentira, está llena de paja en lugar de estar animada de vísceras! --¡La novela que he de escribir es una novela imposible! (39-40)

The title is a self-conscious reference to the impossibility of representing the story of Moctezuma from his perspective or from the perspective of anyone who was disenfranchised by the Spanish conquest and colonization and thereby excluded from or distorted in Mexico's historical memory. The implied author identifies the impossibility of the novel's content because of the difficulty of representing the sixteenth-century optic of Moctezuma through twentieth-century Spanish, a language that is based on other ontological references. The author-narrator continues her metafictional musings while saying:

La confesión de Moctezuma el joven tiene que ser hecha en el marco de su cultura para ser comprensible. Empresa inútil: Tenochtitlan ha muerto y su memoria es confusa [. . .]. ¿cómo podría yo armar el discurso de M. X., si recuperar su entorno es imposible? (39-40)

In spite of this recognition of impossibility and the frustration experienced in the narration of the novel, the task is not abandoned and repeated efforts are made to retell the story. Different narrators begin to tell the story of Moctezuma and then abandon the attempt, resulting in the collection of incomplete fragments. However, the very inconsistency and gaps in this composite narrative represent the collective history of Mexico through the telling of the story of Moctezuma. It achieves a representation that is perhaps more accurate than any endeavor that pretends to be absolute and complete.

In its attempt to tell Moctezuma's version of his meeting with the Spaniards, *Llanto* relates the fantastic rebirth of the Aztec emperor in the twentieth century and his subsequent interaction in modern day Mexico City with three women, Laura, Margarita,

and Luisa. The tale of a twentieth-century Moctezuma is temporally impossible according to traditional logic. His story is represented by a narrative structure that would be considered impossible according to traditional literary norms, which demand self-sufficient, closed and absolute texts. The self-conscious narration and metafictional self-reference, as seen in the examples above, bring into question the work's own novelistic form. The novel's title further emphasizes its transgression of the literary genre by simultaneously proposing and denying its definition as a novel.

This and other metafictional references highlight the narrative as an artificial construction and emphasize the agent of its creation as someone who is subject to social and ideological conditioning. Hutcheon has described self-consciousness about form in postmodern fiction as "a characteristic that problematizes historical knowledge and ideology and works to foreground the implication of the narrative and the representation in our strategies of making meaning in our culture" (183). *Llanto* attempts to include diverse and multiple discourses in its representation of the story of Moctezuma through multiple and ambiguous narrators with different perspectives, excerpts from official documents that were once considered historical, and fragments of invented historical testimonies. The self-reflexive discourse of the novel submits all textual representation, including its own narrative, to a questioning which requires the reader to participate more actively in reading the text.

Recognizing that it is not possible to tell one absolute and totalizing representation of Moctezuma, the author chooses to leave gaps and contradictions in the histories that she reproduces and creates. The result is a narrative that is indeterminant,

de-centered, and more inclusive, challenging readers to examine the past for themselves. The narrative discourse interrupts itself with fragments from Moctezuma's own memories, the testimony of others from the sixteenth century, chronicles of the Spanish conquerors, and commentary from multiple narrators presumably from the twentieth century. The intercalation of narrators from different time periods contributes to the convergence of time in the novel and, in this way, it can return to the past to examine the problem of history within the reality of the present. Consequently, the novel examines the question of contemporary Mexican identity.

The poetic style of this novel and of this first section, in particular, is characteristic of Boullosa's writing and evokes what Ann Duncan has identified as "the erosion of the distinctions between prose and poetry, and the emergence of narratives created through patterns of suggestion rather than by developing an argument—narratives that are self-sufficient works of art" (6). Boullosa's first publications were collections of poetry and she has also described the process of writing novels as a poetic process. The novel opens with three discontinuous sections entitled "La aparición," "el despertar," and "POR UNA ESTAMPIDA DE IMÁGENES." The first section uses a metaphorical and symbolic language, opening with the line, "Lo primero que apareció fue el hormiguero" (11). The first section of *Llanto* relates Moctezuma's magical reappearance in the twentieth century in the following words:

Así, se formó otra vez, sin madre, el cuerpo...que no había alcanzado a ver caer lo que hacía nueve veces cincuenta y dos años él había dejado desplomándose, y así fue como llegó, el 13 de agosto de 1989, acostado sobre el húmedo pasto, durmiendo, soñando, envuelto en trece mantas

bordadas y descansando el peso sobre las plumas de águila y la piel de jaguar [. . .] Así fue como apareció. (11-12)

The second section, “el despertar,” is an impressionistic description that is also a mixture of poetry and prose, presented from the perspective of Moctezuma as he forms and gains consciousness from his dormant state. The description focuses primarily on physical sensations of pain and discomfort as the body awakens. This part presents a succession of images that might compare to a baby’s experience of birth or to the metamorphosis of a butterfly from the pupal state: “Se diría que el cuerpo incómodo le está ardiendo, que respirar por primera vez, despertar después de siglos, era estar en aceite hirviendo y soportar adentro de la piel frita un enorme cuerpo enfermo” (14). The third opening section, “POR UNA ESTAMPIDA DE IMÁGENES,” also presents a form of poetry in prose and consists of a series of brief images, ranging from a few lines to a few paragraphs, each with its own subtitle. These impressions are a non-linear patchwork of the memories of Moctezuma and include impressions from his childhood, from when he was most powerful as emperor, and from the first meetings and subsequent dealings with Cortés and the Spanish soldiers, including his last moments and death. Boullosa creates a possible representation of Moctezuma’s perspective of the world in such a way that the descriptions of contact with the *conquistadores* seem almost to invade and disrupt the internal logic of the narrative. Without narrating the story of Moctezuma’s interaction with Cortés and his men, the text dramatizes the clash of two cultures, the lack of understanding, and the utter confusion that this experience created for Moctezuma through the combination of discordant narrative discourses.

