Astvaldur Astvaldsson
Editor

Violence and Endurance

Representations of War and Peace in Post-War Central American Narratives

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REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR AND PEACE IN POST-WAR CENTRAL AMERICAN NARRATIVES

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nova publishers
New York

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN: 978-1-63485-093-3 (ebook)

Published by Nova Science Publishers, Inc. † New York

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all I would like to thank the British Academy for awarding me their UK-Latin America and the Caribbean Link Programme Grant: without that support it would not have been possible to organise the two seminars that have led to the publication of this volume of essays. And, of course, I owe a lot to all of those who participated in the two seminars, some of whom did not submit their work for publication. In particular, many thanks are due to Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos, who was my partner in El Salvador and organised the seminar there.

Secondly, I owe much gratitude to all the people who supported me in the process of making this dream come true. Among them are many colleagues at the University of Liverpool, but it would be impossible to name them all. However, I would like to mention Professor Eve Rosenhaft, the then Head of School, who supported the application for the British Academy grant, and Professor Charles Forsdick, Head of School at the time the seminar in Liverpool took place, who gave us his full support too. I would also like to mention Dr James Knight and Dr Angela Romero, both of who help with the translation and copy editing of some of the papers.

I am very grateful to all of you.

INTRODUCTION

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The articles published in this volume have grown out of two seminars on post-civil war Central American literature, supported by a British Academy UK-Latin America and the Caribbean Link Programme Grant and organised jointly by the School of Cultures, Languages and Areas Studies, University of Liverpool, and the Departamento de Letras, Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas in El Salvador.[2] At their inception, the main purpose of the two seminars was to bring together leading specialists in Central American literary and cultural studies from the UK and Central America – with many of the latter living in the US and Europe – to critically assess recent developments in the region's literary output. The results of that enquiry are displayed on these pages and we hope that they will encourage further academic interest, not at least in the world outside Central America, in the steadily increasing and fascinating literary production of this neglected region of Latin America.

Compared to the rest of Latin America, with the exception of only a handful of canonical writers (Rubén Darío, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Ernesto Cardenal and, to a lesser extent, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Augusto Monterroso, Claribel Alegría and Roque Dalton), modern Central American literature has traditionally received limited attention from literary critics. In fact, in a recent book, *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America* (2007), the Guatemalan writer and academic Arturo Arias points out that Central America, its people and literature have long since been doubly marginalized, both by the cosmopolitan centres (US and European) and by countries exercising hegemony in Latin America. It is for this very reason that even the writings of internationally recognised writers, whose work is among the finest in world literature today, have tended to enjoy less distribution and much less critical consideration than might have been expected, although there are now signs that this may be changing. To the writers listed above, we can add names such as Manlio Argueta, Sergio Ramírez, Gioconda Belli and Arturo Arias, who have been translated, not just into English, French, German and Italian but, in some cases at least, also into Scandinavian and Eastern European languages, and Hebrew. Yet, despite reasonable commercial success, relatively

[1] Email: valdi@liv.ac.uk.
[2] The first meeting took place in San Salvador in April 2009 and the second in Liverpool in April 2010.

little serious criticism has been published on their work,[3] a state of affairs that is, without a doubt, intrinsically related to the region's violent history and its long-standing political, economic and cultural marginalization, in particular from the early twentieth century to the present.

What partly explains the lack of serious literary criticism is the fact that the socio-political situation – the repression and armed conflict – that Central America experienced during much of the twentieth century affected the region's academic institutions in a devastating way. In many countries any organisation, let alone political parties, opposed to the reigning dictatorship were banned and political activists persecuted, frequently forced into exiled or even killed. In this situation, universities often became centres of socio-political and cultural opposition and activity, which led to military repression against staff and students, the destruction of equipment and libraries, sometimes even the closure of universities over extended periods of time. Departments of humanities tended to be particularly hard hit and, ever since, it has been an uphill struggle both to get them re-established and to keep them open because, even after the end of the open armed struggle, right-wing civil governments have continued to be hostile towards them. Yet, progress has been made and a window of opportunity seems to be opening as a new generation of academics appears. Many of these young Central American scholars are the sons and daughters of political exiles, who have been educated in and now work for North American and, to a lesser extent, Canadian, European and Australian universities. Their presence at these institutions is testimony to increasing international interest in Central American literature: in the US, in particular, this increased interest derives from the ever growing migrant population from the region in different parts of the US, such as Los Angeles and Washington. However, there has also been a revival at key Central American universities, such as the UCA in San Salvador.[4] Many of those invited to take part in the two seminars that led to the publication of this volume belong to this group of upcoming scholars and, indeed, a key purpose of the project was to create an opportunity for them to meet and learn from each other.

Until quite recently, scholars in the UK have shown limited interest in Central American literature and next to none in what has been published in the last twenty-five years. Yet, there are some signs to suggest that this may be changing.[5] Although still in its infancy, there is a group who want to be involved in the exciting new trends that are taking place in Central American literature and criticism. One purpose of the project that led to the publication of this volume was to allow the strengthening and expansion of existing academic links between Central America, the UK and the US, as well as within these regions, and it is our hope that

[3] This is particularly true of the English speaking world, where few books comparable to this one have been published before: recently published one-authored books include Rodríguez (2009) and Caso (2010). In Central America the electronic journal *Istmo* has led the way with the publication of articles on post-war literature, and in Italy the journal *Centroamericana* has published one volume per year since 1991, while the only book length studies in Spanish published recently seem to be Cortez (2010) and Ortiz Wallner (2013).

[4] These universities have received crucial support from the University of Costa Rica, which did not suffer the kind of repression its sister institutions had to endure: a Pan-Central American Postgraduate Programme set up in 2001 is based there and, since 2000, it has published the online journal *Istmo*, which has become a central platform for the dissemination of the new Central American literary and cultural criticism.

[5] For example, the University of Liverpool, whose library now houses a sizeable collection of Central American literature and criticism, hosted the *XII International Congress on Central American Literature* in 2004. Moreover, with the support of the AHRC, James Knight, one of the contributors to this volume, successfully defended his PhD thesis, 'Perceptions of Violence and Peace in the Novels of Roque Dalton, Manlio Argueta and Horacio Castellanos Moya', at Liverpool in 2010.

this volume will further encourage the participation of young researchers, and lead to more interest in Central American literary studies in both Europe and the Americas.[6] Hence, the essays published in this volume are timely and necessary for three key reasons: 1) they support and give impetus to Central American literary studies; 2) they further develop and cement existing links between European and US institutions and their counterparts in Central America, and create new ones; and 3) they assist young, upcoming Central American academics in their efforts to the establish sustainable academia in their own countries, and even attract back home some of their talented people now based abroad.

Another factor that has significantly contributed to this postponement since the 1990s is the emergence of a particular academic interest in so-called *testimonio*. As Arias rightly points out: 'Some theorists of *testimonio* argued in the mid-1990s that we no longer needed to study "highbrow" Latin American literature and tried to make a valid point of its dismissal' (x). Although *testimonio* has also played a key role in other parts of Latin America (in particular Cuba and the South American countries who suffered dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s), it soon came to be seen as a quintessentially Central American phenomenon and much of the theoretical attention it has received has focused on Central American texts, which, in the long run, has had a negative impact on the way in which both fiction and poetry have been viewed. In fact, even when the so-called testimonial novel has received critical attention it has tended to be for its content and for the urgency of its socio-political message, while there has been a conspicuous tendency to ignore its aesthetic qualities, as if they did not exist, were minor, or even undesirable in the context of testimonial literature.

Writers who started to publish in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, and whose work has began to receive recognition and some critical attention, have quite often reacted critically towards both *testimonio* and the tendency of some academics to undervalue the formal aspects of those literary texts that deal with the causes and consequences of political and criminal violence. These authors, such as the Salvadoran Horacio Castellanos Moya or the Guatemalan Rodrigo Rey Rosa, two of the best known fiction writer of the post-war period, constantly stress the important role that aesthetics play in their work. For example, in one of many interviews he has given, Castellanos Moya declares: 'Yo escribo ficciones que muchas veces tienen un paisaje político de fondo, pero me gusta ser leído como un escritor de ficciones' (Matus 2005: 5). And in another, referring to the novel *El arma en el hombre*, in a similar vein, he says: '...como todas mis obras, no tiene más intención que plasmar en una narración aquellos aspectos de la realidad que me atosigan y que puedo procesar a través de mi imaginación' (Guerrero 2001: n.p.).

Hence, in order to address the critical vacuum, the main academic purpose of the two seminars that instigated the essays in this volume was to bring together leading experts in Central American literary and cultural studies to critically reflect on recent developments in the region's literary output – including the emergence of a new Maya literature –, and in the criticism it has received, both inside and outside Central America. In this context, it is worth highlighting that being able to study Central American literature from a regional perspective and not just from the narrow perspective of national literatures, which tended to be the norm

[6] A recent development in Europe, inspired by our project, is the establishment of RedISCA – Red Europea de Investigaciones sobre Centroamérica – in 2010. It organises an annual colloquium that has until now been held in Potsdam, Germany (2010), Milan, Italy (2011), Aix-en-Provence, France (2012) and Bern, Switzerland (2013), Berlin, Germany (2014), and Barcelona, Spain (2015), which the next scheduled for Liverpool, England (2016).

in literary studies in Central American until recently, is quite a significant new development. One successful regional project that has come about as a consequence of these changes is *Hacia una historia de las literaturas centroamericanas*. It is driven by the University of Costa Rica and has already seen the publication of three volumes of its history of Central American literatures.[7] Moreover, some variations in the approach to theory and methodology have been introduced: for example, the so-called 'culturalist' perspective takes into account the interrelations of the literary production with other domains of social life. As has happened elsewhere, this has opened up the possibility of broadening out the concept of 'literature' to include other language practices, traditionally excluded, such as oral literature, performance or song. This is particularly important for the study of indigenous literatures, for example, the rapidly increasing corpus of Maya texts, some of which are studied in one of the chapters of this volume.

The main focus of the essays is on post-war literature, both in its own right and in relation to the literature published during the long years of social conflict and armed struggle from the mid-1950s through to the 1990s, including *testimonio*. The essays draw on the pioneering, though often scattered and difficult to locate, academic work that has been produced so far, and aspire to bring it into focus, produce its own coherent body of criticism and point out themes and avenues for future research. The essays address issues that are crucial for the understanding of what has been happening in Central American literature since the mid-1980s and how it relates to earlier literary output in the region. Hence, the book's significant contribution to knowledge and understanding of Central American textuality over the last four decades, offering new insights into the development of both literary content and aesthetic quality.

Since the mid-1980s and especially since the signing of the Peace Accords in the early 1990s major changes, both formal and thematic, can be noticed in Central American literary output. This is particularly true in the work of the majority of young writers who begin to publish during this period, who perceive and express the region's often violent history in terms that are radically different from those of their predecessors. While not forgotten, the socio-political and military conflicts of the past, including the long and tortuous years of civil war, are no longer a central concern in Central American literature, and the ideological zeal and the great urgency to provide sociological and political explanations for and suggest ways out of the vicious circle of violence, fundamental to the work of many earlier writers, has all but disappeared. Instead, it is the often apparently senseless, brutal violence of the post-war period that has captured the imagination of young writers and become the basis of a new aesthetic. This 'new' violence, which permeates not just society and politics, generally, but also families and personal relationships, is quite often an inheritance from the patriarchal ideologies, structures and institutions of the past, which refuse to go away, but is also marked by the 'non-political,' criminal violence that has invaded Central America during the post-war period. None of this means that the past has been forgotten, and the traumatic memories of the civil wars continue to be a major theme in post-war literature, alongside issues related to sexuality, gender, ethnicity and race. While still drawing on Central American history and contemporary reality, the new aesthetic, which now seems to be influenced by certain artistic developments at the international level – for example, on what has been happening in North

[7] It is worth pointing out that several of the contributors to this volume have been involved in this project and, indeed, are prominent among the editors of the three volumes published so far (see Mackenbach (ed.) (2008), Grinberg Pla and Roque-Baldovinos (eds) (2009) and Cortez, Ortiz Wallner y Ríos Quesada (eds) (2012)).

American cinema – has already been denominated an aesthetic of 'cynicism' (Cortez 2000, 2010), while other possibilities might be to call it an aesthetic of 'scepticism,' or an aesthetic of 'indifference.'

Bearing in mind the development of Central American literature since the 1950s, in order to assess the implications of these formal and thematic changes, the essays in this volume look at what characterises the work of the writers of the post-war period and how and why it differs from that of its precursors. The types of question that are pursued are: If it is arguable that form and language are as important as content and social denunciation in the literature of the 'guerrilla period,' what is the linkage between these elements in post-war narratives? Is it accurate to state that social commitment is mostly absent from the work of young Central American writers, or is it simply less obvious? Why is it that we do not seem to find in the new narratives the optimistic tone and the idealism that often characterise the work of older writers? Does the new Maya literature differ from the mainstream of the new output? How can we best describe the aesthetics of this new Central American literature? Does the work of women writers differ in content, structure, style and aesthetic principles from that of their male counterparts?

Some brief comments on the essays will help to guide the reader. They will highlight common themes that link the essays, giving the book a coherent outlook and allowing it to provide a notional map of what has been happening in Central American literature since the end of the civil wars. While the themes treated in the various essays often overlap, they have been grouped together under four separate headings for further guidance.

Providing a historical overview, the aim of Dante Liano's essay is to reflect on the most outstanding formal and thematic tendencies that one notices in the Central American narrative of the beginning of the present century. He starts with the flourishing of historical narrative and then suggests that, among the genres reclaiming ground at present, the detective and the intrigue or black novel stand out. He also discusses the rise of the social novel. In this trajectory he says we must not forget the literature 'of gender' in which many female authors have expressed the oppressive situation that Central American women experience. Likewise, he points to the importance of paying attention to the emergence of native literature.

In a first of two essays in the volume, Arturo Aries argues that, according to theorists of globalisation, the third global design is the one that impacts the Central American civil wars. But this design itself slides from a developmentalist phase, elaborated at first with the creation of the UN and its economic arms, which was hegemonic from the 1950s through the 1970s, to a neoliberal one from the 1980s onwards. If the regional narrativity commonly associated to the 1960-1990 'guerrillerista' period were to be a literature attempting to go against the grain of US-centered developmentalism, while all the same located within its broader purview, then, we could argue that post-war Central American literature corresponds to its neoliberal phase, and wrestles with, or depicts, the implied consequences of neoliberal policies in the region. In this logic, the post-war period would theoretically conclude when alternatives to neoliberalism begin to permeate Central American social imaginaries. Yet, if topographical representations do indeed undergo a transformation and if the characters represented in these post-war texts 'reinvent themselves as individuals of the most varied sort trying to forge transnational communities that denaturalize the old nationalist discourses of authenticity,' recycling 'the remaining fragments of their cultural memory in order to reconfigure some new conception of post-national identity,' can we claim that these shifts break with the modern notion articulated by Foucault? Aria's sense is that, whereas these are

writers who have had to live with the collapse of social utopias and nationalism, thus, forcing them into alternative thematics and post-war, dystopic subjects to represent in their literature, they do not attempt to re-define the subject of the Enlightenment in the Foucauldian mould.

The axis of Leonel Delgado's essay is the question about how the global market is present as a kind of unconscious narrative in contemporary Central American literature. Focusing on the case of Nicaragua and the heritage of the Sandinista revolution, he examines how intellectual conservative ideas about the nation and history work behind the desire of insertion into the global. Moreover, he thinks about the possibilities of a methodology based on Subaltern Studies to interpret this type of narrative. The basis of his analysis is the novel *El universo en la palma de la mano* (2008) by Nicaraguan author Gioconda Belli. In her novel, Belli narrates a universal origin using as basis the mythic story of Adam and Eve. His main hypothesis is that this narrative implies an allegoric reading of the present of the nation in which modernist aesthetic and political positions, especially the narrative model typical of the Latin American 'boom,' are normalised in terms of the themes and clichés of frequent circulation in international debates and the global market. Therefore, Belli's text operates as a sort of literary formula confronting the localisation of the national in the global. In addition, this insertion in the market is based on a melancholic relationship with the national, since the fable of the novel shows that the purity of origin is obliterated by global history.

According to Werner Mackenbach, in Central America, and Latin America generally, one particular cultural-scriptural practise has, since the 1960s, occupied an especially privileged place in the field of literature and politics: testimony, in its various forms. At the same time, testimonial narratives have resulted, or rather have been accompanied and overlapped by, and intervened in and by multiple (theoretical) discourses leading to their canonisation as an integral part of the liberation struggle and movements, a sort of cultural-scriptural practise that not only narrates strategies of resistance but is one of those strategies. This canonisation does not do justice to the diversity and contradictions of Central American testimonial literature, resulting in an exclusive 'memory' that marginalises the testimonial production that does not correspond to the dogmatic premises of the testimony debate. Furthermore, with post-revolutionary testimony and the use of testimonial elements in recent fictional texts, in autobiographical memoirs and in documentaries, a paradigmatic shift took place towards the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s. The distinctive feature of this new testimonial literature is the loss of faith in 'a' historical truth, the abandonment of the demand for representativity in the name of the subaltern and the recuperation of a pretension for literariness. Individualisation, fragmentation, relativism and fictionalisation characterise the majority of such texts. With this, the function of testimony in the construction of national identity or its role as the privileged site of national master narratives has also changed. A new critical reading of Central American testimony, which concentrates in particular on the relationship between extra-literary reality and its narrative presentation and representation in the testimony, is necessary. The essay is a contribution to this task.

Emilio del Valle Escalante shows that, since the 1960s, in Guatemala, a Maya literary corpus has been forming, slowly gaining authority within Latin American cultural and literary studies. Written in Latin alphabet and in bilingual modes of production (Maya language/Spanish), Maya literature, according to Arturo Arias, represents a 'strong, vital counterstatement to Ladino [*mestizo*] discursivity' (2007: 78). Del Valle's essay explores the tensions that emerge out of the relationship between contemporary Maya poetry, the *criollo-mestizo* literary canon and modernity. Modernity, in particular if understood as an economic

and cultural hegemonic condition, is one of the places of discursive and political contention in which contemporary Maya writers engage with their *others* in order to rewrite and/or *re*-right history. From a Maya perspective, modernity has been the story of the powerful and how they have become powerful by the colonisation of the indigenous world. Taking this context as a point of departure, firstly, del Valle reads Maya literature against *indigenismo* and Latinamericanism in order to establish and identify its own cultural and literary project. Secondly, he analyses works by Humberto Ak'abal, Pablo García, Rosa Chávez and Sabino Esteban Francisco in order to show how Mayan writers are rewriting and/or *re*-righting modernity by inscribing it with indigenous memory. In so doing, he argues, they develop a *politics of the possible* by constructing a collective subaltern consciousness.

In his second contribution, Arturo Arias points out that the fallacy of maintaining the aura of the *letrado* speaking for the subaltern subject in a post-auratic age has already been sufficiently problematized by Beverley, Moreiras and Avelar, among others. Alternative perspectives for critiquing Central America's Post-War narratives must contextualise what is understood as 'Post-War' in the Central American scenario within broader epistemic parameters that analyse the isthmus' neoliberal period and, by extension, the meaning of its cultural enunciations during the same time-frame. According to Arias, an alternative possibility is that of considering the post-war period as a failed process of mourning, because of its incapacity to assume the lost object of desire (revolutionary transformation). If Derrida associates successful mourning with historicism, Central American Post-War Narratives would seem to illustrate the impossibility of translating colonialized history and subalternized memory into a recognisable and coherent contemporary form. The unwillingness on the part of many Central American post-war texts to show the war's consequences, the damage they caused and their resulting trauma, seems to operate as a symbolic indicator of the ethical rejection to assimilate the past, the dead and the political defeat within a coherent historical narrative. The essay both theorises the category of 'post-war' in a Central American context and analyses it as a failed process of mourning that elides the consequences of war from the contemporary Central American identitary horizon.

Héctor M. Leyva's essay focuses on the novel *Cenizas en la memoria* (1994) by Jorge Medina García in order to explore one of the manifestations of the discursive articulation that the experience of the post-war period took on for one specific Honduran writer. The analysis takes as its starting point Walter Benjamin's idea that narrative, as it pretends to recover life experience, loses it turning it into a discursive act. As a consequence of this intent, which always fails, what the novel ends up offering, according to Benjamin, are the mirages of the subject and his/her ideas about the world (*The Storyteller*, 1936). Medina García's novel, written in the years when the Peace Accords were being negotiated and economic adjustment carried out under neoliberal policies, presents the experience of absolute poverty for the people who, having just come out of the guerrillas, ended their lives in prison, facing the ultimate dispossession of their moral and material dignity.

In his contribution, James Knight argues that one of the most striking features of the development of narrative fiction in El Salvador over the last thirty years is an apparent generational split between writers who became established before the civil war (1980-1992), who often defined themselves and the role of literature in terms of political commitment, and those who emerged during and after the conflict, whose work often expresses a profound distrust of political ideology and a scepticism regarding the ability of politics and literature to effect social transformation. Horacio Castellanos Moya's debut novel, *La diáspora* (1989),

describes the experiences of a group of disparate individuals involved with the guerrilla, at times drawing from real-life events. By highlighting elements of the corrupting side-effects of violence, class based exploitation, patriarchal attitudes and an inflexible chain of command within the revolutionary organisation, the novel shows the movement to be fundamentally flawed in its replication of values that characterised the oppressive regime it was attempting to overthrow; a replication that unwittingly succeeds in alienating individuals whose initial impetus toward revolutionary commitment was a moral repudiation of those values. Through an analysis of this critique of the militant Left, the essay presents *La diáspora* as a key text in providing understanding of the process of disillusionment that seems to have affected many of the Salvadoran writers who came to prominence during the post-war period.

Astvaldur Astvaldsson argues that, if we can talk about civil war literature, on the one hand, and post-war literature, on the other, then, that implies a rupture between the two. However, since both often deal with similar themes, such as violence, memory and trauma, then, there must also be certain continuity. In fact, post-war literature can frequently be seen to respond critically to what younger writers see as the failed political project in which their predecessor were involved and which blighted their work: for example, not enough attention is provided to what Horacio Castellanos Moya has called the 'art of fictionalising' (1993: 68), i.e., aesthetic, or the vision that the wartime writers provide is seen to be utopian. Astvaldsson asks: what have been the changes and are the similarities between the Salvadoran literature written during what Arias calls the 'guerrilla period' (2007: ix) and that which is identified with the post-war? Was there an abrupt rupture or are we rather talking about a period of transition? Focusing on the relationship between violence, testimony and aesthetics, in order to try to answer these questions, the essay examines certain features of two novels by Horacio Castellanos Moya, one of El Salvador's most distinguished post-war writers, relating them to aspects of the work of one of his principal precursors, Manlio Argueta.

Ricardo Roque Baldovinos points out how one of Castellanos Moya's most recent novels, *Tirana memoria*, continues the family saga that began in *Desmoronamiento*, the first of his novels to deal explicitly with historical memory. The narrative of *Tirana memoria* unfolds in the background of the events of 1944, the civil disobedience movement that led to the overthrow of General Hernández Martínez, El Salvador's most infamous tyrant. This movement is important because it represents, perhaps for the first time, a Demos, a heterogeneous and trans-classist movement that manifests in the street to challenge a violent, corrupt and elitist government. Hitherto, democracy had been a more or less abstract ideal sustained by an enlightened intelligentsia. *Tirana memoria* presents the demise of the political subject represented by its male protagonists, anti-authoritarian conspirator Pericles Aragón and his son Clement, and the emergence of a more democratic, political subject, represented by Pericles wife, Haydée, and a spectrum of subaltern characters who take part in spontaneous resistance to the dictatorship. It is argued that *Tirana memoria* is not told as an epic or even as a bildungsroman but is a lesson in history, whose transmission is ultimately interrupted and has to be recovered in a fragmented and allegorical manner.

Yansi Pérez suggests that the Rosemberg case in Guatemala, as the Dreyfus case might have been for turn of the century Europe, can be read as a symptom of the difficult and precarious processes of national reconciliation that have occurred in El Salvador and Guatemala. Using this case and the various paranoid narratives that have been built around it as a starting point, Pérez studies 'crime narratives' in various Central American post-war novels to try to cipher how in these crimes we can observe the different tensions and conflicts

that these societies undergo in the post- war period. She first constructs a genealogy of crime as a narrative, rhetorical and ideological device in modern literature. In the central part of her essay, she studies 'crime narratives' in the works of Rodrigo Rey Rosa and Horacio Castellanos Moya, proposing that this narrative form is a privileged space to read the traces of trauma left by the civil wars. Inspired by the work done by Josefina Ludmer and Roberto González Echevarría, she then studies the rich and tense history between the law and literature evident in these texts as in other Latin American texts studied by these two critics. Some of the questions that inform her study are: 1) how can we narrate what lives outside the law and all legitimate spaces?; 2) what role do these crime narratives play in national histories, and in the construction of a national identity?; 3) what is a political crime and how does one narrate it?; 4) what relationship exists between crime, trauma and memory in post-war Central American narratives? In the case of Central America, because of the lack or precarious nature of institutions and legal recourses, the processing of historical memory and the trauma resulting from the wars becomes manifest in crime, which lives outside the law and legal processes. Crime, then, becomes a privileged space in which to read the traumas and anxieties of the post-war period in Central America.

Karen Poe's essay analyses sexuality and violence in two Central American post-war novels which, despite their different narrative strategies, both have former revolutionaries as their protagonists. Poe reads *Sopa de caracol* by Arturo Arias (2002) as a carnivalesque text which describes a sexuality that is beyond social norms and, in contrast, argues that *Limón Reggae* by Anacristina Rossi (2007), beyond political disenchantment, proposes an erotic utopia as a means of reconstructing post-war subjectivity.

Uriel Quesada study offers an analysis of the transformations of post-war Central American narrative from the point of view of the construction of masculinity. Several theoretical approaches to this issue are discussed, including psychological, sociological and, in particular, feminist studies. Although it is not possible to reach an agreement about what it means to 'be a man' in contemporary societies, Quesada suggests that the different fields of study open up alternative readings regarding the social and cultural issues involved. In his study, the main interest regards considering masculinity as a hegemonic phenomenon in relation to women and to the interaction between men themselves. Using this theoretical basis, the essay aims to discuss the representation of masculinity in the post-war Central American literature. In order to examine the changes that have taken place, the essay first offers a reading of *No me agarran viva* by Claribel Alegría and D.J. Flakoll, as a text paradigmatic of the myth of the heroic guerrilla fighter. The representations of masculinity in *No me agarran viva*, with their implications for identity and family, social and political dynamics, are then contrasted with works by José Ricardo Chaves y Fernando Contreras (Costa Rica), Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Maurice Echeverría y Francisco Alejandro Méndez (Guatemala) and Jacinta Escudos (El Salvador). The conclusion is that post-war Central America has opened up spaces for alternative forms of masculinity – and therefore for social and power networks – which the literature has picked up. These masculinities are presented in opposition to the myth of the heroic guerrilla fighter, whose hegemonic discourse becomes problematic.

Finally, according to Yajaira M. Padilla, among the many representations of revolutionary heroism that characterise the Central American literature produced during the 1970s and 80s is the figure of the clandestine *guerrillera*, a conceptualisation of female subjectivity that evokes the mythical aspects of the 'woman warrior.' In testimonial texts,

novels and poetry, the *guerrillera* was represented as an individual whose identity was comprised of different aspects: the erotic, femininity, sexuality, nationality, sacrifice, maternity, and violence. In the post-war period, new visions of female subjectivity emerge, which contest this paradigm, but which also affirm certain aspects of it, such as violence, sexuality and eroticism. Padilla's analysis explores these new visions of women in the short story collection, *Mujeres que cuentan* (2000), and focuses, in particular, on violence. She argues that these stories posit women as a new type of woman warrior, one who can be construed as an abject *guerrillera* and who uses violence to liberate herself.

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I. KEY DEVELOPMENTS

In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-093-3

Chapter 1

FORMAL AND THEMATIC TENDENCIES IN CENTRAL AMERICAN LITERATURE: FROM PAST TO PRESENT*

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> Tengo al alcance de la mano las definiciones de Eliot, de Arnold y de Sainte-Beuve, sin duda razonables y luminosas, y me sería grato estar de acuerdo con esos ilustres autores, pero no los consultaré. He cumplido sesenta y tantos años; a mi edad, las coincidencias y las novedades importan menos que lo que uno cree verdadero. Me limitaré, pues, a declarar lo que sobre este punto he pensado (Borges 1970: 224).

This assertion by Borges, in an article about the literary classics, can be taken as an expression of arrogance. It can also be considered a declaration of humility. It may only reflect a period in one's life. When we have managed to get beyond this period, if we have not been able to complete those readings, and transform them into what the Germans called on for every writer, an understanding of the world,[1] then perhaps we have read and lived in vain. Maybe this fear troubles some. It troubles, I think, those of us who have devoted ourselves to literature. I find in some reflections on contemporary art the author's desire to be as ephemeral as the period in which he was destined to live. I am talking about manufacturers of 'installations' or 'happenings.' Denying their willingness not to last, they film them and show them on video. Perhaps destroying the work gives its author a higher profile.

A reflection upon Central American literature requires the identification of a point of origin. According to this reasoning the origins Central American literature can be located in those of literature in general. On one occasion, criticising the programmes broadcast by his Ministry of Public Education, Octavio Paz criticised the didactic division between 'Mexican and Universal Literature.' Paz asked himself whether Mexican literature was not included in

* In order to be able to talk with authority about the Central American narrative of the post-war period it is necessary to reflect on the principal characteristics of the literature that preceded it. The main purpose of this chapter is precisely to offer a general overview of the literary tradition of the area that can support the reading of the following chapters, which focus in greater detail on more recent work.

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[1] The word *Weltanschauung* was first used by Dilthey (1954).

universal literature, revealing, perhaps, a personal fear. His objection is valid. By separating the literature produced in Central America from literature written elsewhere in the world, we run the risk of forgetting a crucial aspect of our literature: that it can be read and understood and appreciated beyond the frontiers of Central America.

It is understandable that some young writers become frustrated when they are described as 'Guatemalan,' 'Salvadoran' or 'Honduran.' It was Simone de Beauvoir who devastated us with her aphorism: 'To be Central America's best writer, what a disaster!.'[2] (For a long time, I attributed this to Tito Monterroso, because he writes it in *La letra 'e'* that unfortunate thought according to which, when called 'the best of his generation, a writer is offended; when he is called 'the best of his country,' he is offended; when he is called 'the best of his continent, he is offended; he is only happy when he is called 'the best in the universe' (89). This observation belongs to Unamuno and is, out of place like this parenthetical statement in *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*: 95). We feel better about the specification of the profession of 'writer' without people using the name of a particular region or country to qualify it. Sometimes, the objective of such name-giving is to be offensive, such as when Neruda referred to Alejo Carpentier as 'the French writer Alejo Carpenter.'

We have to accept, then, that when we talk about 'Central American literature' we are accepting the idea or, to use more prestigious vocabulary, the necessary abstraction to limit the object of study. We know that the first criterion for any investigation is to define the object of study, to decide its limits, if it does not have them, and to accept this convention. The literature written by those who have been born within the geographical limits of the entity called Central America might serve as an appropriate conceptual frontier, although it excludes authors such as Francisco Goldmann, who I would gladly admit into our literary circles.

In order to understand contemporary Central American literature, I think it is necessary to examine the twentieth century. It seems to me that one of Hobsbawm's best ideas, in *The Age of Extremes*, is that the epochs never begin in the first year of the centenary. And, if for the political history of Western Europe, the English historian announces the beginning of the twentieth century with the war of 1914, we, in terms of the literary history of Central America could propose that the twentieth century begins in 1888, with the publication of *Azul* by Rubén Darío. As I see it, the century ends in 1974, with the death of Miguel Ángel Asturias, after which a void opens until 1982, when Rigoberta Menchú publishes her testimony, the first introduction of post-modernity in Central America and also Latin America.

My proposal, for this short discussion, is to accept the aforementioned hypothesis and, hence, to examine some Central American authors of the twentieth century, before entering the twenty-first. If we consider Rubén Darío as the founder of the twentieth century, we then go on to Miguel Ángel Asturias y Salvador Salazar Arrué. Next, I suggest the poetry of Ernesto Cardenal. The final considerations will be about some authors who have recently, devised ways in which to think about literature, both inside and outside Central America.

One of the biggest mysteries regarding Rubén Darío is his untranslatability. When his verses are rendered in a foreign language, it commonly provokes scepticism and coldness. What can one do to make the following verses, which we all know by heart, 'La princesa está triste. ¿Qué tendrá la princesa?/Los suspiros escapan de su boca de fresa/que ha perdido la risa, que ha perdido el color...' (Darío 1985: 187), resonate in English or French or Italian?

[2] 'Ser el mejor escritor centroamericano, ¡qué desgracia!.'

The Hispanist Oreste Macrì, who has to translate Darío for his anthology of Spanish Poetry in Italian, immediately recognises the difficulty. And he tries to solve it by turning to Darío's last works, the verses of the melancholic Darío in his twilight years, whose sombre tone the critics confuse with the philosophical tone. One only has to hear, in Italian, the first verse of 'Lo fatal' to perceive the difficulty faced by the translator:

> Dichoso el árbol que es apenas sensitivo
> [L'albero, sí, è felice, ch'è appena sensitivo] (Macrì 1974: 245).

The tree may be happy, but the translation is not. The verse that flows freely in Spanish stumbles clumsily in Italian. Perhaps because of this difficulty Macrì chooses the famous 'Nocturno,' where Darío anticipates the coloquialism that later came to characterise parts of the avant-garde movement and where the content is, at the same time, dense and communicable:

> Los que auscultasteis el corazón de la noche
> los que por el insomnio tenaz habéis oído
> el cerrar de una puerta, el resonar de un coche
> lejano, un eco vago, un ligero rüido...
> [Voi che avete ascoltato il cuore della notte
> e voi che avete udito nell'insonnia tenace
> un chiudere di porta, il risuonar di ruote
> lontano, un'eco vaga, un rumore fugace…] (Macrí 1974: 243)

Anyone, or almost anyone, appreciates that the nocturnal solemnity of Darian poetry becomes almost banal in the Italian translation, without it being the fault of the translator. How to mimic that strange verb, 'auscultásteis,' how to reproduce the effect of distance produced by the enjambment between 'coche' and 'lejano,' how to imitate the diereses of 'rüido' which increases the meaning of what it is meant to say? All this reminds us Central Americans of classes at secondary school, where the teachers repeat that the modernist revolution is more than anything musical, that is to say, verse and rhythm.

Whenever explaining Darío, one should remember that the most famous Spanish poet of his time was don Ramón de Campoamor, whose 'Doloras' sound like this:

> NO VALE LO QUE CUESTA.
> ¡No sé este vivir maldito
> porqué ha de pagarse tanto,
> que se compra con el llanto,
> y á veces con el delito! (Campoamor 1861: 114)
> Dolora XII
> LO QUE HACE EL TIEMPO
> Pasan veinte años: vuelve él,
> y al verse esclaman él y ella:
> ("- ¡Santo Dios!¿Y este es aquel!...")
> ("- ¡Dios mío!¿Y esta es aquella!...") (Campoamor 1861: 124)
> LA CONCIENCIA.
> La conciencia á los culpados

> castiga tan pronto y bien,
> que hay muy pocos que no estén
> dentro de su pecho ahorcados. (Campoamor 1861: 119).

Campoamor's verses really deserve the definition of 'ideas in verse,' if the banalities they encompass were anything but commonplace. Don Ramón forgot one of the fundamental questions of literature and poetry: the question of form. Or perhaps he never contemplated it, because he had no ear for music, so evident in his verses. The Spanish language contains a roughness that some try to resolve by being wordy. Before the introduction of the Italian rhythm, that is, before Garcilaso, Castilian had its own, unique rhythm:

> Amigos e vasallos de Dios omnipotent,
> si vos me escuchásedes por vuestro consiment,
> querríavos contar un buen aveniment:
> terrédeslo en cabo por bueno verament. (de Berceo 2012: 9).

Gonzalo de Berceo tells us and in this both the learned poetry and the popular minstrel verse of the Middle Age in Spain are the same. They ignore the soft rhythm of the kharjas and the Italian melody, which would come later. The tendency to go back to this Visigothic rhythm is all in Campoamor, who ignores centuries of work on Spanish metrics.

All that has been written about Darío comes to the same conclusion: his experimentation with all the verses of the Spanish tradition and his successful intent to bring French rhythms into Spanish can be found in any text book. The canonical studies of the Modernist Revolution frequently forget that this revolution comes from Central America. To Buenos Aires, to Santiago de Chile, to Madrid, Rubén Darío arrives with the schooling previously received in El Salvador from the master Francisco Gavidia. From Gavidia, Darío learns many things, among them a love of the French language and its poetry.

All this we know. I would like to suggest thoughts on another issue: Darío's popularity. There are authors who, despite their knowledge, despite their erudition, manage, by different means, to become part of people's memory. Who, in the sphere of Spanish language, does not know what follows the verse: 'Juventud, divino tesoro…'? And one has to make a great effort not to continue, after the name Margarita, with the inevitable: 'está linda la mar.' These are poets who have coined phrases that enter into everyday language. And they are not the only ones. There are phrases by Cervantes that we repeat without knowing they are by Cervantes: 'hueles… y no a rosas,' says the Knight of the Sad Figure to his trembling squire. There are regions, in Guatemala, where Quevedo is a character in oral tales. There are jokes that come directly from the Archpriest of Hita (or that the Archpriest took from the Arabic Vulgate and that went to America on account of him. Not to mention García Lorca, as famous himself as so many verses from his poems.

Darío becomes popular because of the era in which he wrote. At the end of the 19th century, because there was no radio and television, in the towns of America and of Spain literary evenings and amateur theatres were organised, where the prestige of literature as entertainment was not questioned. There, provincial orators, whose repertoire was mostly Romantic, practised their skills. It was impossible to avoid the emphatic 'Pues bien, yo necesito/decirte que te quiero/decirte que te adoro/con todo el corazón...,' especially if a likely female addressee of these verses was present, and which includes the opprobrious 'y en

medio de nosotros, mi madre, como un Dios.' Rubén Darío's verses spread throughout the whole of the Spanish speaking world and catch on because they are easy to memorise.

Why do people like Darío's verses? Let's remember, for a moment, that this coincides with the height of French Naturalism and its imitators all over the world. Zola is a great storyteller, but is helped, in the diffusion of this work, by the topicality of the theme on which he writes. Realism and Naturalism rely partly on the form, but find equilibrium in their content. The world of the miners and the harsh life of oppression from which they suffer or the life in the poor neighbourhoods of Paris give rise, in America, to the description of life on the farms, on the haciendas, on the sugar plantations and also to the description of the struggle for survival in the jungle. It is obvious that Americans like such content. In contrast, Darío brings us marquises, princesses, viscounts, Chinese kings, poets, dwarfs, tumblers, Paris, Japan, expensive restaurants, champagne, fine Baccarat crystal, malachite kiosks, cardboard sceneries, the gods of Olympus, centaurs, Pegasus, Heliopompo,[3] triumphant marches and clear bugles…. How could all these phenomena be popular alongside the workers who bled gum trees in the Naturalist novels? And yet, they were popular. Darío was loved by the people despite the aristocratic content of his writing. When he married Francisca Sánchez, everyone came out to receive the one who had by then been crowned 'the divine poet.'

I would like to risk one thought. Those who consider that the conglomeration we call 'the people' or 'the popular classes' don't understand literary content of a certain intensity, or very complex aesthetic, are probably hiding a certain haughtiness towards this social group. It is true that some social groups may not be interested in that which to other groups is indispensable. It is not pleasant to have to recognise that Mozart's music may be of no interest to the members of a certain culture. Neither is it pleasing to know that marimba music can seem tedious, monotonous and ugly to those who have not been brought up in that culture. It is possible that, by now, it accepted that there are no universalities in culture. Likewise, that no culture is without aesthetic elements. These aesthetic elements, in Latin American culture, include Rubén Darío's poetry, accepted as an element typical of this culture. This makes me return to the previous issue: the contents of Darian poetry would not appear to allude to Latin American reality: at least not everyday reality. Hence, I suggest this idea: the formal resources used by Darío are those that the so-called 'people' like. What does it matter to the people, if Darío is experimenting with the alexandrine, with the 'serventesio,'[4] with internal rhyme, or 'cross-rhyme'? In some way, the technical virtuosity is intuited. Not at the circus level of juggling, but as flesh and blood of the commitment to poetry. One way or another, Rubén Darío speaks to the ear of Spanish speaker. This is the poetic form he adopts. With this I want to say that liking a verse such as this one:

> Margarita, está linda la mar,
> y el viento
> trae esencia sutil de azahar;
> yo siento
> en el alma una alondra cantar,
> tu acento.

[3] A machine designed to use the rays of the sun to produce energy (see 'The Paris Exhibition. Sun Engine,' *The Engineer*, The Willmer and Rogers News Company, 31 Beckman Street, New York, Jan. 17, 1879: 40).

[4] According to the Dictionary of the Spanish Real Academy: 'Cuarteto en que riman el primer verso con el tercero y el segundo con el cuarto.'