The reader may already approach the text with a raised level of skepticism due to its title. After reading these first three sections, the traditional reader who is conditioned to lineal narrative, or at least the western perspective in the telling of a story, becomes disconcerted by the non-traditional presentation of information which appears to favor other modes of perceiving and expressing reality. To some extent, the reader is disoriented by the text and must change his or her way of reading the novel as it continues with eight other "fragmentos de novelas," interspersed with sections narrated in the alternating voices of the three twentieth-century women of the novel, Laura, Margarita and Luisa. Each of these women narrates her experience of the same events surrounding their meeting with Moctezuma, after finding him asleep in Chapultapec Park. The multiple perspectives that they provide for the same history emphasize once again the subjectivity behind narrative discourse. The "fragmentos de novelas" are narrated by different implied authors and continue the metafictional self-reference of the first fragment in describing the impossibility of writing a novel about Moctezuma. Each fragment represents a new attempt by a different narrator to tell the story of Moctezuma that ends only in frustration. These segments end with metafictional commentary by the narrative voices that compare the idea of writing about Moctezuma with particles of dust in the wind to be carried to the next narrator who will attempt again the impossible novel.

These fragments serve to emphasize the fictionality and subjectivity in *Llanto* and subvert the novelistic form of the work. The metafictional self-reflexivity in this text corresponds to the postmodern text as described by Hutcheon: "an anti-repressive

liberation of the reader from conventions which were representations of dominant social and political institutions [. . .]” (206). According to Hutcheon, readers are given more power in the interpretation of the text and its multiple discourses, and along with this freedom, a greater responsibility and engagement in the reading of fiction (206-207). Because the readers are further empowered, the meaning that they derive from the novel has as much value as any other interpretation in the text. The authority of the implied authors is reduced to that of another subjective discourse or version within a text of multiple heterogeneous discourses.

The subversion of traditional textual authority also applies to the fragments of historical documents from colonial codices, chronicles and other historical sources that are included throughout the novel: *Códice Ramírez*, *Códice Aubin*, *Las cartas de relación* by Hernán Cortés, and the writing of Antonio de Solís. In addition, to these official historical texts, the novel includes testimony by an unidentified “Otra voz” that is the voice of an Aztec who carried Moctezuma’s body from village to village in search of a place that would receive him for burial. Another section that is entitled “Otra voz” is in the first person plural and represents the voice of the “pueblo” – or subjects of Moctezuma. This novel contains a plurality of voices that represents Moctezuma’s perspective, multiple and metafictionally self-conscious narrators as implied authors, descriptions by fictitious characters, historical documents, and the possible testimony of other voices from the sixteenth century. All of these discourses are juxtaposed within the same work and all speak with equal authority.

Llanto constitutes a collage or pastiche of diverse discourses and perspectives and does not privilege any single discourse over another. It does not reject past hegemonic representations that were rendered by the dominant power structures of the colony, nor does it privilege any single point of view over the others. Moreover, it does not merge all representations into a mixed single identity since it permits the plurality of voices and representations to predominate in the overall portrayal of Mexican history. This inclusive nature is precisely what Leopoldo Zea proposes for the needed process of assimilation in Latin America:

La conquista realizó el primer acto de superposición de una cultura sobre otra. Lejos de asimilar la cultura indígena, se empeñó en borrarla [. . .] La toma de conciencia de esta situación de esta historia, de este pasado es la que puede poner fin a esa historia de acumulaciones, de suposiciones [. . .] es la que puede impedir que tal situación siga existiendo; es la que puede originar igualmente una cultura que no refute al viejo modelo occidental, sino que surja de la experiencia propia del hombre de esta América sobre su realidad. (484-85)

The heterogeneity of this work transgresses the traditional generic boundaries between fiction and history and constitutes a re-evaluation of narrative discourses in their representation of history and reality.

Through its questioning of the writing of both literature and history, *Llanto* places the burden of responsibility for understanding on the reader. Boullosa's readers must interpret and speculate to fill in the gaps left by the structure of her novel. This process includes an interrogation of the work – of its many fragments and as a whole – and it results in the reader's reconstruction of the past, which in turn, determines the

their vision of the present. By problematizing historical knowledge and ideology that influence narrative discourse, the novel empowers readers to reexamine the past and their relation to that past in a process that permits the reconciliation referred to by Zea, which is necessary for the realization of a present identity.

In *Llanto*, Boullosa destroys past representations of the story of Moctezuma through an open heterogeneous text that transgresses literary norms and permits the reader to reexamine present constructions of identity that were based on the historical past. *Cielos de la tierra* enacts a similar temporal transgression through multiple rewritings of the past in time periods that would correspond to the reader's past, present and future. In this novel, Boullosa also uses strategies of historiographic metafiction similar to those seen in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles*. According to Chorba, the result is a textual competition, in which "revisions and rewritings . . . vie for the inherent powers of historicism -- powers that concretize and institutionalize a singular optic or perspective and contribute to a controlled, configured world vision" (301-2). Boullosa reworks representations of the past in order to reveal their bias and present a more open, plural, and inclusive representation of history and reality that is shaped by that past.

History as Process in *Cielos de la tierra*: The Presence and Future of the Past

The novel *Cielos de la tierra* (1997) begins with a letter from the author, Carmen Boullosa, in which she describes the "forma irregular y múltiple" of the work.

The form of this text characterizes it as a postmodern manifestation of late twentieth-century literature which, according to critics, presents discourses that are fragmented, multiple, simultaneous, self-reflexive and metafictional.²⁴ Like *Llanto*, the discursive techniques in *Cielos de la tierra* transgress narrative norms and traditional temporal logic. In the narrative of the novel, there are at least three spacio-temporal instances: the present of the narrator, Lear, in some post-apocalyptic and undetermined future; the present of the translator and narrator, Estela, during a twentieth-century past; and the present of the autobiographic memoirs of Hernando de Rivas in the Sixteenth Century.²⁵ The temporal indetermination of this novel presents a critical dialogue between the past, present, and future, recognizing that none of these time periods can exist without the others. Through this dialogue, the novel constitutes a postmodern re-examination of the relations between language, history, and identity. It challenges the dominant discourses of tradition and, at the same time, proposes a recuperation of the past in a process of reconciliation as described by Zea.