> Margarita
> te voy a contar
> un cuento. (Darío 1985: 374).

is not elicited by the sentimentality that pervades it, but by the timbre, the tone and the rhymes that animate it. The magic is that someone who has studied at university and knows all the secrets of Modernist poetry likes it, and it is also liked by a great number of Latin Americans who have not had access to a formal education. Darío's popularity is real, almost tangible. And Darío continues to be popular, despite the fact that more than a century has now passed since he wrote his work. My previous statements lead us to one conclusion: to reach the heights of popularity, an artist does not need to make concessions of content or form, as Darío does not do. Artists reach the heights of popularity thanks to the aesthetic form of their compositions. In some way, the so-called 'people' are prepared for appreciating art. I apologise for the repetition: not because of the content but because of the form of this art. In this regard, Darío offers an advanced lesson: the form, in his work, becomes content. The famous 'Marcha triunfal,' which turns us into spectators of the passing by of an onomatopoeic parade, could serve as a good example, although perhaps a somewhat emphatic one. If so, another example is his most intimate and most intense poetry, where the poet appears to tone down shades, colours, lights. Here it would be worth changing old definitions of poetry. No longer 'an expression of a sentiment' but 'an expression of a form,' a form that is already content. Perhaps there is more complicity than that which we want to accept when we start: 'El varón que tiene corazón de lis/alma de querube, lengua celestial/el mínimo y dulce Francisco de Asís...' (Darío 1985: 416-19); because we know that it is all a linguistic game, that the only interesting truth is not theology but the pure playful truth of the play on words, clever and smiley, parodic, cunning. It is possible that this could help us understand the diffusion of Otto René Castillo and of other political or less political poets.

Before taking about Miguel Ángel Asturias, I would like to recall Salvador Salazar Arrué, known as Salarrué. If we go through a manual of the history of Central American literature, it is quite probable that we find Salarrué among the realist authors, under the criollista rubric. I propose to examine this classification. In terms of criollismo, Salarrué has it all in *Cuentos de barro*. Poe's 'philosophy of composition,' the imitation of 'popular speech,' the rural thematic, the moral at the end. 'La botija' reads like a story from *Thousand and One Nights*. It has a lazy peasant as its protagonist, who has been convinced that on his land (which, with his lax attitude, the owner has turned into a wild moor) a pitcher of gold coins is buried. The peasant begins to dig around to find this treasure. Finally, without realising it, he has ploughed the land and this, in itself, is the treasure he finds (Salarrué 1984: 11-14). 'Semos malos' opens with a father and son, trinket vendors between El Salvador and Guatemala, who camp in the middle of the forest. A band of thieves attacks and kills them. Among the stolen objects is a record player. They put on a record and a sentimental song is heard. The bandits are moved, they weep and think: 'Semos malos' (Salarrué 1984: 19-25). The stories are enjoyable, original and have an ancient flavour. They recall another story, by the Honduran Froilán Turcios, also considered criollista. It is called 'La mejor limosna.' We are in a town upcountry. It rains relentlessly. Someone knocks on the door of the house of a thug. The thug opens. He pulls out a gun, puts a bullet between the visitor's eyes and says: 'Esta es la mejor limosna' (Turcios 1930: 280). Like with Salarrué, Turcios' story is amusing, a memorable anecdote, but the difference between them is noticeable.

In fact, Salarrué is not a typical realist. The realist writer distinguishes very well between the language of the narrator and that of his characters. Heir to Romanticism's tales of customs, the realist speaks like an educated man, urban and above all 'civilised.' Salarrué starts a process that Asturias will bring to perfection. We see it at the beginning of 'La honra':

> Había amanecido nortiando; la Juanita limpia; lagua helada; el viento llevaba zopes y olores. Atravesó el llano. La nagua se le amelcochaba y se le hacía calzones. El pelo se le hacía alacranes negros en la cara. La Juana iba bien contenta, chapudita y apagándole los ojos al viento (Salarrué 1984: 15).

The narrator embraces the language of his characters and imitates its phonetics. In that way, the author, who we know is educated, distances himself from the narrator, creates him as character and allows him to speak. The practice is as old as literature: it is a question of using the language of ordinary people, to craft it aesthetically. No one is fooled: it is about a literary practice. The same way the ancient minstres use the Castilian romance to sing about the heroic deeds of knights. Or Dante Alighieri uses the Tuscan language poetically. Breaking away from the distinction between an educated narrator and a 'popular' narrator, from early on, Salarrué also breaks away from the distinction between 'educated' and 'popular' literature. It is still an operation in the making, demonstrated by the fact that he puts the deviations from the Castilian norm in bold. Paradoxically, in the chosen text, Salarrué forgets that the word 'amelcochada' is also a Central American localism. Note how, in the passage cited, the initial enumeration mirrors the classical method of working meticulously.

The *Cuentos de barro* are an excellent example of the best in Poe's aesthetic and put Salarrué in the same position as Horacio Quiroga regarding the narrative of the River Plate. I cannot find another Central American short story writer who has exerted the same degree of influence as Salarrué on both contemporary and subsequent narrative. There must be others like him, but few with such influence in Central America.

What Salarrué begins in *Cuentos de barro* is brought to fulfilment in a delicious book, unique in Central American literature for its audacity, ingenuity and creativity. The book, which would appear to be for children, is in fact conceived as a book by children. It is called *Cuentos de cipotes*. Here Salarrué jumps the barrier of linguistic correction and passes straight on to a kind of phonetic transcription of Salvadoran Spanish, or rather Salvadoran Spanish the way he imagines it. The miracle of literature is expressed here beneath the guise of verisimilitude. Salarrué imagines that Salvadoran children speak in this way. He trusts he can make us believe this invention. *Cuentos de cipotes* can only be read aloud. Its imitation of the oral begins with two conventions: the opening of each story with the tag 'puesiesque' and its closure with another: 'siacabuche.' What we encounter in between is a feast of language, where a narrative voice, supposedly that of a child, tells a kind of story, which sometimes does not even turn out to be an anecdote. If we consider that the abandonment of the anecdote will come many years later as a sign of postmodernity (in terms of the fragmentation of narrative discourse) we can better appreciate the extent to which Salarrué's literary production was a head of its time. The titles alone suffice: 'El cuento del Cipitío Cabezón que tenía reló y comía cáscaras de majoncho'; 'El cuento de la rosa caliente y la tortiya marchita'; 'El cuento de la escuelita miñatura, la monjita linda y la tentada de juguete'; 'El cuento de la Cuitía y el pedico con la pipiada'; 'El cuento del cabayo que se enebró por una ventana onde la niña Timo, con sus subsecuentes consecuencias y efectos' (Salarrué 1961). Salarrué's work

on language carries a risk: confidence in his ability to convince the reader that it is about infantile language and not 'infantilism.' The gamble is on the faultless verisimilitude of the narrator. In my opinion, he emerges unscathed from the bet. Let's look at the following story, 'El cuento de la monjita zapato sí, zapato no, pata blanca, caradiangel, pestañas de niñodios chulón':

> PUESIESQUE iban por el bosque cortando cinco negritos en un canastiyo, y eneso vieron venir por una veredita a una monjita bien chula, sonrisándose con los palos, con un zapato en una pata y en lotra no, sino que un piecito rosado, descalzo y con uñitas rosicler. Entoce la Durmita le dijo a Chitín Chisotia: '¡Mirá, Chitín que monjita la quianda suelta por aquí!, ¿no será espanto!' Y Chitín Chisotia le dijo: 'Quizá es loquita o sorámbula de día.' Y se acercaron y eya se paró mirando como muñeca, con pestañas de niñodiós chulón. '¿Quiánda haciendo?' le dijeron, y eya se sonrisó otragüelta y hizo el bendito y dijo con hablado finito: 'Es que ando cuidando una manadita diángeles.' Entonces la Durmita miró asustada por todos lados y pararriba, y también Chitín Chisotia y sólo vieron un montón de pericos ayá en la rama diuna ceiba pelona. Y entonce le dijeron: '¿Questá loquita, monjita?' Y la monjita hizo sí conla cabeza y levantó la patía descalcita que no tenía zapato y se la miraron bien y la soplaron una hormiga que liandaba, y la monjita suspiristró como seis veces, siempre con caritemuñeca y les dijo: '¡Mirad almitas delimbo mis corderos celestes como revoloteyan en el viento del Señor!.' Y Chitín dijo: '¡Agüen, si los pericos son verdes, no celestes!' Y la Durmita dijo: '¡Cayate, tonto, si no nos está hablando de pericos sino que de cordeles!' Y entonces la monjita, siempre haciendo el bendito y mirando con caradiangel, deladito y tristoncita, siguió caminando como sorámbula, sin decir adiós, y eyos se jueron despacito detrás y cuando puso el pie chulón en una espinota de ishcanal pegó un respingo y dijo: '¡Ay, babosada, ya me ensarté una espina!' y entonce le dijeron. '¡Ah, qué malcriada la monjita, buenostá por andar de papa mirando pararriba sin chancleta y por no regalar medayitas!' Y salieron a toda virazón y siacabuche (Salarrué 1961: 43-44).

The relationship of this prose with that of Guillermo Cabrera Infante y of José Agustín, both of whom are later authors, reminds us of the definition 'novela del lenguaje,' coined, unhappily, by some critics. I ascribe the infelicitous nature of this term to the fact that all novels are novels of language. Salarrué definitively breaks away from the distance between author and narrator and turns to direct discourse. The technical novelty in the *Cuentos de cipotes* tends to be surpassed by the impeccable grace of the invention. However, one could consider these formal innovations in terms of the delightful anecdotes invented by Salarrué. Only two years later, in 1963, Asturias was to publish *Mulata de Tal*, another advance in the linguistic games of the following decade. I would like to conclude these brief observations about Salarrué highlighting his importance for Central American literature. Little known outside the Isthmus, the Salvadoran writer left his mark, be it because he was widely read or because the influence of a writer passes through labyrinths of readings, reaching later generations, to a far greater extent than one might think.

I have mentioned Miguel Ángel Asturias. I was about to write a set phrase: 'his works cannot be ignored,' but I have recalled those who ignored him, owing to ideological antipathy, or perhaps simply to human antipathy. Jorge Luis Borges, when he mentions him, calls him 'farabuto' (according the version that Bioy Casares gives us), and on Sunday 17 May 1959, when he dines in Bioy's house (the date is irrelevant, because he dines in Bioy's

house almost every day), he says: 'Wally imagina que uno sigue la obra de Asturias, que ha leído *El señor Presidente* y *Soluna [...]* Wally pide indulgencia para Asturias, porque un día lo vio en una iglesia. Yo todavía le tengo más rabia por esa pequeña representación' (Bioy Casares 2006: 492). By the lowly means of gossip it is revealed to us that Borges did not read Asturias, but that, notwithstanding, he made literary judgements about Guatemalan author.

Borges is not the only one who voices judgements about Asturias without having read his work. There are those who read his work for no other purpose than the completion of their undergraduate dissertation and are annoyed at him because of it, just as it annoyed Borges knowing that Asturias had attended church. Maybe the Argentinian author pictured Asturias as a hypocritical Catholic. Maybe the undergraduate critics imagine they have seen Asturias go into the church of 'indigenism' and this small sacrilege bequeaths them the same rage. We are talking about churches and the sacred, about blasphemies and sacraments. Maybe it is better to talk about literature outside of theologies.

I wanted to propose the idea that Asturias has been, for Central American literature, a paradigm in at least three aspects: the practice of literature as a profession, the approach to the characters as human beings without labels, the use of language as a literary mannerism. About the first, it seems pointless to highlight that it is not something new. The professionalization of the writer comes with Modernism, for those who can afford it, who are few. There is nothing original about Asturias. Darío had already been a full time poet, and remember that Arévalo Martínez liked to use the expression 'poetísimo' to exaggerate complete dedication to the literary profession. But Arévalo could only achieve this status when he attained the privilege of becoming Director of the National Library, a symbolic post whose duties were imaginary. The rest of his life was spent doing unlikely jobs, as bookkeeper on country estates, putting their country states' accounts in great jeopardy, or grammar teacher in some secondary schools, where the students had fun correcting his spelling mistakes. Being a professional writer, now as then, required substantial economic backing from one's family, or, in its absence, an almost suicidal leaning toward begging and misery. Asturias, like Cardoza, belongs to the first group. Had it not been due to his wealthy family, *El Señor Presidente* would never have been printed. The rest of his contemporaries had to work freelance to be able to support themselves, some as journalists, some as diplomats (and these are the best cases, since there were those who wore themselves out in teaching, in the courts, in the banks). What is it that makes Asturias different? That his professionalization was successful to the extent, in addition to receiving many other prizes, he was granted the Noble Prize for Literature in 1967. In this respect, Asturias' public figure takes on an important role for later generations: one can be a professional writer, make money, become famous and gain success. I can say that, for the generation to which I belong, his example was decisive (whether or not we have managed to imitate it) because it happened at the same time as the explosion called the 'New Latin American Novel,' led by García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar and Mario Vargas Llosa, all masters of this professionalization. Since Asturias, conceiving of literature as a profession is not only possible but can even be advocated as desirable. I think I can say that the writers who are most prominent at the beginning of the 21st century in Central America have this goal in mind. Jacinta Escudos, Anacristina Rossi, Horacio Castellanos Moya, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Humberto Ak'abal seriously consider the possibility of rejecting any profession that is not that of writer or poet.

Another aspect of Asturias, in which I think he can be seen as a model for later literature, is the treatment of his characters. Were it not for their names we would not be able distinguish

between a Ladino[5] and an Indian. Only in *El Señor Presidente* does Asturias make the mistake of making an Indian speak with the pronunciation attributed by the Ladinos to the Indian. In Chapter XXVII, 'Camino al destierro,' an Indian tells his story to the fugitive general Canales: 'Vas a ver, tatita, que robo sin ser ladrón de oficie, pues antos yo, aquí como me ves, ere dueñe de un terrenite, cerca de aquí, y de oche mulas. Tenía mi casa, mi mujer y mis hijes, ere honrade como vos...' (221).

In this text, the mimesis of how the Indian speaks is easy to note: in many cases the word ends in an 'e' instead of an 'o.' 'Oficio' becomes 'oficie.' This kind of perception on the part of the Spanish of the Guatemala highlands also occurs with the Spanish of the highlands of central Mexico, and is due to a phenomenon that linguists call 'vocales caedizas': a weakening in the pronunciation of the final vowal, which is pronounced as if in a blow. The poor aural comprehension of the non-indigenous perceives as an 'e' what is actually a kind of a murmur (Lope Blanch 1996: 14-15). In the conversation of the Ladinos, this linguistic feature becomes a defect and a motive for racist jokes.

This only concerns a short episode, which is not essential for the whole story to work. When, however, Asturias writes *Hombres de maíz*, with clear allusion to the *Popol Vuh*, his story bears no linguistic rarities and makes all the characters speak without ethnic particularities. Moreover, like in Salarrué, the narrator adopts a way of talking whose register is the Spanish spoken in Guatemala. If we take into account that language is at the core of culture, this equal treatment of the characters implies a move beyond criollismo at a time in which the custom was different. *La vorágine* is from 1924; *Doña Bárbara*, from 1929; *Huasipungo*, from 1934; *Cuentos de barro*, from 1933. We know that Asturias finished *Hombres de maíz* in 1932. The enumeration of names and dates becomes meaningful when we recall the treatment of language and the treatment of the characters in the works of the criollistas. In one way or another, the criollista author seems to reduce his peasant character to a state prior to the age of adults and the reader seems to perceive them as 'other,' different to themselves. I ask myself if the same happens with the characters in *Hombres de maíz*. To a certain degree, yes, but not in the same way as in the criollista novel. Let's say that a movement beyond the indigenism of the day in *Los ríos profundos*, for example, is detectable in the protagonist, with whom we can identify because of the cultural community that brings us closer to the young Ernesto. The superseding of indigenism in Asturias resides in the mythical nature of the characters, in their fantastical dimension. The criollista stories have something of a sociological essay about them; *Hombres de maíz* does not. Goyo Yic, Nicho Aquino, Domingo Revolorio, don Deféric are more related to the characters of Conde Lucanor, remote and close at the same time, because of their archetypical role. Coronel Chalo Godoy is every soldier and none. Gaspar Ilóm is every indigenous person and none of them. What characterises them is the fact that they are reminiscent of characters from popular fables, a bit like el don Chevo or el Tío Conejo and el Tío Coyote. In one way or another, we know that the associates of Goyo Yic and Domingo Revolorio, who finish up drinking the brandy they are taking to sell at the festival of Santa Cruz de las Cruces, are, the first one, an Indian and, the second, a Ladino, but this is of no importance, neither in the way they speak nor in the way in which they behave. This implies a fundamental stage in Latin American narrative. We are not talking about ethnic groups but about human beings, just as in Rulfo's work. I may be wrong, but Rulfo cannot appear without having previously read Asturias.

[5] 'Ladino' is a Guatemalan term used in the same way as mestizo in most other parts of Latin America.

I think Asturias' third lesson can be detected in his use of language. If his profile, perhaps, was similar to that of the Maya, with all the confusion that this misunderstanding caused, in evoking Asturias' novels one could think about one of the steles that populate the archaeological site of Copan. I think we are talking about a suggestive and admirable mistake. Asturias' prose comes from the laborious workshop opened by Rubén Darío in the so-called 'poetic-prose' of *Azul...* and continued by Gómez Carrillo, in his chroniclers polished language, and by Valle Inclán, in his almost obsessively thorough exploration of the Castilian lexicon. Via the same route, Cervantes and Quevedo and Calderón come to settle as the prestigious predecessors of the writings of the Guatemalan master. That is, perhaps, why we talk about the baroque and the neo-baroque. Quevedo's excess does not have much to do with Cervantes' questioning of a society that appears new to him and, in some sense, unjust and incomprehensible. The grotesque, in Quevedo, has a lot of moralism; the sane madness, in Cervantes, tries to adapt to a new moral code. These attitudes are not remote from the language they generate. In Quevedo there is a solid ownership of the words, and this solidness authorises an avalanche of rhetorical games that correspond perfectly to Gracián's *conceptista* theory.[6] In Cervantes reality escapes, the avalanche is the new world which comes to light as one travels along the roads of Spain, and the language, consequently, does not manage to capture that reality. There is, in the baroque attitude, one way or another, a certain security about the world; in the mannerism of Cervantes, however, the opposite is true. If we had to assign Miguel Ángel Asturias to one of these domains, maybe the most appropriate would be to place him in that of mannerism, for reasons of similarity, rather than accuracy and precision. But one observes in Asturias this tense evolution, in his major works, as in the search for a language to express the world. A search that begins with *El Señor Presidente* and finishes with the delirium in *Mulata de Tal*. Perhaps Asturias' lesson lies not in having imposed a language or a style but in having proposed a hazardous and daring search for a language and a style. And that would be Asturias' third lesson.

Let's now look at the poetry of Ernesto Cardenal. The Reverend Father, a follower of Liberation Theology, a member of an ancient Nicaraguan family (he is said to descend from Pedrarias Dávila), of carefully-fashioned prophetic appearance, arouses strong empathies and antipathies. Especially with regard to his political participation. Cardenal receives the diatribes of the neo-liberalist believer Mario Vargas Llosa and enters, abundantly, in the Peruvian writer's collection of betas noires, alongside brothers Raúl and Fidel Castro, Commandant Chávez, Evo Morales, Lula Ignazio da Silva. But just as the Peruvian patriarch cannot be judged literarily because of his ideas, which don't overshadow some excellent novels, neither can Reverend Cardenal be judged, in poetry, for his political adventures. There is, on *You Tube*, a short video which documents the Poetry Workshop run by Cardenal, whose members are children seriously affected by cancer. There is the poet, the prophet, the priest.

I find in Ernesto Cardenal's poetry a stronger aesthetic than that of his contemporaries in the *Vanguardia* group. Cardenal himself accepts that his reading of North American poetry that is contemporary to him can be denominated 'exteriorsimo.' The rupture with Darío and Modernism is not enough. Cuadra, Coronel Urtecho and Joaquín Pasos do it too. I think we notice in Cardenal's work this latter force which entails the idea of a new conception of literature. I am not referring to the features that the criticism has highlighted and repeated: the

[6] Conceptismo was a 17th century literary style which made extensive use of conceits.

colloquialism, the pastiche, the materialism, the collage and other issues we all know. I would like to draw attention to another feature, which seems interesting to me at this time.

The question of the form, which has been the guiding thread in my considerations about the other authors, represents a kind of deception or mirage, in Cardenal's work. The so-called 'exteriorsimo' would appear to do without rhythmic and metric considerations, or to put it more plainly, it would seem to lack the musicality that Darío imposed with Modernism. But if one reads Cardenal's poetry aloud, or, even better, if one listens to a recital of these poems, one realises the careful rhythmic study there is in his poems. Let's look at an example. In one of his most famous compositions: '*2 A. M.*,' Cardenal describes the nocturnal service in the Trappist monastery where he is spending his novitiate. With a taste for paradox, the description of the religious ceremony turns into an evocation of Nicaragua: not with the nostalgia of one who presents his memories of the fatherland as a myth but with reminiscences of the life he has just abandoned, replete with partying and abandon in the shadow of Somoza's ferocious dictatorship. Yet, if we take note of the rhythm of the poem, we see that special attention is paid to its rhythmic stress. Let's look at the first verses:

> Dos aÉme. EslahÓra delofÍcio noctÚrno, ylaiglÉsia
> enpenÚmbra parÉce que está llÉna de demÓnios (Cardenal 1972: 87).

I should make clear that this particular way of presenting the rhythmic stress is mine, but I find no other manner of highlighting how the poet attentively captures the sound of the poem, when, at the same time, he would seem only to be paying attention to its content. The following observation sounds a bit old fashioned: the verses of this poem are dominated by anapaest. Throughout the verses one must pay close attention to this rhythm, which gradually seems to turn into a kind of metaphor of the repeated and monotonous prayer of the monks. The use of the anapaestic verse is reinforced with a highly structured rhetorical device, which it appears to me is very consciously used. The alliterations are more than evident:

> Vuelven viejas escenas de cine, pesadillas, horas
> solas en hoteles, bailes, viajes, besos, bares.
> Y surgen rostros olvidados. Cosas siniestras.
> Somoza asesinado sale de su mausoleo. [...]

There is more rhetoric that one might think in this anti-rhetorical poem. When Cardenal says that the church 'parece que está llena de demonios' he uses a simile that smacks of oxymoron. There exists a subtle distinction between the 'penumbra,' which is the appearance of the church at this time of night, and the 'tinieblas,' which are the internal spiritual darkness, provoked by one's memories. The past is presented in the form of chaotic enumeration: scenes from film, nightmares, time spent alone, dances, travels, kisses, bars, with a notable pun: 'horas solas en hoteles' which accompanies the alliterations, perhaps the most notable resource of this fragment. The poetry, therefore, extends itself in parallelisms between the biblical and the present, to then close cyclically with: 'Y la iglesia está helada, como llena de demonios.'

Despite what has been set out above, I would like to draw attention to an aspect of content in Ernesto Cardenal. I do so because I believe I detect that these themes determine the form and the aesthetic intention of the Nicaraguan poet. I think I find in Cardenal, from the

time of the poetry of the convent, a severe critique of modernity. Let's look at the poem called 'Kentucky.' In it we see a heavenly description of the State of Kentucky, as it must have been at the time it was explored by Daniel Boone. There is certain pleasure (which reminds one of some features of Romanticism) in the ending which destroys the picture that the poem has been building up at a slow pace. In that way, the relaxed recognition of the beauty of the Kentuckian plain, crossed by the Ohio river, is destroyed with a note in brackets: '(que ahora huele a fenol)' (Cardenal 1972: 112).[7] The second stanza is parallel to the first and continues to describe the ancient paradise this North American state used to be. From the middle of the poem, the spell is broken, with a description of what has become of this ancient paradise: a hellhole of noises and bad smells (the grass-cutting machines, the tinkling of the highballs, the roar of the radio, the shouting of the croquet game, etc.). The poem closes with an apocalyptic and environmentalist description *ante litteram*: 'Y ahora en el Ohio desembocan todas las cloacas,/desperdicios industriales, sustancias químicas./Los detergentes de las casas han matado a los peces,/y el Ohio huele a fenol…' (Cardenal 1972: 113). The poem is fiercely critical of modern society, seen in its supposedly most developed state: the well-being of North American society. Where before there were grasslands and landscapes, now there is ruin: grass-cutting machines, highballs, croquet, volley-ball, baseball, hi-fi, barbecued steak. The river is polluted by industrial waste. Civilization has destroyed Nature.

In the 'Oración por Marylin Monroe' the rhythm of the poem is a religious prayer. The exhortation 'Señor,' with which it opens, is unmistakable. Almost immediately, Cardenal resorts to allusion: 'ése no era su verdadero nombre' (Cardenal 1972: 95). Norma Jean Baker (1926-1962) did not have a father and the problematic life of her mother forced her to move from one adoptive family to another. In order to have a home and avoid the abuse of lustful philanthropists, she married when she was sixteen years old. Only when she becomes a Hollywood star will she change her name to Marylin Monroe. Cardenal makes use of pastiche, of documents taken from a magazine, in this case *Time*, to recount a childhood dream of the actress. And although Cardenal accepts, in the first instance, the psychoanalytical interpretation of the dream, he immediately goes beyond this interpretation to give it a Christian slant: 'Tú conoces nuestros sueños mejor que los psiquiatras' (Cardenal 1972: 96). The girl had dreamt that she was in a temple. This temple, according to the poem, is not a film studio but the very body of the diva. The body, in this interpretation is the divine temple. The body of every man and of every woman holds God, hence it is sacred, since it is not only the image of the divinity but also its repository. Moreover, the church is Christ's body and every one of its members is a representation of God. From this premise stems a first critique of modernity, when the poem attacks 'este mundo contaminado de pecados y radiactividad' (Cardenal 1972: 96). The rejection of modernity does not come from a moral or reactionary attitude but from a prescient critique of progress and its failed promises. Thus: 'para la tristeza de no ser santos/se le recomendó el Psicoanálisis' (Cardenal 1972: 97). While modernity promises the 'construction of the stable subject,' the poem dedicated to Marylin describes exactly the opposite for us: 'the fragmentation of the subject' typical of the post-modern epoch. The whole poem recounts the disintegration of the subject, an epic of destruction. The great failure of modernity is represented in a powerful image:

[7] Phenol is one of the main derivatives of the production of carbon and petrochemicals. When it comes into contact with the chlorine in drinking water it forms cancerous phenol-chlorinated compounds, whose smell is unpleasant, sickly sweet like petrol.

> Sus romances fueron un beso con los ojos cerrados
> que cuando se abren los ojos se descubre que fue bajo reflectores
> y apagan los reflectores!
> y desmontan las dos paredes del aposento (era un set
> cinematográfico) mientras el Director se aleja con su libreta
> porque la escena ya fue tomada (Cardenal 1972: 97).

We all know that the ultimate promise of modern society is to bequeath every one of its members with happiness. This happiness is described as the total fulfilment of all our material needs. Cardenal describes this happiness as one describes a fantasy: the staging of a dream. In this case, as soon as one opens one's eyes, what one thought was a love story reveals itself as a cinematographic representation, which ends when the lights are turned off, the scene is dismantled and the director considers the take finished. Maybe it is, more than an image, an allegory. Modernity is no more than a fantasy. This critique of modernity situates Cardenal as someone who predicts postmodern ideas, not only because of the content of his poems but also because of their form. In 'Managua, 6:30 P.M.,' the use of advertisements is notable. Putting forward the following as verses shows indisputable boldness:

> TACA BUNGE KLM SINGER
> MENNEN HTM GÓMEZ NORGE
> RPM SAF ÓPTICA SELECTA (Cardenal 1972: 110-11).

The language of advertising becomes the language of poetry. It is notable that, in this composition, modernity receives two epithets: 'bárbara y primitiva.' Perhaps as in no other, in this poem we find the pop aesthetic of 'exteriorismo,' with its self-assured use of modernity, as Andy Warhol's tin of Campbell's soup from 1962. As we have seen in Darío, Salarrué and Asturias, in Cardenal there is also an issue of form that becomes powerful content.

It might be said that the enumeration is brief. The Central American twentieth century has other significant and influential authors. With good reason, it could be implied that the conclusions are found in the selection. Among the authors suggested names such as Rafael Arévalo Martínez, Arturo Ambrogi, Luis Cardoza, Martínez Zeledón, Enrique Gómez Carrillo, Rogelio Sinán, Augusto Monterroso or Sergio Ramírez might just as easily feature. In my defence, I can only respond that I did not want to produce a catalogue but rather present an argument about the importance of the form as content, a lesson that seems important to me not only in terms of contemporary Central American literature. Having selected one author and not the other inevitably entails a value judgement. But whoever might want to object could perhaps agree that in the act of offering literary opinions the taste and the emotions of the exponent cannot be totally absent. It is enough that they be judged as reasonable and that to this patience and benevolence the judgement of others may be added.

We enter the twenty-first century in 1982 with the publication of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. What is this book about? A young maya-k'iche' woman tells a Venezuelan anthropologist about her life and customs. The anthropologist, Elizabeth Burgos, seeks the help of anonymous editors (though not that anonymous, since their names become known with time), orders and reworks the story and presents it to the literary contest of the *Casa de las Américas*, where it wins first prize in the category of Testimony. The account of the life of Rigoberta Menchú contains an interesting part where

the customs of the indigenous people of Guatemala are recounted: the rituals of birth, of sowing the fields, of marriage. All this had been studied and discussed in the different volumes of the *Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca*. What is new in Rigoberta is the tone: clear, naïve, fresh. There is a touch of elegance in this book that comes from the oral ability of the Maya, the same one that makes Humberto Ak'abal a charismatic and popular poet. In recounting her life Rigoberta does not evade the most difficult part of the existence of indigenous people in Guatemala: the descent into hell through heavy labour for the big landowners and the sorrow resulting from the genocide suffered in the 1980s. Those who experienced it know it. They do not need North American anthropologists to come and explain that life is a dream, and that dreams are just that, dreams.

We enter the twenty-first century with a work that destroys the ancient divisions between literary genres and puts in doubt scholarly definitions of literature. As happens with this kind of literature, it is easier to say what it is not than to define it. As is true for Latin American literature in general, it is characterised by mixture and confusion, the amalgam of times, places and literary concepts, that which some critics have called 'hybridity,' while others, upset by the term, have preferred to call 'heterogeneity,' though it is not less ugly a term. We cannot deny that Rigoberta Menchú's testimony has found many passionate readers. We cannot deny that this passion has also been transmitted to its literary criticism. We cannot deny that we are talking about the most loved and most hated work of the late twentieth century in Latin America. In these three denials is the literary affirmation of the book, and it makes us remember, quite naturally, other foundational works of our literature that have provoked similar passions: the *Verdadera historia*, by Bernal, and the *Comentarios reales*, by the Inca Garcilaso. We all remember the comic attitude of the scholars who disapprove of Bernal's work and advise him to correct it. And we remember the angry reaction of Bernal to their scholarly remarks. Am I only speaking for myself? And who did you want to speak, the birds in the fields? We all remember the harsh claims of the Inca Garcilaso, when, accused of being a mestizo by the Spanish, a word loaded with great racial distain at the time, he responds raising the flag of the supposed defect as a sign of culture and pride. When time passes and the arguments fade – some full of vulgarity – it will be said of Rigoberta's testimony that it should be added to the landmarks of Hispanic American literature and that there were, in the past, great discussions whose authors disappeared into oblivion. Because of what interests me, I want to point out that this testimony stamps character on the Central American literature of the start of the century: the emergence of the indigenous voices which for the first time, since colonial times, speak without intermediaries. I acknowledge the contradiction: Rigoberta speaks through intermediaries and, nevertheless, she opens doors to other indigenous people who take the word without the need to seek aid from educated Ladinos. Luis de Lión is the pioneer, with his *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*, and is followed and accompanied by Humberto Ak'abal and Luis Sam Colop.

Central American literature enters the twenty-first century with many young writers whose work is known inside and outside the Isthmus. The novelty of the century is in the possibility of entering into international markets through Spanish publishers. The first filter is the Spanish editors and literary agents. Once through, the translations and reviews in other countries can follow. Perhaps a distinct feature of the twenty-first century is the need to pay attention to the international publishing industry and to international criticism. In that way, we can distance ourselves from the national literary traditions, to enter straight into the generational movements of the wider Hispanic American world. I would like to propose the

idea that the dominant aesthetic canon is the one laid down by Roberto Bolaño, who not only suggested literary modes but also names, sometimes in a slightly bitter manner. To the García Márquez paradigm, which he loathed, he preferred Borges' lesson. However, in Bolaño I think we can see quite a conscious assimilation of the North American minimalist story, especially that of Charles Bukowsy, with his somewhat comfortable aura of doom, and also the reformed Raymond Carver. Bolaño's disciples dominate the current literary landscape, although in some of them we can observe a parable that moves from the intimate story to social realism.

To avoid running the risk of compiling a catalogue, as well as the risk that those excluded see in their exclusion a value judgement, I consider that the two most significant authors of our time, after Sergio Ramírez, are Rodrigo Rey Rosa and Horacio Castellanos Moya. In the literary content of the first lies an interesting parable, related, probably, to his life: from 'cosmopolitan' themes (to give them some sort of denomination) he has gradually come to concentrate on the Guatemalan experience, to the point of culminating with what is probably his best novel: *El material humano*, a sort of intellectual diary written during his visits to the Guatemalan Police Archive, where a century of persecutions and horrors are hidden. In an extraordinary palimpsest of all kinds of texts, Rey Rosa manages to recreate the paranoiac climate, the 'total institution' that is Guatemalan society and not only during these times. Also here Rey Rosa demonstrates his characteristic style, which brings him closest to a completely new conception of literature, not only in his own country: an ambiguity that encompasses content and form. Horacio Castellanos Moya, for his part, from the very first of his narrative works, shows the indisputable mettle of a narrator. In the course of time, this creative talent has come to focus on the recounting of violent acts in El Salvador and Guatemala, with a series of tremendously dense examples of literature noir that will be essential reading for all those who want to remember our times.

I will be forgiven for concluding these thoughts without going too deeply into contemporary issues, for it would be excessively ambitious to give definitive views about what is contingent, contemporary. Who knows if we might not have to confirm, with regard to much of what is indisputable today, Marx's phrase made famous by Berman: 'all that is solid melts into air' (Berman 1982)? The only issue I would be prepared to be unequivocal about is the consolidation of indigenous literature. In a recent competition of literature in the Maya languages, sponsored by Rodrigo Rey Rosa, the expressive power of many of the works caught my attention. Unfortunately, I could only read them in Spanish translations, rendered by the same authors who are perfectly bilingual. Reading them opened up new worlds for me, as happened some time ago with the literature I am used to reading: new words, new forms and new imagination. And all this expressive novelty in an assured tone, without stammering or primitivisms, without naïveté or sentimentality, but with the mature tone of a literary form that recognises its profound roots in the millenary culture on which it is based. This is a fact. The twenty-first century opens with abundant and ambitious 'official' literature, and also, with less pageantry and less publicity. It opens with a solid indigenous literature that would appear, alongside the whole social movement, to aim to share the literary landscape of the entire century for the first time since the epoch of the Spanish colonisation.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 2

CENTRAL AMERICAN NARRATIVITY AND THE COLONIALITY OF POWER: IS POST-WAR LITERATURE NEW?

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In an article written in Fall 2009 for a multi-volume history of Central American literature being compiled by a team of researchers, I stated that there are multiple ways of problematizing Central America's post-war literature. By way of example, I cited two alternatives, among many other possibilities. I stated that this task could be done by considering broad epistemic parameters such as those articulated by the coloniality of power, and added that it could also be done through a psychoanalytical reading, considering Central American post-war production as a sort of failed process of mourning. For the purposes of my previous article, I developed the latter direction. For this one, I shall follow the first one of the two alternatives cited.

I therefore begin this article by positing the question: How is Central American narrative production conceived in relation to globalizing neo-liberal trends, capitalism, and modernity? Since at least 1855, when William Walker invaded Nicaragua, Central American countries have always operated within the geopolitical imaginary of the United States. The modern literature of the isthmus has, in consequence, been an oppositional discursivity to this hegemony. Twentieth-century narrativity in the region has, for the most part, invoked a two-pronged approach to its articulation. It has constituted itself as the 'unheard voice' from those populations and from the geo-historical area that has suffered more directly the consequences of the U.S. imperial aspirations, while simultaneously articulating a counter-discourse to the positivist, racialized depiction of Central American subjects by nineteenth-century U.S. justifiers of this occupation such as geographer E.G. Squier or historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, by creating alternative social-imaginaries articulating national histories and

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teleologies pointing in the direction of the conformation of non-U.S. hegemonized nation-states.[1]

According to many contemporary critics, globalization is a set of designs to manage, control and homogenize the world along neo-liberal tenets. Theorists operating from within the perspective of the coloniality of power argue in turn that the non-occidental world has undergone three stages of globalization, and are in the process of initiating a fourth one. To quote Mignolo:

> The first global design of the modern world was Christianity, a cause and a consequence of the incorporation of the Americas into the global vision of an orbis christianus [...]. The global design of Christianity was part of the European Renaissance and was constitutive of modernity and of its darker side, coloniality. (2000: 721)

In his narrative, Mignolo then places the second one in the European Enlightenment, and argues that, whereas 'the first was a religious project; the second was secular' (2000: 722), both of them had the effect of being linked to 'coloniality and to the emergence of the modern/colonial world' (2000: 722). The third one is set in the aftermath of World War II, associated with the U.S. and 'transnational colonialism' (2000: 725).

If we are to borrow Mignolo's phases of globalization for our analysis to give further breadth to our understanding of Central American post-war literature, we could very well position the emergence of Central American narrative at the tail-end of the second stage, still marked by an Enlightenment framework, yet placed at the point in which U.S. imperialism begins to displace northern Europe as the focus of what is defined as 'the West.' It is therefore a narrative that emerges still within Enlightenment parameters, and one still marked by the cosmopolitan set of projects designed by Kant at the end of the eighteen-century to articulate principles of sociability within an Enlightenment framework, albeit as a critical perspective. It emerges and consolidates itself as an emancipatory narrative. But emancipatory of what? Of U.S. imperialism in a strictly political sense, absolutely. Suffice to return to Darío's 'Ode to Roosevelt' from 1906. We could very well quote other narrative titles, such as *La oficina de paz de Orolandia* (1925), by Rafael Arévalo Martínez, *La sombra de la Casa Blanca* (1927), by Máximo Soto-Hall, or *Mamita Yunai* (1940), by Carlos Luis Fallas. But, was this contestatary literature that pre-dates World War II truly emancipatory from the overall Enlightenment framework? I think not. This was a narrativity that wanted to conform to and be operative within the given parameters of the Enlightenment framework, articulating a social imaginary that sustained its guiding principles with the centrality of freedom, democracy, and reason as primary values of society, while clamouring for a rise of the public sphere, where *letrados* could once again shine as the unacknowledged legislators of the world, in Shelley's terms. *Letrados*' resentment of U.S. interference in the region was sustained more by their belief, faith even, in the fact that the U.S. was the sole obstacle preventing Central American nations from becoming those enlightened little nation-states of fantasy where everything would operate like clockwork, in line with figurations of what Central America could potentially be, as they had originally been depicted by José Cecilio del Valle (1780-1834) or Mariano Gálvez (1794-1862), to name only those two *letrados* writing in the 1820s and 1830s. Costa Rica's self-image of 'the Switzerland of Central America'

[1] Rodríguez (2004) dedicates a chapter to E.G. Squier's writings on Central America.

would be in this case an apt trope of the horizon of imaginary expectations of these narrativities for the entire region in the mid-fifties.

According to the same theorists of globalization previously alluded to, the third global design, explicitly associated with the U.S.'s 'trans-national colonialism' is the one that ultimately impacts the Central American civil wars. But this design itself slides from a developmentalist phase, elaborated at first with the creation of both the U.N. and its economic arms, especially the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL, in Spanish), which was hegemonic from the 1950s through the 1970s, to a neo-liberal one from the 1980s onwards. If the regional narrativity commonly associated to the 1960-1990 'guerrillerista' period were to be a literature attempting to go against the grain of U.S.-centred developmentalism, while all the same located within its broader purview, then I could argue that post-war Central American literature corresponds to its neo-liberal phase, and wrestles with, or depicts, the implied consequences of neo-liberal policies in the region. In this logic, the post-war period would theoretically conclude when alternatives to neo-liberalism begin to permeate Central American social imaginaries, much in the same way that Mignolo argues that the world is at present immersed in a transition to a critical cosmopolitanism in a post-national world, one reconceiving the colonialized horizon of Western modernity.

Let's look at these arguments more carefully. There is no further need at this point to review the legacy of Enlightenment in the conceptualization of the Central American federation, and then of the separate nation-states that ensued after the liberal-conservative civil wars of the 1830s. Suffice to refer to our re-readings of José Cecilio del Valle and other *letrados* configuring the social imaginaries of the time. In another article (Arias 2010), I have outlined the relationship between Del Valle and British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, as well as with German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, both of whose ideas helped Del Valle envision what the Central American federation ought to have been. We also know how, with the beginning of the Cold War, US-Central America relations became tense as a result of Guatemala's modernizing nationalist project colliding with the interests of the United Fruit Company, leading to an armed intervention in 1954. What interests me more at this time is to explore how interrelated notions of the self, autonomy and emancipation emerged within Central American literary groups in the developmentalist stage of Mignolo's third global design, and how these notions transformed themselves in the neo-liberal period. Not much needs to be added to the notion of developmentalism linked to representations of social imaginaries, which María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has not already argued. For clarity, let's recall that Saldaña-Portillo (2003) states that twentieth-century revolutionary challenges to colonialism and capitalism in the Americas failed to resist –and in fact were constitutively related to – the developmentalist narratives that justified and naturalized post-war capitalism. Her critique of development discourse even highlighted such exemplars of revolutionary and resistant political thought and practice as 'Che' Guevara, the Sandinista government, and the Guatemalan guerrilla resistance. She suggested that for each of these, developmentalist constructions framed the revolutionary struggle as a heroic movement from unconsciousness to consciousness, from a childlike backwardness toward a disciplined and self-aware maturity, whose goal was, nonetheless, the achievement of a 'developed' nation-state along modern capitalist parameters.