The postmodern character of the narrative is signaled in its first pages by the self-conscious commentary given by the multiple authors or narrators. The first pages include a note for the "Querido lector" that is signed by Carmen Boullosa and another "Nota del autor" that is signed by Juan Nepomuceno Rodríguez Álvarez. In her note,

²⁴ Linda Hutcheon, Terry Eagleton and Raymond Leslie Williams are just a few of the critics who have noted these characteristics in postmodern writing.

²⁵ It is important to note that these are not the only spaces of time that are implied by the narrative structure. The temporal spaces of the multiple implied authors, Carmen Boullosa, and the readers of the novel could be included in an examination of the dialogue with the past.

Boullosa denies being the only author of the novel and makes reference to three characters that she first recognizes as the authors. She then contradicts herself by adding that the true authorship does not belong to any of the three authors mentioned above. This denial and the presence of the note by Juan Nepomuceno Rodríguez Álvarez as "Nota del autor" puts the authorship of the novel into question and destabilizes the traditional concepts of fiction.

These notes serve as an introduction to the anti-totalizing novel that is fragmented into at least four intercalated discourses that interrupt one another: 1) the autobiographic memories of the Mexican-Indian, Hernando de Rivas, translated from memories in his mother tongue to Latin through the process of writing them in the sixteenth century; 2) the notes, commentary and memories of Estela, translator from Latin to Spanish in the twentieth century; and 3) the notes, commentary, and memories of Lear who lives in some undetermined future and translates Estela's version into her own unspecified language.²⁶ Additionally, throughout the novel, there are notes by an unidentified editor that present a fourth discourse. In traditional writing, the editor's notes would present a voice of unquestionable authority over the work as a whole. However, because he or she is not identified, these notes do not have more authority than the notes of Estela or Lear, or than any other part of the text, for that matter. The

²⁶ Lear's language could be determined to be Esperanto because the subtitles of all of the sections are written in Esperanto or in a form that is very similar to it. Lear and Estela are the only narrators that could have knowledge of this language and since Lear is the last translator of the document, it is likely that she wrote the section titles. As an additional note, it is evident in the text that Lear is a female because the adjectives used to describe her are feminine: for example, "fui gestada" and "soy la única" (15).

unidentified editor's notes represent just another voice among the plurality of the text's narrators.

In addition to proposing multiple and ambiguous authorship and narrative voices, it is important for a postmodern analysis that the text that is read by the reader be, according to its narrators, the result of a series of translations and transcriptions. Lear, an archeologist who investigates "el tiempo de la Historia" (which in the novel is the twentieth century), describes how she found the manuscript of Hernando de Rivas in the National Library of Mexico while looking for the works of Álvaro Mutis, her preferred poet.²⁷ She describes the manuscript in the following words:

El manuscrito se conforma de dos unidades, no sucesivas sino intermitentes. Una de ellas fue escrita por Hernando de Rivas, [. . .] pero su versión no llegó a mis manos en su idioma original, que fue el latín, sino en la traducción que hace de ella la autora de la segunda unidad del manuscrito, Estela Díaz. Estela se presentará a sí misma en las siguientes páginas. Sólo quiero aclarar que hubiera preferido paleografiar un texto más literario que el suyo. Porque este manuscrito no es invención, o no mayor que la que no pudieron evitar sus autores. Llegó a mis manos, y de mis manos lo traslado a este lugar. (30)

Thus, it is emphasized that the original text that has been translated and transferred between two languages and time periods that are literally and ontologically distinct.

²⁷ Because Lear's text was written in a post-apocalyptic future after the twentieth century and after the demise of humankind in that century, it is logically impossible for the readers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century to have access to her text. Furthermore, it is possible that the fictional text that Lear transcribes and writes is in another language that is similar to Esperanto and not in the Spanish of Carmen Boullosa's novel. At the end of Lear's narrative she describes the disintegration of her civilization, which creates further doubt as to the possibility of her text still existing except perhaps as an artifact that a future species might find. The impossibility of the novel that is implied within this fictional work may compare to the impossibility of representation in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles*.

The fact that it is a work of translation and transcription implies also the subjective bias imposed by its translator in choosing the exact words of the translation and deciding the parts to be included in the new version. Both Estela and Lear insert their reactions and comments into the text that they are translating and narrating to the reader. They also add footnotes that include historical information, references to other texts and to the existence of certain persons mentioned in Hernando's memoirs. These notes appear to give authority and authenticity to the text as an objective and scientific document that corroborates and presents an absolute truth. However, the comments of Estela and Lear provide evidence of their subjectivity in translating the manuscript. Estela comments implicitly on her own bias and invention in the process of translating the original text when she says:

El manuscrito está en bastante mal estado. Algunos pasajes son ilegibles por las manchas en el papel, otros, o ya han desaparecido del todo, o se me van quedando en las manos al intentar leerlos [. . .] Era mío, lo decidí desde que pensé trabajar con él, y a mi modo remedié las ausencias. (53)

With this statement, she recognizes the authenticity of the manuscript but, by calling it her own, she also denies accuracy and authority of her own translation of the manuscript. She further highlights her own subjective act of creation and invention in translating Hernando's text with the following statement:

Me he ido tomando, incluso, la libertad de acompletar también las partes que aluden a su propia persona [Hernando], echando mano de lo que mi imaginación me regale [. . .] ¿Por qué no? Es *mi* lectura,

exageradamente personal, de un manuscrito que *me* pertenece, que me habla a *mí* desde el siglo XVI, me explica *mi* presente. (67)

These comments draw attention to the fact that the readers cannot rely on Estela's accurate translation of Hernando's manuscript and, in doing so, they emphasize the subjective influence that is imposed in all writing.

Hernando also reminds readers of the manipulation of discourses according to the bias of those in control when he censors his own writing and invents false sections in his memoirs. Without any transition, he begins to write some sections in Spanish (the change is indicated in a footnote by Estela) that interrupt the narration of his memories with descriptions of indigenous customs, similar to those that were commonly written by the priests of the time. Again without transition, he returns to his original discourse in Latin and excuses the interruption, explaining that someone was spying over his shoulder and, for that reason, he had to invent a different subject matter so as not to offend or arouse suspicions. The discourses of Lear, Estela, and Hernando are all metafictional and self-conscious of the process of their own creation and even the artificiality of their own discourse. Additionally, all three include intertextual quotes and references to other authors that serve to emphasize or comment on their own discourses or on the text that they are translating. *Cielos de la tierra* is the postmodern text described by Eagleton as self-reflexive on the level of form and language. It recognizes itself as fiction and exhibits its ironic consciousness of this state, drawing attention to its own artificial character (201-202).

By stressing its own nature as an artificial construction, each narrative voice also emphasizes the subjective prejudice in the construction of all discourses and, in this way, deconstructs the traditional discourses of power as biased manipulations of representation. Like *Llanto*, this novel presents heterogeneous voices of numerous characters who have traditionally been marginalized by the institutions of power. Hernando is an indigenous man from Mexico during the colonial period, Estela is a single, adult, Mexican mestiza woman in the twentieth century; and Lear is an excluded minority in her society because she values the cultural production of the past.

Cielos de la Tierra transcends traditional time barriers through a plurality of simultaneous discourses that are layered in the multiple translations of Hernando's texts for a palimpsest effect in the representation and construction of its characters. Each exists through the representation of others. The multiple discourses of this work are from three different temporal spaces that converge in the translation and rewritings of one text. They include the narratives of socially and historically marginalized characters: Hernando (an Indian), Estela (an unmarried mestiza woman), and Lear (a nonconformist woman). The temporal convergence in the discourse of this novel corresponds to the relation, described by Eagleton, between language and history and the manner in which postmodern texts parody history. According to Eagleton:

Part of what it parodies is past history – a history which is no longer to be seen in linear terms as the chain of causality which produced the present, but which exists in a kind of eternal present as so much raw material torn from its own context and cobbled together with the contemporary. (202)

Lear recognizes the importance of the past in order to exist in the present and observes that "[d]esde el momento en que los libros fueron escritos, empezaron a parlotear con el pasado y con el futuro. Los libros siempre han sido memoria hacia otros tiempos" (21).

Another Mexican author, Carlos Fuentes, has spoken of the importance of language and of the past for the resolution of problems of the present. He says:

[la arena de la novela es] la del conflicto de lenguajes, admitiendo en su perímetro la amplitud que el gran crítico soviético Mijail Bajtin le exige: la novela moderna es no sólo diálogo de personajes, sino diálogo de lenguajes, de fuerzas sociales, de géneros literarios y de tiempos históricos. Este proyecto para la novela moderna es particularmente válido en sociedades como las de América Latina, donde la reconquista del tiempo y del lenguaje es una tarea interminable. (Klahn 100)

Hernando's memoirs constitute this task of reconquering time and language. The voice of Hernando represents the marginalized voice of the conquered and colonized Mexican Indian. His conflicted colonized identity stems from the in the difficulty of self-representation in the languages of the conquerors. Hernando chooses to use Latin, the language brought to Mexico by the Spanish clergy, as the medium to narrate his life as the son of the first Christian matrimony imposed on the Indians of New Spain (82). As the first Christian son of Indians in Mexico, Hernando is the symbolic first product of the conquest and colonization, or the first identity constructed within the reality of the colony. Latin is the language of the Roman conquerors of Spain and was brought to the Americas by the victims of an earlier conquest. Dussel comments on the relation

between the Roman conquest of Spain and the Spanish conquest of the Americas, as it is rooted in the very word "colony":

'Colonia' romana (junta a la 'columna' de la ley) eran las tierras y culturas dominadas por el Imperio – que hablaban latín (al menos sus élites) y que pagaban tributo --. Era una figura económica-política. América Latina fue la *primer colonia* de la Europa moderna – sin metáforas, ya que históricamente fue la primer 'periferia' antes que el África y el Asia [. . .] –. La 'colonización' de la vida cotidiana del indio . . . fue el primer proceso 'europeo' de 'modernización', de civilización, de 'subsumir' (o alienar) [. . .], al Otro como 'lo Mismo'; [. . .]. (49)

Hernando writes in Latin to avoid censorship because few of the lay priests can read the language. This choice also serves as a reminder of Spain's own colonization by the Romans and of the use of language as a tool of domination used in the colonization and continued subjugation of conquered peoples.

While it is ironic that Hernando chooses to disguise his discourse in Latin, it also emphasizes the colonization of identity that was enacted with the conquest and that is expressed through language. Dussel describes the effect of this colonization as alienation, which results from assimilation into a system of domination that denies Alterity and subsumes it under a definition of the Same (49). Hernando expresses the problem of identity, language, and the past in his own self-definition and representation upon saying:

Madre mía: Hernando, yo, tu hijo, desconoció las palabras de los antiguos dioses. ¿Desconoció también un día las palabras divinas del que está en todo lugar, del que todas las cosas ve y todas las cosas sabe, y es sumamente maravilloso, que desde el principio del mundo, y un día nos quiso incorporar a su fe, de lo cual nos debimos tener por

bienaventurados? ¿En qué tuvo la fé Hernando? ¿A qué mundo perteneció? [. . .] ¿Qué no tienen sentido ya más nuestras vidas? (365)