As for his third global design, Mignolo only sketches a macro historical approach, a time that thickens, making these designs more visible, more or less within what Bakhtin labelled 'great time.' Therefore, we have to turn in a different direction to look at how aesthetic spaces

may have operated within them. For this I turn to Foucault's 'What is Enlightenment?', focusing on the part where he leans on Baudelaire to problematize what he labels an 'attitude of modernity.' After tackling Kant's understanding of modernity, Foucault says:

> [...] by 'attitude,' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an ethos. (1984: 39)

He adds a little bit later: 'Modernity is often characterized in terms of ... a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment.' Citing Baudelaire, he amplifies his description of 'an attitude' by adding that, for Baudelaire, 'modernity is the attitude that makes it possible to grasp the "heroic" aspect of the present moment... it is the will to "heroize the present.... For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is ... to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it ..."'.

Thus, the Baudelairean modern aesthetics demands that individuals start to reflect critically on their own era and their individual selves. This points the way both for politics and for ethics. Thinking of Central America, this aesthetic model immediately brings to mind the writers' groups that first appeared on the scene from the mid-1940s on, such as the Grupo Saker-Ti in Guatemala in the late forties, the *Generación Comprometida* in El Salvador in the mid-fifties, and the *Grupo Ventana* that later coalesced around CSUCA and EDUCA in the sixties, including writers such as Sergio Ramírez, Carmen Naranjo, and Samuel Rovinski, among others. We could also include Guatemala's *Grupo Nuevo Signo* of the late 1960s.

When we place Central American narrative production in its context, we see how Foucauldian traits of modernity, read through Baudelaire, manifest themselves in these groups, in a way that had not been present in pre-World War II Central American literary production, with a few individual exceptions.[2] What the Baudelairean modern subject aims at, among other things, is both to cultivate beauty in his/her work, by satisfying his/her passions, feeling and thinking intensely, and fusing the transformations within themselves with the aesthetic production of their works. Modernity shifts from the Baudelairean dandy, a manifestation of social inactivity and non-utilitarian liberty, to the notion of *literature engagé*, as the non-utilitarian liberty shifts from the cult of the self to the cult of the social. Nonetheless, the aesthetic embodiment within the self, represented by Baudelaire, never disappears in this second stage, as we know from the iconic image of the *engagé* writer embodied by Jean-Paul Sartre, the 'universal intellectual' by self-definition. In both stages the self constitutes an embodiment of originality, whether this is original beingness as a bohemian subject or, in the second, as a politically engaged subject. In both cases their literary production is urban cosmopolitan, because, as Anita Seppä has pointed out, the city streets serve as 'living expressions of actual beauty, be this expressed in ... gestures or human faces, or just simply in the heterogeneity of the crowd' (2004: n.p.). Carmen Naranjo's *Diario de una multitud* (1974) immediately jumps to mind upon reading Seppä's lines.

[2] These exceptions include writers who lived in Europe in the 1920s such as Guatemala's Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974) and Luis Cardoza y Aragón (1901-1992). Of those who spent their lives in Central America, the only ones who could fit in this model are Rafael Arévalo Martínez (1884-1975) in Guatemala, and José Coronel Urtecho (1906-1994) and his *Grupo Literario de Vanguardia* (1929-33) in Nicaragua.

Indeed, what Foucault chronicles as a discontinuous, fleeting, bizarre and strange beauty, emerges in Central American literary production at least since Yolanda Oreamuno's *La ruta de su evasión* (1949). It offers space for differences and ruptures, from a nascent feminism in Oreamuno (1916-1956), to a reconceptualization of indigeneity from a Ladino perspective in both Miguel Angel Asturias's *Hombres de maíz* (1949) and Monteforte Toledo's salient novels of this period, *Entre la tierra y la cruz* (1948) and *Donde acaban los caminos* (1952), to the fully developed textuality that would emerge in the 1960s and 1970s with Central America's own mini-boom. In all this narrativity, artistic achievements depend upon individual innovation in language and in modes of representation on the formal level. At the same time, irrespective of their degrees of political engagement, none of these writers renounces the specifically modern attitude of making one's body, behaviour, passions, and existence a work of art. They all are bohemians at first, bohemian/militants later. In Foucault's understanding, the bohemian subject is aware of the historical limits of him/herself and his/her situation, but tries to invent him/herself as a kind of transgression of these limits. Certainly all the isthmian writers from this broad period fit within this category as well.

Perhaps the best example of these representations in the Central American mini-boom is *Pobrecito poeta que era yo...* (1976), by Roque Dalton. As those who have read this magnificently complex novel know, this text represents the construction of subjectivities of a group of young Salvadoran writers in 1960, and their failed attempts to constitute themselves as revolutionaries. If there is a difference between the modern aesthetics of the self-described by Foucault and the model created by Dalton it is that, in the latter case, the poets, unlike Baudelaire and the *poets maudits* of nineteenth-century France, the Salvadoran poets live in what Agamben (1998) calls a 'state of exception.' The fact that the State operates outside of the law enables certain forms of knowledge to be privileged over others, and certain voices to be equally recognized, even if repressed. The nature of this rogue state also forces a transformation from bohemianism to that of *engagé* writer. This would explain that the poets represented in the text, as well as the writers of the 1960s and 1970s, instead of dedicating themselves to useless passions and extreme leisure as traditional bohemian writers would, and as their own behaviour as represented in the text would dictate, feel a need to transform themselves into revolutionary subjects. The source of their tension becomes the embrace of modern aesthetics, a fact that remains unquestioned by all of them, and the contradiction this generates with the militant ethos that displaces aesthetics from the centre of their lives.

Well, within the parameters of modernity, Dalton's characters in *Pobrecito poeta que era yo...* wrestle with national identity. He does deconstruct with a corroding irony the solemnity-sentimentalism structure of thought that had previously defined the discursive articulation of an inferiority complex within identity:

> Lo que en el fondo ya quiero decir es que se vayan mucho al infierno todos los gerifaltes de las generaciones anteriores a nosotros, que huelen a jocote de corona o a camándula de vieja de puros viejitos pacíficos, seráficos... dundos, lorocos, terengos, guaguacetes, tarailos, bembos, pentágonos.... Exceptuando, claro está, a don Chico Herrera Velado, que éste si no tenía lombrices de tierra en la lengua y era honrado con su verba a carta cabal y con su pluma ya no se diga, y por eso se volvió viejito prohibido, cieguito abandonado, exiliado al haz del volcán de Izalco. (1976: 140)

Nonetheless, the inferiority complex remains rooted within the poets represented in the text, as does their struggle with national identity. They feel cheated, and respond with wounded machista pride to their perceived slights, losing themselves in all the false alternatives of romanticism, avant-gardism and criollism, as Ileana Rodríguez has pointed out (1986: 380).

The narrative text is a parody of all modern literary styles. They are reconstituted in the novel to be deconstructed immediately. The objective of this continuous process is to question the limits of subjectivity as an ethics of being. In this context, the poets re-think and constantly argue about aesthetic notions of creativity within the parameters of a certain Marxism that they intuit more than they actually know. In this context, aesthetics becomes the process by way of which the poets understand themselves as subjects. In this latter logic, they are well within the scope of modernity. Being 'pobrecito' implies being marginal to their generic understanding of cosmopolitan modernity, with which they are largely unfamiliar because of their parochialism. For them, it is a struggle between alternative moral instrumentalizations of the subject, all of which fail to deliver them from their monologist, closed, dogmatic world. They aspire to a transformative limit-experience that can both deliver them outside of their perceived marginality, and also metamorphosize them into Guevarista warriors without undergoing the pain of transformation. But they are unable to understand how to do this. In that context, the phantasmatic figure of Otto René Castillo, the Guatemalan guerrilla poet, appears as emblematic of all to which they aspire but are unable to reach. Castillo is clearly discernible in a few dialogues of the 'Party' chapter. But, otherwise, he is not actually present in the text, though all the poets refer to him or cite him at one point or another. He remains in the text as a phantasmatic signifier of what revolutionary subjects ought to be in their own imaginary conceptualizations, but most often are not. Castillo is a referent to the unattainable, essentialized idealism that darkens the quests of the poets, the fetishized representation of an auratic Central American Guevara-figure dangling uselessly in a post-auratic age.

In his article titled 'Roque romantic,' Rafael Lara-Martínez already placed *Pobrecito poeta que era yo...* within the romantic tradition of literature. Lara-Martínez appeals to the romantic heritage of the late eighteenth-century, quoting Schlegel specifically and tracing romanticism all the way to the writings on tragedy by Nietzsche, before jumping to Heidegger's assertions on 'the age of poets' as a golden age of departure into nationhood to justify his argument that Dalton's novel is a romantic project (1999: 189-90). His reading, thus, would fit within the modern articulation of the self as embodiment of originality, reflecting critically on their era and their individual selves.

How do the self, autonomy and emancipation transform themselves in the neo-liberal period? Do we see a transformation of social inactivity and non-utilitarian liberty into a social activity and a utilitarian one? Certainly there are thematic changes, no one would argue against that. Representativity displaces itself towards a broader, post-national topography, and the characters move in the direction of post-national subjectivities.[3] However, unlike what I stated in the article in question, if topographical representations do indeed undergo a transformation, and if the characters represented in these post-war texts 'reinvent themselves as individuals of the most varied sort trying to forge trans-national communities that

[3] See my 'Post-National Post-Identities: Transformations in Post-War Central American Literary Production' in this volume.

denaturalize the old nationalist discourses of authenticity,' recycling 'the remaining fragments of their cultural memory in order to reconfigure some new conception of post-national identity' (Arias 2009: 137), can we claim indeed that these shifts break with the modern notion articulated by Foucault? My sense is that, whereas these are writers who have had to live with the collapse of social utopias and nationalism, thus, forcing them into alternative thematics and post-war, dystopic subjects to represent in their literature, they do not attempt to re-define the subject of the Enlightenment in the Foucauldian mould. A *culte de soi-même* operating with certain bohemian parameters continues to be the mould of the contemporary Central American writer. A choice to be modern seems to be present as well. After all, for Baudelaire the modern cult of the self was, first of all, a manifestation of the *culture of difference*. In other words, a true artist did not follow any given rules, laws or norms, nor did s/he care for official values such as money, conformism, heterosexuality or marriage. We now see more a certain bodily level of existence, including aspects of sexuality, desire and pleasure, that were previously absent in a culturally-backward region, fostering certain cosmopolitanism without emancipation. But this does not represent a break with the specifically modern network of ideas. If anything, it represents the belated arrival of sexuality to a traditionally conservative region displaying a hard time dealing with the politics of the body. However, if what we see during its neo-liberal period is a greater remoteness from everyday life on the part of the artist, a withdrawal into complete aesthetic autonomy, an ennui on the part of the artist who is now an outsider looking in the neo-liberal machine, then what we have here is a return to the origins of modernity.

Perhaps the emblematic text to test these hypotheses is another salient Salvadoran novel of the first decade of the present century, Jacinta Escudos' *A-B-Sudario* (2003). As I have previously indicated, Cayetana, the main character in this narrative, is a figure adrift in a post-national landscape.[4] However, Cayetana's quest is also an aesthetic quest. The novel is organized around a pastiche of fragments from advertisements, the protagonist's personal diary, artefacts of popular culture, and scenes mimicking a *film noir*. The varied display of techniques of aesthetic self-empowerment support the kind of individual freedom sought by Cayetana to avoid domination by masculine subjectivities, given the presence of four male figures laden with symbolic names, The Pharisee, The Trumpeter, the Apostle Peter, and Homer, whose presence at the bar 'El Egipcio' would appear to be solely that of perpetually attempting to both interpret and harass Cayetana, with whom they are obsessed and they all desire. The main character's aesthetic practices of the self are not confined to aesthetics but also form part of her personal ethics, politics and freedom. Cayetana refuses to become a 'docile body,' manifesting obedience to the normalizing heterosexist power, yet she is incapable of conceiving an alternative outside the confining parameters of Enlightenment-derived modernity. There is no abandonment of 'the lettered city'; rather, a stronger embrace of it than during the *guerrillerista* period, even if its mode of manifestation does vary. In Dalton's case, aesthetics represent a means of transforming the bohemian self into a revolutionary self, whereas in Escudos' case they represent more a life-saver after the sinking of the ship of State. This appears in *A-B Sudario* as a sort of interior exodus that constitutes a withdrawal from the social. Writing becomes her only vehicle to explain her subjectivity. In the course of the novel readers discover that the words being read were written by Cayetana. Thus, it is ultimately through the writing process that she manages to achieve a degree of

[4] See 'Post-National Post-Identities'.

contentment with her fragmentary self. Like Cortázar's Horacio Oliveira in *Rayuela* (1963) forever torn between Paris and Buenos Aires, Cayetana is also torn between Sanzívar and Karma Town, the place of origin and the adopted home and, like Oliveira, longing for the 'there' where she is not. We are still grounded in a modern ennui where rootlessness articulates the ever-presentness of bohemianism, of constant desire that, once fulfilled, becomes undesirable, while the subject wears masks that change from day to day to reinvent herself on a daily basis:

> [...] me disfrazo, me lleno de frases ajenas, sigo educada/domesticada, haciendo lo que todos dicen que debo, recomendándome a mí misma discreción y encanto, siguiendo la norma del cómo-hacerse... . (Escudos 2003: 113)

Likewise, echoes of Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde appear in her personality split between *la bondadosa* and *la bestia*, a characteristically modern struggle between the disciplining process of the subject within the norms of the State, and the libidinal impulses of her body, in tension with the aspiration to freedom, working together with a will to transgress, pushing her towards the border of the unsayable. Cayetana's solution, like Proust, like Stephen Dedalus, like Durrell's Darley, is to write. That is why Regan Boxwell (2009) states that confronting disintegration the novel is the dramatization of Cayetana's writing process. Writing is her way of relating with the world. And, as we know, it is the modern way of relating to the world since Baudelaire.

Perhaps what post-war literature constitutes is an articulation of all those things, individual subjectivities, sexualities, the everydayness lived as modern reflexivity, affecting not only one's psychic processes or gestures but also the experiences of the body that could not be expressed by the prolonged political crisis of the region, one lasting from 1944 until 1996. Perhaps that is also why many of the post-war writers refuse so adamantly to deal with the political. They treasure their possibility to deal for once with their own selves, and refuse to relinquish this privilege on behalf of the social.

We may see *A-B Sudario* pointing in a new direction in its attempt to develop a critical alternative for female subjectivity by transgressing the limits of modern self-subjugation. This helps re-define female subjectivity as a site for cultural resistance and individual autonomy that might pave the way for the eventual deconstruction of a virulent patriarchy still gripping the region tightly in its claws, a step in the direction of a future critique of Mignolo's third phase of globalization. Nonetheless, whether we register the importance of *A-B Sudario* in relation to modernism, postmodernism, postcolonial narratives, feminism, or the Central American post-war as a phenomenon unto itself, it is still a modern novel.

However, if Aníbal Quijano's (1997) concept of the 'coloniality of power,' conjoined with their corollaries, geopolitics of knowledge, and post-Occidentalism, operating sometimes as epistemic metaphors deployed to move thinking beyond Western and Eurocentric conceptualizations, provided a new way of framing the issues of cultural production and agency as a whole, then we have to look in this direction to explore when the post-war period in Central America, as the last gasp of modernity, can be located. We have to take as a point of departure the problem of modernity and the crisis of Western models of development in the present.

In the latter sense, we could conceive Maya literary production as marking the end of Eurocentric modernity in the region. After all, when we look at Maya literary production, we

see the representation of a uniquely different gaze, not just on Central America but on the Americas as a whole. By introducing into the literary/symbolic process new linguistic and representational challenges, Maya works manage to provincialize Spanish as an organic vehicle in the constitution of symbolic imaginaries dating back to the Conquest, the foundational moment of coloniality, and they especially succeed in problematizing the nature of the Nation-State itself, a direct heir of Enlightenment modernity. Maya literary representations demonstrate already a strong, vital counterstatement to Central American Mestizo discursivity, which, as I have stated in this paper, despite its qualitative transformation in the second half of the twentieth century, did not transcend the third state of globalization. Rather, Mestizo discursivity aspired to re-position itself within its overarching scheme by pulling in the direction of developmentalism as the panacea for the region's ills, while remaining inevitably unaware of the basic tenets of the coloniality of power. Meanwhile, Maya literature has been quietly breaking down with the coloniality of politics that censored the presence of subalternized indigenous subjects as validated citizens and granted the exclusionary monopoly of creating national imaginaries to lettered Mestizo men. The exclusionary character of this monopoly is at the core of the modern epistemological disputes between Ladino and Maya regimes of truth and knowledge. Maya literature has given flesh and blood to the colonial difference and global coloniality by coming up with a new post-war imaginary that, however tentative and economically precarious it may seem in its present conditions, enables effective and practical resistance to the seemingly overpowering logic of neo-liberal globalization. As may be plainly evident, subaltern ethnicized subjects were not subsumed within the Washington consensus, partly because the Western gaze, whether coming from U.S. functionaries implementing it or from Central America's own elites kept them 'invisible' despite their overwhelming presence in the region. They did not fit within the validated limits of either official 'centroamericanidad,' or the recognized, tolerated marginality of the United States. As a result, they sought alternative possibilities. The blueprint of their literature is an alternative vision for the construction of potential post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist societies, traits that would indeed signal the end of the third state of globalization and mark the beginning of what Mignolo labels the 'upcoming decolonial and communal pluri-versity.' Whatever we may think of Mignolo's habit for turning words and concepts around into seemingly blind knots, we cannot deny that the 'coloniality of power' represents both a way to redress indigeneity and a new horizon of expectations in a post-Eurocentric world, coming from the colonial histories of the Americas and articulated by both indigenous and non-indigenous decolonial thinkers. Indigenous thinking is being modernized intrinsically, taking as a point of departure the problem of modernity and the crisis of Western models of development in the present. Ethnicity is a complex manner of reworking and reinventing culture. It relates the present with the ancestral past in more composite ways than one might have thought.

We can then conclude that the post-war Central American novel is indeed the expression of a historical period following the region's civil wars of the 1980s and represents the social imaginaries of the neo-liberal period. However, this literature does not break with the third stage of the modern/colonial world, the one emerging in the aftermath of World War II, associated with the U.S., which has continued into the first decade of the present century. Central American post-war literature might represent the culmination of that period, yet remains entirely within the framework of both coloniality and modernity, and exhibits traits totally coherent with literary modernity in belated fashion.

From the perspective of the coloniality of power, the problem then becomes, how do we truly measure the end of this third stage of globalization, and if the post-Eurocentric world we are presently detecting as a new emergence will indeed continue to challenge both the categories of the space of experience and our horizon of expectations, generating what Ernst Bloch labelled the 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneity' of subaltern aspirations. These issues, nonetheless, give rise to a new politics of culture. After all, and as parting words, we have to account for the co-existence of modern and non-modern conceptions of the world. This implies that modern thought is not an indispensable condition for oppressed social sectors to enter the public sphere. These groups can also access modern traits through alternative historiographical projects that juxtapose secular and supernatural traits. In turn, these hybridized elements become transformative of those Western traits originally employed by urban elites, and their *letrados*, to constitute the Nation-State in the first place. The subalternized knowledge that enters into this configuration cannot be explained by Western space-time coordinates. Yet it impacts the present, giving it a 'thickness' that sets it apart from the horizon of expectations of modernity.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 3

TRANSNATIONAL NARRATIVES OF ORIGIN, AFFILIATION AND CANON IN THE NICARAGUAN POST-REVOLUTION: ON GIOCONDA BELLI'S *EL INFINITO EN LA PALMA DE LA MANO*

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In this paper my intention is to analyse the novel *El infinito en la palma de la mano* (2008) by Gioconda Belli as symptomatic of the Central American post-civil war era. My main assumption is that the novel refers to the present in allegoric ways and, therefore, Belli´s concerns about the origin and historicity of the human race codes intellectual and political anxiety regarding the failure of the national project in Nicaragua. My analysis consists of four stages. Firstly, I believe it is necessary to note a sort of intellectual constellation and ideology that understands civil war as national fate. I see Belli's text giving continuity to and at the same time resetting this ideological stance. I explain that a potentially alternative view on the defeat of the revolution may integrate a subalternist strategy. The second stage concerns the direct and indirect (or unconscious) connections of Belli's novel to the market, giving to the concept of 'market' the allegoric function of representing globalization and the new geopolitical context. Thirdly, I maintain that Belli relocates origin myths in a postmodern context, presenting the heterogeneity of vanguardist tales about origin as ruin. Finally, I consider how the question of filiation and affiliation is relocated at the moment of the collapse of the national I see Belli's book confronting this contradiction through its worries about the destiny of new generations. In summary, I read the universal or general narrative of the novel through particularity and context.

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THE INTELLECTUAL FRAME

In Central America, the term post-war has a particularly political significance because, to paraphrase a famous dictum, it alludes to the 'continuation of war by other means.' Struggles for symbols, memories and narratives of the revolution, the national and of origins characterize this period, indicating, therefore, battles for political and cultural hegemony. Moreover, the post-war moment has a particular political and cultural logic in each one of the countries of the region. In the case of Nicaragua an obvious fact is that, at the end of the revolution of the 1970s and the following civil war of the 1980s, an army of Sandinista origin became foundational to the new institutional order or, in more prosaic terms, it retained the weapons. This fact is connected to the role of the Sandinista as a decisive political and cultural force, one that exercise an important influence over the State and civil society.

This apparently powerful political role contrasts, however, with an actual crisis of identity. Undoubtedly, during the recent fifty years, Sandinista politics have redefined the discourse of the national, but principally since their electoral defeat of 1990, a process of political, ideological and cultural contradictions and paralysis has mined its creativity as a leading force.[1] In fact, the political strength of the Sandinistas is, at best, ambiguous, in part due to the radical alterations of domestic politics and regional geopolitics. Among the components of this singular context, one must point to the dissolution of the national and the concept of national sovereignty as it was understood during the peak of the revolutionary process. This collapse of the national is, of course, a process common to all Latin America. After the failure of the national project of the 1980s, globalization and neoliberal mutations were particularly violent in Nicaragua. Although not a much studied phenomenon, intellectual and cultural poverty typify recent decades.[2] On balance, the defeat of the Sandinista project produced suspended results. Its more radical objectives were not accomplished and neoliberal democracy normalized the political transition. According to Sergio Ramírez, the revolution did not bring social justice to the majorities but offered democracy as its best product (1999: 17).

Due to its unfinished closure, the defeat of the Sandinista revolution can be analyzed from different and contradictory points of view according to various intellectual positions. One essential question here is whether the revolutionary failure can acquire a new meaning. Can the Sandinista revolution become a renewed political and cultural force? How can it be reframed in the new (global) scenario? Although the question of memory has been fundamental for the debate regarding these questions,[3] the more general issues about origin and utopia have also been integrated into the discussion in recent decades, as Belli's text demonstrates. I would like to describe two of the possible intellectual positions that implicitly respond to these questions, because they are important to the essence of my exposition. On the one hand, it is possible to see the defeat of the revolution as the collapse of the liberal values of citizenship and identity under the logic of civil war, projecting these values as universal and, furthermore, disciplined by the tragic narrative of the national establishment.

[1] As it is known, Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista party returned to power in 2007. However, this event has not solved the contradictions between the leftist foundations of the Sandinista ideology and the predominant neoliberal politics of the country.

[2] The crisis in the educational system is the best indicator of this situation. See, for example, Vijil (2011).

[3] The memoirs and autobiographies of intellectuals (Belli (2001), Ramírez (1999), Cardenal (1996) are fundamental to this debate.

This position is framed by a debate regarding the morals of the state and civil society, and traditions that come from cultural politics that now emerge as decisive. There is a long tradition in the national discourse debating these points, which can be traced back to the ideology of the intellectual circles of the conservative governments of the 'thirty years' during the 19th century.[4] This conservative and melancholic discussion culminated in the reflections about the history of Central America by José Coronel Urtecho (2001). He proposed that history should become a conversation between the people and their past, emphasizing the decadent nature of modernity, which he viewed as the fundamental source of civil war. In contrast to modernity, the colonial era was, according to Coronel (2001), peaceful and culturally productive, an epoch in which communal conversation was possible and, in fact, the basis of national culture. In Coronel, the narration of history and longing for colonial times becomes nostalgia for Paradise, also a strong motive in the oeuvre of Ernesto Cardenal.[5] This motive refers to a social order in which contradictions are solved and the spectre of civil war disappears. Race is a decisive element here. According to Carlos Cuadra Pasos (1976: 113-14) – Coronel's mentor and the most important conservative intellectual at the beginning of the 20th century – at the moment of Independence from Spain the failure of miscegenation, visible in the presence of indigenous and black people who apparently had not mixed with whites, enforced social 'anarchy' and civil war. The process of miscegenation – *ladinización* or *mestizaje* – is viewed, then, as a fundamental requisite for the idyllic social state of peace and stability for which the conservative elite longed. In the intellectual debates of the twentieth century defending the ideology of *mestizaje* was equivalent to strengthening the (traditional) nation and since the beginning of the post-war era, in the 1990s, a crisis of the national or the relationship between nation and race (i.e., miscegenation) has been re-enacted as a fundamental theme.[6]

A second position, and alternative to the conservative tradition, can be found in academic transnational circles. It considers that issues related to ethnos, gender, religion and the subaltern were decisive to the final outcome of the revolution. Although other elements were significant too, such as both geopolitical and economic factors, questions related to the subaltern (i.e., the real impossibility of subaltern agency) are viewed as essential elements in the process of the deterioration of the revolution. In general, this criticism constitutes a potential questioning of the *mestizo* national project. Let's be reminded that Ileana Rodríguez (1996) studied revolutionary narratives from Central America, emphasizing the opaque place that the subaltern has in them. In a similar vein, Erick Blandón (2003) has demonstrated a *mestizo*, Spanish-speaking and homo-social continuity from the traditional-national into the Sandinista cultural project. Josefina Saldaña (2003), for her part, has analyzed the developmentalist elements of the new ideal peasant subjectivity proposed by the Sandinistas. All these critical approaches can be summarized in what Jeffrey Gould (1998), in his studies on the history of Nicaragua's working class, called the myth of *mestizaje*. In fact, all of these analyses, although theoretically non-homogenous, criticize in a more or less radical way the doctrine of *mestizaje* as an ideological weapon for the contention of difference and the parallel consecration of traditional nationalism.

[4] For the idealization of the conservative 'thirty years' as a brief historical moment of democracy, see Cruz (2003).
[5] See Coronel's preface to Cardenal's well known poem, *El estrecho dudoso*.
[6] As I will argue later, I see Belli's novel and the essay by Ramírez (*Tambor*) as part of this return of the problem of race.

If one considers these two positions in relation to cultural hermeneutics, the contradictions are apparent. I would like to take the three-part division used by Claudia Ferman (2008: 81-83) in her explanation about the concept of literature, placing in her scheme the positions discussed above. According to her, firstly, there is a trans-historical concept of literature marked by a general narrative task related to an anthropological function. Secondly, there is a 'historical' definition of literature, founded on its institutional nature, related to academia, disciplined structures of reading, and the book market. The third concept of literature is based on a postcolonial/subaltern position, one that sees literature as 'deliberate, anti-hegemonic space.' 'Esta perspectiva "subalternista"', Ferman says, 'reordena los materiales narrativos de la tradición de una manera en que "otros textos" (o los textos del Otro/a) se manifiestan' (2003: 82).

I would like to emphasize that in the case of Nicaragua there is a link between literature as institution and the elitist-nationalist ideology that sees history as the narrative of civil war, a tragic narrative in need of moral transformation. In fact, framing the collapse of the national-popular of the 1980´s in this narrative is a sort of ideological operation that reads history as unredeemable repetition. Later I will show how Belli sees the beginning of humanity and initiation of history in a similar tragic tale. On the other hand, the questioning of *mestizaje* on the basis of cultural differences (race, gender and sexuality) implies a critic to the traditional ideas of the national and national literature, and as I see it, implies a subalternist tendency, although maybe not one with a defined or unified strategy. In other words, even if scholars taking this alternative position do not share a structured subalternist position as such, they still participate in what Spivak (1988) sees as a characteristic of Subaltern Studies: they use deconstructive strategies to access the narratives of dominance.

Furthermore, it is important to remark that Subaltern Studies necessarily pay attention to current processes of change in the concept of the national brought about by globalization. As Gareth Williams states, a subaltern position integrates into its analysis the process of dispersal of the subaltern classes at the moment of mutation or dissolution of the boundaries of the national. According to Williams: 'through increasing trans-nationalization we are living the historical "other side" of the national-popular; the (collapsed/collapsing) side of the people; the national-popular in its state of exhaustion and redistribution across regional and national frontiers' (2002: 8).

This dispersal of the national indicates not an already established methodology of study but to one open and sinuous that necessarily has to be ordered through questioning the ruins of the national-social order. In the case of Central American Studies, the post-war moment merges with globalized dispersal of the national or, to put it another way, post-war, post-revolution and, in the case of Nicaragua, post-Sandinista, combine in the same field of cultural and political contradictions, one which is highly motivating for a subalternist tendency.

ORIGIN AND THE MARKET

My intention in what follows is to retain as the hermeneutic limit of my article a possible subalternist reading. Fundamentally, I consider it possible to grasp in Belli's novel the contradictions of the Sandinista (post)-revolution and post-war. On the one hand, I believe her

novel thinks of the national past reframing the transnational in the postmodern era. On the other hand, her novel can be read in relation to the post-revolution opening of the country to the global market.

I will, in fact, consider of the market from three basic points of view. Firstly, the market as world economy: as a key condition for the division of the world into regions and nations and, as such, a decisive factor in the foundation of nationalism (Wallerstein 2009; Desai 2009). Secondly, the book market (and the market of cultural objects) as a decisive factor in the establishment of a globalized Latin American identity, as it became verifiable especially during the conjuncture of the so-called literary *Boom*, and as it has been studied by, among others, Ángel Rama (1985) and Mario Santana (2000). And, thirdly, the market as allegory or *trama* (plot), as it is suggested by Cárcamo-Huechante. According to him, the structural neoliberal adjustment was also cultural: 'un ajuste cultural y/o un giro simbólico.' He explains, furthermore, that market becomes a 'cultural discourse' that, taken as basis for rhetorical and imaginary interventions, ended up gaining hegemony over social life (2007: 17).[7] These three levels of the market as a concept can be classified as geopolitical, ideological and figurative, and are all present in Belli's novel.

El infinito en la palma de la mano narrates the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, their fall through sin, and the parallel beginning of necessity and the rise of the human race that culminates in the murder of Abel and the dispersal of the sons and daughters of the original pair. I would like to associate this expulsion from Paradise and the beginning of the human race in the novel to the crisis of an ideal national harmony. Moreover, as I explained earlier, nostalgia for Paradise is associated with the philosophy of history elaborated by Nicaraguan intellectuals at the end of the 19th century.

Following this tradition, but using a much more radical idea of modernity, the vanguardist writers (let's say in the genealogy that goes from José Coronel Urtecho to Ernesto Cardenal) saw in pre-modern communities a political object of desire, one afterwards inherited by Sandinista politics. This desire articulated the dream of a horizontal community that would redeem modernity of its contradictions. Belli's novel both reacts to and relocates this desire, allowing the globalized market to to become a determinant forece in her text. The most apparent aspect of this presence of the market is that her novel won the Biblioteca Breve Award in 2008, which is a guaranty of massive international circulation. Moreover, the 'universal' thematic of the novel implies an international reader who easily escapes from regional or national identifications. Of course, the elements of magic realism in the novel functions at some levels as identification of the Latin American or Third World market niche. As an object that circulates internationally and asks to be read beyond particularities, Belli's novel integrates the market into her own logic of reading. However, there is a wider range of more recondite elements connected to this presence of the market. These not so apparent elements help to singularize the novel, destabilizing its supposedly universal location for a neutral or standardized reader. A determinant element is, of course, the option for a master, canonical and central narrative. Selecting Adam and Eve over any other narrative of origin, Belli seems to be rejecting other possible dissonant narratives. It is a matter of suspension of the heterogeneity of the narratives about origin that characterized the texts of the vanguardist authors in Latin America, a tendency that can be exemplified with works by, among other writers, Carpentier, Lezama and Borges.

[7] Of course, Cárcamo refers mainly to Chile, but the 'cultural turn' of market is readable in all Latin America.

In fact, as is well known, in the genealogy of *lo real maravilloso* the confrontation between an exhausted Europe and an original America becomes apparent.[8] (Latin) America appears here nourished by myth and aboriginal cosmogony and enriched with African races and tales. This Americanism has, of course, its limits, the most evident being the use of transcultural codes in favor of homogeneous national or regional narratives: in fact, the transcultural works as a dispositive of modernization (Williams 2002: 29-37). But in Belli, such a transcultural horizon is not a motive or a problem as she writes in a moment in which such modernization has been alienated from the concept of national autonomy. It can indeed be argued that taking the story of Adam and Eve is a narrative option like any other, and that in any case Belli is subverting the original biblical source (for instance, telling the story of the children of Adam and Eve). However, this passing over the instability of the origin (or origins) becomes significant in relation to the historic context in which Belli is writing and her ideological position. If there is only one, singular origin, which implies deferring a debate about the heterogeneity of origins, this permits pointing out to another (and maybe a new) narrative desire. In what follows, I would like to link this desire to the intent of reading national intellectual traditions through globalization and post-modernity.

Part of the answer to the question about origin in relation to the role of (modern) literature is found in the preface to the novel, 'Nota de la autora,' suggesting an allegorical reading a la Paul de Man: that is, an allegory of the literary system that it is intended to be affirmed as a political and cultural frame and as a limit of reading. Belli explains how her curiosity in a supposedly well-known tale, namely about how the life of the first man and woman emerged:

> Forzada a esperar largo rato en la biblioteca de un familiar – una habitación pequeña con estantes en las cuatro paredes y cajas con tomos polvorientos apiladas en el suelo –, mis ojos vagaron por los anaqueles hacia los lomos de los libros. Sabía que eran ejemplares antiguos que el dueño terminaba de desempacar de una bodega donde habían estado guardados muchos años. (2008: 11)

In this room the author discovered the apocryphal texts on Adam and Eve that would bring her to research the thematic of what would later become the basis for the novel:

> Alimentada por estas lecturas llenas de revelaciones y fantásticas inferencias, di rienda suelta a mi imaginación para evocar en esta novela los entretelones insospechados de este antiguo drama, el paisaje surrealista del Paraíso y la vida de esta inocente, valiente y conmovedora pareja. (13)

Belli is conscious of the nature of the palimpsest that her novel acquires: 'Ésta es pues una ficción basada en las muchas ficciones, interpretaciones y reinterpretaciones que alrededor de nuestro origen ha tejido la humanidad desde tiempos inmemoriales' (13).

If one takes the preface as an 'able of direction' for the interpretation of the novel, one in fact obtains the concept of literature that motivates the text. Fundamentally, Belli seems to believe in an apocryphal and secularized function of literature characterized by a continuous labor of deciphering and rewriting. Understood in this way literature is disciplined by a

[8] Of course, the famous Prologue (1986: 9-16) by Carpentier to his novel *El reino de este mundo* is the fundamental text here.

universal concept of humanity whose immemorial origin becomes the essence of the plot of the novel. Moreover, the author does not doubt that the (ideal) reader of the novel is included in that master narrative, because it is the tale of 'our' story. The preface suggests, therefore, a pact based on an 'historical' idea of literature, in the sense Ferman (2008) gives the term, that is, reaffirmed as institutional and established and, most of all, immune to the contradictions of heterogeneity.[9] For some reason, the origin of the novel is located at the library as an allegory of a unique humanity occupied by narrating itself, and whose members are able to see themselves reflected and identified by the narrative plot. The presence of a 'structuralist' idea of literature in the novel, one in which deciphering and codification are the basis of re-writing, should not be taken, of course, as a novelty after its massive use in popular literature in recent decades. In contrast to the radical positions, both political and aesthetic, of the vanguardists, in a text like Belli's one can only find normalization and tradition.

But what has happened to the vanguardist tales of origin, to be presented now in such a monologist and homogenous way? I would like to refer again to the market as a cultural plot operating at various levels of the narrative. The market indicates, in fact, a liberal horizon of cultural values, especially through a subjectivity moralized by individualized limits and perceptions, and their ethical attributions. For instance, the fundamental needs (such as killing animals and eating meat to survive) are perceived subjectively by Eve as moral transgressions. In fact, in the novel, subjectivity has been modernized to permit the introduction of a sense of origin in the present, which becomes an objective of the novel. Consequently, Eve's perception is different of Adam's, for he sees the solution to necessity in the use and exploitation of nature, and acts according to this principle. He is presented as a kind of modern, developmentalist Adam, still not conscious of ecological issues, while Eve, on the contrary, brings to the novel the great moral issue of the right over the life of other living beings. In essence, the morality of the novel is actualized by recent debates about ecological balance and a (supposedly) feminine legislation over them.[10] Following this logic, the novel teaches the ideal reader about closeness with the narrative of origin, the universality of certain problems of the overwhelming present, and the need for 'intuitive' (and, of course, 'feminine') knowledge in the search for solutions. This is a key level of interpellation for the readers, performed through the use of themes of high circulation in which the narrative can be integrated in a dynamic way. The influence on the novel by media products and their logic (TV series and reality shows with tales of surviving in the jungle or 'primitive' spaces) helps to make this displacement of heterogeneity more evident.

THE RUINS OF THE VANGUARDIST TALES

But this standardization of origin around entire and separated subjectivities is not original itself. In fact, the narration of origin is a typical tradition of cultural systems and, especially, inside the Latin American literary system.[11] It will be necessary to use a genealogical strategy to reconstruct the process by which Adam and Eve enter ecological postmodernity and a

[9] Actually, in Belli's ideology, literature, as an institution, controls all narratives/narrativity.
[10] Regarding the debate about *ecological feminism*, see for example, Warren (2009).
[11] I'm leaving aside cosmogonies and myths because I understand that a novel that begins at the library is proposing as a principle an exclusively literary interpellation, one that should be developed inside the literary establishment.

globalized sense of history. In Latin American narratives, thinking the origin implied interpretative changes in which myth and history would appear juxtaposed, generally located around transcultural or heterological production.[12] It is the case, indeed, of a postcolonial condition functioning as a narrative of modernity. Some canonical models recall this construction, for instance that of Carpentier when he argues against European surrealism and tries to articulate Latin American history as difference because of its particular temporality and cultural mixture (1986). In Borges, it is possible to find yet another version of origin. Emphasizing cultural creativity, Borgean originality operates through the alteration of the metropolitan codes – thus, origin becomes ironic. And in Lezama Lima (his title, *Paraíso*, cannot be more evocative) the saga of origin is that of filiation and family. Certainly, adding more examples could lead us to conclude that the origin is a major Latin American theme. Of course, Belli's novel erases both the irony of origin and its Latin American development: this happens because of (1) the option for a universal and canonical narrative in which particularity disappears and (2) the urgency of the present as a sort of analogical laboratory, i.e., the present as an immense centre that consumes all hermeneutics (a logic and attitude known as postmodernity).[13] In fact, Belli writes at a time when the Latin American transcultural has been bled dry.

There remain, however, marks of this expired feature in her narrative, and if one searches for an ironic restitution of the origin one finds them. We already saw in the 'Nota de la autora' how the adjective 'surrealist' is used to characterize 'the surrealist landscape of Paradise.' It is possible that she is using the term in a simple sense as synonymous with unbelievable or marvellous. In any case, surrealism refers here to a vanguardist past that is perceived now as ruin. I would like to propose, therefore, that the intertextuality of the novel transcends the canon designated by the author in her prologue, i.e., that it is not about the rewriting of ancient texts but about the desire to incorporate vanguardist narrative into a new market flow and postmodern logic.[14] In this case, this logic implies the consumption of cultural traditions that are interpreted as the conscience of the present. It is important to note that this emphasis on the (global) present represents one possible way of viewing the Sandinista revolution as a version of a transcultural-national project, marked by the Latin American traditions of the 20th century, and most probably the last of such types of project. In this sense, the erasure of heterogeneity in the novel is an interesting symptom of a historically more significant deletion, that of the transcultural and, therefore, the national-popular, as such.[15]

Moreover, it can be argued that although the ethics of the novel is postmodern, it is based on a modern philosophy of history. As I already suggested, the novel emphasizes the feminine (Eve's) over masculine conscience (Adam's) based in a sort of vanguardist interpretation of the moral crisis produced by the human intrusion of nature. In fact, in the novel Eve is the keeper of the codes of human history, and I see this identification between woman-the feminine and history as part of the allegoric level of the narrative, or in other words how the novel deploys a thought on history. Before the original transgression, Eve experiences two types of visions; the first of 'cualidad iridiscente y fugaz,' in which a surrealist style seems to be codified, the others 'rotundas, claras, su realidad más contundente que la del mismo

[12] Rama (1987) is still a fundamental study of these operations.
[13] Regarding the question of time and postmodernity, see Jameson (1981), especially 29.
[14] I am not implying that Belli achieves this goal successfully from the point of view of literary formal complexity.
[15] Regarding the link between the Latin American transcultural and national-popular, see Williams (2002: 23-70).