The life of Hernando ends without any resolution. As the first product of the conquest and colonization in Mexico, Hernando also embodies the conflicts of identity caused by the colonization that are manifested in the language of the conquered. As a direct result of the conquest and colonization of Mexico, Hernando loses his father. Later, as a part of colonial domination and indoctrination of the Indians, Hernando is sent to the Colegio de Santa Cruz in order to replace his cousin who was the son of one of the leaders of his village. He loses contact with his mother, his village, and his indigenous past, assuming the new identity that they teach him in the school for indigenous priests (frailes). In effect, Hernando is a vivid example of this problem of language and its relation to the past in Latin America.²⁸

The persistence of this conflict of identity is seen when Lear, in her work as an archeologist who investigates the twentieth century, finds its expression in a quote from José Emilio Pacheco that refers to a short story by Carlos Fuentes:

México se soñaba moderno y modernizante y querría verse ya entrando en el impensable Siglo XXI sin haber resuelto aún los problemas del Siglo XVI...El Chac Mool sigue viviendo en el sótano de la casa de Filiberto y de la nuestra. Para él nosotros somos los fantasmas. (67-68)

²⁸ Refer to Chapter 1, where I explain how crisis of representation in Latin America has served as catalyst to greater innovation and experimentation in the use of language to represent the American reality. The problem of language in Latin America is emphasized precisely by the projects of Latin American *modernismo*, *vanguardia* and postmodernism in the twentieth century, when authors have continued to experiment with and innovate the Spanish language in order to better represent its past and present realities.

With the memories that Hernando writes, disguised ironically in the Latin language of conquest and colonization and hidden inside the seat cushion of a colonial chair, he consciously initiates the possible process of reconciliation between the past and the future: "Ocultaré mis escritos, los legaré a otros tiempos" (70).²⁹ By consciously linking his writing to other times, Hernando initiates a dialogue between different time periods that is continued by the writings of Estela and Lear. In this way, the writings of Hernando, Estela, and Lear transgress the limits of time through a simultaneous narrative that permits the possible reconciliation with the Mexican past through dialogue and rewriting.

Estela, a mestiza paleontologist in the twentieth century, finds Hernando's manuscript and, for her, the act of recuperating its text and translating it opens a dialogue that permits a re-evaluation and her own reconciliation with the colonial past. She describes the manuscript as something that breaks the walls of time (52). She also narrates fragments of her own memories between her commentaries on Hernando's text. She comments on the problems of a mestiza identity for Mexicans and describes impressions and memories of her own childhood. Estela's memories include sociopolitical commentaries that observe traditional and historical attitudes of prejudice towards those with darker skin, as well as oppression and discrimination towards the Indians of her region. Estela describes her family relations as divided by race and heritage. Her paternal grandmother was white and of European heritage, whereas her

²⁹ It is worth noting that the use of a "colonial seat" also serves as an ironic reference to colonial power.

mother was a Tabascan Indian, who according to the relatives of her grandmother, was “fea” because she was Indian. In her impressionistic memories, Estela reveals the binary oppositions created by the colonial system and symbolized by the relation between Estela and her grandmother. The reality of the colonial past remains present in Estela’s life, and her need to reconcile the present with the past is evident when she says: “Es cierto que vivo en la ciudad de México, que comparto la fantasía de un posrevolucionario país mestizo, pero es verdad también que tengo muy cerca a mi abuela, y que ella habitó un pasado diferente, un pasado que es colectivo y que, además, tiene bastante de presente” (48). By translating the manuscript of Hernando, Estela participates in the dialogue between times that was initiated by Hernando and that poses a possible reconciliation with the colonial past.

The world of Lear is a post-apocalyptic world, created by the self-destructive effects of modernity and in the twentieth century. Her world is the dystopia described by M. H Abrams as a ‘bad place’ or an unpleasant, imaginary future world where the tendencies of twentieth-century social, political, and technological orders have culminated in disaster (218). Living the results of the self-annihilation of humankind the undefined descendents of the human race attempt to cut all ties to the political, social, and cultural manifestations of past societies. The beings of L’Atlantide reject the ideals of modernity that led to the struggle for control and domination of Others and, ultimately, resulted in wars and the obliteration of the cultures that created those ideals. This rejection poses one possible reaction to the postmodern condition which Eagleton

describes as “the end of modernity, in the sense of those grand narratives of truth, reason, science, progress and universal emancipation [. . .]” (200). The creators of L’Atlantide lived the postmodern delegitimization of the grand narratives of the past and carried the questioning of dominant institutions to the extreme, which is a complete negation of the past and its discourses.

As seen in *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Smeeks and other characters attempt to escape the colonial order by joining the pirates but they only find themselves incorporated into another system of domination that is inspired by the ideals of modernity and Enlightenment thought. Similarly, the people of L’Atlantide attempt to break their ties with a history of societies and languages that are based on domination, control, and the need to wage war on one another. Because it exists after the complete destruction of the earth, L’Atlantide is transparent and without substance, literally existing in the air or skies. The members of this community were created in test tubes and raised in pods that projected video images as a form of education and memory creation. They do not have parents, names, an origin in the sense of biological and cultural heritage. The governing bodies of L’Atlantide attempt to eliminate language because they believe it carries all of the evils of the “hombre de la Historia,” or the same errors that caused the self-destruction of humankind sometime after the twentieth century.

Lear is unique in her society because she values the past. She recognizes that those of L’Atlantide do not have an authentic origin and she confesses:

En él digo que si ejerzo la arqueología, si soy la única que practica este oficio, en mi comunidad, y también la única entre los vivos que piensa en la mamá y el papá que no tiene, es porque con mis estudios, vuelvo a nuestros padres, los reconstruyo. Con mi trabajo, urgo en nuestros orígenes, en el tiempo de la Historia. Ah, pero aquí empezaría un problema serio. Porque nadie en L'Atlantide querrá reconocer en los hombres de la Historia a nuestros padres, ni fincar en ellos nuestros orígenes. (15)

Faced with the rejection of history and all that constitutes cultural origins, Lear acknowledges the need to recognize and recuperate the past and its discourses within the context of her own present. This recognition of the past is not a nostalgic return or renewed faith in the ideals of modernity but, rather, an attempt at a more inclusive representation of and dialogue with the realities that have created the conditions of the present.