Jardín' (38). The latter are revelations of human history as ascendant, an aspect very attractive both to Eve and God (Elokim): 'El sentido de seres que, movidos quizás por lo que la Serpiente llamaba libertad, se las ingeniarían para traspasar su voluntad creadora y vivir más allá de ésta' (38). In the novel, the revelation of human history is made visual:

> [...] un ojo salido de quién sabe dónde abrió sus párpados [dentro el agua del río], la miró y al hacerlo le concedió ver a través de su tembloroso cristalino imágenes fascinantes y vertiginosas en la que ella mordía el higo [la fruta prohibida] y de ese minúsculo incidente brotaba una espiral gigantesca de hombres y mujeres efímeros y transparentes que se multiplicaban, se esparcían por paisajes magníficos, sus rostros iluminados con gestos y expresiones incontables, etc. (34)

This mysterious eye might have come out from Borges's 'El Aleph,' except that in this novel Belli is not interested in the synchronicity of human temporality and history but in a heroic sense of its inexhaustible development that reaches, in the final image, a reconciliation with Paradise:

> Curiosamente, la última imagen que surgió cuando el agua aún no terminaba de aquietarse fue tan plácida y clara que no logró saber si era ella la que volvía a saberse en el Jardín o si el misterio del final de todo aquello era la posibilidad de regresar al principio. (35)

The narrative of human history, using a modern logic, then, presupposes reconciliation with a Paradise localized in the future. It is the type of narrative of philosophy of history that Hayden White would call comic or romantic (Jameson 1981:103), presupposing a final reconciliation between humanity and nature. In Belli, this narrative is essentially sustained by nationalist-intellectual traditions framed by liberal political values that have been reactivated by globalization, and a sense of history as wholly interpretable by one single conscience – one that, moreover, is able to foresee the end of history. By leaving aside the alternative images of history that I have called surrealist/vanguardist and opting for a master narrative of History (the capital letter is necessary here), Belli reiterates a homogenous hermeneutic. From an allegoric point of view, therefore, the novel conceives literature and narrative as specialized versions of history, and history appears filled with the transcendental longing for Paradise, a position that is not a novelty for national literary and history traditions, although in Belli we are faced with a kind of (post)modernization of Paradise.

NATION AS ILLNESS

This process of (post)modernization also has to confront the problem of filiation and affiliation, mainly in relation to the continuity of the nationalist intellectuals. In a strictly national scheme, this genealogy is the one previously mentioned that comes from Coronel to Cardenal. However, there are also some fissures in this genealogy of the national, a theme which Belli has discussed before in her novel *Waslala* (1996), precisely with Coronel and Cardenal as characters who set out to establish a Utopia that fails. How are the problems of affiliation expressed in literary nationalism? It is through affiliation that a new sense of family

is created, one that unites writers and intellectuals around cultural and political national projects. Edward Said (2004) has studied how modern cultural projects operate to break filiation and impose a secular affiliation which, nevertheless, reproduces the power structure that it was supposed to break. When in Nicaragua, and probably Central America generally, cultural groups with a family/nation sense/structure are created, a break with the cultural patriarchs is deferred for long periods of time. But when national continuity is broken, i.e., when the national collapses before globalization, affiliative continuity enters a crisis. The market, understood as world economy, shatters territories, redefines their functions and status in the structure of nations. At the same time, it displaces and mobilizes massive human groups; alienates the national-intellectual projects, and produces a gap between discourse and practice – in a word, the market, in an allegoric sense, becomes a narrative that is suggestive but difficult to control and interpret. How, facing this assault by the market, which implies a new 'national' beginning, can the story of the original and foundational family (i.e., the intellectuals who 'founded' the nation) now be retold? Which parts should be proclaimed as national and nostalgic, and which should face the global future? History, which, according to the novel, on the one hand, ascends in spirals of ever-increasing development, is also the history of infinite competition for food, in which some beings eat others, a revelation which the Serpent makes to Adam, i.e., to the dominant masculine conscience. It is an essentially capitalist (and 'masculinized') existence in which competition and its connection to the death of the other and personal survival become debatable topics coded in the novel as great philosophical themes. The fact is that, beginning with this rupture in which competition is imposed, a process of normalization, which can be understood as an adaptation of bourgeois ways, operates in the life of Adam and Eve, a process that will be broken only after their progeny displaces them as owners of the earth. Through this process of normalization, Adam is in charge of the hunting and Eve of the domestic work, but also the invention of the arts, narrative and writing. Yet, the historical rupture, strictly speaking, is affiliative – the birth of two pairs of twins, Cain and Luluwa and Abel and Aklia. Alongside filiation discord begins. Adam and Eve are faithful to the original code of life at Eden, while their children have no such experience of timeless, idyllic origin but are properly historical beings. The birth of Eve's first child marks the last moment in which nature is in harmony, as wild animals come to contemplate it pacifically.[16] History introduces the struggle for symbols and violence; it also fractures the territory and produces human races. It is the moment that the Nicaraguan vanguardist feared the most, i.e., the original moment in which social and racial differences, not yet disciplined by national discourse and morality, are revealed. It is also the moment, especially for Belli, of globalization and post-war in which the territory itself suffers radical transformations. That is the way in which the novel reiterates an unconscious concern regarding the new 'races' that emerge in the post-war era and how controllable can they be.

I would like to summarize my interpretation of Belli's novel in the following way: the narrative of the origins is contextualized by the transnational present. Also, the thematic of the post-national intellectual is basic in the novel as it is the perception of globalized market as a master narrative that penetrates 'paradisiacal' territories. Therefore, there are at least two levels on which the novel can be read. On the one hand, there is a narrative located in the postmodern circulation which aspires to neutralize the hermeneutics of difference, the genealogy of the origins, and alternative cultural and political projects. On the other, there is a

[16] As in other novels by Belli, there is here a Disney-like sense of nature, plot and characters.

more unconscious or subterranean narrative which tries to relocate the defeat of the popular-national –the Sandinista project – within the master narrative of the 'history of humanity' – the one of infinite competition. Uncertainty regarding the historical direction the new generations, who did not experience life in Paradise, will take is also an important aspect of the anxiety of the novel, mirroring the concerns of conservative intellectuals like Cuadra Pasos and Coronel.

To conclude, I would like to note that similar concerns emerge in other texts that inquire about the national origins. In 2007, Sergio Ramírez published an essay about the national *mestizaje*, noting that it is not just Spanish-Indian but one in which the African element is decisive, a fact that would permit the vindication of the mulatto (*mulatidad*) as a new centre of cultural production. In the same way as in Belli's novel, in Ramírez the origin must be rethought through the actualization of the narratives of the national that are in crisis (in Ramirez's case, the narrative of *mestizaje*). In both cases, intellectual authority and the book market guarantee a wider reception that locates their discourse in two ways, inside the debate of the national and on an international ground. However, the concern about the origin also includes younger authors who propose divergent discourses before the master narratives. An example, among others, is Rodrigo Peñalba's brief short story collection *Holanda* (2006), which, from various viewpoints, again raises the problem of the origins. In the story 'El glaciar,' situated in Iceland, a man abandons his son in a remote place in mountains covered with snow. As time passes, and after leading a solitary life, the son comes to understand his plight as a kind of identity fable which suggests that returning home/to the fatherland is not desirable:

> No regresé a Reikjavik, y todavía ignoro el camino hacia Sigür Ros. En el bosque estuve solo. Recordé la paz. Aprendí por ejemplo, que hay un tiempo en que no nieva y es posible subir por la montaña de hielo, hasta la cúspide en donde nacen todas las rocas del país. Llevaré un cayado que me ayude a subir y pueda usar de palanca. Seré un ángel de furia para mi país. Mi enfermedad es la nación, y debo eliminarla, debo curarme. Subir por la montaña, agotar mis energías, pero ver más lejos, más sereno. Quizás envejezca en la montaña aprenda a olvidar este deseo de moverla como piedra rodante sobre el país; una columna de rocas y grietas blancas arrastrando a personas y heridas blancas de una nación hasta el fondo del mar. (76)

In this suggestive passage it is notable how the abandoned child is looking to cure the illness of nationalism. Certainly, it can be stated that nationalism is a kind of neurosis that is fully revealed during the Central American post-war era. One must ask if the cure for this neurosis will come through a return to the master narratives of humanism, or through an actualization of the doctrines of *mestizaje* and homogeneity (one origin, one race, one history, one market), the explicit proposal of Belli and to some extent Ramírez. Or rather, perhaps, the rupture of national affiliation and filiation which the post-war period implies is much more radical and alternative narratives scarcely audible among the ferocious competition that the market imposes. In any case, thinking heterogeneity and difference seems to be an urgent task for the cultural hermeneutics of the post-war moment.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 4

TRANSMUTATION IN CONTEMPORARY CENTRAL AMERICAN TESTIMONY: FROM EPIC TO PARODY?

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[...] y cuando recordaron todos empezaron a caminar para adelante [...] (Luis de Lión 1996: 59).

Human memory is a marvellous but fallacious instrument
(Primo Levi 1989: 11).

In Central America, and Latin America in general, one particular cultural-scriptural practise has, since the sixties, occupied an especially privileged place in the field of literature and politics: testimony, in its various forms. At the same time, testimonial narratives have resulted, or rather have been accompanied, intervened and overlapped, in and by multiple (theoretical) discourses.[1] There has been discussion on the 'modalidad testimonial' as 'uno de los vehículos privilegiados' of a vital reconstruction, which arises 'en circunstancias en que la vida ha sufrido cambios irreversibles y está en vías de reconstrucción (Yúdice 1991: 214).[2] Since the nineties we seem to be confronted with a paradigm shift, a transmutation of the values that dominated the political-military and literary-cultural discourses of over four previous decades.

Nelly Richard points out a phenomenon in Chile that has already been well observed some years ago in Latin America and Central America: the surge and the 'creciente éxito editorial' of 'biografías, autobiografías y testimonios [...], entregando a la voracidad de su

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[1] In this essay I will limit my study to testimonial 'narratives' in a strict sense, meaning written (and printed) forms. A broader conception would have to include other practices and ways of producing testimonial narratives, such as video, film and the visual arts. See Mackenbach (2012).

[2] See also Richard (2007a: 124-25). In the case of Chile, Richard states, 'De hecho, en el Chile de la dictadura, el testimonio se convirtió en un formato privilegiado que "les daba voz a los sin voz," textualizando historias de vida y narraciones biográficas situadas en los precarios márgenes de las visiones constituidas e instituidas por los relatos maestros de la ciencia social y de la política' (125).

mercado de lectores múltiples retazos de las historias privadas de las figuras públicas' (2004: 41).[3] Despite the direct attack on humanism, the subject and its (literary) representations by poststructuralist theorists, Nelly Richard sees a return to the individual, of the self in a context of a 'neoindividualismo capitalista que comercializa la instantaneidad del fragmento mediante las técnicas periodísticas de captación de lo humano "en vivo y en directo"' (2004: 41):

> Este nuevo mercado de lo confesional, del que participan biografías, autobiografías y testimonios de personajes públicos, se vale del compulsivo voyeurismo social para someter la interioridad no confesada del sujeto a la extroversión mediática. (2004: 41)

Thus, favouring public figures who reaffirm the 'official' versions of their respective political fields (with the differences in each case that Richard outlines), this textual and editorial production completely destroys the essential features of testimony and its strategic role between memory and history, resulting in a new textual production of veritable 'anti-testimonies':

> La emergencia del testimonio como género confesional suele estar ligada, sobre todo en contextos de violencia y trauma históricos, a la defensa ética de una verdad en primera persona hablada por quien toma la palabra en su condición de víctima o para representar a las víctimas. El testimonio busca despertar una toma de conciencia solidaria en torno a la negatividad residual de un índice de realidad traumática generalmente negado por la historia que se ve luego rescatado por la intervención de una voz comprometida en divulgar las injusticias o crímenes ocultos. (Richard 2010a: 84-85; also, see Richard 2004: 42)

According to Nelly Richard's criteria, '[a]quí, nada de esto ocurre' (2010a: 85). Rather, the 'lanzar de estas pseudo-confesiones al relativista mercado del consumo' contributes to 'disolver el peso ético de las contradicciones históricas de la memoria política en los flujos amorales del consumo de novedades que sólo busca excitar la curiosidad en torno a los secretos femeninos de lo público y lo privado' (2004: 43).

Before this, however, since the late eighties and early nineties, a noticeable paradigm shift emerged in the written practice of testimony in Central America that matched changes in political-military discourse. By way of an example, I refer to the case of Nicaragua: in the political-military field, by the time of the undeclared war of the eighties, guerrilla warfare, namely, those forms of armed struggle that were determined by the ideologies of leftist movements pertaining to national and social liberation, was 'occupied' and 'usurped' by counterrevolutionary forces: the *Contras*, in their aim to overthrow the revolutionary government. It seems that something similar also took place in the literary field. Because of its close links with the anti-dictatorship movements, testimony was seen as an integral part of the struggle itself: the testimonies, writes the North American critic Barbara Harlow, 'no sólo

[3] A longer version of this essay was published under the title 'El mercado de las confesiones (lo público y lo privado en los testimonios de Mónica Madariaga, Gladys Marín y Clara Szcaranski)', in *Revista de Crítica Cultural* 26 (June 2003). Also, see Richard (2010b). These works refer to the memoirs of the former Minister of Justice of the Pinochet government, Mónica Madariaga, the former president of the Chilean Communist Party, Gladys Marín, and of the former president of the State Defense Council, Clara Szczaranski, and are particularly concerned with reviewing the relations between gender and power and representations of women as public figures. Also, see Mackenbach (2012).

relatan estrategias de resistencia; son en sí mismos una de estas estrategias' (1991: 125). In the nineties it seems that testimony was equally occupied by those marginalised from the revolutionary process itself, serving them as a means of expression, as is shown for example in the book, *Una tragedia campesina: testimonios de la resistencia,* published in Nicaragua by Alejandro Bendaña in 1991 (the book compiles testimonies of *campesinos* who supported the anti-Sandinista contras) and others.[4]

In the same way, also during the nineties and early 21st century, there has been a recurrent use of testimonial techniques in a series of novels which resort to parody and irony in a caricature of the form,[5] as well as a growing number of autobiographical type publications by public figures which, in a similar way to what Nelly Richard observes in Chile, renounce the original features of Central American testimony, especially its supposed representativity, emphasising the dominant and particular role of the self.[6]

Finally, with regard to the testimony debate, since the second half of the nineties a series of critical studies have been published on certain foundational works of Central American and Caribbean testimony. In particular, analysis has focused on the testimonial production of Miguel Barnet, Rigoberta Menchú/Elizabeth Burgos, Roque Dalton and Sergio Ramírez, resulting in a questioning of the supposed historical-truth, anti-canonicalness and non- or anti-literariness of testimony and its re-inscription into the field of literary fiction (see the following discussion).

Obviously, testimony along with the representation of the past is undergoing a crisis, as Elizabeth Burgos states in her article on the controversy surrounding Rigoberto Menchú's testimony, in which she alludes to Paul Ricœur:

> [...] que el problema de la representación del pasado no comienza con la historia sino con la memoria; no radica en el registro que hace la historia sobre el pasado, sino en la memoria, en tanto que órgano de la representación del pasado. (Burgos 2001: 27; also, see Ricœur 2000: 27)[7]

Are we, perhaps, faced with a crisis of historical memory and the loss of testimony's strategic position between memory and history?

CANONISATION

Since the Cuban Revolution, testimonial literature has left a profound mark on Spanish-American literature in general (see Garscha 1994: 276) and especially in those countries which attempted to take up the revolutionary thread, namely, those states which went through

[4] For example, the testimonies of Danilo Guido and Ernesto Castillo Guerrero; see my study on testimony and the novel in Nicaragua (Mackenbach 2004: 118-137) and my essay on Central American testimony (Mackenbach 2001).

[5] For example, the novels of Chuno Blandón, Dante Liano, Franz Galich, María Lourdes Pallais, Jorge García Medina, Horacio Castellanos Moya and Rodrigo Rey Rosa; see Mackenbach (2004: 141-44 and 2012).

[6] In the case of Nicaragua, for example, the texts of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Sergio Ramírez (1999), Gioconda Belli, Ernesto Cardenal and Humberto Ortega; see Mackenbach (2004: 137-41; 2012).

[7] In his work, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, the French philosopher Paul Ricœur grants a strategic role to testimony as a bridge between memory and history: '[...] el testimonio constituye la estructura fundamental de transición entre memoria e historia' (Ricœur 2000: 26, cited in Burgos 2001: 23).

a prolonged phase of armed struggle, conflict or civil war. In the seventies and eighties, Central American testimony underwent an unprecedented boom, so much so that, in her study of the new Central American novel, Magda Zavala pointed out that, even as late as 1990, testimony constituted 'la tendencia sub-genérica característica de Centro América' (1990: 380).[8] Studies on Central American testimonial literature have stressed in particular its strategic relationship to processes of social change (see Delgado 2002: 98, 102; Beverley and Zimmerman 1990: 172; Zavala 1990: 296) and it has even been said that testimony would become the most appropriate literary form for the supposed historical rupture taking place in Central America since the early seventies. Essentially, testimony would be something new, the heart of the new Central American novel:

> Con la novela testimonial, Centro América y el Caribe hacen su aportación distinta al desarrollo del género en América Latina como nunca antes, por el número y variedad de propuestas. La novedad novelesca tiene claramente en ella otra expresión. (Zavala 1990: 296, see also 98, 99, 380)

Along with the innumerable testimonies that have been published in Latin America, and especially Central America, there has been, since the seventies, from the first conceptual definition of the testimonial novel given by the Cuban author Miguel Barnet (1979 [1969]), a practically incalculable number of analytical texts and theories on the subject.[9] The controversial point of departure for the testimony debate that began in the late eighties (which was never limited to just Latin America, but since the beginning developed with the intense participation of European and, above all, US critics, academics and authors) consisted of at least two sides. The first, based on a critique of the cultural exhaustion of consumer societies in the USA and especially Western Europe: the literature of these societies would come to a dead-end because its works had shut out reality. The 'new novel,' with its direct allusion to the French *nouveau roman*, would get lost in formal games, 'el lenguaje del hombre' had become detached from 'la palabra del hombre' (Barnet 1979 [1969]: 126-129; also, see, Dröscher (2001)). The novel of Western Europe would reach a crisis. In contrast, in Latin America, a new alternative was emerging. The second side of these early debates on testimony would be directed against the novels of the *boom*, which were accused of having little relation to reality and hardly any real content, as well as being completely lacking in any kind of revolutionary militancy.

Thus, central to the debate was the problem of appropriating extra-literary reality, as well as its narrative presentation and representation. This demanded, as Zavala states, a new literature, or more precisely, a literary practise that would transcend the traditional criteria of literariness and which could be characterised by the following features: 'la asunción de la realidad, la verosimilitud e inteligibilidad de las obras y su carácter militante revolucionario'

[8] In a similar way, Cynthia Steele (1992: 11) writes of the 'testimonial novel' and of the 'social and political chronicle' as 'the quintessential narrative genre of the seventies and eighties' in Mexico.

[9] Along with texts by Barnet (1979 [1969] and Collazos, Cortázar and Vargas Llosa (1997), the majority of these texts have been registered in detail in the following anthologies: Jara y Vidal (1986); Beverley y Achúgar (2002); Gugelberger (1996); as well in various editions of the magazines *Casa de las Américas* and *Latin American Perspectives* (see the bibliography in Gugelberger) published in the eighties and nineties, particularly studies by Beverley, Casaus, Colás, Duchesne, Harlow, Jara, Pérus, Prada, Oropeza, Randall, Sklodowska, Sommer, Yúdice, Zimmerman and others. See also Rincón's studies (1978), the works of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, the studies of Indian authors (especially Spivak) and more recently the anthology by Carrillo and Méndez de Penedo (2006), which focuses on Central America.

(Zavala 1990: 247). This argument marked a broad tendency within the testimony debate and remained decisive well into the nineties, especially in North American universities.[10] Thus, drawing on Beverley and Zimmerman, in 1993, the North American scholar Greg Dawes still maintained the thesis that testimony had recuperated reality for literature or, in his own words, 'history, and popular characters and speaks in colloquial language' (Dawes 1993: 170), all of which, in his view, had been largely left aside by the *boom* novels, as these overstated the unconscious or insisted on the autonomy of art.

Nevertheless, from the late eighties onwards, there emerged a parallel series of critical studies which, eluding the increasingly dominant premises of the testimony debate, proposed systematic typologies and classifications of testimony.[11] These were directed specifically at overcoming the fixation on aspects of content and the social function of testimonial literature and managed to leave behind the orthodox definition (which ostensibly excluded a large part of testimonial literature), which even in 1989 was still being forwarded by Beverley and continued to dominate much of what was written about testimony:

> By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. [...] The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. (Beverley 1989: 12-13)[12]

[10] It is worth listing, by way of example, the publications of the North American literary scholars John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman (Beverley 1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1996a; Zimmerman 1995; Beverley and Zimmerman 1990).

[11] Amongst these can be found, being one of the most exhaustive, Elzbieta Sklodowska's study (1992), which includes an excellent bibliography.

[12] See also Beverley, 1987a: 157; Beverley and Zimmerman (1990: 173. Similarly, George Yúdice defines testimony as 'an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting right the official history.' (1991: 17; see also Gugelberger1996: 9). Considering the heterogeneity of testimony in respect of its differences in narrative form and content, as well as form of publication, Beverley draws attention in his text of 1989, to the provisional and problematic nature of all definition: '[...] any attempt to specify a generic definition for it, as I do here, should be considered at best provisional, at worst repressive' (Beverley: 1989: 13, as cited in Gugelberger 1996: 25; see also Beverley 1987a: 153-58). This did not prevent the formula that he proposed in 1989 from being accepted as definitive in many studies on the subject (see Cortez 2001). In later articles, Beverley has himself relativized his position, although he still maintains certain premises like adjudicating a greater reality quotient to testimony in comparison with novels of the boom, the general argument against the new Spanish American novel, affirming the anti-literary and non-canonical subversion of testimony and testimony as a democratic cultural practise, which permits a new relationship between intellectuals and subalterns. Testimony was characterised as prototypical of a 'concepto no literario de la literatura', as 'posliteratura'. (Beverley 1996a: 165ss, also 145, 153, 158, 161ss.; Beverley 1996b: 266-286). Also, in his most recent book on the theme, Beverley insists, as Valeria Grinberg Pla (2006: n.p.) rightly criticises, on the supposedly authentic, non-fictional aspects of testimony: '[...] it is what really happened, "the real thing," truth versus lie –the Big Lie of racism, imperialism, inequality, class rule, genocide, torture, oppression– that is at stake in testimonio' (Beverley 2004: 3). Grinberg Pla (2006: n.p.) asserts: 'La reciente publicación de *Testimonio. On the Politics of Truth* es un claro indicador de que John Beverley sigue esforzándose en demostrar la autenticidad del testimonio, más allá de las críticas sobre las limitaciones de su concepto del mismo. Así, el presente volumen es una reedición del ensayo en cuestión, junto con otros tres textos que también han sido publicados con anterioridad: "'Through All Things Modern': Second Thoughts on Testimonio" (1991), "The Real Thing" (1996) y "What Happens When the Subaltern Speaks: Rigoberta Menchú, Multiculturalism and the Presumption of Equal Worth" (2001). Estos artículos constituyen los cuatro capítulos de este nuevo libro de Beverley, quien ha escrito expresamente para esta nueva publicación, además

Attempts to arrive at a broader categorisation that did not resort to any thematic fixation focused initially on textual typological criteria, later becoming increasingly concerned with the relations of diverse instances of narration in testimony and their particularity in comparison with other types of prose.[13] In fact, it is possible to find examples that correspond to those categories in the Latin and Central American literature of the seventies, eighties and nineties (in the same way that the classifications are always based on the analysis of concrete texts). Nevertheless, until now, despite the numerous and competent studies, no universally accepted definition of testimony has come to the fore (see Cortez 2001); as Elzbieta Sklodowska states: 'Despite all the critical attention it has received, *testimonio* remains undefined' (1996: 84). This is, without doubt, due to the heterogeneous character of testimony itself, which has led Magda Zavala (1990: 253) to write of 'la naturaleza titubeante misma de la escritura y de la subordinación de las realidades textuales a las opiniones o teorizaciones de los oradores,' and Mario Roberto Morales to refer to a 'dispositivo narrativo fronterizo entre la verdad y la alucinación' (2001: 28). This did not prevent, however, the imposition of a new canonisation within the dominant discourse on testimony during the seventies and especially the eighties, and which was consolidated through a series of fundamental characteristics that were attributed to testimony. Prominent among these is the representativity of the individual for the collective/ethnic group/community/nation, the recourse to collective/national history, the process of assuming conscience and self-expression of subaltern voices, the disappearance of the author as an instance of the narration or, rather, the symbiotic relationship between the testifier and the author, the anti-canonical and non-literary (or anti-literary) character of testimony (see also Delgado 2002: 95-98). In other words, in the Central American literary discourse of the seventies and eighties, the anti-canonical impetus of testimony became the new canon.

QUESTIONING

All these categorisations present problems of major significance with respect to the relations between (extra-literary) reality and fiction, between historiography and literature, between testifier and author, and between testimony and the traditional literary canon. In the already mentioned manual, *Testimonios* (see note 10), published in Costa Rica in 1983, and which is fundamentally dedicated to elucidate questions of technique, organisation, and editing that relate to textual production, the North American writer and critic Margaret Randall attributes a quality to testimony that sets it apart from other traditional forms of literature: the ability to represent the 'verdadera historia' (1983: 7). This close link between testimony and historiography has become an indispensable constitutive element in numerous studies and articles on Central American testimonial literature. Its primordial function would be the recuperation of a collective memory and the transmission of a hidden and repressed history (see Zavala 1990: 260). Thus, it has been characterised as a subversive 'documento metafórico de la versión extraoficial, comúnmente silenciada por los organismos oficiales de

del prefacio de rigor, una introducción en la cual plantea la actualidad de sus puntos de vista sobre el testimonio a la vez que se sitúa a sí mismo política y epistemológicamente en el contexto de los estudios literarios latinoamericanos y de los así llamados *subaltern studies* a partir de su interés por el testimonio y de su simpatía por los movimientos de liberación en América Latina'.

[13] See Mackenbach, 2004: 68-69 (note 11).

la historia' (Narváez 2000: 114) and a document which presents 'historia escrita desde abajo' (Craft 2000: 82; also, see Zavala1990: 260, 265).

A logical progression from this took the form, on the one hand, of a discussion of a double 'contrato de veracidad' (Craft 2000: 81): a) between the testifier and the author/publisher, which would result in the 'anulación del ego del escritor y su identificación incondicional con los protagonistas' (Narváez 2000: 118); b) between 'el testigo a través de su agente (o *gestor*) y el lector' (Craft 2000: 81): 'El lector sabe que no está sólo frente a un producto de la imaginación, sino ante una forma de registro de la historia real' (Zavala 1990: 259-260).[14] On the other hand, another principle function of contemporary testimonial literature has been designated as the self-representation of the marginalised and repressed subject, the subaltern, the 'Other' (see Craft 2000: 82). Finally, this perspective on testimony was linked to references to the incorporation of the oral tradition, to popular language in all its social and regional variants. It was precisely because of this that testimony would break away from the norms of a traditional concept of literature, it would explode the literary canon through its recourse to popular culture (see Zavala 1990: 291, 387ss).[15] Without a doubt, in the Central American context, which was determined – in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, in particular – by decades of military dictatorships, which were characterised by their systematic repression or total elimination of non-official history, such a discourse became subversive *per se*.

Certain scholars – especially certain North American academics – went even further in their assertions. In their well known study, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, Beverley and Zimmerman inscribe testimony into a class discourse:

> [Testimony is] not only a form of representation of popular ideologies and cultural forms; it is also a means of popular-democratic cultural practice, closely bound up with the same motivations that produce insurgency at the economic and political levels. (1990: 172; also, see 97; see Zavala 1990: 257; Beverley 1989: 23-41, esp. 35)

According to this conception, testimony is ultimately seen not only as a direct and authentic expression of the working classes and peasantry (see Dawes 1993: 170), but also as an anti-literary genre or practise that has left behind the mark of bourgeois literature:

> [...] es evidente [...] que constituye un nuevo género literario posnovelesco. [...] Si la novela tuvo una relación especial con el desarrollo de la burguesía europea y con el

[14] Regarding this function of granting a name and a voice to an anonymous people (see Beverley 1987a:165ss), it has been affirmed that in testimony there is a form of 'convivencia y dependencia mutua' (Beverley 1987a:165), a 'relación simbiótica entre locutor e interlocutor' (Román-Lagunas 2000: 107), namely, between the testifier (representative of the subaltern class) and the writer, publisher or interviewer (member of the middle or upper class). This seems to have developed into a rigid orthodoxy based on the idea of the total subordination of the testifier and identification with their interests on the part of the progressive intellectual who is committed to fighting oppression, and who acts as the author or editor of the testimony.

[15] Zavala and Craft refer in this context to the historical roots of contemporary Central American testimony: the travelling tales of the 'narrador popular, el "cuentero"', as well as the '"cuenta cuentos," el fabulador espontáneo comunitario' (Zavala 1990: 291) and 'una forma jurídica antigua [...] desde los tiempos de la conquista, cuando se usaba el testimonio como un documento legal en el que un testigo/solicitante reclamaba lo que se le debía' (Craft 2000: 81). These traditions had been reactivated in the Central American context of the sixties, seventies and eighties, namely, in a situation of mass repression and oppression (see Zavala 1990: 249ss). See also Lienhard (1991) on this subject.

> imperialismo, el testimonio es una de las formas en que podemos ver y participar a la vez en la cultura de un proletariado mundial en *su* época de surgimiento […]. (Beverley 1987a: 168)

Texts of testimonial literature were viewed as an integral part of resistance against the military dictatorships. In Nicaragua, for example, testimony (along with the texts produced in the *Talleres de poesía*) even came to be a central cultural practice, directly linked to the national liberation project; it was canonised as an expression of revolutionary nationalism in the literary field, as the dominant form of a 'nacionalismo literario.'

In an article from 1997, the Guatemalan literary theorist María del Carmen Meléndez de Alonzo criticises certain aspects of this canonisation and orthodoxy. In particular, she highlights the close relationship between the sudden rise of testimonial literature in Central American and the escalation of the conflict between the state and guerrilla forces, especially in Nicaragua and Guatemala, attacking the operative concept of the underlying literature behind testimony, which served politically defined objectives of the guerrillas. The dominant literary discourse had favoured a concept of testimony as committed literature in opposition to literature pertaining to entertainment and the exclusion of all that did not correspond to that category. Accordingly, in testimonial literature the individual disappears 'para que una colectividad se asome al mundo en una obra que busca destinatario' (1997 and: 53). She cites four determining characteristics in this interpretation of testimony: 1) 'anonadamiento del yo y el simbolismo,' 2) 'exaltación de la mística rebelde,' 3) 'información por tamiz,' and 4) 'inserción en la ecología' 1997: (56-62), to conclude that:

> [...] el modelo se ha agotado ya en sí mismo, porque ya no es nuevo y porque –en cierta medida– los conflictos armados en Centroamérica han finalizado. Su persistencia radicará, pues, en la capacidad de autorenovación cualitativa y adaptación a los cambios socio-políticos y económicos globales. (1997: 62)

Leonel Delgado (2002: 98-104) convincingly asserts that this canonisation of the seventies and eighties in no way does justice to the diversity of testimony in Nicaragua. He points out the testimonial tradition in the national literature (partially even before the Cuban Revolution), highlighting its close links with the corresponding literary or intellectual discourse of the time and criticising the contradictory relationship between subalternity and the cultural and/or political elites, for example, the principally masculine (or rather, *macho*) character of the discourse of the 'hombre Nuevo.' This view is even more convincing if we take into account the fact that, even in those Central American countries that did not directly experience armed conflict between insurgents and the state –as was the case in Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama– there is still a significant testimonial production, which does not correspond with the dogmatic premises of the dominant discourse on testimony. This production has been almost completely ignored by the 'maestros del pensamiento' of the testimony debate who have reduced Central America to three countries: Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Finally, the critical reading and study of certain foundational testimonial works of Central America and the Caribbean –as mentioned– have gone even further in their questioning of these premises. First was the debate around *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) by Miguel Barnet, since the publication of the results of the research carried out in Cuban archives by

the German historian Michael Zeuske, which mainly concentrate on the gaps in the history of Miguel Barnet's testimony of the escaped slave, Esteban Montejo, but also refer to aesthetic-literary issues (Zeuske 1997a; 1997b; also see Walter 2000). Secondly, since the journalist Larry Rohter's announcement (1998) of the imminent publication of an investigation by the North American anthropologist David Stoll into Elizabeth Burgos' *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), in which the Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize-winner (1992) was accused of falsifying reality, a controversial debate has developed on the issue, which is still ongoing. This research mainly attempts to address the question of political justification of the armed insurgent struggle of the seventies and eighties in Guatemala, but also deals with the problematic of the representation of extra-literary reality in Menchú's book, one of the most significant texts of Central American testimonial literature (see Stoll 1999).

While these debates have challenged the alleged close links between these testimonies and 'historical truth' and the premise of testimony as a direct source of historiography, more recently other studies have appeared which are directly concerned with the process of the production of testimony as a work of literature, of the transformation of the initial testimonial texts (recordings, interviews, videos, notes, etc.), compiled by a manager/editor/writer into a finished product: the printed testimony. This is the case of the scholars Rafael Lara Martínez (2000; 2005; 2007) and Werner Mackenbach (2001; 2004), who focus on the testimonial novel *Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* (1972), by the Salvadoran Roque Dalton and the testimony, *La marca del Zorro. Hazañas del comandante Francisco Quintero contadas a Sergio Ramírez* (1989), by the Nicaraguan Sergio Ramírez. Both scholars insist on the inscription of testimony into the field of literature and the need to analyse it using the tools of literary criticism and linguistics to arrive at the conclusion that testimony, in its aim of creating a truth effect, employs the same mimetic resources that characterise social-realist tendencies of various kinds that have been present throughout the twentieth century.[16]

CHANGE

The canonisation of testimony described above does not correspond in any way, then, to the testimonial literature of Central America. A critical revision of testimony, which concentrates in particular on the relationship between extra-literary reality and its narrative representation and presentation in the testimony, is necessary. This new critical reading of Central American testimony demonstrates that the canonisation that occurred in the heart of the literary discussions of the seventies and eighties does not do justice to the diversity or the contradictions of Central American testimonial literature, resulting in an exclusive 'memory' that marginalised the testimonial production that did not correspond to the dogmatic premises of the testimony debate. At the same time it indicates a paradigm shift that took place towards the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties. New questions had emerged and the old questions demanded new answers with regard to the relationship between extra-literary reality and literary worlds, with respect to the appropriation of reality and its narrative representation and presentation.

[16] Also, see Michael Zeuske (1997a; 1997b); Monika Walter (2000); David Stoll (1999); Arturo Arias (ed.) (2001); Mario Roberto Morales (2000); Beatriz Cortez (2001); Héctor Lindo-Fuentes et al. (eds.) (2007).

For testimony's 'maestros del pensamiento' it was, and continues to be, to a certain extent, completely out of the question the assumption that testimonial literature is characterised by a relation of agreement and overlap between the narrated world and extra-literary reality, or at least by a relation of similarity, as a relation of correspondence or mimetic fiction. The latter has been considered especially typical of the testimonial novel. Indeed, not even the Central American testimonial literature of the eighties and nineties breaks the close link between 'factual' and 'narrated' history (or, to use Genette's terms, *histoire* y *récit*), and keeps this privileged relationship alive. Nevertheless, it is evident that the appropriation of extra-literary reality and its narrative presentation and representation produce, thematically, as well as in terms of discursive strategies and the interrelation of narrative instances, multiple forms; which allows us to see testimony as an open and hybrid narrative form, ratifying, also in this context, Roberto Morales' concept of a 'dispositivo narrativo fronterizo.'

Certainly, the Central American testimonial production of those years is thematically dominated by questions concerning the (armed) struggle against military regimes and guerrilla projects of political, social and national liberation; certainly the discourses of the 'hombre Nuevo,' of liberation theory and class struggle determine the representation of extra-literary Central American realities in the narrative worlds of the testimonial narratives on the Isthmus. However, it is worth noting that Central American testimonial literature is in no way tied to such themes and the inclusion into a revolutionary project cannot be considered under any conception as an indispensable characteristic of any definition of testimony. On the contrary, in testimonies written since the nineties, it is obvious that the narrator no longer wants to continue being 'the synecdoche representative of the collective, the lower class, or an oppressed racial or ethnic group' that Greg Dawes (1993:170) early saw as a typical feature of testimony. The symbiotic revolution-testimony relationship increasingly disintegrates, especially in the nineties. Literature is emancipated (once again) from the revolution.

A great diversity of forms and grades of fictionalisation characterise narrative representation. Testimonial literature does not cling in any way to an enslaving relationship of correspondence with extra-literary realities; the texts have value in the same manner as mimetic, non-mimetic, and even anti-mimetic fiction, the latter to a greater degree since the nineties. This phenomenon corresponds with the presentation of a plethora of narrative techniques and perspectives that definitively render obsolete any dogmatic attempt at reduction, exclusion or fixation a la Beverley (see Beverley 1989: 12ss). Testimonial literature is characterised in all its diverse expressive forms by a more or less proximity or distance to other genres and subgenres, such as autobiography, biography, the epic, documentation, journalistic reporting, the novel and others. Just as it incorporates elements from other genres and subgenres, elements of testimony are in turn inscribed into other genres and subgenres, especially the novel.

Finally, the relation between narrator/testifier narrative instances and author/editor is far from the harmonious one it has been allotted by dogmatic discourse, whether as a conscious subordination of the intellectual beneath the subaltern, or in the form of a symbiotic fusion between both. The relation between both is highly conflictive; the text itself is the terrain in which these conflicts take place. The touted authentic reconstruction of the 'other,' of the subaltern, becomes –on the contrary– a construction that is over determined by interests, ideologies and access to the political-literary field, traditionally dominated by members of the

lettered middle class. The following appraisal by Linda Craft of literary indigenismo from the beginning of the twentieth century is applicable, *mutatis mutandis* (or rather, for the author-testifier or lettered-subaltern relation), to a large proportion of testimonial literature:

> [...] writers [...] interpret their referent, the indigenous world, with a nonnative system of signs and language (Spanish) and nonnative literary forms (the novel) to nonnative readers [...] The text not only describes cultural and political conflict, it is itself the site of conflict. (2000: 35).

With regard to the testimony debate, it is also necessary to underline that in the case of Central America, such an author-testifier relation corresponds to a relation of first world-intellectuals-theory-discourse over third world-subaltern-praxis-testimony. This debate has taken (and takes) place for the most part on a battlefield outside Central America, which has been (and is) determined by political and academic interests of the 'first world' intelligentsia, especially in the USA. 'The desire called testimonio was the desire called Third World literature,' writes Gugelberger (1996: 1) in reference to the aims of establishing testimony within the canon of literary studies in North American universities, highlighting the paradox of such a proposition, as it is those very same first world academics who have been (and still are) adamant in affirming its anti-canonical subversion:

> We wanted to have it both ways: from within the system we dreamed about being outside with the 'subaltern'; our words were to reflect the struggles of the oppressed. But you cannot be inside and outside at the same time. (Gugelberger 1996: 2, also, see 3-9; and Craft, 2000: 2-3, 28)

Testimony and the discourse surrounding it do not coincide. In a sense, testimonial literature becomes the field of conflict between the 'periphery' and the 'centre'; thus, the concept of a 'dispositivo narrativo fronterizo' coined by Mario Roberto Morales acquires a new dimension.

Against this background, is there any sense in still talking of testimony as a form, genre or subgenre in its own right? With regard to our analysis of Central American testimonial literature, the attempts (undertaken by Barnet and later Beverley, among others) to establish testimony as a 'post-bourgeois' (anti)genre, which, upon revolutionising relations between extra-literary reality and novelistic worlds, leaves the (bourgeois) novel behind, has certainly been shown to be inconsistent. Arturo Arias has pointed out the difficulties of any fundamental differentiation between novel and testimony:

> Para el testimonio actual, como para la novela decimonónica o la novela realista de principios del siglo veinte, no hay distinción epistemológica entre el hecho narrado y el documento científico, entre la ciencia y el arte, entre la proyección ideal de la nación y la realidad de los proyectos integracionistas. (1998a: 17, also see 212-214, 217; and Sommer 1991: 7).

Such a valid distinction for literature in general was imposed on Central American testimony in the nineties. If it is a consequence of the hybrid character of testimony itself that no unambiguous definition is feasible, I believe that a differentiation regarding the novel does

make sense in terms of the relation of narrative instances: in testimony, the narrator is or refers to a person who is authentic, real, or has been construed as such (in extreme cases, such as novels which employ elements of testimony in a fictitious-fictional manner). From this comes the particular reality effect that testimony produces in the reader. It is precisely this quality that has preordained testimony as a literary form and practise, in which those voices 'forgotten' by official historical narratives find expression, without the need to bluntly define themselves ideologically or politically. Hence, to refer to testimony as a specific genre or subgenre, involves the following two aspects: the relations of interdependence of narrative instances in testimony are based on the series narrator-author-reader, or rather, narrator (real)-author-text-narrator-reader (as opposed to the classic author-text/narrator-reader).

In addition, there is a need for a historical concept that does not lose sight of testimony's function in the political-literary field and that includes its itinerant relations with other genres and subgenres, particularly the novel (see Craft, 2000: 22,188-191). In this sense, an oscillating relationship between fiction and diction, similar to that which Ottmar Ette (1998) forwards in his studies on the work of Roland Barthes and travel writing, rooted in Gérard Genette's now classic dichotomy, can be affirmed with regard to testimony. The characteristics which apply here to testimony bring it closer to a textual production and reception that Ette describes as *frictional*, although, in the case of testimonial literature, with a clear preponderance of fictional elements (the weight of which can nevertheless vary in the different hybrid forms and sub-forms of testimony, which also need to be evaluated in different ways, depending on the corresponding historical conditions of production and especially reception).[17]

A consequence of the above has been reference to testimonial *literature*, or rather, that the analysis of testimony should operate with categories of literary history and science. It follows that testimony should be accepted as an integral part of the literary corpus or, put another way, it has received recognition within the literary discourse on Central American literature, which has traditionally been determined by a disregard of testimony or its disqualification as a 'second rate' genre. It is obvious that, as Zavala argues (1990: 295ss, 379ss), since the seventies, testimony represents a significant literary (sub-)genre, without the study of which any serious academic research of the literature of the era is unthinkable.

Another consequence consists in the definitive abandonment of the confused mix of historiography (understood from a positivist perspective) and literature (for more on this, see Arias, 1998a: 212, 215, 217). The canonisation of testimony in the seventies and eighties has given way to what we might call a new complexity or incomprehensibility, as can be seen in the heterogeneous and multiple tendencies within testimonial literature. With post-revolutionary testimony, the use of testimonial elements in recent fictional texts, in autobiographical memoirs and in documentaries, a definitive paradigm shift has been produced. The distinctive feature of this new testimonial literature is the loss of faith in 'a' historical truth (in a similar way to the new historical novel),[18] the abandonment of the

[17] Ette defines his concept of frictional literature as follows: 'Between the poles of fiction and diction, the travelogue rather leads to a friction, insofar as clear borderlines are also to be avoided as attempts to produce stable amalgams and mixed forms. Contrary to the novel, the travelogue is a hybrid form not only referring to the ingested genres and its variety of speech, but also in regard to its characteristics of evading the opposition between fiction and diction. The travelogue wears off the boundaries between both fields: it is to be assigned to a literary area that we might term frictional literature' (Ette, 2003: 31; on Barthes, see Ette 1988, esp. 312; also, see Genette, 1991, esp. 31-40).

[18] Regarding this see Mackenbach (2004: 270-347).

demand for representativity in the name of the subaltern and the recuperation of a pretension for literariness. Individualisation, fragmentation, relativism and fictionalisation characterise the majority of such texts. With this, the function of testimony in the construction of national identity, its role as the privileged site of national master narratives, has also changed.

COMPLEXITY

The end or future of testimony? By the late eighties it was already, for Beverly and Zimmerman, a *fait accompli* that any integration of testimony into the literary field would deprive it of its innovative and revolutionary function (and consequently its very reason for being, according to them) (see Beverley 1987a 167; Beverley and Zimmerman 1990: 188; Zavala 1990: 275ss). For Gugelberger it was even necessary to specify 'how this movement from an authentic margin has been betrayed by inclusion in the Western canon, which can be considered as yet another form of colonization,' in order to –clinging onto the most dogmatic premises of the testimony debate– search for a new 'revolutionary' form and 'find other developments that now have the potential the testimonio had years ago' (1996: 13-14, also, see 17). Finally, Linda Craft sees in the conservation of the original, anti-repressive (and perhaps anti-literary) impulse with which those who are repressed by new revolutionary governments 'continue to write testimony protesting the injustices of the new regimes [...] still a place for testimony' (2000: 191ss.). In my view exactly the opposite has occurred: if something with the subversive energy of testimony can survive, it is for its fictionalisation, its reluctant incorporation into the broad field of the novel or literary fiction.

But does this mean that testimony has lost its definitive role in the current identitary processes of Central American societies, its fundamental function against oblivion and lies in the painful attempts at reconciliation and the construction of a future based on memory, its strategic position between memory and history? Not in the slightest. Memory that is organised, transformed, fictionalised in testimony (or testimonies) maintains its role in the social and cultural processes that combat oblivion.[19] The remembrance of the past is not 'una reserva estática de significaciones definitivamente consignadas en los archivos del tiempo' writes Nelly Richard:

> La actividad de la memoria surge del deshacer y rehacer de los procesos de evocación y narración del pasado a los que nos convocan las solicitaciones políticas y comunicativas de un presente curioso, o bien disconforme. (2007b: 197)

[19] In her article on the memoirs of three female figures from Chilean public life, Nelly Richards highlights the need to 'reinsertar la contingencia individual de estas voces testimoniales en lo colectivo del recuerdo público para averiguar cómo interviene cada una en la escena de la memoria' (2010a: 80). As a task of critical science, in her essay on the book *Romo; confesiones de un torturador*, by the journalist Nancy Guzmán, which is based on a lengthy interview the author conducted with one of the main torturers of the Pinochet regime, Richards formulates: 'En tiempos de post dictadura, una primera responsabilidad ética consiste en oponerse a los flujos de desmemoria que, velozmente, buscan disolver las adherencias traumáticas de un pasado históricamente convulso en la superficie liviana, sin restos, de la actualidad neoliberal. Pero existe también una segunda responsabilidad crítica que nos obliga a desconfiar rigurosamente del reciclaje de mercado del *boom* industrializado de la memoria. Debemos sospechar de los promiscuos artefactos del recuerdo que simulan rescatar el pasado de las víctimas pero que, en realidad, no hacen sino traicionar su memoria sufriente al dejar que los dramas de sentido tormentosamente vinculados a ella caigan en la trivialidad de lenguajes demasiado ordinarios, en la rudeza de voces demasiado simples' (2010b: 117).

The recourse to testimonial techniques maintains its relevance in these processes, particularly in documenting the most recent experiences and events of Central American history in terms of the politics of memory, but no longer in the form of texts that try to construct *a* or *the* memory, but instead relate collective and/or individual memories, in plural.[20] Testimony continues to be a privileged narrative form in the construction of history, especially because of its particular character, or rather, the relationship of what is narrated to an authentic extra-literary source (in contrast with the novel), or as Elizabeth Burgos summarises in her already mentioned essay on Rigoberta Menchú's testimony:

> No obstante, cualesquiera que hayan sido sus motivaciones: estratégicas, políticas o narcisistas, su testimonio seguirá ocupando en el mundo indígena el espacio del coro en las tragedias griegas: la prosopopeya que permitió se escuchara la voz de los muertos y contribuyó a que cesara la invisibilidad de una cierta categoría de seres. (2001: 74).

With this, nevertheless, the pretension of speaking 'the truth,' of serving as an immediate source of history, is definitively renounced. Although a testimony can be transformed into a text that represents a collective, a class, a nation, an era or a political situation, it is no more than *a* voice. History as a science cannot and should not renounce its essential task of completing, verifying, questioning this voice with others, and in this critical task it must consult the tools of its sister disciplines, literary and linguistic studies, just as it must equally consult non-fictional sources, validating itself with other disciplines such as sociology, economics and political science.

'Human memory is a marvellous but fallacious instrument,' writes Primo Levi at the opening of the first chapter of his memoirs, charting his years at Auschwitz. He continues:

> This is a threadbare truth known not only to psychologists but also to anyone who has paid attention to the behaviour of those who surround him, or even to his own behaviour. The memories which lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change, or even increase by incorporating extraneous features. (1989: 11)

Nevertheless, it is also an absolutely necessary instrument for the future of all societies, not just those of Central America. Or as the 'disappeared' Guatemalan author Luis de Lión states in his novel, *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*:

> [...] luego cuando se murieron los bisabuelos que les contaban estas historias a los abuelos, luego cuando se murieron los abuelos que les contaban estas historias a los padres, luego cuando se murieron los padres que les contaban estas historias a los hijos y así hasta toparse con el último recuerdo que ya no recordaban y cuando recordaron todos empezaron a caminar para adelante, a chocar contra todo lo que deseaban, por ejemplo un pedazo de tierra, que los hijos no se murieran de sarampión, de tosferina, [...] que a las niñas no se fueran a hacer nada antes de tiempo, [...] que no hubiera sequía, [...] que el próximo gobierno no fuera otro hijo de puta, [...] que ya no se llevaran a los hijos al

[20] See my study on Central American memory narratives (Mackenbach 2012, esp. footnote 10), in which I make reference to certain recent testimonies in the context of the 'batallas de la memoria' (Dobles 2009: 306) waged in the processes of transition towards more peaceful and democratic forms of government in Central America.

> cuartel, [...] que no hubiera tercera guerra mundial, que ya no hubiera ese cuento de bolos que se llamaban elecciones, [...] que los gringos se fueran a la mierda y se hicieran mierda con los rusos pero no con otras naciones y, en fin, que estuvieran de verdad vivos y no muertos. (1996: 59)

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 5

CONTEMPORARY MAYA POETRY AND THE QUESTION OF MODERNITY: XIB'ALB'A AS AN ALLEGORY OF GLOBALIZATION*

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ABSTRACT

Western modernity has been the target of attacks coming from the so-called Third World. Modernity is a galactic spaceship that, in its lineal progression, destroys the global space of the past, present and future of peoples who experience its violence from the margins. Nonetheless, from every subaltern latitude the galactic spaceship receives projectiles from small and diverse spaceships that gradually emerge seeking to disrupt and even destroy its unscrupulous progression, began in October of 1492. Ever since then, many of those small ships have been driven by indigenous peoples subalternized by modernity. In fact, understood from an indigenous perspective as a hegemonic cultural and economic (neo)liberal condition, modernity represents the story of how the powerful have acquired their power by colonizing indigenous peoples. Indeed, as Arturo Arias indicates, in Guatemala Maya literature represents 'a strong, vital counterstatement to Ladino [or criollo-mestizo] discursivity' (2007: 78). Such counterstatement presupposes the restoration of indigenous dignity, which has been trampled on by a shameful modern Guatemalan history. It should come as no surprise then that one of the most important concerns for contemporary indigenous writers is defined as an epistemological and political contest with their non-indigenous others to not only rewrite or *re*-right history (Smith) but also reinstate the autonomy and self-determination they lost with the imposition of modernity and its institutions.

* A version of this article was presented at the seminar 'Theme, Structure and Aesthetics in Post-Civil War Central American Literature' at the University of Liverpool April 15-17, 2010, and at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference in Tucson, AZ (June 2010). I am indebted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Romance Languages department and the Institute for the Study of the Americas for their support to attend both these events.
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In this chapter, I will explore the way literature becomes bullets that attack the galactic ship by providing an analysis of contemporary Maya literature from Guatemala, represented by Maya K'iche'-Kaqchikel poet Rosa Chávez's *Casa solitaria* (2005) and Maya K'iche' poet Pablo García's *B'ixonik tzij kech juk'ulaj kaminaqib'/Canto palabra de una pareja de muertos* (2009). As I will show, through the metaphor of the journey to the underworld, these poetry books provide a critique and demystification of the modern hegemonic Guatemalan narratives of citizenship and nationhood, allegorized in Xib'alb'a, the underworld, from the Maya K'iche' book the *Popol Wuj*.[1] Chávez develops Xib'alb'a as a literary trope associated with the city or 'solitary house' to explore the modern 'infernal' condition that is the legacy of the civil war and neoliberal globalization. For his part, García employs Xib'alb'a to explore the colonized condition of Maya subjectivity and the search to transcend it through a journey to the origins. I conclude arguing that Chávez and García use Maya cosmology to develop the conditions of possibility for decolonial resistance by articulating a collective subaltern political consciousness.

CASA SOLITARIA: GLOBALIZATION AND ITS POSTMODERN PRISON

Chávez's *Casa solitaria* is a collection of poems linked by urban settings where the experiences of indigenous peoples coincide and coexist with other marginal subjects like prostitutes, the homeless children, transvestites, drug addicts and homosexuals. The book resists ethnic labelling. Contrary to Chávez's later poetry book *Ab'aj/Piedra* (2009), *Casa solitaria* has very little to do with the political and cultural demands advocated by other Maya writers, like Gaspar Pedro González or Calixta Gabriel Xiquin. We could well say that Chávez's book defines a generational distance from the first generation of indigenous writers, who, responding to a historical moment characterized by deep racism and political marginalization, wrote a literature that denounces the human rights violations that many indigenous peoples have suffered. This group of writers wrote in defense of people directly affected by the civil war. They aimed to dignify Maya memory, as well as authorize and inscribe Maya linguistic, cultural and religious specificities in the hegemonic narrative of the nation-state. In addition to exploring these issues, the new generation of Maya writers develops other topics, which include the valorisation of the indigenous feminine body, erotic and even lesbian images. The sounds inscribed in the poetry are not only those of birds, the wind and trees, but also those of the city: screams from the streets, cars, lights or gunshots that interrupt the daily urban experience. From these surroundings, a transformed vision of indigenous realities, rooted in a changed Maya cosmology, emerges. Several of these urban indigenous writers have not left their past or origin behind. Rather, they have kept them and transported them to the city.

[1] The *Popol Wuj*, or the 'Book of the Community' as it is commonly translated, is a text of myth-historical narratives of the Maya K'iche' peoples in Guatemala's western highlands. Among other things, it narrates the creation myth, genealogies, and the epic tales of the journey of the hero twins Hunahpú and Xbalanque to the underworld. The Popol Wuj's survival is attributable to the seventeenth century Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez (1666-1729), who came to Santo Tomás Chichicastenango in 1701. It was here, around 1714, where Ximénez transcribed and translated the manuscript in parallel K'iche' and Spanish columns. The original manuscript has been lost and we only have Ximénez's copy, which is currently housed at the Newberry Library in Chicago, IL. Recently, a facsimile version of the text has been produced and it is available on line: http://library.osu.edu/sites/popolwuj/

Casa solitaria presents us with an omniscient, first person narrator: 'es cierto/yo lo vi todo' (18). She enters the underworld or the 'dark side of modernity' (Mignolo 1995) to focus her gaze on marginalized subjects in order to explore the concrete effects of the civil war and globalization, effects that generated a slow deterioration of humanity. The 'solitary house' becomes a literary trope that acquires diverse metaphoric connotations associated with the personal interior and the daily reality of those who survive modernity from a position of subalternity. The book demystifies and satirizes the urban setting – 'eterno circo' (9) – as representative of a modern world associated with 'progress,' 'development,' 'prosperity,' 'hope,' 'tolerance,' 'equality,' 'order' and 'elegance.' Contrary to these adjectives, the images of the city offered by Chávez – as we will see – display grotesque, mundane and nauseating surroundings where we witness the survival of marginal subjects, despite degrading experiences.

The poems in *Casa solitaria* are written in free verse and lack titles; this provides an initial effect of impersonality. The poems portray images deprived of beauty, harmony and order through crude and grotesque language that creates a sombre atmosphere. Chávez employs diverse rhetorical devices that include personification – 'el invierno vomita' (18) – and irony. She concludes the description of the sinister routine of a transvestite who has been beaten with the line, 'y todo parece normal' (13). After the first poem, 'Hace un mes' (I will refer to the poems by using their first line), the book is divided in two parts that reveal a cyclical structure that is expressed in the line, 'casa solitaria oculta en la alacena.' This line appears in the poem that opens the first section, 'pequeña dosis de placer autómata' (9), and then in the last poem that closes the second section as well as the book, 'Desenchufar' (36). The line denotes alienation and even forgetfulness: the house *hidden* in the storeroom is a forgotten object and the loneliness is made explicit in the adjective 'solitary.'

In the first part of the book, the protagonists move in a public urban sphere. The omniscient narrator describes their journey through the subterranean settings of the city. The poems describe the plot of marginal and despised subjects in the hegemonic social and discursive order. The section concludes with the poem, 'Fueron sus palabras,' which describes a conversation between the narrator and her mother. The mother offers a prayer to the gods so 'que aparten la tristeza/que llevo dentro' (19). The second part offers a more intimate and personal insight. Here we find poems that speak of deceit ('Él maquilló sus ojos'), impatience ('El niño le habla'), abandonment ('tú'), anguish ('Nacemos al dolor') and indifference ('Hoy somos los desencontrados'). In most of the poems from this second part, the characters move in more confined and private spaces, like a room or a kitchen. It would seem as if they are inside the solitary house with the exception of the last poem, 'Desenchufar' (36), where the poetic voice speaks in the first person, describing the action in the street, the public sphere.

The first poem of the book, 'Hace un mes,' serves as a preface to the themes of fear, confinement, verbal and physical violence that Chávez will explore through the experiences of her urban characters in the poems in the first and second parts. Here, I will cite the entire poem in order to provide a more thorough analysis of it:

> hace un mes
> vine a la capital
> mi tata nos abandonó
> y en la casa el hambre dolía,

yo trabajo en una casa
(la señora dice que de doméstica)
aunque no entiendo muy bien qué es eso,
me dieron un disfraz de tela
ese día llore, llore mucho
me daba vergüenza ponerlo
y enseñar las piernas,
la señora dice que en mi pueblo
todos somos shucos
por eso me baño todos los días
mi pelo largo lo cortaron
dice que por los piojos
no puedo hablar bien castilla
y la gente se ríe de mí
mi corazón
se pone triste,
ayer fui a ver a mi prima
voy contenta porque puse mi corte,
el chofer no quería parar
y cuando iba a bajar, rápido arrancó,
—apurate india burra—me dijo
yo me caí y me raspé la rodilla
risa y risa estaba la gente
mi corazón se puso triste
dice mi prima
que ya me voy a acostumbrar
que el domingo vamos al parque central
que
hay salones para bailar
con los grupos que llegan a la feria
de allá, de mi pueblo,
estoy en mi cuartito
contando el dinero que me pagaron
menos el jabón y dos vasos que quebré
la señora dice que soy bien bruta
no entiendo porque me tratan mal
¿acaso no soy gente pues? (5)

In its apparent testimonial straightforwardness, the poem displays complexity in its various discursive layers.

To begin with, through the metaphor of the 'house,' the poem represents the dichotomy of the countryside (the house where hunger ached) and city (the house where she obtains a job as a 'domestic maid' and the public sphere). The poem represents the character's journey from the countryside to the city in a cyclical or spiral descending structure, which relates to the structure of the book as a whole and specifically to the line, 'solitary house hidden in the storeroom.' The character travels from the house where hunger aches (the countryside) to the house where she works (the city) and to the little room within that house. The image we

obtain of the room within the house, and in turn the house within the city is directly associated with the line 'solitary house [small room within the house] hidden in the storeroom [house + city].' The poem also has a social dimension. With the abandonment by the father and the migration of the main character to the city, the poem suggests the rupture of the indigenous social fabric. Although the poem does not mention the armed conflict in Guatemala, the experience of the domestic maid recalls the migration of thousands of Mayas who moved from the countryside to the city in search of survival or better opportunities. These migrations were the result of the poverty and social injustice they endured during the civil war. However, as we can see, instead of finding the desired prosperity, the protagonist confronts a world that rejects and harasses her due to her ethnic origin.

In the city, the protagonist's cultural specificities are attacked. The lady she works for as a domestic maid obliges her not to use her traditional clothes, cuts her hair, and accuses her of being filthy and stupid. Her experience in the public sphere is not alien to these attacks either. People make fun of her because she cannot speak Spanish well. The bus driver that takes her to her cousin's house refers to her as 'stupid Indian' and ridicules her in front of everyone else when she gets off the bus. When she tells her cousin about these experiences, the response is that she 'will get used to it,' which indicates that the cousin has also lived similar experiences of aggression. The cousin's experiences suggest a historical precedent marked by a naturalized racism. When the protagonist returns to the house where she works, in her small room she reflects upon her own social condition as a dehumanized subject, 'I don't understand why they treat me so badly,' developing a rhetorical question, 'aren't I a human being?', that parodies the 'civilizing' symbolism represented by the city.

Contrary to such symbolism and similar to Michel Foucault's idea of the prison as an institution of discipline and punishment (1975),[2] the city emerges here as a centre where violent mechanisms of control operate to regulate and domesticate the – in this case indigenous – body. Contrary to the progress, hope and social well-being normally associated with the urban setting, the city turns into a hostile place that at once segregates, excludes and domesticates subjects in subaltern positions. In addition, the experience described in the poem illustrates modernity's *modus operandi*, built on coloniality (Mignolo, 1995; 2000): it rejects indigenous cultural specificities, but at the same time feeds on their human capacities to function.

The violence that characterizes the ambiance of the city is not particular to indigenous peoples. Other differentiated subaltern characters from *Casa solitaria* who have been pushed to the margins experience physical and verbal aggression similar to the attacks experienced by the Mayan domestic maid. Employing olfactory, tactile and sensorial grotesque images, Chávez represents these characters in conditions so degraded that they acquire animal and monstrous dimensions. The prostitute in the poem 'la putita es una trastornada,' for instance, 'es una perra en la banqueta,' 'gran monstro triste,' 'con pulmoncitos ahogados en estiércol' (17). She makes love amid 'moscas que giran y circulan/cosquillas en los genitales' (17). In a similar way, the transvestite in 'Las luces se encienden' lives among 'cucarachas' and 'golpes, susurros, asfixia' (13). Like the 'little whore,' he survives out of 'cogidas pagadas y mal pagadas' (13). The children from the streets in 'Ciudad de ladrones chiquitos' are a

[2] According to Foucault, once 'disciplinary professions' are created, the metaphor of the prison can be extended to other institutions that serve to domesticate individuals. These may also include the school, psychiatric hospitals and military institutions (1995: 300).

'pequeña villa de duendes' that wander around, 'disfrazados/perros callejeros/adoptando la orfandad humana' (10). Besides living in repugnant conditions and spaces, these subjects live in loneliness and fear, like the children from 'A esta hora nadie habla' who as soon as the night arrives, 'se guardan solitarios/mientras sus padres se intoxican' (14), or the child from 'Él es un hijo anonimo,' who 'le teme a las aves, los perros,/mariposas.' He is a 'metafora/de letras revueltas' (15). Paradoxically, in this last poem, elements that supposedly symbolize freedom and beauty – 'birds' and 'butterflies'– acquire a different meaning in order to underscore the fear they provoke in the child. In turn, the child becomes a symbol of confusion and chaos ('metaphor of scrambled letters').

As we can see, the environment in which these characters move is very somber, marked by a grotesque ambiance that displays a slow human degradation. It is a society impregnated by a monstrous and banal condition. These representations of the characters and their fragile situations, especially those of the children, evoke consternation and impotence in the reader. Their presence and voices have no significance within an urban context that lacks hope. All of the characters, the text suggests, are accustomed to experiences where 'todo parece normal' (13). Reality is a 'común llanto cotidiano' (12), 'rutina, nada más' (14) and the characters move in confined spaces where they confront a naturalized physical and verbal violence in their everyday lives. Even the future seems to be marked with no hope as indicated in 'Nacemos al dolor,' which describes 'este mundo deshuesadero' with a 'final invisible' (31).

Far from the *dictums* associated with Western democracy and modernity ('liberty,' 'tolerance,' 'equality,' etc.), what we obtain through the metaphor of the city, which is related to the solitary house, are surroundings filled with a 'común llanto cotidiano' (12) and 'canto[s] de pájaros enjaulados' (10). When the lights of the city are turned on at six in the evening in 'Nacemos al dolor' (31), the streets become sad. The image of the city is related to a prison characterized by its confinement and uncertainty. It is a world horrifically marked by the experience of the civil war and neoliberal globalization, both of which implicitly spread a violent democracy that has dehumanized certain subjects, pushing them to the most obscure corners of the city. In such 'modern,' globalized spaces life becomes a metaphor and personification of 'sangre' when Chávez writes:

> ya no es un misterio
> se vende, se alquila,
> se roba, se devuelve,
> se derrama, se bebe,
> se orina, se decolora,
> ya no vale, no une, no detiene,
> no coagula, no sabe a hierro,
> se arman circos para absorberla,
> la sangre
> ya no es un misterio (27)

The end of the civil war and globalization were supposed to represent the growth of material and spiritual prosperity as well as the eradication of violence. However, for the subjects that have survived them from the margins, these tendencies represent the restoration of a new democratic-violent order, characterized by slow human degradation and dehumanization. The city, or modernity, emerges as a prison or hell for subjects that are

relegated to the margins due to their profession (prostitutes), ethnic origin (the domestic maid), social status (the children from the streets), sexual orientation (homosexuals or transvestites), etc.

THE DECOLONIZATION OF MAYA SUBJECTIVITY

For his part, in *B'ixonik tzij kech ju'ulaj kaminqib'/Canto palabra de una pareja de muertos*, Pablo García develops a discursive construction of Xib'alb'a that is associated with the colonized condition of indigenous subjectivity. Like Chávez, García employs the metaphor of the journey of a dead couple (the poetic collective voice) through the underworld. This man and woman develop a process of mental and political decolonization through songs and prayers to 'resurrect' themselves and reconcile with the gods in order to avoid a 'segunda muerte infernal' (16). The representation of the dead couple can be read in great measure as a rewriting of Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise in the biblical book of Genesis and in John Milton's (1608-1674) epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), which illustrates Adam and Eve's journey in search of reconciliation with their creator, God. Contrary to *Paradise Lost*, *B'ixonik Tzij* is not about Satan tempting the main characters but rather how a world where everything 'is revelry and celebration' (16) for a man and a woman turns into punishments. Their condition has become degraded because they have adopted foreign values that have distanced them from their native ones. While Milton uses the Bible as a point of departure for Adam and Eve's expulsion, García employs Maya oral tradition, which in many ways echoes the Maya K'iche' *Popol Wuj*, to re-conceptualize 'original sin.' Moreover, unlike the Bible and Milton's epic poem, García universalizes his protagonists by not employing proper names.

The book is written in Spanish and Maya K'iche' and consists of an introduction and four songs. The introduction, composed of eight stanzas of forty lines, establishes the temporality between a 'before' when everything 'es jolgorio y parabién' (10) and an 'after' when the couple fall to the underworld. Initially, the couple are the 'semilla de la luz' and the 'la flor de la estrella del Creador/de la Creadora'; then, they are interrupted by a cataclysm that throws them to Xib'alb'a, where they become 'los muertos del anverso y el reverse del infierno' (10). Once they realize their condition as a 'dead couple' from 'el magno reposo relative del silencio' (10), the man and woman begin a journey through the darkest roads of Xib'alb'a. They plead and pray that their 'Father' and 'Mother,' creators of humanity and the universe, 'perdonen [sus] pecados.'

The first song includes eleven hymns or prayers that describe the infernal situation and the characters' complaints of the punishments they receive in the underworld. For instance, the man and woman have been emptied of 'life essence.' They are turned into 'cañas podridas del infierno' (24), 'consumidores de animal muerto' (34). They have turned into 'terribles durmientes' (68) and been fried, toasted and grinded by the gods of death, Jun Kame (First Death) and Wuqub' Kame (Seven Death) (20). The second song consists of one hymn, 'Señor – Señora nuestros corresponsables y complementos' (56). This song evokes the creators in order to carry out a process of liberation from the underworld through solar self-purification, self-correction, self-resurrection and self-realization in order to be resurrected like the 'flor de la estrella del Creador/de la Creadora' 58). The third song, consisting of eleven prayers from

'la escuela infernal' (62), implores for the liberation from Xib'alb'a through an 'educación solar cooperativa' (62). Here, the author describes the path toward resurrection as a desire to 'la perenne vida de nuestros corazones' (66). Finally, the last song concludes with an expression of 'Agradecimiento' to the Father and Mother for 'habernos escuchado' (94).

For the most part, the poems are written in free verse. García employs language that is highly symbolic as well as complex discursive constructions to develop an ambiance that recalls the dualist philosophic conception of the *Popol Wuj*. As we know, the sacred Maya K'iche' text emphasizes the paradox and reciprocity of binary opposites as an epistemological base for sociability and intersubjectivity. *B'ixonik tzij* displays this dual discursive tendency through the languages employed (K'iche' and Spanish), the double temporality (before and after, yesterday and today), the dead couple, the Creator and Creatress or Father and Mother invoked, and the binary oppositions that characterize the 'hellish' ambiance of the characters in Xib'alb'a: heaven/earth, life/death, light/darkness, and good/evil. In addition, the binary opposites fulfil epistemological functions that serve to establish and 'identify links between all forms of life as well as to express complementary aspects of a similar referent. Objects are not perceived semantically isolated from one another, but rather they offer a natural contextualization of the reality being described' (Craveri Slaviero 2004: 35). On the other hand, García emulates the K'iche' oral tradition and the sacred K'iche' text in the form of songs or prayers, which follow continuous couplets and lines that display contradiction: 'una vez fuimos tiernos/otra vez fuimos tiesos/una vez fuimos risueños/otra vez fuimos enojados' (16).

By using 'songs' to constitute the form of the poetry book, García also legitimates and performs orality as a vehicle of artistic transmission. Following Walter Ong's (1989: 21 and 36-37) approach, the orality in the book manifests itself in onomatopoeia – 'zumban los hierros por los aires' (42), repetition – 'nuestros rostros/nuestros cuerpos/nuestros gustos/nuestras palabras' (18), and the constant presence of epithets – 'Somos el claro de sol/ somos el claro de luna blanca' (10). Moreover, the poems are characterized by indents that represent long pauses that offer intonations that alternate between nostalgic, aggressive, pretentious and even burlesque. Indents are sometimes employed to develop calligrams of the described referent, like the first stanza of 'Consumidores de animal muerto,' one of the prayers from the first song. It draws the image of the fire at the entrance of Xib'alb'a:

La lengua del fuego revolotea
irradia
y calienta
si se le enciende
acopla
y se le sopla (32)

A calm fire emerges through the sounds articulated in the onomatopoeia in the 'flickers' of the fire and the acoustic pauses established through the indents in the stanza, and the phonemes at the end of each line 'light,' 'heat,' 'ready,' steady.' The onomatopoeia is once again employed at the end of the song when García imitates the sounds a dog makes when it licks the liquids in the underworld: 'riq' riq' riq' it sounds' (32), he says.

The main figurative devices that García employs in his songs are metaphor and simile. He uses these to develop imagery that is paradoxical around the light/darkness dichotomy. As

I said above, in the beginning the man and woman are compared to luminous and radiant elements. They are 'the seed of light,' 'the flower of the star of the Creator/of the Creatress,' 'the sun clearing space in the clouds,' and 'the white moon shining through this earth/to hell/the universe' (10). In Xib'alb'a, these images disappear to give way to an ambiance that is highly sombre. For example, in the poem 'Caña podrida' [rotten reeds] we find: 'Nuestra Mirada refleja un cierlo ahumado/y un corazón desnuedo sin tornasoles' (24). Similarly, García underscores how the pureness of a full life withers in the underworld, as occurs in the poem 'Cuchicheamos' where the 'tiernos rostros se hicieron viejos rugosos' (20). The man and woman are like 'llagas flacas/encorvadas/y enclenques' and they '[parecen] llagas gordas/chorreamos/apestamos/y aullamos' (24). Darkness becomes the main protagonist in the 'hellish' stage and is the place from which 'the voracious death' that consumes 'el fuego de la vida' (78) emerges. In the underworld, the characters vanish along with the radiant imagery, leaving us with a world marked by desolation and gloominess. The luminous images in that ambiance are evoked through prayers that display a tone of nostalgia for a harmonious and full past that has been lost. With the prayers, the dead couple petitions a return to a world where everything is 'revelry and celebration,' and harmony 'con nuestros padres y madres Estrella/Sirio/Sol y Luna Blanca' is restored (20).

Nonetheless, harmony will not be restored unless the 'original sin' is eliminated. The dead couple has assimilated ways of life that have distanced and alienated them from their original subjectivity, as is figuratively expressed in the poem, 'Lagarto, Mono.' The poetic voice indicates: 'Bebimos un río de deseos/después vomitamos un terremoto de sabiondeces' (28). This metaphor – 'we drank a river of desires' – is extended through rhetorical questions that allegorize the dead couple's alienation of ancestral values. For example, in 'Cuchicheamos,' the poetic voice asks 'Por qué dormidos nos encerramos en la sepulture?' (20). In 'Consumidores de animal muerto,' the speakers wonder 'Por qué nos convertimos en consumidores de animal muerto?' (34) and in 'Desarmonía: 'Por qué nos desarmonizamos/ con el corazón del cielo y el corazón de la tierra?' (40).

The experience of assimilation and alienation appears more clearly represented in the figure of 'Animal racional,' which is a metaphor for the violent imposition of modern values in the protagonists. The rational animal is a 'galloping' being (18) that rose 'desde la negrura de la Luna Negra' (18) to position itself 'en los cuatro pilares y sostenes de nuestros corazones' (22). The animal consumes 'el fuego de nuestra esencia,' turning the dead couple into decomposed and inactive bodies like 'rotten reeds from hell.' Their heads become 'desecadísimas piedras pómez' and their organisms 'arrugadisimos gusanos' (22). Instead of being 'seeds of light,' they are 'trementina seca de animal racional/amontonados ante Jun Kame Wuqub' Kame' (22); they no longer see each other 'en el corazón del cielo y de la tierra' (18). They have broken the 'harmony/well-being/and the peace of the living essence' (64) that connected them to their creators. As a result of this disconnection with their values, they have been locked up in hell:

> Con la amargura y resequedad de nuestro dolor
> decimos a ustedes
> Señor – Señora
> nuestros rostros
> nuestros cuerpos
> nuestros gustos

nuestras palabras y nuestros trabajos
son ya el reflejo del animal racional, pensador (18)

In another part of the poem, we read:

ya no seguimos la sabiduría solar
ya no sembramos nuestro corazón
ya no sembramos nuestro maíz
ya no sembramos nuestro trigo
ya no sembramos nuestro arroz
en el amanecer
en el atardecer del Sol y de la Luna Blanca (36-38)

The solemn tone expressed through the anaphor ('our' and 'we no longer…') underscores the imposition of alien values that mirror not an original world, but rather the disfigured, alienated and fractured subjectivity of the poetic voice. The rational animal, in this sense, represents modernity's march, destructively advancing to impose a logic characterized by the alienation and fragmentation – 'With the bitterness and dryness of our pain,' 'we no longer …' – of the ancestral values that made the dead couple enjoy revelry and celebration.

The images of light/darkness evoked by the poetic voice represent a colonized condition associated with their 'hellish' experience in Xib'alb'a and their efforts to overcome their alienation. Darkness represents the infernal condition and light symbolizes the past, the search to reconnect with and vindicate ancestral values and the possibility of overcoming their colonization. The nostalgia expressed in the tone of the songs from Xib'alb'a suggests a return to an original world, untouched by the hand of modernity, as the only path to 'resurrect' and escape from the infernal death. This is clearly expressed in the hymn 'Ayuda mutua' where the Creators, after listening to their prayers, indicate to them:

para que sean liberados del infierno
necesario es que juntos siembren la flor de su estrella
tanto hombre y mujer
para volver a la armonía sempiterna de Tulan Siwan (80).

As indicated by the Creators, the liberating effort must be a collective and reciprocal one – 'together you must plant.' The reference to Tulan Siwan (the mythical place of the seven caves from where Mesoamerican peoples emerged) suggests an exit from the hellish settings, which in turn would allow for the resurrection of the dead couple as the creators' seeds and flowers of light. It would also permit them to live a harmonious and everlasting existence without the punishments experienced in the underworld.

While García proposes a return to origins, we should not interpret his proposal literally. It is, in my view, strategic essentialism (Spivak) that is employed in order to defend and dignify Maya identity and counteract the hegemonic cultural and economic model established by neoliberalism, which promotes and imposes capitalist values as strategies to alienate and separate indigenous peoples in subaltern positions from their original values. The idea of a return to origins, represented by Tulan Siwan, aims to re-imagine a world where indigenous peoples maintained their autonomy, another world, absent of a colonized experience. García's

songs, in this context, recall Michela Elisa Craveri Slaviero's definition of the 'word' for the Maya K'iche': it 'represents a form of gratitude, a petition and a way to get close to the gods. Along with other offerings, it allows the collective voice in the poems to settle a debt with the creators and maintain a balance with the cosmos' (55).

CONCLUSION

Employing the idea of the journey through the underworld as an allegory, we can conclude that Chávez and García provide a critique of the violence that Western modernity – through neoliberalism and the violent legacy of the civil war – has represented for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples subalternized and marginalized by its mechanisms. Their respective representations can be associated with Xib'alb'a as a condition and experience that dehumanizes their protagonists. That is, Xib'alb'a is a place characterized by verbal and physical violence, pain, punishment and suffering, a representation that recalls the experiences of Jun Hunahp'u and Jun ix'b'alamque who suffer the punishments imposed upon them by the Lords of the Underworld. They do not find a way out of the hellish condition until their offspring, the Hero Twins, Hunahp'u and Ix'b'alamque, finally manage to defeat the Lords of Death, bringing stability to the cosmos (Florescano: 37). This defeat of the Lords of Xib'alb'a, according to Enrique Florescano, 'symbolizes the beginning of an era of abundance and stability, supported by the farmers, who assume the role of suppliers of human food and sustainers of civilized life' (51).

The journey of the twins to the underworld has been interpreted by Frauke Sachse y Allen J. Christenson as the allegorization of the agricultural activity of planting corn and its consequent birth. 'the life cycle of the maize plant, we may – in the widest sense – see this as an allusion to the planting stick that splits open the ground and leaves a little cave where the maize kernels are sown' (12). Once they sow the underworld with the maize kernels after they defeat the Lords of Death, the new humanity made of maize is born and with it the new beginning Florescano describes.

Unlike the defeat of the Lords of Xib'alb'a, in Chávez's and García's books, the main characters have not yet transcended their 'hellish condition.' Like Jun Hunahp'u and Jun ix'b'alamque, they remain trapped in the underworld undergoing the violent mechanisms imposed by modernity. I take this to indicate not an expression of cynicism on Chávez's and García's part; it does not mean the end of the Maya world or the loss of hope. Rather, I interpret it as a discursive strategy that suggests the need to create the conditions of possibility that allow for a collective struggle that can potentially defeat the galactic spaceship and the mercantilist values it advocates. In other words, Chávez and García aim to develop a collective decolonial subaltern struggle to replace modernity's progression with 'seeds of light' that more adequately will sustain ways of life that are more humane and dignified of a collective subaltern population. In this sense, a way out of Xib'alb'a or modernity can only be possible through a collective struggle of the subaltern guided by the Maya cosmology. We may thus interpret their 'hellish' representations of modernity as (post)modern accounts 'of death and resurrection – a concept that in Maya belief always involves a passage through the underworld' (Sachse and Christenson 2005: 16-17). In this context, it is the Maya cosmology that will allow the conditions of possibility of a world in which the subaltern and their

respective neglected history can find a place; a dignified humanity which can serve as a model of sustenance for everyone, a world, to recall and paraphrase the Zapatista slogan, where we can all live and coexist.

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II. VIOLENCE, CRIME, MEMORY, TESTIMONY AND TRAUMA

In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 6

POST-NATIONAL POST-IDENTITIES: TRANSFORMATIONS IN POST-WAR CENTRAL AMERICAN LITERARY PRODUCTION*

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As William I. Robinson (2003) has pointed out, after 1990 globalizing forces introduced thorough transformations that ushered in a new transnational model of economy and society. The globalizing process was not one-sided of course. It was a dialogic movement that put into tension local, national, and global practices, in which resistance and/or modifications stemmed from the very heterogeneity that marked local conditions. The latter have never been passively affected by globalization. They also modify and adapt globalization to their sui generis conditions. However, the innate weakness of Central American economies, further constrained by a decade of civil wars, facilitated external impositions that also modified the ways through which local cultures were produced and circulated. Perhaps the most evident example was the appearance of regional literary markets that no longer conformed to the old national models, which were simultaneously disappearing at an astonishing rate. The Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, created by the Sandinistas, was privatized and soon changed its name. The Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana (EDUCA), established in 1968 by the High Council of the isthmus's national universities, was privatized and at the same time changed its focus from an academic/literary undertaking to a more commercial one. The few national university presses that survived were hardly able to maintain even a fraction of their previous production, exposing them to undue pressures on behalf of the new university authorities, which had to operate with unprecedented austerity when they did not base their efforts on neoliberal politics. The literary market came to be controlled almost entirely by transnational Spanish companies, which were at the same time subsumed under even larger German or

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American corporations.[1] This pattern became the new norm, ceding only minimal space to small private presses that burst onto the literary scene during the ensuing decade.

Transformations in book production and the emergence of literary markets, as minimal as they were, revolutionized the traditional disdain that Central American authors felt toward their readers, a feature that until that point had squarely situated them within the Romantic framework of prophets of the apocalypse who scorned all efforts to please or accommodate their readers. The market took charge of squelching utopian, messianic, or revolutionary inclinations and transformed the self-perception of most authors, who in the preceding period had considered themselves, to a great extent, as prophetic voices speaking in the name of the masses. The fallacy of trying to preserve from a leftist perspective the aura of the *letrado* ('man of letters'), speaking for the subaltern subject in a post-auratic age, has already been sufficiently problematized by Beverley, Moreiras, and Avelar, among others.[2] Such conception did not account for the colonial difference that Dussel and Mignolo signal.

Within this vast context of rapid regional transformations, and embedded in broader problematics such as the end of the Cold War and the triumph of neoliberal globalization, narrative textuality changed as well, registering these subtle alterations as only a finely tuned seismograph could do. The study of narrative from this period would open for critics the possibility of exploring the after-effects of the cataclysmic wars in the region, as well as the transitions that took place in the symbolic sphere, the unconscious space of its cultures, in a manner analogous to Jean Franco's description of the rise and fall of the lettered city (Franco 2002).[3]

In *Mil y una muertes* (2004), by Sergio Ramírez, the narration contains multi-local elements that imaginatively push representation toward a broader topography, and the characters toward post-national subjectivities. While Castellón, the main character, circulates within France, Mallorca, or Poland, and while heterotypic functions are recognizable, they are not limited to the chronotopic, primordialist space of Somozist/Sandinista Nicaragua. Similarly, the most recent of Gioconda Belli's novels, *El pergamino de la seducción* (2005) deals with the romance between Juana la Loca and Felipe el Hermoso, from the Queen's particular subject position. Belli, also Nicaraguan, may represent palace intrigues and political conspiracies as responsible for the categorization as 'madness' of the jealousy or depression

[1] See Jill Robbins (2003).