The dissolution of existence in the novel coincides with the systematic elimination of language in L'Atlantide. Language is seen as a link to the past and, through its elimination, the people of L'Atlantide lose all contact with their origins and inherited past. Lear's narrative fragments recount the steps that her community takes in a process to eliminate language. First, they reduce the number of words permitted for communication and conversation for the sake of conversation is strictly prohibited (90). Later, the use of language and words is abolished and the people of L'Atlantide are only permitted to communicate through gestures and body language (251-54). Because the past and the language used to transfer it to the present serve to self-definition in the present, the loss of language corresponds to the disintegration of L'Atlantide by the end of the novel. Lear comments: "Dudé de mi propia existencia. Dudé de la Tierra, dudé

de la destrucción, dudé de la Naturaleza. Dudé de la lengua" (309). The only way for Lear to continue her existence in a disintegrating and meaningless world is through the preservation of the past and language in the transcription of the Hernando's manuscript, already translated and commented on by Estela. Lear places her faith in the recuperation of this text when she says "Sólo tú puedes, Hernando, evitar que me disuelva, que me vuelva peor que todos los demás atlántidos que pierda el cuerpo, la razón, el corazón, en este torbellino" (310).

The community of L'Atlantide proposes to be a utopic world that can avoid the errors of the past but, like Smeeks, they find themselves in the dystopic society that Lear describes:

Todo lo hemos perdido. En la última comunidad de hombres y mujeres, todos fueron iguales, nadie hizo menos al otro por razón de raza, sexo of apariencia. Nadie fue rico ni pobre, poderosos o esclavo. Se vivió en armonía, se venció la enfermedad, la vejez y la muerte. En esa comunidad idílica que pudo ser eternal, el horror al pasado impuso la destrucción de la especie. (363)

The complete negation of the past reproduced a totalizing social order that paradoxically requires a lack of order but is still based on conformity and the repression of difference. Through their rejection of the past, the people of L'Atlantide fall into the trap of, on the one hand, duplicating the exclusive order of the past, and, on the other hand losing all substance and meaning that would give order. As Lear says, her world does not have body.

The chapter titles are in an unidentified language, which appears to be the language of Lear's world and is similar to Esperanto. Boullosa's use of this language in her chapter titles draws attention to the role of language in expressing or suppressing identity. One will recall that Esperanto is an artificial international language based as far as possible on the words that are common to all European languages. This language is a homogenous blending of many languages that erases all individuality and cuts all ties with the heterogeneous origins of the root languages. Esperanto imposes one totalizing language that denies uniqueness. In addition, it is marginalizing and exclusivist in its very attempt to be inclusive because it only incorporates European languages. The people of L'Atlantide attempt to eliminate all use of language; first by conforming to a homogenous blend of languages, then by limiting written and spoken language and only permitting gestures, and finally by prohibiting all forms of communication. By the end of the novel, self-representation is impossible, and the expression of individual identity is erased from their society just as it is lost through blending of many languages into one.

L'Atlantide is an allegory of the postmodern condition taken to the extreme, and Lear's voice expresses the experience of living within such a world. The rejection of the past with its dominant discourses has only resulted in an existence in nothingness. Lear describes this existence as a world without body, invisible and made up of air. Without language and its link to the past, Lear's world has no substance. The past has been denied but not assimilated. By recuperating lost texts and language, Lear is the only member of her community who attempts to return to the past. Even in her

metafictional commentary, she represents the voice that seeks to recuperate the past “in light of the present” (Hutcheon 19-20). Lear proposes an alternative future through the memory and recuperation of the past:

No puedo permanecer ya con mi comunidad. Voy a intentar brincar al territorio que puedo compartir con Estela y Hernando, volverme de palabras. Creo que puedo hacerlo. Es cierto que aquello que habita un libro es un territorio verdadero. Éste en el que estoy no lo es más. Si vivíamos en una fantasía desde el principio, engañados, sumergidos en una virtualidad que no coincidía con los hechos, como lo he sospechado últimamente, una fantasía en la que no había mierda, ni árboles, ni muerte, al romper la comunidad con la gramática, han roto también con la versión impuesta a los atlántidos, y me han dejado sola ‘con los pies en la tierra’, flotando entre las nubes a punto de disolverme como ellos. (368)

Through her re-reading and writing of Hernando’s manuscript and Estela’s intercalated comments, Lear unites her reality with those of Hernando and Estela. She adds that she will unwrite the end of their lives and that the three of them will live in the same territory:

Los tres viviremos en un mismo territorio. Los tres perteneceremos a tres distintos tiempos, nuestras memorias serán de tres distintas épocas, pero yo conoceré la de Hernando, y Hernando conocerá la mía, y ganaremos un espacio común en el que nos miraremos a los ojos y formaremos una nueva comunidad. (369)

Lear states that their future will be created through the act of remembering, that they will save and record the language and memory of humankind. These three narrators merge with one another and, like the narrators of Boullosa’s other novels, they speak from a new discursive space:

Salvaremos al lenguaje y a la memoria dle hombre, y un día conformaremos al puño que nos relate, [. . .] aunque nuestros cuerpos no conozcan más ni el frío ni el dolor.

Un abismo estará abierto a nuestros pies. Ésos serán los cielos de la Tierra. (369)

Through layered discourses that are inclusive in the simultaneous representation of the multiple discourses of three different historical periods and perspectives, *Lear* along with Hernando and Estela, narrates from a point that is elsewhere and opens a new space for textual representation.