[2] The concept of letrado was originally conceived by Uruguay critic Angel Rama. Letrados were not competing with ideologues, because they were the ideologues themselves, the producers of symbolic capital. Their autonomy enabled them to feel equally at home in all kinds of genres, and they covered the terrain presently circumscribed by traditional disciplines. Originally, letrados were for the most part criollos, full-blooded Spaniards born in the Latin American colonies. They were the early protagonists of national public spheres in the hemisphere. They intervened to legitimize exemplary narratives of national formation and integration in the process of constructing the nation itself as a symbolic entity, constituting its national imaginaries through discourses, symbols, images and rites. Letrados imagined themselves at the vanguard of progress, often playing a role integrating those of military leader, prophet, priest, judge, and man of letters. All of these were linked to an active political career and to political considerations. Nineteenth-century literary production, then, established an ideological hegemony that interpellated individuals and transformed them into subjects who identified with the discursive formation named by the letrado. For the reminder of this article the phrase 'man of letters' will be placed in quotes to signal the concept of the letrado.

[3] Franco visualizes a decline in the importance of literature following the Cold War. After the collapse of utopia, according to her, little importance remains for literature, given that now the market is the only barometer for implementing criteria for what is published (1991: 274). In Foucault's words, all literature falls 'outside of truth' after the Cold War ended.

of the Queen, or even recreate an erotic Juana immersed in a melodramatic psychological tragedy, but she reinscribes affective space removed from the associations that, in the guerrilla period 1960-1990, had established the relationship between cultural identity and nationality. From any angle, we are now quite far from the everyday texture represented in *La mujer habitada* (1988), a narrative that tied affective structures to space, time, memory, and ideology in the process of recounting the rise in political consciousness of a bourgeois woman located in the Nicaraguan revolutionary sphere that becomes a Sandinista militant and, subsequently, a martyr for the cause when she is killed in action.

This emblematic mention of certain topographies of contemporary Central American fiction allows us to perceive that during a large part of the second half of the twentieth century, identitary representations problematized in regional textualities were tied to the constitution of the national and to the creation of a modern state, fixing subjective representation in a narrow model that positioned all aspects of identity within univocal parameters of utopian nationalism, which were generally arrived at, at least imaginarily, through the guerrilla path.

However, beginning at the end of the eighties, when the first signs of the globalized era coincide with the end of the guerrilla period, topographical representations as well as textual identities undergo a transformation. Soon, literary subjects begin to reside in heterogeneous spaces differentiated from their attributed nationality of origin, and they reinvent themselves as individuals of the most varied sort attempting to forge transnational communities that denaturalize the old nationalist discourses of authenticity, as occurs with the photographer Castellón in Ramírez's novel, and even with Queen Juana of Spain in Belli's. In these texts, subjects that were previously rooted in symbolically representative locales that connoted nationality now appear inserted in distinct, heterogeneous spaces in which they try to recycle the remaining fragments of their cultural memory in order to reconfigure some new conception of post-national identity.

In this paper Iwill attempt a first approach to these representations, examining the latest novels by Sergio Ramírez, before establishing a synthetic balance of the production of the young Central American writers who have emerged throughout this decade. It is understood, of course, that this is not a critique of the individual named 'Sergio Ramírez,' who is outside of the text and even precedes it, problematizing normalizing flows and reactive resistances, but rather a critique of the mechanisms that delimit the conditions of possibility of a certain type of text above others or, better still, a critique of the editorial mechanisms that circulate certain fictional models instead of others in transnational spaces. One must recall the debates generated around the polemic articles about the 'death of the author' that revolved around articles by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault at the beginning of the seventies, and that have had serious after-effects until now.[4] In this article, I will not revisit those debates, but one must remember that the category of 'author' is understood as a theoretical construct. The present conditions of commercial circulation of literary texts through globalized corporations that propose to pre-package such texts so as to better situate them in comparable spaces of consumption rob the individual of the power of creation, and these authors go on to merely become name brands that guarantee the quality of the product that is consumed. The writing subject, the flesh and bone man named Sergio Ramírez in this case, disappears under these

[4] See Barthes 'Death of the author,' in his S/Z (1974), and Foucault 'What is an Author?,' in his Language, Counter-memory, Practice (1977).

conditions, lessening any meaning that he could possess as an intellectual/ideologue who marked his texts with singular modes of thought, or as a sui generis methodology of transgressive styles whose signification could be found in the social, and whose discursivity would be capable of causing a whole collective way of thinking to circulate in the public, social space. In the present context, authorial function is limited to designate a mass consumer product interchangeable with any other, and just like any other.

As indicated, in the Central American region one of the collateral consequences of the globalizing forces was the creation of regional literary markets dominated by globalized publishing conglomerates that broke with the old national models of cultural production. Its emergence displaced the possibility of circulating imaginary localisms as a dimension of literariness. The global dimension of the publishing houses that monopolized the regional market underlined the necessity of disciplining memories or affective ties that characterize local subjectivities within a translocal space, in which the territorial is ordered, normalized, and reproduced as legible within the spaces regulated by the new transnational order.

As a result of the former, the transgressive role that textuality played during the guerrilla period has ceded its position to a production that has molded itself more on the parameters of transnational entertainment. In these narratives it is possible to observe how subjects once rooted in local symbolic representation now recycle their cultural memory in order to reconfigure translocal identities. As Abril Trigo (2003) has pointed out, affective spaces lead to an 'emotional memory,' a phenomenon that forms part of the process of construction of the social imaginary. It is not merely a reconstitution of memory and desire but also a multidirectional means of articulating reflective answers to what is happening in the present, a way of constructing an alternative *ethos*. The above is important if we consider that, at present, much of Central American literary production takes place outside of regional topographies. If the articulation of memory through imaginary-symbolic elements which entailed that writing comply with a particular function focused on the national space of the previous period, in the present translocal period space does not appear as fixed, confined to national parameters but rather as a series of landscapes or topographies heaped together in the subject's memory that complies with the narrative function. Borders no longer denote a fall into the emptiness of the non-national but rather the entrance into new ethno-territorial spaces that dynamize the transformation of the subject of narration from a national one anchored in modernity to a one that reimagines him/herself playing the role of a post-national subject.

Possibly the best location from which to explore this complex phenomenon, which forms part of a multitude of much more broad processes that transcend a specifically Central American context, is in the narrative production of Sergio Ramírez. As I indicated in another article (In press), upon winning the 1998 Alfaguara Prize for *Margarita, está linda la mar*, Ramírez became the best known Central American novelist in the Spanish-speaking world. A quick look at the novel indicates much of what has changed from one period to another. It recounts a great swath of Nicaraguan history, beginning with the day that Rubén Darío returned to his country in 1907 and wrote a poem to Margarita Debayle in her fan, and ending with the assassination of the dictator Anastasio Somoza García in 1956, while he sat next to his wife, Salvadora Debayle, Margarita's sister. Although the novel closely follows the historical facts, politics are reduced to simple elements of the plot, in stark contrast with *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?* (1977), which covered a similar historical period – from 1930, when Colonel Catalino López was ambushed in a movie theatre by General Pedrón Altamirano, one of Sandino's combatants, and his men, to 1961 when Bolívar brings back to Nicaragua the

cadaver of his father, el Indio Larios. However, in the pre-revolutionary novel, transgressive political action provides the narrative momentum. This strategy brought with it an ideological hegemony that interpellated the characters and transformed them into subjects identified with the discursive formation signalled by the author. In this way, the subject conferred authority on the national imaginary constituted through the link with the Sandinista struggle, which fractured the Somocist nation-state project regulating the abject public life framed by dictatorship. As a result, the political dimension of the discursive language subverted the reader and the reading process. The text invited its readership to break with the normative nature of the state, offering alternative forms of sociability and of the imaginary reconstruction of their community. Similarly, this same political action evidenced that even the most intimate or private gestures, even the best-kept secrets, were exposed to continual siege by the dictatorship.

In *Margarita, está linda la mar*, unlike *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?*, the plotters' conversations emerge within the text as dominant, despite the thriller-like narration of the preparations for the assassination of Somoza that provide the textual strategy of the plot. This structure reduces the political order, and the centrality of politics, to the margins of the novel's discursivity. While the conspirators prepare Somoza's demise they verbalize remembrances of Darío, whose memory activates and legitimizes the authority of the social imaginary that forges the identity and complicity of the group of conspirators. Despite the fact that what is about to take place in the plot is a political assassination, politics themselves are nothing more than a backdrop for the evocative flow of Darian anecdotes, or for the scientific and bohemian doings of Debayle, a French scientist, in the poet's company. This creates spaces that, despite their heterogeneous nature, are diluted in a flat spatial horizon that negates the separation of almost 50 years between the plot's episodes. This spatialized discourse amalgamating both narratives overshadows the specific details of the conspiracy, and negates all political/transgressive effect of the same. The epic gesture of a political assassination is transformed into a mere anecdotal element that advances the narrative plot, maintaining a high level of suspense, although without problematizing its implications or transgressing the contemporary post-national normativity. Holding fast to its colourful cast of characters, the text not only mythifies, and mystifies, the Darian past, but also the Somocist past. Both serve merely to recycle the cultural memory of the origins of Nicaraguan-ness as a translocal identity that not only deterritorializes it but also deshistoricizes it, paradoxically, in an historical novel. It seems as if the conspirators, confronting an identitary fracture, can only regenerate it through cultural memory. Despite the subjectivity of the characters and the historical period in which they operate, they do not differ much from the characters in *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?*, because in *Margarita, está linda la mar* their own action does not bring them to consider political alternatives for the reconstruction of the nation. The re-emergence of the cultural memories buried beneath the historical memory of the dictatorship and the social imaginary that brings with it the temporal present of the narrative as an everyday experience stimulate the unsatisfied ludic and libidinal residues of the previous social imaginary. However, these same aspects distance the reader from the political event that would require a radical creativity rooted in a utopian imaginary as the motivating factor and the dedication of the conspirators. In *Margarita, está linda la mar*, they act more like war veterans recounting picaresque libidinal anecdotes, as though the peak of the war had already passed, rather than as though they were about to act, to engage in a limit-experience that most likely would imply a sacrifice of their lives for a cause. This fissure evidences the suture

between the opposing motivations behind the writing process: on the one hand, the need to problematize the political wrinkles in the local history; on the other, the commercial imposition to entertain readers situated within a post-national perspective in which the idea of transgression, or of territoriality, exists merely as a ludic mechanism of consumption arbitrated by global flows, to whom the text offers a minimalist exotic flavor for their moderate tastes.

In *Mil y una muertes*, the evocative historical flow continues along with the mindful presence of Darío, although now the object of representation has been displaced to France in the second half of the nineteenth century. The political acts present in this framework are those of Louis Bonaparte, friend and protector of the Nicaraguan photographer Castellón, who also drank with Darío in Mallorca before ending his days in Poland during World War II. The text traces the desire of a character named Sergio Ramírez to discover the identity of this enigmatic photographer, unknown in his own country. We have, then, the symbolic re-appropriation of Darío as a mechanism for launching the illusion of a cosmopolitan modernity emblematized by Castellón, a subject who is doubly *mestizo* for being the son of a *criollo* and of a black Miskita. This allows the text to construct another imaginary modernity in which a Nicaraguan with transnational loyalties, Castellón's father, plays the role of architect of Louis Bonaparte's rise to power at the same time as William Walker's invasion dissolves his estate, a symbolic representation of the disappearance of the national imaginary articulated in the same moment in which post-national subjectivities emerge. This text finds itself even farther than *Margarita, está linda la mar* or *Sombras nada más* (2002) in its intentions to communicate a meaningful interpretation of political structures, beyond that of the sheer pleasure, the *jouissance* of storytelling, legitimate in itself and certainly very professionally conveyed in the text.

Traditionally, period transitions in Central America – as in other regions – have been marked in cultural spaces by stylistic changes. In this sense, space is articulated in a different manner because textuality employs rhetorical tropes to understand continuities and mutations of topographies, as Ileana Rodríguez has indicated (2003). We can prove this through the transition between *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?* and *Margarita, está linda la mar*. The latter, like *Mil y una muertes*, mixes the revolutionary attributions that frame the author's function as signatory of the same, while eliminating contradictory or conflictive aspects that emanate from this enterprise, so as to adapt textuality to new post-national cartographies delineated by globalized publishing corporations. If *Margarita, está linda la mar* and *Mil y una muertes* retain some traditional representations of cultural memory in liminal processes of narrative (Darío's legacy, the first Somoza's dictatorship, Ramírez's own exercise of power as Sandinista vice-president), when we pay attention to the style (narrative point of view, use of time and voice), we realize that both texts are constituted by new verbal signs articulating different imaginary spaces from which to constitute the "social" than those represented in *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?* and the earlier literary production of this author, all written prior to the Sandinista defeat and his own fall from power.

His recent work, even though it evokes memories of the insurgent period, is tragicomic in its attempt to articulate the 'voluntad de eludir la derrota' in Avelar's words (1999: 21). All the transgressive and utopian contradictions present in his earlier discursivity have been neutralized from a post-national editorial perspective. The iconic image of the 'author' has been recodified to defend the inviolability of the ontological field of the once-revolutionary hero, while at the same time reconfiguring him as a wise 'man of letters' displaced from any

nationalist interests intersecting with translocal formations. The new discursivity cancels out the previous model by altering the relationship between language and subject. Whether we discuss *Sombras nada más* or *Mil y una muertes*, the character who now occupies centre stage is the 'man of letters,' interpellated from and towards a new subject position. This *ethos* possesses a different function from that of the authorial function that produces the texts from a position that brings with it as merchandise the fetishism of his previous authority as a central protagonist of a well-known revolutionary process. In *Sombras nada más* a woman who has resided in Miami since 1979 reproaches him for the manner in which she was represented in *¿Te dio miedo la sangre?*, yet they re-establish the friendship interrupted by the revolutionary interlude. In *Mil y una muertes*, the 'man of letters' retraces the steps that he took on his travels as Sandinista vice-president and reconstructs Castellón's life after his own fall from power, traveling through Mallorca while evoking the ghosts of the great artists who made their homes on the island. In both cases, the 'man of letters' occupies centre stage. He has been displaced from the centre of politics to the centre of the text. The subject conveys the feeling that he has chosen to memorialize himself as a mechanism of post-national validation in order to cancel out his recently experienced marginalization and so as to reconstitute his exchange value as a counter-national iconic subject separated from any territorial entity that would anchor his subjectivity within localist parameters. The stories around which he weaves the plots of his most recent novels – for example, that of Alirio Martinica, close Somoza collaborator who, unable to escape the country, is arrested and executed by the Sandinistas in *Sombras nada más*, or even that of Castellón, who arrives in France in 1870 as a result of a gesture of gratitude on the part of Napoleon III toward his father who had helped him escape from prison in 1846 –, are but background material. His post-war novels dramatize a handful of memories that is symptomatic of the ex-Sandinista nation because they are, above all, parables of the exemplary hero referencing himself in order to convert the narrated event into a regularization of the post-revolutionary 'man of letters' who, in this manner, constructs his affiliations with the transnational networks of literary flows sedimenting themselves as emerging morphologies of a new post-national literary order, and that only demand loyalty to the translocal production of the book as an object of merchandise.

Thanks to Ramírez's most recent texts, we discover that the final victory of the Sandinista guerrilla is merely virtual. It materializes only in the textual imaginary. It consists of a portrait of the 'man of letters' as an iconic, reified celebrity of a strictly symbolic nature who travels around the world – Miami, Poland, Mallorca – as much to prove his prestige as an *ancien combattant* as to recapture the sensation (*frisson*) of power that he lost with the end of the revolutionary cycle. It is a new way to imaginarily live the nation from an affective space free of patriotism and of nationality, a no-place located where the post-national writer reterritorializes his present free of nativism, but with territorial tropes of a phantasmatic community, the substance of which is memory and whose subject is the richness of language. It is also the only means by which the intellectual is able to locate himself within a translocal spatial formation that admits his self-representation, expressing in this way not only his desire but also, and above all, the necessity of fabricating a new identity as a mechanism of revalidation and cultural coherence.

In a similar vein, Gioconda Belli's latest novel, *El pergamino de la seducción*, slides toward the spaces of the sentimental romance, despite the fact that the author pretends to represent the psychological tragedy of women subjected to powerful men in an erotic novel of

historic proportions. The vast transgressive scene efficiently elaborated in *La mujer habitada* is converted here into samples of sexual provocation to trap morbid readers. It is globalized entertainment for mass consumption á la Isabel Allende, regardless of the justification offered by Belli that she narrates the tale of Juan la Loca from a feminist perspective that allows the reader to understand the historical domination of women.[5] For the same reasons previously ascribed to Ramírez, in this text we now find ourselves very far from *La mujer habitada*.

In this light, when we rethink contemporary Central American narrative, we can perceive in its most recent examples how a certain past intoxication with revolutionary utopias has given way to a heavy hangover. Almost no writer of the previous generation has returned to civil war topics in a seemingly convincing way, and certainly none of the young writers who emerged during the 1990's has dealt with them. It could be argued that part of this reaction is due to war fatigue, a certainly temporary state, but in reality the present situation transcends such a simple explanation.

Until more or less the 1950s, 'formal' literature (poetry, novels, what Jean Franco calls 'Literature with a capital L' (2002: 275)) sought to create national cultural identities as a mechanism for problematizing failed nation-states that privileged a small segment of their elites while maintaining the great majority of their populations in abject poverty. Apart from a radicalized Catholic social perspective (Asturias), from social-democratic ones (Mario Monteforte Toledo), or even from Marxists (Dalton), all writers attempted to construct nationalist discourses that tried to generate a moral hegemony among ample sectors of their societies, to use Gramscian terms, as a way of organizing the masses around new modernizing projects that required a radical transformation of the nation-state.

In the nineties, however, Central American writers could no longer believe that literature was instrumental to the formation of class consciousness (they doubted the very existence of such a category), or even that it was a privileged space in which they could formulate projects of social transformations with nationalist inclinations. Trapped between a past that they could not forget and a future charged with apocalyptic prophecies, many writers no longer knew what the role of literature was. Marc Zimmerman has written a brilliant chronicle of this process in a section of his book *Literature and Resistance in Guatemala*, titled 'Cultural Politics, Literature, and Postmodern Currents under Serrano Elías' (2005). I would add here only that, influenced directly or indirectly by globalizing tendencies and hybridizing them in their own tropical way, these young authors articulated a pastiche of myths and rituals, whether to convey satires of cultural memory or to evidence its lack. We can see this in the works of Horacio Castellanos Moya, Jacinta Escudos, Rafael Menjívar Ochoa, Carlos Cortés, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Maurice Echeverría, Ronald Flores, Eduardo Halfon, Uriel Quesada or Erick Blandón, as well as in older writers such as Anacristina Rossi, Franz Galich or Magda Zavala, who produced in the nineties and at the beginning of the twenty-first century fascinating post-war novels. A new addition to this group would be the Guatemalan Carol Zardetto, whose novel *Con pasión absoluta* won the 2004 Mario Monteforte Toledo Prize for best Central American novel. Without a doubt, hers is the best novelistic text produced by a woman in Guatemala. This novel reopens from a feminine subject perspective the experiences of the past Guatemalan war, articulating it within the story of three generations of women, who all problematize masculinist behavioural patterns according to the different subtleties of their time.

[5] See Aurora Inxausti's interview in El País (2005) during the novel's launch.

Despite the fact that the technical excellence of the best works of the aforementioned new authors is clear, their representations do not fail to inscribe themselves within what Beatriz Cortez has called 'la estética del cinismo,' which she defines as 'una estética marcada por la pérdida de la fe en los valores morales y en los proyectos sociales de carácter utópico' (2001: 2).[6] Mauricio Aguilar Ciciliano takes up Cortez's position, although he defines it as:

> […] una propuesta de ficción narrativa donde los personajes, vacíos de todo contenido ideológico y social, desprecian el sistema de normas y creencias limitándose a desbordar sus pasiones donde encuentran alguna manera de sobrevivir; Se reafirman en la intimidad, el erotismo, la violencia y la fuga topográfica para salvarse de la nada. (2003)

According to this logic, many of the texts from the nineties have adopted patterns of the thriller. It differentiates them markedly from previous texts of the guerrilla period, in which the thriller virtually did not exist in Central America. Within this tendency we can include, among others, *Que me maten si...* (1996), by Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *La diabla en el espejo* (2000) and *El arma en el hombre* (2001), by Horacio Castellanos Moya, previously studied by Misha Kokotovic (2003), as well as *Caballeriza* (2006) and *El material humano* (2009), by Rey Rosa.

The work of all of these writers has produced a fundamental transformation in the process of reconfiguring national memories, as well as in the construction of subjectivities and citizenship in the Central American post-war period. They have also reopened the issue of identity. In this sense, there is no greater questioning than that proposed by Castellanos Moya in his 1997 novel *El asco*, which refers to the disgust felt by Vega, the narrator, toward the Salvadoran and toward the identitary horror that Salvadoran-ness implies. The text is a continuous monologue without any blank space. It produces, even formally, the choking sensation that invariably takes place when the problematic is described.[7] It exposes the validity of any positive view of a hypothetical national identity (a representation that earned the author a great collection of abusive threats). One fragment of *El asco* is sufficient to exemplify the problematic of the nineties:

> Horrible cómo ha crecido esta ciudad, Moya, ya se comió casi la mitad del volcán, ya se comió casi todas las zonas verdes que la circundaban [...], me dijo Vega [...] una ciudad que convirtió su centro histórico en una porquería porque como a nadie le interesa la historia pues el centro histórico es absolutamente prescindible y ha sido convertido en una porquería [...] dirigida por tipos obtusos y ladrones cuya única preocupación es destruir cualquier arquitectura que mínimamente recuerde el pasado para construir gasolineras Esso y hamburgueserías y pizzerías. Tremendo, Moya, me dijo Vega, San Salvador es una versión grotesca, enana y estúpida de Los Angeles [...][te lo juro, Moya, pero no aceptan que su más preciado deseo es convertirse en gringos, porque son hipócritas, y son capaces de matarte si criticás su asquerosa cerveza Pílsener [...]. Me dan un verdadero asco, Moya. No soporto esta ciudad, te lo aseguro, me dijo Vega [...]. Increíble, Moya, los conductores de esos autobuses seguramente han sido criminales patológicos desde su primera edad, se trata de criminales a sueldo convertidos en

[6] This same quotation has been previously employed by Misha Kokotovic (2003).

[7] Claudia Milian (2005) argues that this text implies a return to certain existential characteristics, and that it dialogues with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*.

> conductores de autobuses, me dijo Vega, se trata de tipos que sin ninguna duda fueron torturadores o masacradores durante la guerra civil y que ahora han sido reciclados como conductores de autobuses [...]. (45-48)

In fact, given the lack of satisfaction existent throughout this decade, the concept of identity itself runs the risk of completely disappearing as a frame of reference. This is the case even among writers like Castellanos Moya who continue to employ the vestiges of a rhetoric borrowed from the guerrilla period, though they direct their signifiers in new directions.

However, whether in Castellanos Moya's texts, in Rey Rosa's, or in many others, the climate of violence continues to permeate everything. This is no longer political violence, with a certain rational logic that makes it possible to explain who is against whom. It is now an irrational, mental violence, whose absurdity permeates everything and everyone. Reality began to be codified among all of these writers with full knowledge of the inability of language to shape national identities. As we can see in the previously cited texts or even in Rey Rosa's, the central problem of textuality becomes that of representing a language that does not pretend to provide extratextual meaning.

Perhaps in this sense *A-B-Sudario* (2003), by Jacinta Escudos, is now pointing toward a new direction. Always interested in questioning what it means to belong to a country, in this text there is no recognizable nation at play. According to the author's logic, which associates the term 'crisis'with the phrase 'national identity,' she names the cities in the novel 'Sanzívar' and 'Karma Town,' names that do nothing more than to deepen the sense of Cayetana, the main character, as a subject removed from reality, as an outsider, a stranger that attempts to mitigate her alienation in multiple ways.[8] As a nomadic figure, Cayetana does not belong to any specific place, but she believes that she belongs to all of the places in which she had lived. Because everything is fleeting, she learns detachment, and leaving ceases to hurt. The narrative contains multilocal elements that drive the text toward a wider literary geography and, by extension, the characters toward a post-national subjectivity. This text activates surprising verbal patterns and anecdotal interactions in an unruly language generated by a rebellious subjectivity, although existentially rebellious instead of politically so. The representation of this rebellion constitutes a censure of social disorder by a suffering subject ashamed of such disorder, but not of her own transgression that allows her to construct herself as such. This abjection offers a crude, dark, depressing and biting study of life.

Escudos is, in effect, one of the most interesting of the new generation of post-war writers. As a person who speaks various languages and who has lived in various Central American and European countries, her narrative voice constantly plays with experimental forms and techniques, a characteristic that distinguishes her markedly from the other writers of her generation, who have adopted a much simpler, conventional, and even commercial narrative style: the short story, preferably in the detective sub-genre, omniscient narrative voice, little or no presence of experimentation with innovative discursive practices, absence of dialogues, monologues, and fragments of writing or languages, dialects or oral jargon. Escudos, in contrast to the great majority of these writers, intentionally experiments with form as a mechanism for infusing her writing with various possibilities for situating her textuality by articulating a singular, fluid cultural space, a symbolic matrix, that recreates the

[8] Despite the previous affirmation, 'Sanzívar' is a coded word, one used by some Salvadorans to name the city of San Salvador.

imaginary space within which the subject operates. Escudos' interest in elaborating alternative spaces is manifested in her blog, *Jacintario*, which she updates daily, constituting an almost unique case in Central America. *Jacintario* is described as a '*blogósfera*' in which the author establishes alternative literary maps, although the term, which fuses the word 'blog' with 'atmosphere,' is indicative of the intention of constructing a vital alternative space through words. An example of this concept would be the short story 'El espacio de las cosas,' part of her collection *El Diablo sabe mi nombre* (2008), which originally appeared in *Jacintario*. In the story, a man awakens because he feels an earthquake. He leaps from bed and begins to open the mosquito net. Meanwhile, the mosquito net envelops his body, and the man discovers that, in reality, it is a tremendous spider web:

> ...está totalmente deshilachado, o eso parece, y se le pega en las manos y el cuerpo, y mientras más se mueve para desenredarse, más parece atascarse. Siente que algo lo jala por detrás y piensa que sus propias maniobras lo están enredando más en los hilos. Voltea la cabeza para saber lo que pasa y mira la sombra de lo que parece una gigantesca araña que avanza hacia él a velocidad vertiginosa. ('El espacio de las cosas,' in *Jacintario*)

Despite the fact that the man does not believe it, and assumes that he is merely dreaming, he is finally convinced that, in effect, a giant spider is pursuing him and 'en lo que parece la boca del animal hay un par de mandíbulas que se abren y se cierran lanzando un líquido que viene a pegársele a la piel.' The man tries to escape, but he discovers that the liquid secreted by the spider has him tied hand and foot. The man screams, attempting to wake his neighbours, but the spider continues covering him in this liquid, 'tejiéndole una mortaja.' Finally, resigned, the man closes his eyes hoping that it has all been a nightmare from which he can awaken:

> [...] la araña cierra el capullo que envuelve su alimento, y se acerca y comienza a chupar su contenido, a sorberlo lentamente mientras se escucha un leve gemido que no perturba a la araña que sorbe el alimento hasta el final, hasta exprimirlo, hasta dejar un pequeño casco vacío, disecado y comprimido, uno más entre tantos puntos blancos, grises y negros que cuelgan de la telaraña en la esquina del dormitorio, una basurita que cae cuando la tela es sacudida a medida que la araña se retira a su esquina para esperar el próximo alimento, basurita que cae sobre el papel sobre el cual una mujer escribe de noche, en su escritorio y que ella limpia con la mano, fastidiada, tirándola al suelo, una basurita blanca que la asistente doméstica barre al día siguiente, con el resto del polvo y la suciedad que encuentra en el suelo de aquella habitación. ('El espacio de las cosas,' in *Jacintario*)

The fusion of the fantastic, the grotesque, the implicit critique of masculinity, and the horrific twist in the Kafkian vein, are evidence of the brilliant originality of her creations.

Despite such promising new tendencies, nineties' narrative has frequently been ignored by serious criticism, although some writers have been promoted by Spanish publishing houses. Unfortunately, without a critical response, literary discourses are not projected beyond their borders and those that are tolerated by the business of globalized publishing are

very rarely circulated outside of their countries of origin and, only occasionally, in Spain.[9] The authors of such works are writers in search of transnational readers and critics. In spite of their absence, they continue to write although book sales are limited. These young writers still believe that this profession is worthy of being practiced, without being disheartened by the post-war stupor that clouds the horizon or by the inevitability that, someday, in Central America as in the rest of the world, writers – at least those who write literature with a capital L – will have become an endangered species.

Throughout the twentieth century, Central American literature operated in the service of nationalism, in its ability to promote popular identifications with a certain territory and history and in its capacity for situating national symbols in daily practices. Narrative textualities in the sixties and seventies were conceived as a variety of re-founding discourses for these 'new nations' to be constructed through revolutionary action. It was at this juncture that testimonial discourse briefly operated in analogous fashion, as a sort of new species of ghost, or a variant, of foundational discourse, introducing subaltern subjects to a progression toward a qualitatively more satisfactory self-realization.

However, the ruptures initiated in the present historical period have changed the nature of literary discourse in the region. Given that it can no longer comply with its former functions, if this were even ever possible, it is now moving in new rhetorical and representational directions by attempting to name a post-war present that is as yet undefined.

Without a doubt, Central American literary discourse has been divested of its political strength while, paradoxically, it has gained power as a consumer product as a result of recent globalizing tendencies. Because of this, we can be certain that the authors with intentions of inserting themselves in the globalized circles of literary distribution and consumption now aspire to an illusory power distinct from the former. They are interested in transforming their products into exotic wares validated in the transnational or post-national space despite the fact that, frequently, it is nothing more than a copy of their tumultuous past, a sort of pastiche or innocuous placebo, ideal for consumption in metropolitan centres as a risqué representation of lechery or tropical *frisson*, but without running the risk of genuine transgression. This is not to say that transgressive novels are not still being produced in Central America, because they most definitely are. An example of this is Otoniel Martínez's *La ceremonia del mapache* (1997). However, despite its quality, this type of text now finds itself condemned to a limited local market for its circulation, therefore limiting its transgressive possibilities.

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[9] An important number of Central American critics exist that began completing their PhDs in the United States in the second half of the nineties and that have been entering into the United States academy since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their youth has kept them from leaving their mark, whether in United States cultural debates or even in their countries of origin. Only time will tell if they will create an effective Central American-American academic space.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 7

ABSOLUTE DESTITUTION IN THE NARRATIVE OF JORGE MEDINA GARCÍA

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There are at least two important reasons for including the novel, Cenizas en la memoria (1994), by Honduran author Jorge Medina García in the debate on Central American post-war narrative. Firstly, the text's discursive features suggest ways in which historical experience could be modelled on literature that, in terms of thinking about 'post-war narratives,' bring us back to the wider issues of viewing experience and representation as categories of literary analysis, as well as the interpretation of literature as a historical document. Secondly, but not unconnected, because the text is written by a Honduran author and is primarily set in Honduras, it tells of the historical experiences of certain people, or of certain sectors of society, in a country that never experienced civil war (in terms of intensity and extent) like its neighbouring countries, but could also be involved in the rise and decline of revolutionary processes of the region.

EXPERIENCE AND REPRESENTATION

Cenizas de la memoria recounts personal trajectories and events that intersect with revolutionary violence, the repression of social movements and the demobilisation of the guerrilla armies. Such events, however, are intertwined with others that are possibly more central to the novel, such as the individual and collective experiences of poverty (family breakdown, unemployment, migration, crime, prison, religious alienation, etc.), which were exacerbated amidst the structural adjustment of the Honduran economy.

The novel takes us back to the problems of experience and representation by virtue of this particular articulation of its referential universe, which is connected on the one hand, but also far removed from what could be considered as typical experiences of the Central American wars and post-war. If the novel has succeeded in offering its own proposal on the

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interpretation of that historical moment, here we pose the question of how such autonomy was possible from a narrative point of view, as well as to what extent could it be considered as a response to 'the Honduran experience.'

The dispute of the 1930s over realism involving Lukács, Adorno, Benjamin and others, doubtlessly contributed to the move beyond the theory of literature as a mechanical representation of reality. It has since been common to consider images of reality in literature as intersubjective interpretations of historical events.

The writings of Walter Benjamin point towards the recognition of the 'loss of experience' in the act of writing as a consequence of the various technologies of narration. For Benjamin, experience is lost in the very act of its novelisation in as much that, in this genre so typical of rationalist modernism that is the novel, events that were lived, witnessed, heard or imagined, immediately become objects of explanation: 'no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation' (Benjamin 2007 [1936]: 89).

According to Benjamin, the novelist, like the historian, is not content with the mere presentation of events as signs of the world's progression, but is compelled to integrate them into an interpretation. This is what Lukács called the 'meaning of life' that resulted from the time experience in the novel (as quoted in Benjamin (2007 [1936]: 99).

> Both the chronicler [writes Benjamin], with his eschatological orientation and the storyteller with his profane outlook are so represented in his works that in a number of his stories it can hardly be decided whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view. (2007 [1936]: 96)

From the point of view of Marxist analysis, Frederic Jameson takes up the role of ideology in the construction of the textual artefact that, along Althusserian lines, supposes 'a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History' (2002 [1981]: 15-16). For Jameson, in the literary act, the textualisation of the real supposes the double and simultaneous operation of creating images of reality and subjecting these to an order:

> The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow "reality" to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture… The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view toward its own projects of transformation. (Jameson 2002 [1981]: 66-67).

For Jameson, images of reality (or experience) are not necessarily given or predetermined, instead their conformation in writing becomes the concretion of a political unconscious that shapes them and gives them meaning with reference to what he calls *ideologemes*.

The literary act is a symbolic act comparable to that which is considered characteristic of 'primitive' societies, the product of a primitive (unconscious) thought process whose function is 'of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions'

(Jameson 2002 [1981]: 64-65). The smallest intelligible units of these discourses, which from their inception enter into antagonistic competition with the others in debates about society, are what Jameson calls ideologemes:

> The ideologeme [writes Jameson] is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea-a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice--or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in opposition. (Jameson 2002 [1981]: 73).

'On this rewriting, concludes Jameson, 'the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes…' (Jameson 2002 [1981]: 70-71).

In Latin America, Isabel Quintana has completed an exemplary exercise in understanding, through literary texts, the ways in which the crisis at the end of the century has been conceived. Starting from the assumption that the literary is neither dependent nor independent of socio-political factors, she proposes the recognition of particular frameworks of social and discursive processes in narrative construction as 'figures of experience.'

In her study of three Southern Cone novelists, Quintana focuses on modes of constituting identities, processes of image configuration and the limits of decidability, with regards to the current context of social, political and ideological crisis. Instead of topical referential images, Quintana pays more attention to the modalities of the subjects' discursive positioning, the spaces which host or define them, and to what factors influence which texts are pronounced or cease to be pronounced, which constitute diverse ways of conferring meaning to experience (Szurmuk 2002: 1157-161).

On the one hand, says Quintana, 'la palabra' seeks to 'sustentar existencias,' which in terms of literary practise means providing support with regards to what is lived. On the other hand, she pinpoints 'la memoria' as the motive of writing, which can 'articular los momentos dispersos de la experiencia en un horizonte de sentido' (as quoted in Szurmuk 2002: 161).

It is interesting to observe that the title of the novel we are focused on here, *Cenizas de la memoria*, alludes precisely to such fragments of experience that, being the remains of what has been lived or witnessed, could become forms of consciousness which harbour or have the potential to foster meaning. Thus, writing becomes a means of both recovery and interpretation for those experiences.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESSES IN HONDURAS

That Honduras never reached a state of open civil war does not mean that the country did not go through the revolutionary processes that affected the rest of the region. It is true that the armed confrontations did not reach the duration or intensity of those that occurred in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, and that the revolutionaries never came close to taking power. Nevertheless, a certain sector of society, which exercised a significant social influence despite its probable minority status, embraced the revolutionary utopias and succeeded in spurring on profound changes in the political system and social life of the nation. As in the other countries of the region, the ideal of a socialist, anti-imperialist and

nationalist revolution spread through the ranks of the radical left (especially the communists with their strongholds among the student sectors, workers and peasants), culminating in the armed struggles of the 1980s.

The Communist Party was founded in the 1920s and was prominent in leading the banana strike of 1954, which led to the labour laws of the 1960s among other things. In 1965, in response to Oswaldo López Arellano's military coup, the communists staged a guerrilla column that was destroyed at the place known as El Jute in the mountains near the city of El Progreso (Rodríguez 2005: 43, 117). The armed struggle alternative, in the form of the guerrilla warfare encouraged by the example of the Cuban revolution, became one of the main subjects of debate among Honduran communists, as was the case throughout the region.

An early division was produced within the Communist Party in 1967, partly as a consequence of this debate, which for the more radical sectors had served to highlight the passivity and revisionism that had beset the organisation's activities. The armed alternative did not come to full fruition at this time, but it did bring the conflict into the heart of the most traditional and pro-soviet wing of the Communist Party (PC) and the Partido Comunista Marxista Leninista de Honduras (PC-MLH), which would eventually adopt a more radical Maoist stance (Rodríguez 2005: 100).

During the 1970s, in the climate of reformism and tolerance proclaimed by the military dictatorship, the communists increased their influence on both popular sectors and state politics. Since the previous decade the communists had gained a growing influence in the emergent campesino movement with the formation of the first agrarian organisation, the Federación Nacional de Campesinos de Honduras (FENACH). Despite its short lifespan, the federation inspired a similar process of organisation in various regions of the country with the participation of other sectors and political groups with similar agendas, particularly those with Christian socialist leanings. In the early 1970s, various campesino and workers' organsations, lead in part by the communists, formed an agreement to create the Central General de Trabajadores (CGT) (Rodríguez 2005: 38; Barahona 2005: 212-13).

During López Arellano's state coup of 1972, the communists were consulted and subsequently incorporated into the discussions for the planned reforms, including the agrarian reform program that would be decisive in easing conflicts in the countryside and would distinguish Honduras from its neighbours. At the same time, the communists took advantage of the relatively favourable situation to extend their program of education, organisation and propaganda among students, workers and campesinos (Rodríguez 2005: 57, 61). During the 1970s, its influence was increasingly evident among the growing ranks of belligerent trade union members, which included workers from the banana companies, the textile and food industries and state institutions (Sitraterco, Sutfraco, Stibys, Sitrapani, Sitraenee, among others) (Rodríguez 2005: 42, 67). Just as in the previous decade, the communists also promoted the formation of political fronts at the National University (which soon became a stronghold of revolutionary utopianism) and among secondary school students, who comprised the youngest militant groups (FRU, FESE, FES, FAR, etc.), which together formed a significant presence among the social movements of the period (Rodríguez 2005: 57; Barahona 2005: 215).

The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979 and the ascendance of revolutionary processes in El Salvador and Guatemala from 1980 onwards, influenced the fragmentation and definitive radicalisation of the communists. This lead to the formation of political-miltary organisations that would become directly involved in the armed struggle. In 1979, a splinter

group of the Partido Comunista Marxista-Leninista de Honduras (PC-MLH) emerged, calling themselves the Frente Morazanista para la Liberación de Honduras (FMLH). 1980 saw the organisation of the Movimiento Popular de Liberación "Cinchonero," which drew a significant number of members from the Partido Comunista de Honduras (PCH). That same year, another group, the Fuerzas Populares Revolucionarias 'Lorenzo Zelaya,' was formed by old members of the leftwing of the Christian socialist movement, along with new adherents from the university students' movement (Barahona 2005: 238).

Another important factor at this time was the internationalisation of the conflict, in the sense that the internal national dynamic became integrated into the regional geopolitical dynamic. With the emergence of the repressive response that was decisively backed by a U.S. government that saw its interests threatened, the revolutionary processes of neighbouring countries overflowed national borders to involve related sectors in Honduras by demanding support for their struggles and encouraging their radicalisation. In this context, Honduras ended up being the seat of U.S. political-military strategy through the establishment of military bases for the U.S. army, training camps for counterinsurgency forces in El Salvador and Guatemala, and the seat of the Nicaraguan contras.

During the 1980s, the armed forces turned completely on its previous policy of reform and adopted a tough stance on national security in a bid to dismantle the insurgent groups in Honduras. These years saw the highest levels of violence, with regards to both the actions of the radical Left and the repression. The insurgent groups set up international offices and radio stations to publicise their cause; they coordinated armed assaults, kidnappings (including the hijack of a commercial airliner and the taking of the headquarters of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in San Pedro Sula). Equally, they made bombing raids against the occupying U.S. forces and launched guerrilla columns in the mountains. In turn, the security forces engaged in a dirty war, relying on the tactics of state terror, which included the physical disappearances of individuals, threats and selective harassment. In addition, paramilitary organisations practiced extrajudicial executions. The Honduran truth commission (*Los hechos hablan por sí mismos*), headed by the National Human Rights Ombudsman, reported 179 cases of disappearances associated with the dirty war that took place in Honduras between 1980 and 1992 (CONADEH: 385). Nevertheless, this can only be taken as an indication of the relatively low level intensity of the conflict (compared to the thousands killed each year in the neighbouring countries), while human rights organisations denounced much larger numbers of victims over the same period. In 1987 alone, according to theses organisations, there were 263 extrajudicial executions and sixteen disappearances (Barahona 2005: 254).

The advent of the 1990s saw the start of a process of negotiation between government forces and the insurgents, which eventually lead to a ceasefire in the neighbouring countries. In contrast with what happened in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, the revolutionary outbreak neither provoked a massive crackdown by the security forces nor aroused comparable public support. Nevertheless, political agitation by the revolutionaries contributed towards some of the advances made in state social policy (regarding labour laws and working conditions, land reform, the delivery of public services, etc.) since the 1960s, as well as deepening the processes of political democratisation during the 1980s. In the 1990s, the military hegemony (whilst maintaining a shadowy presence) gave way to civilian power and the country's democratic institutions were advanced with the creation of a National Human Rights Ombudsman and the Public Ministry. In this sense, the revolutionary processes,

although they did not lead to any taking of power nor produce a comparable quantity of victims to that of the other countries, constitute an intense lived experience for radical sectors and even influenced social structures.

UTTER DESTITUTION

Addressing the interpretative portrayal of the experience of radicalised sectors in Honduras presented in a novel like *Cenizas de la memoria*, allows us to see beyond the affinity and contiguity of Central American revolutionary processes and consider the specificity that these experiences may have had for those involved.

The novel is set in a prison where two childhood friends have ended up now that their lives have been curtailed. The prison (surely the central penitentiary that was a common concern of the time) is a citadel of misery; an allegory of a country where the inhabitants live in subhuman conditions. The first image is of the protagonist, Fausto López, delousing himself in the morning before visiting time. Thus, the text begins with the unspeakable, expressing the abjection experienced in such places, which is not far removed from the lives of the majority in society. These are images of poverty and chaos. Ordinary prisoners are mixed with the insane while the most bloodthirsty criminals exercise authority. The walls not only house filthy cells, but also the permanent market improvised from cardboard boxes, people offering a gamut of goods and services, from food to washing and ironing clothes, mending shoes to prostitution or drugs.

One of the epigraphs, taken from César Vallejo's *Poemas Humanos*, reveals the author's intentions:

> Un hombre pasa con un pan al hombro
> ¿Voy a escribir, después, sobre mi doble?
> Otro se sienta, ráscase, extrae un piojo de su axila,
> Mátalo
> ¿Con qué valor hablar del psicoanálisis? (Medina 1999: 13)

The novel's main character is an extension of Vallejo's; it is the story of one such victim of the world. To write, on the other hand, is something that is done through choice. He could ruminate on metaphysical or psychological topics, but instead he responds to the ethical obligation stemming from social problems that demand to be told. This observation suggests that images of reality are not imposed by history but by conscience, and that they are shaped according to a particular aesthetic determinant, in this case the social and political content.

The lice that distress the character throughout the novel are signs of human degradation, of the subject's assimilation into a repulsive collective condition. They are signs of illness, of animality, of filth. The prison/city is a stronghold of wasted humanity, whose inner and outer lives are confused with excrement. The beginning of the third chapter repeats the provocative scatology of the first. David, Fausto's friend and companion, blows his nose in a dirty handkerchief. There is a description of the fluids, the stiffened cloth and how, in the act of returning the handkerchief to his pocket, the character is reunited with his excrescences.

The references to prison food underline this sense of a subhuman condition integrated into the waste cycle. To the question of whether he has already eaten, David responds: '[…]

con la mierda que nos dieron mejor digamos que recomí […] recomí como reciclaje […]' (Medina 1999: 18).

At the most fundamental level, the characters' sufferings are of a physical nature. The prison's punishment-cells demonstrate how confinement causes direct harm to the body. One of the cells consists of four panels arranged so that the prisoners have to stay standing with their arms raised for a whole week. Another has a thick layer of lime on the floor that burns the skin and in which prisoners can be held for up to six months at a time: 'La única abertura estaba a la altura del rostro, permitía verle la lividez y el alucinamiento de los ojos. Por ahí le alcanzó un bocado que el cuitado masticó con voracidad de cerdo' (Medina 1999: 83).

The suffering however, is also moral, which, because of its subtlety, can permeate the characters more deeply. Another *leit motiv* in the novel is the poverty of clothing. At the end of the novel, immediately before David is stabbed to death, Fausto observes the patches on the shirt of the friend who will be dead within an instant (Medina 1999: 102). This image is connected to the opening of the novel when, because it is visiting day, Fausto has to exchange what remains of his toothpaste in order to have his least deplorable change of clothes washed and ironed. The clothing is a sign of a person's dignity, with old clothes indicating a lack of dignity, as is the case with hygiene. In another particularly humiliating scene, Fausto, who had previously been a solvent employee, finds himself forced to buy used clothes (another familiar reference to the early 1990s when the stores which sell discarded clothes imported from the USA were set up). An Indian woman tells Fausto, '[…] esos yaguales son de gringos tuberculosos,' to which Fausto replies: '[…] ya pueden tener SIDA […] la necesidad tiene cara de perro' (Medina 1999: 126).

Another form of suffering on a moral level experienced by the characters is the exasperation they feel within an environment that is polluted by alienating industries, particularly those connected to music and religion. The grotesque scenes of prison life are crossed with music emanating from innumerable radios that blast out utterly ridiculous lyrics and melodies. As Fausto wanders absorbed in his soliloquies, a Blackman croons: '[…] te pones tu mini y te ves bien buena, vas a la playa y te ves bien buena […]' (Medina 1999: 16). A few steps later and it is the prison preachers who broadcast their religious message, 'biblia en ristre' (Medina 1999: 18). These evangelical preachers attain a presence and earn an exorbitant degree of animosity in the novel. One preacher becomes the target of Fausto's fury when he discovers that he had abused his daughter who, because she was so young, subsequently died after prematurely giving birth.

The prison as an allegory of a degraded human condition provides the principal referential context for the novel. It is a fall into extreme deprivation and suffering. There seems to be a clear connection with the consequences of the economic policy of structural adjustment that led to a dramatic impoverishment of the population, especially among the lower and lower-middle classes. The most apparent ideologeme in this allegory is the interpretation of the situation with respect to the pauperisation of living conditions and state violence against individuals, as the result of neoliberal policies. It is through such an implicit reference that the prison/country comparison becomes meaningful. The lives of individuals are pushed below the poverty line, as they suffer moral and material punishment, oppression and class violence, alienation and the dismantling of livelihoods and traditional cultures.

Importantly, the novel connects the situation with the region's revolutionary movements. The narrative makes it known that the principle characters, Fausto and David, were both involved in political-military organisations in Honduras and El Salvador (a reference to the

connections that existed between movements from different countries in the region). This raises the possibility that the imprisonment experienced by the characters could be a consequence of their revolutionary militancy.

The action takes place during the course of two days leading up to the fight in which David and Fausto meet their demise. On the first day Fausto waits for a visit from his old lover, Ligia. Meanwhile David anticipates the worst after receiving a death threat because of a gambling debt. Thus, their conflicts are far removed from what is typical of the revolutionary struggle, but this has also affected them somehow.

The imminent visit causes Fausto to feel ashamed of himself, because of the state he has fallen into. He is horrified that his lover might view him as a common criminal. This compels him to trawl through his memories in search of an explanation for his situation, with the most intense of these being his initiation into the revolutionary ranks.

In particular, he remembers the moment in which he was forced into clandestinity. In response to his involvement in a bombing campaign (another well-known point of reference in Honduras), the law enforcement agencies set up an ambush, which fails at the last minute when his eldest son, Aquiles is mistaken for him and killed, along with his best friend Carlos, who had been his inspiration as a combatant. Completely oblivious to the ambush, Fausto was actually at the cinema. The memory leaves Fausto with a lingering sense of guilt and an unbearable feeling of having been a victim of fate.

In this way, it is clear that episodes from the war constitute some of the most profound experiences for the characters, even though they are surrounded by a mysterious aura of dread. Fausto and David are in fact two demobilised combatants who returned to Honduras after the FMLN's final offensive in El Salvador. However, their participation in the resistance movement was ambiguous and had no bearing on their eventual imprisonment. The sense of failure felt by both characters seems to correspond with the defeat of these movements but, as is discussed below, with further reaching implications.

Fausto had run the full scale of commitment to the revolutionary movements without really feeling any pride in what he had done (Medina 1999: 74). He participated in awareness raising and political education campaigns for the masses, although he felt he had been given these tasks to keep him away from any danger; he was an explosives expert responsible for bombings, but he was never the one who planted the bombs directly; he was an announcer for Radio Venceremos, the guerrilla station in El Salvador, but this continued to hold him back from the front line; and finally, when the opportunity came to use his gun during the FMLN final offensive, for which he earned the praise of his colleagues, he ultimately felt that it was just a fluke.

Over the years, Fausto realises that his participation in the war was based more on personal motivations. He had enlisted at a moment in which, as a consequence of having become unemployed, he could no longer provide the basic necessities for the family he and Ligia had made, and she accepted a job at a business run by an ex-lover. Thus, he was as motivated by resentment and spite as by the political struggle.

David's case was even more pathetic; he even admits that he did not know for certain why he had fought. In a particularly illustrative passage, David asks Fausto if they had ultimately won or lost the war, and David replies: 'ganábamos cuando luchábamos […] la lucha es un triunfo' (Medina 1999: 111). Thus, having given up fighting, it seems he lost a reason to live.

As has already been said, the ultimate imprisonment of the characters also has nothing to do with their revolutionary activism and is actually due to arbitrary causes. David ended up in prison through sheer bad luck: just back from his revolutionary adventure, he went to live in a town in the country's interior where he was accused of cattle rustling. Subjected to brutal torture, he was eventually accused for some murders he had not committed. Thus, his conviction was completely unjust and arbitrary.

Fausto's case is not dissimilar. He is sent to prison for shooting in the head the preacher who abused his daughter. Undoubtedly, he was also unlucky in that a sequence of circumstance presented Fausto with an opportunity for revenge that he had not sought, even if he was convicted according to judicial logic. In spite of himself, Fausto is a common criminal, as is David, albeit unjustly.

As can be seen, what the novel does in practice is show a relative, albeit inconclusive, integration of the characters with the revolutionary processes. The novel suggests while at the same time distances itself from a revolutionary explanation for the situation. This is particularly important when we consider the proposed interpretation of the novel, as it demonstrates a deliberate distancing from what we might call the ideologeme of the revolutionary war.

The lives of these characters are embroiled in the war, but the war does not explain their troubles. The ideologeme of war that the novel makes us aware of becomes the interpretive construct that allows us to link the conditions of deprivation and oppression with rebellion and insurrection, and the latter to repression and punishment. Thus, as we have seen, neither their enlisting for the revolutionary cause nor the imprisonment that the characters suffer corresponds to this causal chain.

Although the novel might be organic with respect to notions of class war or the vision of the state as an expression of class violence, Marxist notions that were typical of the region's leftist movements, it is contradictory when it elevates misfortune or tragic fate to a more prominent level of explanation.

Walter Benjamin found that the truly poetic in traditional or pre-modern narratives lay in their ability to offer the pure event, devoid of any explanation. According to his point of view, the magical effect of the narrative is found in its ability to leave the events speak for themselves, independently of the narrator's preconceptions (and ideologies, as we would say).

Evidently, Medina García's novel gains autonomy as it distances itself from explanations that are marked by leftist ideology, which probably allows it to bring other contextual factors (which are important although not typical of revolutionary struggles) into its narrative vision, such as unemployment and pauperisation. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the narrative is free of explanations, but rather that these correspond to a different belief system. As is discussed further shortly, the interpretive construct that Medina García makes prevalent is fatalism; a negative, deterministic vision of history, according to which doom is imposed over the freedom and will of individuals, condemning them to tragedy.

Fatalism is a conservative ideologeme (in the sense that it reaffirms passivity with respect to the *status quo*) that could be considered as more poetic (in the sense that individual lives are subsumed by the inscrutable arcana of destiny). It can also be argued that fatalism is linked to traditional religious thought (where it can usually be found under the denominations of divine will and predestination). In this sense, the novel draws connections between its interpretation of the historical moment to a body of popular beliefs that prevail even among

intellectual elites, which emanate from the cultural past but are certainly still active in Honduras.

On the visiting day, it is Fausto's wife, Daisy who unexpectedly turns up. The wife to whom he has been unfaithful; to whom he has left two children whom he has not helped to maintain; who has seen her children persecuted and one of them killed because of him; and she who, when he returned from his revolutionary adventure, had received and kept him at her home until he was sent to prison. Hence, Daisy has no kind words to offer but only an overwhelming barrage of reproaches, which bring to light these various facets of their relationship:

> ¡Satanás! [Daisy's rebuke alludes to his prison nickname] ¡Ni siquiera sabés lo que tratan de decirte! Lo más malo y perverso del mundo… el traidor más ruin… el Anticristo… la bestia más repugnante del infierno… ¡Dios mío! ¡Qué pecado debo que me has echado encima tanta vergüenza! (Medina 1999: 41)

For Daisy, Fausto has been the curse that has drawn her life into tragedy. Fausto himself seems to agree, as he does nothing but feel sorry for himself and recognise that his life has been a complete failure from start to finish. Given to drink, Fausto would normally wallow in theses depressive states, which would be made even more profound by alcoholic alienation:

> […] Salud, decíamos a cada rato entre grandes tragantazos, hasta el punto de que dejé de ponerle atención a lo que decía y me dio la borrachera nostálgica, metiéndome en la onda del completo fracaso de mi vida como oficinista abortado, revolucionario de a centavo y padre irresponsable que no había terminado en otra cosa más que en un viejo acabado, zampado en una mudada regalada y con ganas de beber hasta caerme […]. (Medina 1999: 137)

Fausto does not respond to any exemplary heroism except that of one who has been wounded by fate. Another epigraph to the novel establishes the similarity of the character with Satan, in the sense of being someone whose only purpose on earth is to spread evil: 'Y dijo Jehová a Satanás: ¿de dónde vienes? Y respondió Satanás a Jehová y le dijo: de rodear la tierra y de andar por ella (Job 2:2)' (Medina 1999: 11).

After Daisy's visit, Fausto's long-standing lover, Ligia finally appears. Ligia is the mother of Malva Marina, the daughter who was abused by the preacher and has now died while Fausto was absent and unable to protect her. Nevertheless, Ligia continues to love Fausto and professes understanding and affection towards him. Their meeting provides some comfort and seems to convey some hope to the situation, but it occurs in such a deplorable setting that the character falls back into self-pity. In order to be alone with her, Fausto uses some very hard-earned cash to rent a filthy room in the prison, which they are nevertheless pressurised from leaving because of their limited time and another couple claiming their turn.

As can be seen, the character sees himself as the victim of endless suffering. He has lost everything: his job, the war, his family, love; and so it is in this sense that his destitution is absolute, both moral and material. It is from the mouth of the perfidious preacher who abused his daughter, that we find the words which best describe the character's situation: 'Escúchenme bien hermanos míos, estar sin Dios es la verdadera y terrible soledad' (Medina

1999: 90). Fausto's sense of being orphaned is cosmic and very similar to that which inhabits the poems of César Vallejo.

The novel's climax reaffirms this fatalistic conception of destiny. In the final chapters, the moment after Fausto shoots the preacher is intertwined with David's stabbing and Fausto's own death. They are extremely intense chapters in which the characters are consumed in their misfortune. With a revolver in hand just as the preacher faces him, Fausto cannot refrain from shooting him. Meanwhile, David, unable to free himself from his addiction to darts and gambling and with massive debts, ends up being stabbed. Fausto jumps in to defend his friend and kill the attacker, but also ends up fatally wounded. Thus, it is in a commonplace prison brawl that the characters meet their demise, as cheaply and senselessly as the very lives they lived.

Several critics have pointed out this fatalistic allegory in the novel that extends the understanding of the country's destiny. Julio César Pineda has written that the novel 'les tiene reservado un destino a sus criaturas que es el mismo para todos: la tragedia' (1999: 179). Juan Ramón Saravia writes that the novel refers to 'el absurdo cotidiano, el fracaso recurrente, el intento eternamente fallido que aherroja a estos personajes,' and that such a story, 'no es otra cosa que una formidable presentación de este pobre, desposeído y frustrado Sísifo que se llama Pueblo hondureño' (1999: 167). Equally, José López Lazo refers to the bad luck that accompanies the characters as 'una sal que viene de lejos,' adding that, 'Fausto es Honduras incapaz de salvarse, de apropiarse y hacer sangre los distintos proyectos modernizantes que se han importado a lo largo de su historia' (1999: 171).

As can be seen, these observations not only recognise a fatalistic interpretation of the novel but also grant it full credit; a fact which reveals just how deeply rooted such explanations are within Honduran society and culture. It should be stressed, however, that this is one of many possible interpretations; one could just as equally choose to explain the situation of the country solely in terms of the neoliberal impoverishment of society or the revolutionary context of the region.

The randomness (the biased or prejudicial character) of these interpretations becomes obvious when we consider them ideologemes, that is, associated with pre-formed interpretive constructs that can not only precede the narrative but also influence the very definition of the described events.

As has been seen, the references the novel makes to typical revolutionary factors, although they evidence social processes that were experienced in Honduras and the region, do not facilitate a unilateral or homogenous explanation. The Honduran experience, the novel suggests, was not the same as that of the neighbouring countries. There were episodes of revolutionary armed violence, but these constitute rather erroneous episodes. For Honduras, the war could be just what it is for the characters of the novel: something that did not turn out as it should have, another failure to add to its history.

Judging by the importance the novel gives to the prison/country interpretation, it is even possible that, after fatalism, the ideologeme of neoliberal pauperisation is hierarchically more important than that of the revolutionary struggle in providing unity to lived experience in Honduras.

According to narratological theory, the act of narrating involves a tension between mental structures, which are usually prefigured, and the facts themselves that challenge these preconceptions. Medina García's novel facilitates a greater appreciation of the debate between facts and ideologemes, a debate that is perhaps the greatest justification for the

narrative, especially if we consider that it effectively takes up the challenge of conferring or recognising meaning (moral, emotional, political, etc.) in experiences that would otherwise be dissipated in the conscience or simply become opaque.

Thus, to say that the novel recounts the historical moment from a Honduran perspective, not only means considering the events which can be registered by historians, but also the figures of experience that can be crystallized in the consciousness, no matter how formidable they may be.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 8

DISILLUSION AND THE BREAKDOWN OF BINARY MORALITY: HORACIO CASTELLANOS MOYA'S CRITIQUE OF EL SALVADOR'S MILITANT LEFT IN *LA DIÁSPORA*

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Of the generation of Salvadoran writers who emerged during and after the Civil War, Horacio Castellanos Moya is undoubtedly the most controversial. His debut novel, *La diáspora* (1989), stands as a key text for understanding the paradigmatic shift that differentiates the 'committed' literature of established pre-war writers like Claribel Alegría, Manlio Argueta and Roque Dalton from certain younger writers, who have cultivated what some critics have dubbed an 'aesthetic of cynicism' (see Aguilar Ciciliano 2003 and Cortez 2000). The earlier writers tended to focus on denouncing the repressive practises and corruption of the government authorities, sometimes extending this to a critique of similar corrosive strands that were replicated in and undermined the revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, these critiques seem to serve as correctives to the revolutionary process and its ideology. Even at their most critical, the 'committed' writers maintain a certain faith in the feasibility of social justice and peace as a viable outcome of armed resistance. Accordingly, their narratives express nation-building aspirations that reflect the polarising, exclusivist notions of identity fundamental to the armed conflict.

In contrast, Castellanos Moya is critical of all utopian political ideologies and presents them as dangerous illusions, showing them to be either the product of a desperate, non-rational response to a traumatic reality or constructed from the populist rhetoric of power hungry ideologues. Rejecting both the right-wing authoritarian repression of the government and the fanatical demands and dogma of the militant Left, many of his characters seem lost in a political and moral vacuum where they can only orient themselves in accordance with their subjective passions, which are moulded in response to the trauma of war. He concentrates on

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problematizing violence, showing the corrupting effects of the power it brings, as well as the devastating impact it has on those subjected to it. This utterly negative portrayal of violence transcends political partisanship and calls into question the quasi-Marxian framing of the civil war as historically inevitable, as claimed by the revolutionary ideologues, including writers like Dalton and Argueta. Hence the subversion of the illusion of politically based moral superiority that makes *La diáspora* constitute such a pointed critique of the violence implicit in the binary logic of Manichean enmities.

The novel is set in Mexico City and is divided into four parts, each describing the experiences of a somewhat disparate group of Salvadorans and other individuals who are linked through either their past or current involvement with 'the Party.'[1] The narrative focuses on each individual in turn, adapting its style according to the character, sometimes drifting from omniscient narration to first person interior monologues, and with frequent flashbacks that describe how each of the main characters became involved with the revolution. Despite these complexities, Castellanos Moya's style is accessible and eschews elaborate literary language and detailed descriptions in favour of a fast-paced narrative that reveals a remarkable ability to capture the rhythms and sharp humour of Salvadoran urban slang.[2] While this oral aspect of his narrative style might suggest the influence of testimonial narratives, its urbanity differentiates it from that genre's penchant for rustic, salt-of-the-Earth earnestness and is actually more reminiscent of US hardboiled crime writers such as Raymond Chandler and Elmore Leonard.

La diáspora opens with the character Juan Carlos' arrival in Mexico City after his renouncement of political militancy, having dedicated eight years to working for the Party. With little money to sustain him and minimal prospects of finding work in a Mexico on the brink of a financial crisis, he relies on the hospitality of an ex-revolutionary colleague Carmen and her husband Antonio while he hopes to obtain refugee status in order to emigrate to Canada. Although the theme of exile has certainly played a major part in both the lives and fiction of Dalton and Argueta, Juan Carlos represents something of a novelty in Salvadoran fiction as a character who is forced to flee to a new country, not only because of government persecution but also because of the need to escape potential victimisation from the Left, by whom he is seen ultimately as a deserter. In the climate of heightened internal distrust and insecurity that has come in the wake of the murder and suicide of the FPL's two top ranking officials, Juan Carlos finds himself pushed out of a war-torn Central America where neutrality is simply not an option.

As such, Juan Carlos emerges as a kind of anti-hero, analogous with what Antonius Robben calls the *undecideables* in a description of the resolutely non-partisan civilians of Argentina's political conflict of the 1970s. Drawing from a Derridean concept, Robben asserts that the *undecideables*' very lack of commitment was perceived as a threat to the

[1] In the novel, the term 'the Party' specifically refers to the FPL (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación). Yet, Castellanos Moya does not neglect the opportunity to suggest a certain totalitarian conceit of the five leftist organisations that made up the FMLN during the war as he points out in a sardonic aside that 'todas las organizaciones guerilleras salvadoreñas se consideraban a sí misma como "el Partido"' (2002: 111).

[2] In an analysis of one of Castellanos Moya's subsequent novels, *La diabla en el espejo* (2000), the Salvadoran critic Rafael Lara-Martínez has noted the author's skill in reproducing the subtleties of the spoken language of the country's capital: 'Castellanos Moya demuestra una honda sensibilidad por reproducir la lengua hablada en la capital. Su conocimiento sutil de los modismos, expresiones, sintaxis cotidiana, hacen que la novela reproduzca con mayor fidelidad la oralidad que muchos testimonios que anhelaban calcar "la voz de los sin voz"' (2002: n.p.).

moral and historical justifications for violence and its concomitant hegemonic masculinity, propounded by both the military government and their militant opponents:

> Armed combatants, locked in violent dispute, expect civilians to take a stand on their conflict. They want people to be forthright about their political sympathies, and declare who has truth, justice and morality on their side […]. Seemingly indifferent civilians provoked contempt and anxiety, as well as fear and uneasy feelings, among the government forces and revolutionary guerrilla forces in Argentina during their conflict in the 1970s […]. These uncommitted civilians fell outside the social categories that had been established with so much bloodshed. They undermined the structure of enmity that characterized a violent conflict presented as an historical inevitability […]. Such civilians were the inversion of the men of action, the military and the revolutionary […]. (2006: 200)

When asked by Antonio about the situation within the Party and the conflict after his arrival in Mexico City, Juan Carlos responds by simply pouring himself a tequila and stating that 'estaba harto y quería irse precisamente lo más lejos posible' (15). Thus, the connection between the perceived futility of political debate, alcoholism and an escapist desire to blot out the violence of the past, a key theme in much of Castellanos Moya's fiction, is subtly introduced. If the preceding generation of writers in El Salvador defined themselves and the themes they explored in terms of socio-political engagement, Castellanos Moya's fiction by contrast often focuses on individuals notable for their apparent socio-political disengagement.

When he meets up with an old University friend who has already been through the process of rupture ('tronar') with the Party, Juan Carlos describes how the murder of the FPL's second in command by the long time leader of the organisation in April 1983 had pushed the Party to adopt ever more repressive security measures similar to those that characterised the very military government it was trying to overthrow. Whether or not the novel's presentation of real-life events in the third section of the novel, such as the brutal murder of Mélida Anaya Montes and the alleged subsequent suicide of the FPL leader Salvador Cayetano Carpio is accurate,[3] a picture emerges of extensive corruption lurking beneath the Revolutionary rhetoric of equality, empowerment, social justice and liberation. These incidents expose a sinister world where murderous violence is utilised as a means of securing domination, which for Juan Carlos signifies an inversion of an idealised view of the world of a profundity that warrants an evocation of the biblical myth of the fall. The moral integrity that he previously attributed to his revolutionary heroes implodes to reveal a fatal susceptibility to the corrupting influence of a power that is intrinsically linked to the practise of violence. Hence, the moral weakness that was perceived as a distinguishing feature of the military government is now attributed to human beings in general:

[3] See McClintlock (1998: 55) for a historical account of the assassination of Anaya Montes and Carpio's suicide. To complicate the issue further, Castellanos Moya (2004a) has subsequently questioned this 'official' version of the deaths of the FPL's two top ranking officers by explaining how the organisation had become ostracised from the Cuban patronage enjoyed by the other FMLN groups because of Carpio's links with Libya, Yugoslavia and Palestine, prompting a Cuban-directed conspiracy to appoint a more 'cooperative' leadership. Indeed, McClintlock's account of his suicide presents it in problematically positive terms: 'FMLN unity was advanced by the death of Carpio.' This alone, however, does not imply that Castellanos Moya's suspicions, in which he also suggests that Dalton's murder was part of a Cuban plot, are necessarily true.

> Juan Carlos experimentó una desoladora sensación de orfandad, de desamparo [...]. Se trataba de una enorme conspiración metafísica, que había movido fuerzas incontrolables, insospechadas, y de pronto los había transformado de inmaculados ángeles revolucionarios en vulgares seres humanos, tan criminales como sus adversarios. (113)

Furthermore, the moral degradation Juan Carlos suddenly becomes aware of among the revolutionaries extends to himself. Unlike Dalton's character, José from the final section of *Pobrecito poeta que era yo* (1976), who endures prolonged imprisonment and numerous interrogations and death threats without losing his sense of a politically-based moral superiority that underpins his loyal pact of silence with his comrades, when Juan Carlos is suddenly abducted from the streets of Mexico City and interrogated about his involvement with the guerrilla organisation, any vestige of ideological or personal loyalties crumble under the instinct for self-preservation and a certain recognition of his own vindictiveness:

> Se sorprendió de la facilidad con que hablaba. Años atrás se consideraba preparado incluso para resistir las peores torturas antes de soltar una palabra [...]. Mencionó los seudónimos de los compañeros que más detestaba. Así se convertía uno en canalla, se dijo. (54-55)

Nearly all the characters in Castellanos Moya's fiction display a fundamental moral ambivalence; there are no heroes. This factor alone distinguishes his fiction from that of his predecessors, such as Argueta and Dalton, whose work reflects a certain faith that individuals can rise above corruption, no matter how prevalent it is in the social environments they inhabit. The apparently insurmountable corruption that some of Castellanos Moya's characters see at the heart of the political projects that vie violently for precedence in El Salvador during the war, and their conscious awareness of their own moral frailties, makes them behave in an apparently cynical manner.[4] Hence the labelling of Castellanos Moya's literature by some critics as based on an 'aesthetic of cynicism' in which:

> […] los personajes, vacíos de todo contenido ideológico y social, deprecian el sistema de normas y creencias limitándose a desbordar sus pasiones donde encuentran alguna manera de sobrevivir; se reafirman en la intimidad, el erotismo, la violencia y la fuga topográfica para salvarse de la nada. (Aguilar Ciciliano 2003: n.p.)

In accordance with this description of Castellanos Moya's characters, Juan Carlos, with his fixation on emigrating to Canada, in order to distance himself as much as possible from the conflict in El Salvador, falls into the category of those who choose topographical flight as a means of survival in what is presented as a corrupt socio-political reality. However, beneath the imperative of self-preservation that lends a moral ambivalence to Juan Carlos' flight, it actually entails an element of resistance to the violence of both the military and guerrilla forces. His actions constitute a virtual vote of no confidence that the novel's title suggests was part of a mass movement. This challenge to the claims of authentic popular representation of

[4] I use here the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the noun cynic as 'one disposed to deny and sneer at the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions' (1983: 481).

both the government and the revolutionaries, which is reflected in the work of Dalton and Argueta, corresponds again with Robben's notion of undecideability:

> Undecideability can also be motivated by an active moral stance against violence […]. The indifferent, the timid, and the frightened did not constitute a military or political threat but a conceptual and moral threat, a threat to the oppositional meaning of enmity and the partisan morality it entailed. They showed that the violence was not inevitable, but a product of human choice and making. Whereas the enemy became defined and definable through political violence, the indifferent escaped the logic of difference and became unclassifiable. (2006: 200 and 204)

As such, the epiphanic moment that induced Juan Carlos' undecideability and subsequent rupture with the Party involves the recognition of and resistance to the symbolic violence that reproduces political opposition as enmity. Consequently, Juan Carlos, in accordance with Robben's description of the threat constituted by undecideables, subverts the violence that 'became the idiom to achieve the society which' the competing parties, 'in their messianism and utopianism,' believed the people 'intensely desired' (Robben 2006: 205).

The second part of the novel focuses on a very different character; one who embodies what Ellen Moodie calls the 'divergent trajectory' of 'lived experience,' which belies the ideological origin of the conflict. In her study of post-war violence in El Salvador, Moodie cites Cynthia Keppley Mahmood's study of terror in Punjab and Kashmir to argue that 'the language used in the analysis of such conflicts, of strategy and politics… does not come close to the meaning of "actual personal engagement of individuals in the violence that enmeshes them"' (Moodie 2004: 243). Accordingly, the second protagonist *La diáspora*, Quique López, readily adopts violence in the guise of political commitment as a means of basic self-assertion.

Quique is first presented to us as a twenty one year old Salvadoran refugee, who works at the FMLN headquarters in Mexico City. After two years away from his home country, Castellanos Moya describes his jubilation at receiving news that he is to be redeployed as a soldier on the front line of the civil war. Using a semi-omniscient narrator to merge descriptions of Quique's rather mundane office chores with his thoughts, reminiscences and desires, a subtly disturbing portrait is built up in which juvenile male bravado and naivety combine with real combat experience and a shocking familiarity with lethal violence.

Castellanos Moya's account of Quique's history of militancy suggests that his affiliation was the product of rather arbitrary circumstances. The only child of an impoverished single mother, as an adolescent he spent a lot of his recreational time at the local garrison where his eldest cousin was a soldier: a detail that implies that he could well have been destined for a career in the military were it not for a particularly defining incident. Rivalry over a girl between a local sergeant and another of Quique's cousins, Lucrecio, erupts violently at a local dance: as a result, Lucrecio is attacked and severely beaten, along with Quique, by a group of soldiers.

Quique's desire for vengeance prompts Lucrecio, who had taken up the revolutionary cause in order to impress the girl, to admit him to a Party meeting at which, despite not understanding most of what is being discussed, the embattled adolescent distinguishes himself through his access to highly prised firearms via his eldest cousin. Thus, Castellanos Moya presents a troubling picture in which an armed conflict based on political differences

has opened up a space in which violent personal rivalries and vendettas, in the guise of either official repression or insurgency, are sanctioned and encouraged as legitimate and useful practises by ideologues on both sides of the conflict, despite the apparent lack of ideological commitment of significant numbers of those who carry out the violence. Within this context of legitimised violence as a form of empowerment, the aims of the revolutionary struggle are reduced to the crude settling of accounts with tyrannical authority:

> Lucrecio le habló de la revolución, del Partido, de los objetivos de la lucha, que a esos hijos de puta de los soldados había que volarles plomo [...]. En su primera reunión, Quique se dio cuenta que a los compas les gustaba discutir sobre cosas que él poco entendía, por eso les dijo que podía conseguir una pistola [...] y que a él lo que le interesaba era quebrarle el culo a uno de esos cabrones. (69)

Quique, then, is shown to have come of age enmeshed in a web of violence, the moral implications of which he, rather understandably, never questions. Whereas the state security apparatus initially seemed to provide the most attractive career and most viable means of social ascendancy, a somewhat routine abuse of the repressive powers afforded to the military conspired to convert Quique into a rebel insurgent. Thus, defined by an overspill of machista aggression and violence in the form of the beating he suffered with Lucrecio, Quique's subsequent life-path is impelled by a need to compensate for the humiliation of being subjected to violence, by asserting himself through recourse to the same, most powerfully visible and impacting method of negotiating power: violence.[5]

The implication here is of a war that engenders an entrenched cycle of violence in which the ideologies in whose name the conflict has been engineered are corrupted to the extent that they become almost irrelevant. Having served to exacerbate a long-standing culture of enmity that dates back to colonial times, ideological affiliation is shown to be so much froth on the surface of a sedimentary culture of violence, at least for those who, usually due to socio-economic exclusion, are most compelled to fight on the ground level. In contrast to the framing of militancy and revolutionary commitment within a utopian ideology or political strategy that we see in the 'committed' literature of writers such as Dalton and Argueta, Castellanos Moya's portrayal of Quique's militancy precedes Moodie's study of post-war violence, which asserts that the actual lived experience of engagement in violence rapidly becomes detached from the 'rational logic of national metanarratives' and 'rational structures of progress and "peace"' (2004: 244).

Inherent to Castellanos Moya's critique of violence is the portrayal of a specific dynamic of social violence similar to what Philippe Bourgois, in his anthropological study of the lives of ex-combatants in El Salvador, terms the *continuum of violence* (2006). In another interesting parallel with Castellanos Moya, Bourgois states that the partisan imperative under which he previously documented the lives of guerrilla combatants during the civil war, with

[5] Castellanos Moya's narrative suggests that the acceptance of violence as the supreme means of negotiating power, implicit in any project of militancy, is so commonplace amongst Quique's generation that it transcends the gender associations that his initiation into professional violence implies. For example, when he flirts over a radio link with Elsa, a young female colleague based in Managua, the topic of conversation flows casually from a discussion of pop music to an enthused appraisal of the merits of AK-47 rifles (88). Thus, the fetishisation of firearms is shown to be embedded in the common parlance of the youth formed within a culture of war.

its concomitant moral oppositioning of violence along political lines, actually prevented him from recognising the continuum of violence:

> My concern with differentiating all-good from all-bad violence, and from separating out politically progressive from self-destructive and irresponsible violence, prevented me from understanding how violence operates along multiple, overlapping planes along a continuum that ranges from the interpersonal and delinquent to the self-consciously political and purposeful […].
>
> By failing to recognize the continuum of violence in war and peace I was unprepared in the case of El Salvador for the rapidity and the ease of the transition from the political violence to delinquent and interpersonal violence […]. I had failed to recognize the ongoing everyday violence that had operated at the height of the civil war camouflaged in political violence that was mimetic of state repression. (Bourgois 2006: 428)

In *La diáspora*, Quique's proficiency at carrying out '*ajusticiamientos*' (justice killings) ensures his progress up the ranks of the revolutionary unit to which he belongs. However, after his guerrilla unit is dispersed during the Salvadoran government's ferocious response to the general offensive of January 1981, he is forced to flee the country. The problem of adapting to situations and social spaces not structured around open hostility becomes a central aspect of Quique's experience as a refugee in Mexico City. Exploited, marginalised and derided, it comes to pass that during a drunken brawl, Quique incapacitates a Mexican youth and is deported to Guatemala. After re-entry into Mexico, he works diligently at the FMLN headquarters to earn a promotion from office boy to teletypist.

The Party seems to offer Quique some degree of social mobility by improving his literacy and training him as a teletypist. However, Castellanos Moya suggests that, beyond the rhetoric of equality and justice, the same rigid stratification and exploitative class relations that fuelled the war have their corollary within the hierarchical structure of the Party. For example, a socio-economic rift is shown to exist between El Negro, the wealthy director of the Mexican branch of the Party's press agency, and a character like Quique. El Negro lives in a large, luxuriantly furnished apartment while, in stark contrast, Quique is obliged to sleep on the floor of the Party press office and has to carefully work out if his meagre wage will stretch as far as to buy him a pair of boots suitable for combat once he is redeployed (64-65). The implication here is that Quique is being exploited as poorly paid cannon fodder while the war furnishes El Negro and his ilk with a privileged lifestyle and the promise of a political career in the future. The existence of such class-based inequality brings into doubt the authenticity and feasibility of the socialist aims of the revolution.

Such doubts are multiplied by the novel's presentation of the cultural repercussions of prolonged militancy along the continuum of violence. By merging details of Quique's outward actions with his thoughts and perceptions, Castellanos Moya is able to suggest subtly the extent of his brutalisation as a trained killer. Quique's brutalised thought patterns and violent fantasies lend an unsettling undertone to what would outwardly appear to be a series of rather unremarkable everyday social encounters and interactions, as we see, for example, in a passage in which he goes to the Salvadoran embassy to make an application for a passport:

> De pronto descubre que junto a la puerta de salida van dos tipos que no pueden con su jeta de ladrones. Que no se la vayan a llevar de vivos con él. Se alista la navaja en el bolsillo de la chamarra.

> El trámite en la embajada es sencillo; ni le preguntan mucho. [...] hay un tira cerca de la entrada al que con placer despanzurraría. Lo quiere sentir a uno como animal. Si supiera que dentro de unas semanas Quique estará rematando a especímenes semejantes. (63-64)

Such passages serve to demonstrate the extent to which the conflict in which he has grown up has had the effect of inculcating a warped value system in which the assertion of human vitality is achieved through identifying, objectifying and then obliterating the 'other.' This value system reflects Robben's observation regarding the Argentine conflict, which he argues was based on 'a narrative about difference' that was used to 'maintain the desire to kill fellow human beings defined as the negation of one's own existence' (2006: 205). In accordance with Bourgois' notion of the continuum of violence, the symbolic violence of such a polarising discourse merges with the humiliating experience of structural violence that, as we have already seen, seems to exist within the revolutionary organisation where it fulfils a coercive function. Hence, Quique can counterbalance his inferiority complex, which surges in the presence of an individual whose profession inherently represents the structural violence of economic stratification, by projecting his insecurities onto the security guard and then objectifying him by equating him with the 'specimens' who he anticipates killing with relish once he is back on the war-front in El Salvador.

Thus, Castellanos Moya exposes the paradox of an individual enlisted and trained to fight for the ideal of a peaceful, more just society, but whose inculcation with the values and worldview incumbent to a strategy of political violence, combines with deeply ingrained resentments stemming from El Salvador's rigid social stratification to severely undermine the viability of the socialist utopia hoped for by the revolutionary ideologues. Implicit here is the sense that, by sanctioning the use of force as a means of acquiring and securing power and actively encouraging and giving specialised training in its practice, the militant Left has contributed, along with the Salvadoran Right, in fomenting a cultural distortion of taboos that otherwise regulate the practice of violence.

The interweaving of Quique's brutalised imagination with an account of a relatively non-threatening, mundane reality culminates in a spectacular anti-climax at the end of the second part of the novel when a description of a violent siege on the Party's Mexican offices merely turns out to be a nightmare. The preceding description of Quique's activities accompanied with interjected details of his paranoid and combative worldview, in which everyone appears as a potential enemy and any situation can suddenly erupt into a violent confrontation, makes the dramatic account of the storming of the Party offices by an armed unit seem entirely plausible.

In the first section of the novel, Juan Carlos' activities in Mexico City are equally accompanied by a series of mounting paranoid interjections, similar to those of Quique, which hint at an obsessive preoccupation with the idea that he is under surveillance.[6] The reader is then shocked when Juan Carlos' worst fears are confirmed with his sudden abduction from the street and the sinister interrogation he is subjected to in a covert cell. Because of this precedent, we are surprised when the violent climax of the second part reveals itself to be nothing more than a projection of the traumatised unconscious of the novel's most

[6] A deceptively mundane manifestation of Juan Carlos' paranoia is apparent in his aversion to public toilets: 'Siempre le había parecido que los servicios sanitarios en lugares públicos eran un sitio ideal para un asesinato. Por eso orinaba lo más rápido posible y nunca se detenía a lavarse' (33).

violent character. This is not only a narrative device utilised by the author to confound the reader's expectations and maintain a level of suspense but also a subtle way of conveying a common problem among people who have lived through situations of war: of reconciling traumatic experience that shatters previous frames of reference with a balanced awareness of the concrete reality that lies beyond the boundaries of that experience. Dori Laub describes the psychological process by which traumatic experience frequently taints the perceptions of trauma survivors, who often live in the grip of a repetitious cycle of re-enactments of the traumatic event, in the following terms:

> The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of salience, a timelessness and a ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor, indeed, is not truly out of touch either with the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its re-enactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both. (Felman and Laub 1992: 69)

Rather than presenting any suggestion as to how a survivor of severe conflict might overcome the sense of entrapment that comes with such traumatic experience, which would give his fiction an overt social function that would link it with the artistic objectives of the 'Committed Generation,' Castellanos Moya deliberately focuses on the ambivalent nature of these types of responses to trauma. In this way, Quique's paranoia appears as a pathological aberration that habitually threatens to recreate a situation of violent confrontation where the basis for such violence actually only exists in that character's brutalised perception of reality.