Cielos de la tierra works to subvert the dominant discourses of the past, not in order to eliminate them but, rather, to displace them with a plurality that is more inclusive. This novel destabilizes and deconstructs traditional forms of writing and results in the recuperation of previously marginalized discourses. By presenting a more inclusive and plural vision of history, Boullosa attempts to reconcile the present with its past. This reconciliation corresponds to Leopoldo Zea's description of the assimilation of the very discourses that have served to alienate Latin Americans. Rather than being incorporated as a colonized body and repressed from historical records, discourses in the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America strive for textual representation that embraces the very Alterity that colonial discourses have attempted to exclude. This assimilation may be seen as a part of the contradictory character of postmodern discourses which subvert and destabilize previous renderings of the past but still recognize the risks of its complete rejection. Denial of the colony and all of its

cultural discourses risks the destruction of identity, which is still determined, at least in part, by that past.

Narrative Transgression of Time and Reconciliation with the Colonial Past

Cielos de la tierra and *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* achieve the representation of a plurality of discourses that transgress the borders of traditional logic and time and achieve a reconciliation with Mexico's colonial past. Both novels participate in the Latin American postmodern project described by Oscar Rivera Rodas as a tendency to return to the colonial past in order to understand the theme of identity in postmodern Latin American thought:

La postmodernidad es fundamentalmente reflexiva y hermenéutica: ahonda su reflexión de la que obtendrá sus parámetros para una nueva interpretación de su realidad y condición [. . . implica] someter a un cuestionamiento radical el concepto tradicional de identidad. El origen, o la raíz, o el significado de lo hispanoamericano había permanecido irrecuperable tras la destrucción cultural de la invasión europea y la imposición de la Colonia en el siglo xv. De ahí, la urgencia de su búsqueda. Permanecía, también desde la misma Colonia, como una alteridad marginada: ausente, pero por el vacío dejado siempre presente, como la parte en sombras y mal conocida de la propia identidad. Repensar la identidad en relación con esa alteridad, desde una posición histórica en la segunda mitad del siglo xx, tuvo resultados tan fecundos como originales. (458)

According to Rivera Rodas, postmodernism signals the search for and affirmation of identity and, as a part of this process, the rethinking of Latin American identity in relation to its alterity (459).

The word “llanto” in the title of *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* could be interpreted as a call for the need to return to and reconcile with the colonial past. Assimilation of the colonial past proposes a new consideration of that past, a revisiting and reworking of the past that would allow for a redefinition of present identity through discourses that are de-centered, inclusive and plural. Both of the novels discussed in this chapter treat the theme of the presence of the past and return to the problems that were initiated during the conquest and colonialization. This return, in the words of Pacheco, serves to recognize the Chac Mool living in Filiberto’s basement and behind the masks of contemporary Mexican identity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Narrations from Elsewhere and the Postmodern Reconstruction of Identity

The narrative voices in all of Boullosa's novels seem to speak from a point elsewhere in order to constitute an identity through textual self-representation. The narrator of *La milagrosa* compiles the first person narratives of multiple voices, and functions as a spokesperson for the dead detective and La Milagrosa, who has disappeared. In this novel, Boullosa proposes the need for more active readers, both of literature and in the interpretation of their own reality. The author presents multiple and subjective perspectives in order to raise the reader's suspicion of all textual authority in its reflection of reality. She uses strategies that serve to undermine the authority of her own narrative and, in doing so, she also subverts traditional concepts of writing and reading. By creating texts that are open, ambiguous, and often fragmented into contradicting and self-interrupting discourses, Boullosa expands the possibilities for textual representation and recognition of heterogeneous voices, which may have been marginalized from past texts.

In *Mejor desaparece*, *Antes*, and *Treinta años*, Boullosa presents the theme of a return to childhood in order to reconstruct the past and, in so doing, to appropriate representational space for identity in the present. The narrators of *Mejor desaparece* and *Antes* have disintegrated or disappeared into an apparent nothingness from which they recount and reinvent their childhood memories in order to seize a space for textual

representation of their existence and identity. As children and females, these narrators have found it impossible to exist in the confining spaces of a patriarchal society and, thus, they are invisible in traditional forms of representation. Because they have been marginalized by society, it is precisely from the margins, from the “elsewhere” that they narrate, that they embrace their Alterity and Otherness and achieve self-representation and affirmation of their existence. In *Treinta años*, the narrator still exists, but she neither recognizes herself nor the European world in which she lives. The return to her Mexican roots and to the small town of Augustini permits her to relive her childhood and to explore the heritage of her identity. Delmira can only find her place in the world through a recognition of her *mexicanidad*, an identity and Alterity from which she has been alienated during her thirty years of exile in Europe.

The disembodiedness and disconnectedness of the narrator and other characters is further emphasized in *Son vacas, somos puercos*, *El médico de los piratas*, and *Duerme*, where the narrators (Smeeks in the former novels and Claire in the latter) find themselves alienated within the constructs of patriarchal and colonial society. As explained by Enrique Dussel, the colonization of the Other and the *encubrimiento* of Otherness or Alterity was a constitutive factor for European Modernity. Boullosa explores the process of colonizing others that occurred during the Latin American colonization, a colonization of other lands, peoples, and cultures, and she extends this concept to include those who are colonized as Others within their own society. Modernity was founded on exclusive ideals that strove for a freedom and equality limited to the elite, European, white male. These values did not include people

disenfranchised by Europe's patriarchal social order, or in Todorov's terms, the Others that were interior to that society. These "interior Others" are determined by factors of the body such as sex, gender, race, class, or age. In *Son vacas, somos puercos*, Boullosa examines the alienation of self from identity as a result of the colonization of bodies. The failed utopias of Modernity are systems of self-affirmation through the domination of Others as seen through Boullosa's presentation of the colonies and subsequent reactionary attempts for freedom and equality, such as the formation of groups like the "Cofradía de los Hermanos de la Costa". Octavio Paz and Enrique Dussel describe Modernity as a myth of utopic futures of liberation. In *La otra voz*, Paz adds that the myths of Modernity have been repeated throughout Latin American history since its initiation:

Las utopías son los sueños de la razón. Sueños activos que se transforman en revoluciones y reformas. La preeminencia de las utopías es otro rasgo original y característico de la Edad Moderna. Cada época se identifica con una visión del tiempo y en la nuestra presencia constante de las utopías revolucionarias delata el lugar privilegiado que tiene el futuro para nosotros. (34)

For the narrators and characters of Boullosa's novels, however, the utopias of the colony and of pirate life become dystopic realities in which they must deny their Alterity and Otherness, becoming alienated from their bodies and self. Their narration is from elsewhere, from the margins of the discourses of Western Enlightenment and Modernity and they voice the discourses that have been suppressed from representation.

Such discourses include Others such as women, children, indigenous peoples, Africans, the poor, and Latin America in all of its heterogeneity.

By recycling past texts, Boullosa draws attention to the intertextual nature of all writing, a postmodern consciousness that Terry Eagleton describes as “parodic recyclings of other works which are themselves no more than such recyclings” (202). This strategy is repeated to varying degrees in all of her works, but is most evident in *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas*. The author’s use of parody and postmodern recycling of texts serves as another example of her experimental writing and efforts to delegitimize the authority of traditional writing forms.

The return to the colonial past as a reworking of history is continued in *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra*, in which Boullosa employs increased innovation of narrative strategies in a postmodern convergence of past, present, and future. The existence of the past in the present of *Llanto* and the simultaneous or layered existence of past, present, and future constitutes a transgression of traditional temporal logic. The presence of the past in postmodern literature has been described by Linda Hutcheon as an interrogation of past representations that is part of an inquiry that problematizes the very conventions within which history and literature are formed. For Hutcheon, themes of the past in postmodern fiction constitute a rethinking and reworking of history as a human construct that permits a re-evaluation in light of the present, taking into account its perspectives and experiences (16). *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra* attempt such a revision of the colonial past and, thus, achieve the reconciliation of the Mexican present with its past. By returning to themes

of the colony and incorporating them into a vision of the present, it is possible to recognize the position of Otherness and embrace the Alterity that is a part of Latin American identity. This process achieves a de-colonization of the present and future through the very recognition and assimilation of the colonial past that had, according to Leopoldo Zea, previously alienated the Latin Americans from an authentic identity.

Boullosa's novels broaden the possibilities for textual representation of previously marginalized voices. By narrating from a point that is elsewhere, the characters embrace and affirm not only their existence but also their difference, the very Otherness or Alterity that places them on the periphery of traditional representation. In *La otra voz*, Paz signals in the first half of the twentieth century the first appreciation of the Other in Latin American Vanguard literature:

Así en el primer tercio del siglo xx culmina un largo proceso de descubrimiento de las civilizaciones *otras* y sus distintas visiones de la realidad y del hombre [humankind]. Este proceso, comenzado en el siglo xvi con la revelación del continente americano, se manifestó en nuestra época por la adopción de formas artísticas no sólo ajenas sino contrarias a la tradición central de Occidente [. . .] el arte moderno rompió la continuidad de Occidente. Así, el cambio fue una auto negación y, simultáneamente, una metamorfosis. (43-44)

In *El pensamiento latinoamericano*, Zea describes this negation as a continued colonization of the Latin American identity and subsequent alienation. Boullosa continues the analysis of the Other that is signaled by Paz, but goes further to include an assimilation of the colonial past and western heritage through multiple discourses that represent the diverse influences on Mexican identity.

The inclusive nature of the discourses presented in Boullosa's novels correspond to postmodern and feminist tendencies that according to Jane Flax, "seek to further decenter the world [. . .] tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity, as well as to expose the roots of our need for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these may be" (88-89). Boullosa's fiction poses an ongoing postmodern and feminist dialogue with society and its treatment of the Other. Craig Owens describes this dialogue as a criticism of the limits of binary thought, which is a part of the systems of domination in society:

Postmodern thought is no longer binary thought [. . .]. The critique of binarism is [. . .] an intellectual imperative, since the hierarchical opposition of marked and unmarked terms (the decisive/divisive presence/absence of the phallus) is the dominant form both of representing difference and justifying its subordination in our society. What we must learn, then, is how to conceive difference without opposition. (61-62)

Boullosa examines how relations that are determined by sex, gender, race and class are often a part of larger systems of domination. All of her novels treat the theme of gender relations and the limiting roles that society places on the body according to sex.

Boullosa's theatre and poetry have also been described as postmodern and feminist. Roselyn Costantino affirms that "Boullosa's contributions to the Mexican stage during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s are seen as part of the creative excellence and experimentation that keep Mexican theatre one of the most important in Latin America" and she adds that "the author's dramatic technique reveals a feminist attitude with a postmodern vision of Mexico for the twenty-first century" (55).

Boullosa's theater is also concerned with the limits imposed on identity by gender roles that are determined by a patriarchal society and, like her fiction, it proposes diverse and alternate possibilities for the construction of identity. Similarly, Boullosa's poetry has been described as postmodern and feminist in its tendency to challenge traditional writing forms and social conventions through an unstable poetic voice, multiple perspectives, and the merging of literary genres.

Boullosa is conscious of her dialogue with society and its art forms and shows a profound awareness of world literature and of her own position within it. Her interrogation of the past and its representations is both serious and playful, and through parody and intertextuality she chronicles the development of Latin American and world thought as it continues into the twenty-first century. The dialogic, inclusive, heterogeneous, and even contradictory nature of the voices represented in her narrative corresponds to the postmodern world in which she writes. In "Carmen Boullosa's Obliging Heretic Art," Costantino has asserted that "Boullosa is one of Mexico's most prolific and respected contemporary writers" (183). Boullosa's fiction, like her poetry and theatre is complex, diverse, and engaging and has drawn increasing attention from Mexican and international literary critics. Hopefully, this study has added to the understanding of Boullosa's writing by situating it within the larger literary projects of the end of the twentieth century and will encourage further research about of her works.

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