On the other hand, Juan Carlos' equal propensity towards paranoia is shown to stem from an extremely subtle, intuitive and unfortunately accurate awareness of a covert threat. Thus, the distinction between penetrating insights into the hidden machinations of a given reality and psychosis are blurred in Castellanos Moya's fiction; a theme the author develops much more radically through the use of unreliable first person narrators in later works such as *La diabla en el espejo* and *Insensatez* (2004). The fact that this indistinct oscillation between madness and insight remains unresolved for Castellanos Moya's characters, who are frequently subject to doubts about whether what they believe and think is happening is really happening, or who sometimes act as if in a state of panic and run the risk of taking drastic action based on a misreading of reality, reflects Laub's comments regarding the lack of closure of traumatic events. She argues that closure is achievable only through the process of creating a narrative through which 'one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again' (1992: 69). Echoing this assertion, Castellanos Moya relates his own artistic motivation to the need to 'purge' himself of the memory of a reality he finds deeply troubling; an individualistic rationale that again differentiates him from earlier writers who claimed to be impelled by a desire for socio-political change:

> [...] si la patria que me muerde es la memoria, no he encontrado otra forma de ajustar cuentas con ella más que a través de la invención [...] la purgación de la memoria puede que sea nada más la excusa para ficcionar [...] (2004a: n.p.)

As far as expressing the extent of the trauma that informs his work, Castellanos Moya claims his earliest memory is of a targeted bomb explosion at his grandfather's house (2004a). He has also written of the 'baño de terror' he received as an aspiring young writer amidst the atmosphere of 'conspiración, terror, clandestinaje y armas' during the early years of the armed struggle. He describes how he '*salté del barco*' in 1984 by moving to Mexico where, in what is presumably a reference to *La diáspora*, 'escribí una novela para sacar el excremento acumulado' (2004b: n.p.).

The difference between Castellanos Moya's expression of purely personal motivation for his work and the social 'commitment' of preceding writers manifests itself in much more subtle ways than the opposition of such statements of intent might suggest. The cathartic element of fiction is just as integral to the work of Argueta, with the difference that the catharsis is projected as having a therapeutic aspect that provides readers with a means through which to reflect upon and channel their assumedly collective frustration and anger.[7]

In a similar vein, the final section of Dalton's *Pobrecito poeta que era yo*, significantly entitled 'José – La luz del túnel,' manages to depict revolutionary commitment as a source of inspiration and strength which permits individuals to endure and face hardship with unwavering resolve, whether or not the revolutionary ideal is realised. Thus, political commitment emerges as the most effective channel for despondency in the novel, despite its chronicling of the resentments, self-doubts, imposture, and self-destructive tendencies of a group of disaffected Salvadorans, which makes it a clear precursor to Castellanos Moya's fiction.

In Castellanos Moya's fiction, corruption and violence are shown to be such an integral part of Salvadoran society that any political projects it generates, even those that aim to effect a radical overhaul of existing social structures and institutions, are more or less doomed to replicate the negative tendencies that inspired their inception. For Castellanos Moya's characters it seems that the only way to overcome corruption is to remove oneself physically and psychologically from it completely or become reconciled with the frailties of human nature through an orgiastic immersion in the sensuality of sex, drugs and violence. Thus, almost as a portent of Bourgois' experience cited above, it seems that Castellanos Moya's rejection of ascribing a social function to his work and his lack of political affiliation facilitates an unsanitised portrayal of extremely disturbing aspects of human behaviour in response to exceptionally challenging Central American realities, without the need to provide an exemplary antithesis.

These elements that differentiate *La diáspora* from the work of earlier Salvadoran writers seem to have been part of a conscious effort by the author to break out of what he had come to see as a political orthodoxy that was limiting to the literary representation of the region's convulsive reality. For example, Castellanos Moya states how, because it won the *Premio Nacional de Novela*, many people assumed that 'the novel was a panegyric to the guerrilla and a criticism of the right wing military.' Aware of the probable hostile reactions that might be elicited on realisation that the novel is actually a criticism of 'the Stalinization and the

[7] C.f. Craft (1997: 121).

crimes within the guerrilla itself,' the author only agreed to attend the award ceremony on the condition that the novel was not circulated until afterwards (quoted in Cárdenas 2008: n.p.). Given the fact that Roque Dalton had previously been accused of treason and sentenced to death by certain guerrilla leaders who maintained their prominent positions when *La diáspora* was published, Castellanos Moya's fears do not seem totally unwarranted.

If Juan Carlos represents physical and psychological flight and Quique the replication of institutionalised violence, the monologue of the third main protagonist, El Turco, embodies escapism in the form of a hedonistic quest for sensual immersion. He is initially introduced in the first section of the novel as a childhood friend of Juan Carlos who, after having served as a revolutionary musician who toured internationally representing the Party in promotional and fundraising campaigns, had grown tired of the demands of his superiors and abandoned El Salvador and the revolution to live in Mexico City.

El Turco serves as the mouthpiece for the novel's most outrageously vehement denouncement of the revolutionaries. He describes the situation in El Salvador as irremediable; a nation torn between two competing projects for political power that, despite their polarised ideological opposition to each other, converge in the commitment to the escalation of violence as a means of achieving their aims. El Turco's outrage is expressed with uncompromising frankness and cutting humour that counters the pseudo-nationalist discourse of the warring factions: 'Ese país está maldito. No tiene salida. La revolución ya la chingo' (30). For him the revolutionaries have actually worsened what was already a desperate situation because of what he perceives as their hypocrisy. He derides as pompous the claims of the 'curas del Partido' to represent the will of 'the people,' when his experience ('yo lo viví') has shown him that in actuality 'la mayoría era un atajo de mulas, ambiciosas de poder, corruptas' (31-32).

El Turco's earlier appearance in the novel allows us to contextualise his unmediated stream of consciousness that makes up the fourth part. It begins with him acrimoniously renouncing his part-time job as a low-paid pianist at a hotel, before heading out with 'el sueldo de una semana y toda la noche para hacerlo pedazos' (143). Expressing his resolutely heterosexist self-centredness, at first he phones Susana, an ex-music pupil who 'a la tercera clase me la estaba cogiendo' (143), but decides not to pay her a visit when she reveals that she is entertaining two gay friends ('prefería tener que pasar solo esa noche antes que soportar un par de maricas' [142]). Then he remembers that El Negro, the Mexican director of PRESAL, the Party's press agency, is holding a party at his house. He considers the fact that El Negro has plenty of money, lots of expensive alcohol and 'siempre invitaba [...] a buenos culitos' (144), and so heads there. First of all, though, he heads to a bar and downs two drinks 'como un desesperado' and smokes some marihuana, before arriving at El Negro's 'excitado, con ganas de zamparme otro trago y joder al primer cristiano que se descuidara' (145). Thus, it is made abundantly clear that, trapped in a rut of dead-end, humiliatingly low-paid jobs despite his education and abilities, and feeling that his home land is in a catastrophic mess that shows no sign of resolution, El Turco has decided that, in a kind of desperate reaffirmation of machismo, the only aim in life worth pursuing is personal gratification through intoxication and sex.

At the party, most of the other characters of the novel are also present. By choosing such a setting for the culmination of his novelistic critique of the revolutionary movement, Castellanos Moya maybe paying homage to the section of *Pobrecito poeta*, entitled 'Todos: El party,' in which Dalton brings together the various protagonists to mingle with upper class

Salvadorans.[8] Just as Dalton used this scenario to satirise the dominant values, social codes and hypocrisy of the elite, the party in *La diáspora* is described from the perspective of the novel's most outspoken and disenchanted character in order to deride certain aspects of the revolutionaries in an astonishingly unbridled manner.

Throughout his account, El Turco utters his general contempt for those connected with the revolution and the Salvadoran solidarity campaign. As he enters El Negro's house he refrains from making a polite greeting and instead comments with disdain: 'no me iba a poner a saludar a tanto cerote' (145). However, his ideological objections do not encroach upon his libidinous fixation: when El Negro points out the 'gringa' representative from a solidarity committee in Washington, El Turco's only comment is: 'Tiene buen culo' (146). When he moves on to dance with Ana, the Party press agency's star reporter, he capitalises on her sympathy with the predicament of the Salvadoran people and her professional interest in the revolution. He impresses her ('Claro que se conmovió [...] repitió que era la primera vez que se encontraba con un artista salvadoreño') with his stories of his past militancy and his present struggle to succeed as a musician in exile. Meanwhile, he endures what he perceives to be ideological naivety in the hope that she will succumb to his attempt at seductive charm, revealed in a cynical aside in which he states: 'Si no hubiera tenido esas piernas, me hubiera encarnizado con su optimismo político' (148-49). But, in his drunkenness, El Turco cannot refrain from venting his revulsion against the revolutionaries. Describing his acrimonious split with the Party, he explains that the majority of its members now detest him. When she asks why, he replies: 'Porque les digo la verdad, la mayoría son un hartajo de pendejos que lo único que buscan es una tajadita de poder para refocilarse como cerdos' (149).

As cynical and embittered as they may seem, there is a sense that El Turco's comments and behaviour, because they bypass any reverence for the moral norms inscribed by the revolutionary organisations, actually do give a truer reflection of the less socially conscious, more irrational impulses that drive the armed struggle. Even his objectification of and predatory attitude towards women is nothing more than an unashamed manifestation of what is shown to be the clandestine conduct of many male revolutionaries. For example, earlier in the novel, Carmen explains to Juan Carlos the 'grotesque' situations in which:

> Dos compañeros del Partido trataron, con insistencia, de acostarse con ella [...]. El primero había sido Arturo [...] esa era su especialidad [...] ocupaba su cargo político para eso [...].
>
> Marcelino era el otro [...] que incluso recurrió a los sentimientos de solidaridad de Carmen para que ésta, como mexicana, satisficiera sus necesidades sexuales. Ni más ni menos el representante obrero del Partido en México [...].
>
> Ambos, por supuesto, se convirtieron en acérrimos enemigos políticos de ella. Hasta que salió volando del Comité. (39)

Thus, we learn that Carmen's disenchantment with the Party stems from an insight into the dubious sexual motives that sometimes lurked behind the socialist rhetoric of some of its high-ranking officials. This exposé of the cynical abuse of power among guerrilla officers extends to a suggestion that such behaviour, along with the general turbulence of a war situation, has inhibited the formation of lasting relationships. Remarkably for a man in his

[8] Castellanos Moya himself has openly acknowledged the direct influence of Dalton on his work by stating: 'parte de mi obra puede considerarse una conversación con Roque Dalton [...]' (Ortiz Wallner 2006: n.p.).

thirties, Juan Carlos has only managed to maintain one serious relationship, which barely lasted more than a year. The girl he lived with had an affair and left him and is now married to a commandant. Since then there have been no deep relationships: 'los ajetreos de la guerra no permitían embarcarse en una relación estable' (38). What is more, the loss of ideals seems to put in doubt the very notion of the possibility of a lasting, genuinely loving relationship. For example, when Juan Carlos senses that Carmen, whose own relationship with Antonio is on the verge of disintegration, might be interested in him romantically, he makes a concerted effort to 'cortar de tajo lo que consideró como una ilusión peligrosa' (16). His disillusionment makes him sceptical of the authenticity of the apparent personal loyalty, faith and trust required to build a lasting relationship. Thus, even where violence does not appear to have a direct cultural manifestation, corruption and the abuse of power taints all aspects of the lives of those affected by it. Hence, even those of Castellanos Moya's characters who do not recycle the violent codes of behaviour inscribed by the war, inhabit an atomised world of corroded social cohesion.[9]

Along with the 'orfandad' that follows the renunciation of a cause and the concomitant belief in a viable project of social transformation, this breakdown of the traditional bonds upon which the most basic units of society are constructed compounds the emotional anguish of many of Castellanos Moya's characters, further impelling them to acts of desperation. For example, in the case of Carmen, political disillusionment, the breakdown of her marriage, Juan Carlos' rejection and the demoralising search for employment during an economic crisis all seem to conspire in wearing her down emotionally. Consequently, at the party, when El Turco channels his libidinous attention towards her, she is pressurised into a somewhat squalid sexual encounter in the toilet.

While these actions seem to concur with Aguilar Ciciliano's (2003) citing of self-affirmation through eroticism as an integral aspect of Castellanos Moya's 'aesthetic of cynicism,' viewing this behaviour as purely cynical fails to recognise the suffering that compels it. Judith Herman's argument for the need to further nuanced diagnoses of PTSD points to a spectrum of related conditions that can exacerbate 'the common tendency to account for the victim's behaviour by seeking flaws in her personality or moral character,' which she claims: 'has interfered with the psychological understanding and diagnosis of a post-traumatic syndrome' (2006: 368-69). One such condition that she notes as a response to the kind of prolonged, repeated trauma, which subjection to 'political terror' can induce, includes compulsive sexuality (370). Therefore, it is possible that the problematic sexual obsession of many of Castellanos Moya's characters is actually symptomatic of a long-term exposure to trauma.

We get some measure of the emotional pain and trauma that underlies even El Turco's brazen show of cynicism in the novel's final chapter, in which the omniscient narrator returns. In the grip of a monstrous hangover, El Turco recalls a protest march he attended in San Salvador in which the authorities opened fire and he witnessed the gruesome killing of a friend, a memory that continues to haunt him. He notes how, after that experience: 'su vida ya no sería la misma. Entonces comenzó la verdadera militancia' (162-63).

As in the case of Quique, El Turco's former militancy is shown to be a product of an instinctive, non-rational response to the violence of the state, impelled by the desire for

[9] The impossibility of forming a lasting, loving relationship, also construed as a kind of utopia, is a central theme of the Salvadoran writer Jacinta Escudos' seminal post-war novel, *El desencanto* (2001).

revenge. If, as William Rowe has noted, 'the law of revenge demands symmetry' (1987: 54), it seems only natural that the armed struggle against the state should come to adopt the same 'vocación asesina [...] autoritarismo y [...] reclamo de obediencia ciega' that characterises the enemy (Aguilar Ciciliano 2003: n.p.). Castellanos Moya highlights this process himself when he discusses *La diáspora*'s critique of the Salvadoran Left:

> Hay una ley en la historia según la cual los enemigos comienzan a parecerse. Mientras más se prolonga un conflicto más te pareces a tu enemigo; mientras más dura una guerra más conoce cada quien las tácticas de combate de su enemigo; más comienzan a asemejarse en su forma de pensar, porque piensan en función del otro y en la medida en que vives en función del otro, comienzas a ser como el otro. Entonces: todos somos criminales. (Quoted in Verduchi 2002: n.p.)

Accordingly, far from heralding a new era of social justice, the civil war is shown to be the product of a static society in which the cycle of violence, through the process of symbolic violence, does not cease to reproduce itself and the tyranny of the oppressors contaminates the oppressed. In this light, despite the desperate escapism, individualism, cynicism and apparent ineffectualness of their responses to this reality, there is an underlying, vaguely positive element to the actions of some of Castellanos Moya's disillusioned protagonists of an escapist bent in that they seem to be at least compelled by a will to break free from the chain of violent repetition. Thus, the novel's descriptions of the gradual breakdown of values of social cohesion and the dispersal of fleeing individuals, conveyed in the title, suggests a process of social entropy that highlights the unsustainability of a culture of violence; an element that betrays the novel's oblique social vocation despite the author's point-blank denial of such motivations in statements such as: 'yo no escribo para cambiar nada' (quoted in Aguilar 2005: n.p.). Hence, the philosophical conservatism of Castellanos Moya's early novelistic vision in fact constitutes an integral aspect of its denunciatory power.

Nevertheless, it seems that Castellanos Moya's rejection of political partisanship and of ascribing a social responsibility to his craft has allowed him to construct an unflinchingly critical portrayal of political violence and corruption in Salvadoran society. Rather than opt for a cultural panacea and portray these problems as contingent to an ideological other, his fiction is much more disturbing, for it presents them as so deeply embedded in the national culture (or the human condition, in general, one might argue) that even those political projects and organisations that claim some degree of moral superiority are shown to actually be just as susceptible to their degrading effects.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 9

¿CÓMO EXPRESAR UNA REALIDAD GROSERA, CRUDA, FEA?:* VIOLENCE, TESTIMONY AND AESTHETICS IN SALVADORAN POST-CIVIL WAR LITERATURE

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> 'Literature is undoubtedly *several* things at once, things that are connected […] and are difficult or perhaps […] impossible to consider simultaneously.' (Gennete 1993: 1; emphasis in the original)

> 'La característica fundamental de la literatura testimonial es su hibridez, vale decir, obras que, por sus características de contenido, pertenecen a diversos géneros.' (Liano 1992: 14)

> 'Novela, poesía o testimonio, los textos centroamericanos se atormentan para que los viejos muertos y las nuevas legiones de muertos, y torturados, y desaparecidos, puedan por fin cerrar sus ojos. […] Dicha motivación trasciende la problemática de los géneros literarios.' (Arias 1998: 2-3)

The main purpose of this study is to ponder the relationship between violence, testimony and aesthetics in post-civil war Central American literature through an examination of certain aspects of two novels, *La diáspora* (1989) and *Insensatez* (2004), by Horacio Castellanos Moya, a writer whose narratives are usually associated with this period. To do this, it is necessary to consider the context(s) out of which these novels arose, for literature tends to

* Castellanos Moya explains: 'Yo vivo una realidad grosera, yo vivo una realidad cruda, fea, donde el crimen es el rey de los valores, donde las peores características del ser humano rigen [...]. Busco un estilo […] que exprese esa realidad' (as quoted in Kellner et al. 2006: n.p.).

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both reflect and comment on the specific socio-political and cultural situations that inspired its creation. So, if we can talk about the literature of the years of armed conflict and another of the post-civil war period, does that indicate some kind of a rupture between the two which makes them different? But, equally, if one of the principal themes of both is the violence – political and criminal; public and private – that characterises and affects both periods, can we also assume there is certain continuity? What changes occurred and what are the similarities and divergences between the Salvadoran literature written during the 'guerrilla period' (Arias 2007: ix) and during the post-civil war era? Did a precipitous fissure open up or are we rather talking about a long, on-going period of transition? Focusing on the relationship between violence, testimony and aesthetics, to try to answer these questions, as well as examining the two novels, I will look at certain features of the well-known – still on-going, it seems, see Ortiz-Wallner (2013) and Mackenbach (this volume) – debate on testimony and testimonial literature, at some of Castellanos Moya's essays, at interviews he has given, and at relevant aspects of the work of his most important Salvadoran novelistic forerunner, Manlio Argueta, whose literature has often been denominated testimonial (cf. Arias 1998; Astvaldsson 2006b). Hence, this chapter aspires to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between fiction, testimony and aesthetics or of what we may also call the testimonial function or value of post-civil war fictional narratives.

As indicated in the introduction to this book, the specific academic interest in testimony and testimonial literature in Central America, which had started in the 1960s, had by the late 80s, early 90s, led some influential theorists (e.g., Beverley 1989, 1993; Beverley and Zimmerman 1990) not only to reject the need for studying 'imaginative literature' but to declare the novel dead and *testimonio* as its revolutionary successor: testimony was supposedly the new discourse that would triumph alongside the revolutionary struggle. Although it rapidly showed itself to be ingenuous and wide of the mark, nonetheless, this suggestion had a long-term negative impact on the way in which not just fiction and poetry but also testimony itself and the so-called testimonial novel have been viewed. Firstly, the impression was created that not only some theorists but also many of the producers of testimony – both witnesses and editors – were opposed to the presence of poetic language in testimonial texts, as if it was adverse to their aims and objectives. Secondly, it came to undermine the quality of literary criticism itself: increasingly, it led critical attention to concentrate on literary content and on the urgency of the socio-political messages of texts, while ignoring the crucial role that aesthetics inevitably play in all the literature that gauges the causes and consequences of political and criminal violence.[1] Thirdly, it sometimes led younger writers, those who started to publish in the late civil war period, or soon after it ended, as well as some literary critics, to react disapprovingly towards testimonial texts.

[1] While many commentators had already pointed this out by the early 1990s, those who argued differently continued to have the upper hand. For example, Sklodowska (1992) shows that calling testimony a genre is unsustainable (4), that the history (re)created by testimony is inevitably invented for the purposes of an ideology (32), that editors of testimonies are often uncomfortable with the poetic language used by witnesses and, hence, tend towards sanitising it, or 'maintaining its supposed transparency' (34). Moreover, she writes: '[…] la mayoría de los críticos y muchos escritores […] han considerado como positiva la incorporación del discurso testimonial al ámbito de lo literario; inclusive los gestores que se mantienen a raya de lo literario no dicen que el testimonio como tal carezca de valor estético intrínseco. Beverley, al contrario, por razones ideológicas – por no decir, estratégicas – insiste en el carácter subversivamente extraliterario o antiliterario de estos textos que él considera testimonios genuinos' (82). However, Beverley's influence did not diminish much, as, with a few nuances, until recently he has kept promoting his theory (for example, see Beverley 2004).

While Castellanos Moya's fiction is usually associated with the post-civil war period, it is marked by and responds to complex and often painful historical processes in Central America – especially El Salvador and Guatemala – from the early twentieth century through the civil wars and into the post-civil war period. Hence, the socio-political and cultural context out of which the novels examined here arose and on which they comment is to an extent similar, while there are also divergences which contribute to making them different. What they have in common is that both reflect on aspects of the long period of violence in Central America. However, the specific historical moments and circumstances with which they deal are markedly different. Moreover, as Castellanos Moya matures as writer, his depiction of the violence, or his aesthetic, develops and comparing his earlier with his later works gives insight into that process. Specifically, I examine the contrasting ways in which the violence is shown to influence the attitude and behaviour of the characters: how it affects their consciences and, ultimately, their humanity. Attention will also be given to what the novels, essays and interviews tell us about the author's view on the relationship between testimony and aesthetics, and his attitude to what it means to represent the victims.

Although Castellanos Moya finished writing *La diáspora* five years before the signing of the Peace Accords in1992,[2] still, it reveals some of the characteristics that would later come to be associated with post-civil war fiction. As Knight (this volume) points out, while many earlier writers clearly believed that revolutionary violence was justified, because it would lead to a peaceful, just and democratic future, Castellanos Moya insists that all violent power struggles, however just they might appear to be, bread violence that sooner or later gets out of control and irreversibly, it would seem, corrupts those who participate in them, as well as having negative effects on others who are caught up in the turmoil. While this is correct, it must be pointed out that Castellanos Moya was not the only Salvadoran writer to have lost faith in the revolutionary struggle by the mid-1980s. As Ortiz-Wallner (2013: 15) implicitly suggests, it is reasonable to consider 1985-86 as a watershed in Salvadoran literature. Three key milestones that support such a suggestion are: 1) the civil war had reached a stalemate that would not be surpassed, 2) serious conflicts and corruption within the guerrilla movement had come to light, and 3) the publication of Argueta's *Cuzcatlán, donde bate la mar del sur* (1986), a novel that, though latently, criticises the actions and dogmatic attitudes of the guerrilla leadership (see Astvaldsson 2000). *Cuzcatlán* clearly shows that Argueta too had come to the conclusion that an alternative solution to end the long decades of violence had to be found. However, he is still optimistic and the main thesis of this novel is the need for initiating an inclusive national reconciliation process that should draw on moral and ethical principles inscribed into ancient indigenous traditions which, according to his view, are still found in the culture of the Salvadoran peasantry and represent a basis on which a more humane future could be built. Hence, the main characters in Argueta's two rural-based novels from the civil war period – the first one of course being *Un día en la vida* (1980) – are mostly uncorrupted peasants whose vision allows the author to offer constructive socio-political criticism and even suggest how those seen to be responsible for the violence might be redeemed.[3] In contrast, many of Castellanos Moya's characters are urban-based, middle-class intellectuals who, having participated in the revolutionary movement, have left it after becoming disillusioned with the internal divisions and dogmatism that sometimes led to

[2] First published in 1989, the novel was written between September 1986 and January 1987.

[3] The recovery of the past that Argueta undertakes in *Cuzcatlán* – and indeed elsewhere in his work – is imaginative, creative, anti dogmatic and rejects any idea of absolute truth (see Astvaldsson 2000 and 2006b).

violence against their own, a state of affairs that makes no sense to those who thought they had joined a modern, progressive organisation fighting for justice, equality and democracy.[4] Yet, while, in his novels, Castellanos Moya is often sympathetic towards the plight of his characters, he tends not to offer them much hope of a better future or any clear road to redemption, although that does not necessarily reflect his personal stance outside fiction.

The immediate historical background to what Castellanos Moya relates in *La diáspora* is the death in Managua of the two main leaders of the FPL, Mélida Anaya Montes – Commandant Ana María –, second in command, brutally assassinated on 6 April 1983, and Salvador Cayetano Carpio – Commandant Marcial –, first in command, who six days later, apparently, commits suicide after finding out that one of his closest allies, Rogelio Bazzaglia – Marcelo –, the FPL's head of security, is responsible for planning the murder. However, on 9 December 1983 the FPL issues a report in which Carpio is accused of having ordered the killing and taken his own life in a cowardly act when the truth came to light. This version of events, related in the novel (see 105-106 for the most detailed account), which is consistent with the FPL's official report (González et al.), was later contested.[5] However, the details of what actually happened are less important to our analysis here than the impact it is seen to have on how the characters in the novel perceive what is going on in the revolutionary movement, and how they react to it.

While these events are the final trigger that sparks the main protagonist of the novel, Juan Carlos, to leave the Party (12-13), it is obvious that his decision is prompted by disillusionment that has been building up over many years, in fact, from before the civil war broke out, caused by a series of alarming incidents, of which the slaying of the poet Roque Dalton by his own comrades is one of the most shocking.[6] This is why, when Carmen asks Juan Carlos about the situation in the Party, he answers 'con evasivas,' because 'no tenía ganas de revolver la miasma de la que venía huyendo [...]' (11): in effect, he has not only left the Party but 'estaba harto y quería irse precisamente lo más lejos posible, donde pudiera tomar distancia, reflexionar' (15). He clarifies: '–Lo que quiero es irme a un lugar donde pueda trabajar un rato, sin matarme, ganar buena plata y que me quede tiempo para estudiar, leer o lo que se me ocurra' (15): in other words, what he longs for is a 'normal' life far away from what he sees as the failed revolutionary project. Yet, the point needs to be made that, despite clearly having seen the signs of corruption, people like Juan Carlos continued to keep their faith and to be politically engaged for a number of years. The reason is that the ideology in which they firmly believed told them that the revolutionary project was bigger than any individual. Hence, even Juan Carlos still held on to hope for several months after the atrocities in Managua, because:

> Sus estudios de filosofía y del marxismo-leninismo le habían enseñado que la revolución es producto de grandes movimientos sociales y no de la voluntad individual y mesiánica de un puñado de hombres. Por lo mismo, se dijo que el Partido sabría asimilar el golpe y sacar las enseñanzas. (113)

[4] It should be noted that Argueta is still writing – he has published three novels in the post-civil war period, the last one, *Los poetas del mal*, in 2012 –, so both authors have published novels both during and after the Civil War.

[5] A contrasting fictional version, apparently based on an account given by Carpio's wife, in which the names have been changed and Cuban involvement is alleged, can be found in the novel *Limón Reggae* by the Costa Rican writer Anacristina Rossi (2007: 184-88).

[6] The killing of Dalton also had a major influence on Argueta and his literature (cf. Astvaldsson 2006b: 59).

This is probably why the disenchantment is so great when they are finally left with no option but to admit that the cause for which they have been fighting is lost. In fact, Juan Carlos is not just upset about what occurred in Managua, he has been deeply traumatised by it: 'algo ha roto dentro de Juan Carlos' (114). This is because he feels there is nothing he can do to amend the situation: he experiences a deep sense of loss, orphanage, guilt and sinfulness since, ultimately, he cannot help feeling that he, in fact, is one of those responsible for what happened (111-13). This sense of joint culpability is shared by Castallanos Moya, who candidly concludes a critical commentary on the Left by saying: '[...] todos somos criminales. Ese es el problema, nadie tiene la bondad ética a su lado' (Verduchi [n.d.]: 3). It is unsurprising, then, that Juan Carlos is the character for whom the author seems to have the most sympathy and for whom there is perhaps a glimmer of hope.

Similarly, what happened in Managua has shattered Carmen's belief in the revolutionary cause. And she is not alone. She tells Juan Carlos that, while she still sees some of the people in the Solidarity Committee to which she used to belong: 'Todos los de la dirección del Comité nos salimos. Sólo quedaron los que dicen sí a todo, ya sabes, la inutilidad pura...' (13). Others had left much earlier and for different reasons, such as Gabriel, who '– a diferencia de Juan Carlos – ya había perdido la inocencia y la muerte de los dirigentes más bien le produjo cierto regocijo íntimo, morboso' (137). Described sympathetically as '«un escritor frustrado», pero no amargo' (134) –, ironically, 'rummaging' his bookshelves, Juan Carlos finds 'mucha teoría literaria, poca poesía' (21), which could be seen as the author's comment on the state of literary criticism at the time – he is a university lecturer who collaborated with the Party press until he was told to give up his job and come to work full time for the revolution (17). It is significant that his unfinished doctoral thesis, about the relationship between the writer and the revolution in El Salvador – 'Un tema caliente, pero inevitable' (20) –, focuses on the 'emblematic' assassination of Roque Dalton by his own comrades. His main predicament is this: '¿qué hacer ahora con el arquetipo del poeta guerrillero (como René Castillo y Javier Heraud) que cae en combate con las fuerzas represivas, cuando a Dalton lo habían asesinado sus propios compañeros?' (135). The fusion of the artistic and political vanguard or the idea of the committed writer advocated by Dalton's generation now seem like irreversibly obsolete ideals, something which reflects Castallanos Moya's own view on the potential that such relationships can be viable.

Now, if Argueta's critique of the revolutionary movement, while firm, tends to be subtle and constructive, the one that Castellanos Moya makes, through some of his characters, is much sharper and more uncompromising. For that reason, while Juan Carlos prefers to talk as little as possible about what for him is clearly a painful situation, there are others, such as his friend el Turco, who, like Juan Carlos, had worked raising funds for the Party, for whom the consequences of participation in the revolution seem to have been a lot more devastating. In fact, they appear to be leading el Turco to self-destruction, which is borne out by his excessive drinking and how he is prepared to say what he really thinks without worrying about the consequences that doing so could have for him. Hence, challenging Juan Carlos' rather timid suggestion that 'one should not be so pessimistic,' in a manner that is characteristically categorical for this kind of an individual in Castellanos Moya's work, he responds:

> –No cabrón, hay que ser realista. Ese pinche país se pudrió a lo pendejo. Imagínate que voy a hacer yo como músico. A tener que lamerme el culo a una manada de

> imbéciles para conseguir un empleíto cualquiera. Y si triunfaría la revolución, sería peor... [...]
>
> –¿Te digo por qué? [...]. Porque ninguno de esos cerotes que dirigen la revolución tiene la puta idea de lo que es el arte. (30-31)

El Turco, then, is suggesting that the leaders of the Party cannot permit an artistic sensibility that goes beyond their dogma, an attitude that ultimately, it can be argued, makes them ignore the true humanity for which the majority of the combatants who put their lives at risk are fighting. Thus, described as 'veneno puro [...], visceral, intransigente, resentido, cruel, obsesivo' (30), he bluntly expresses the profound disenchantment that Juan Carlos and others feel too, but find difficult or are afraid to articulate. The reasons behind their frustration are clear: having put their efforts into a struggle that was supposed to rid them of successive military dictatorships, they are faced with a political party that rejects honest debate (15), where a climate of distrust has led to police style vigilance (18), where the most primitive machismo against the dignity of women and the abuse of power, generally, are the norm.[7] Only a few years into the Civil War and corruption and the desire for personal power are already epidemic in the revolutionary movement.

However, while it is evident that different characters have their own particular reasons for leaving the revolutionary movement, others decide to stay. One of them is el Negro, described as an ex-Jesuit and the son of an influential Mexican business man (47). He is well of – 'compraba como un buen burgués, sin reparar demasiado en los precios' (49) – and the director of the press agency controlled by the Party. This makes him a rather ambiguous character. El Turco describes him as 'un pinche creyente, que nunca dejaría de militar, el típico burguesito que pasaba de la orden jesuita al Partido' (33), and clearly has him in mind when he talks about 'esos dirigentes que se dedican al turismo revolucionario' (32), although he adds: 'Lo salvaba que fuera tan buen tipo' (33). While Juan Carlos also considers him a good friend (48), the fact is that he is someone who has gained personally from the revolution, is well connected to those who control the Party and, thus, has no intensions of leaving a position that allows him to travel the world and live in comfort. For that reason, while he does not come across as a ruthless character, his words sound hallow when he tells Juan Carlos: 'Pensaba que había que dar la lucha desde dentro hasta donde fuera posible, para evitar que se consolidaran las tendencias stalinistas' (50). The bottom line is that he seems to be prepared to defend what his friends have come to see as indefensible.

Now, as Antonio observes, leaving is not necessarily a realistic option for everybody: '[...] él entendía que los combatientes en los frentes de guerra no tuvieran otra opción que seguir combatiendo, morir o pasarse al enemigo' (15). Paradoxically, this would seem to be true in the case of Quique López, a twenty-one year old who works under el Negro's directive in the party's press office. Recruited into the guerrilla at the age of seventeen, at eighteen he was an established squadron leader fighting in the Civil War, but was then forced to flee the country after his group suffered defeat by government forces. However, as if compelled by a force beyond his control, Quique would like nothing better than to be back in the midst of battle, and the day he receives the news that he can return is described as a highlight in his life: 'su deseo de retornar a combatir en las filas de la guerrilla salvadoreña se ve por fin

[7] While some are openly aggressive towards women (39), all the male characters talk about the opposite sex in terms that degrade and objectify them (for example, see 23; 33; 65).

realizado' (61). So, who exactly is Quique? He is perhaps best described as the total opposite of someone like Juan Carlos.[8] The latter seems to be from a relatively privileged middle-class background – he can rely on his family to send him the money to pay for his flight from Managua to Mexico City (19) –, he is clearly intelligent, although not confident – he doubts his ability to become a writer (20; 35) –, sensitive – prone to anxiety and paranoia (22; 33; 35) – and not courageous. Ironically, he tells Rita that faced with either leaving his homeland or going underground he chose the latter, since: 'Desgraciadamente, nunca he sido hombre de armas' (25). Quique, on the other hand, is of poor rural background, the son of a single mother – 'de padre desconocido y sin hermanos' –, he is poorly educated – having reached the six grade of primary school, he came to the conclusion that 'la escuela no estaba hecha para él' (68) – and rather simple. All of this, it is implied, makes him easy prey for those looking to recruit 'natural born killers' into their ranks: that he is one is shown by how, although slightly nervous at first, he dispassionately shots and finishes off his victims right from the start (70).

In fact, as Knight argues (this volume), the novel suggests that the circumstances through which Quique became a member of the guerrilla movement were arbitrary and that, if things had turned out differently, he might have been recruited into the military: two cousins he was close to belong the opposite camp.[9] He is totally oblivious of the political issues underpinning the armed conflict and seems to be driven by what is essentially a personal desire for revenge against soldiers who beat him and his cousin Lucrecio up, a moment described as having defined his life. What motivates him is probably best defined as raw, reciprocal male aggression: it was a dispute between an army sergeant and Lucrecio over the latter's girlfriend that lead to the beating (68).[10] When he first joins the local guerrilla group to which Lucrecio and his girlfriend belong, he has little or no idea what the others are talking about but is fascinated by the violence (69), and that continues to be the case: in his last meeting at the press office, where an attack by the guerrilla on an army barracks is being discussed, instead of paying attention to the political and diplomatic analysis, he daydreams about being back on the battle field (86).[11] His attitude to discussions about what happened in Managua is revealing: 'Qué jodedera se traen con eso, piensa Quique. La cagaron los dos [commandants] y ya estuvo. [...] a él no le gusta pensar sobre eso porque uno puede terminar aculerándose' (74). Referring to the same events, he is described as: 'Hombre de intuiciones más que de razonamientos complicados,' who 'permaneció inmune a la vorágine de poder que generan tales situaciones políticas [...] como si la crisis hubiera pasado a su lado, sin tocarlo, como algo que no tenía nada que ver con él' (95). In fact, the novel makes it clear that, unlike Juan Carlos, Quique is almost totally unaffected by the political infighting:

> A diferencia de Quique, un joven para quien el mundo intrigante de la alta política podía pasar desapercibido y toda la simbología revolucionaria permanecía en un segundo plano ante la eventualidad de la acción, Juan Carlos resintió profundamente el asesinato de Ana María y el suicidio de Marcial. (111)

[8] As we will see below, the novel itself explicitly invites the reader to make such comparison.

[9] Implicitly, a similar thing is suggested in the case of Robocop, the protagonist of *El arma en el hombre*: he could quite possibly have been recruited into the revolutionary movement as a guerrilla fighter.

[10] His sexist attitude to women is telling in this context.

[11] The last chapter of Part Two of the novel, mostly devoted to him, relates a dream he has about childhood military enemies attacking him in the press office.

Quique, then, who might have been a positive character in Argueta's civil war novels, is used by Castellanos Moya to set up a striking contrast between the Party's urban-based, middle-class, petit bourgeois intellectuals and its mainly rural-based masses. He may not understand what they are saying when they talk about politics and ideology – to him it is all 'paja' (77) or 'verborrea' (94) – but he sees there is a fundamental difference between the role that they and those like him have to play in the revolutionary struggle. Hence, while recognising his limited analytical skills, he comes to this logical conclusion: '[...] una cosa es echar el rollazo fino sobre la situación de la guerra, como hacen Fausto y el Negro, y otra poder conducir a una media docena de hombres en medio de los cachimbazos. Lo principal es esto, sin duda' (77). Quique, then, is a man of action not of words, and he has no problem with feeling 'como una especie de animal ignorante, incapaz de hurgar en el sinuoso mundo de las teorías' (94). However, he is ill at ease in the capital city, a space to which the intellectuals belong – 'le costaba ubicarse y siempre tuvo miedo de perderse' (70). So, when he is sent on a mission to San Salvador and finds himself under attack, we are told: '[...] sólo supo correr y disparar, desesparado, correr y disparar, como rata entrampada [...],' and this is when he realises, without any anguish, that he is 'un animal de monte' (71). The fundamental contrast between the likes of Quique and Juan Carlos could not have been made any clearer.

What, then, does the novel tell us about the relationship between fiction and testimony or, more precisely, the testimonial function or value of post-civil war narratives? In this contex, it is worth considering whether the literature that, as Castellanos Moya defines his work, 'no tiene más intención que plasmar en una narración aquellos aspectos de la realidad que atosigan al autor y que él puede procesar a través de su imaginación' (Guerrero 2001: no p.n.) has any true value for the reader? And if it has, if it touches, directly or indirectly, on aspects of life that are of interest to him/her, then, is it not precisely testimonial, since it testifies to the fact that the preoccupations of the reader are not only personal but shared by others? For the same reason, it can't help being 'socially committed,' because it deals with general problems of human existence, not only those limited to solitary individuals. *La diáspora*, then, set in 1983 and 84, testifies to the experiences of a representative group of characters, many of whom, only a few years into the Civil War, have lost faith in the revolution and the leadership of the Left, which has shown itself to be corrupt, blinded by senseless dogma and ready to use brutal violence to defend its personal interests. It is not, of course, a text that, as might be expected of what Beverly calls a 'genuine testimony,' directly denounces the oppression and violent treatment of the underprivileged, and it does not idealise the poor. However, it does something that those kind of texts tend not to do: it puts into relieve the flaws of human beings that contribute to weaknesses in the revolutionary project – infighting, conspiracies and power struggles amongst the leadership – and the scepticism, disillusionment and trauma this causes. And if, as Sklodowska notes (1992: 32), the editors of testimonies tend to sanities the language used by the witnesses, in contrast, Castellanos Moya uses language that is blunt, aggressive and reflects the state of mind of diverse characters who resemble real people, showing us that his fiction clearly has testimonial value.[12] To examine

[12] If it is true that 'genuine testimonies' are resistant to using poetic language, then, that again suggests they may not be doing full justice to the complexities inherent in human experiences and in the cultural production of subaltern societies. It is in this context that imaginative literature can fulfil an important testimonial function, because poets and fiction writers tend to be particularly interested in the more intricate aspects of life. One advantage that the novel has over testimony is that it is not limited to a single point of view but can provide a spectrum of experiences.

this further, I will now look closer at the differences between how some theorists of testimony and fiction writers such as Castellanos Moya view the role that literature can play in the effort to create more just societies in countries like those of Central America, which have long been plagued by violence.

Beverley and Zimmerman say that their book 'began in the intuition shared by its authors that what had been happening in modern Nicaraguan poetry was crucial to the development of the eventual victory of the Sandinista Revolution' (1990: ix). This peculiar belief in the capacity of literature to influence the political process is, to say the least, debateable (Astvaldsson 2006b: 73). Moreover, all good literature reflects an intimate and non-transferable process, and we can't expect writers to use their art as a political platform.[13] It is for this type of reason that authors such as Castellanos Moya have found it necessary to highlight that, while their novels often draw on real socio-political events or cultural situations, in the interpretation of those events, they rely on their imagination and what they write is fiction. If we look at what Castellanos Moya has said in essays and interviews, it is clear that he is not critical of testimony per se but rather of those who claim it represents absolute truth, of lack of aesthetic quality and of the dogmatic political point scoring to which it has so often been subjected, which frequently comprises an attack on intellectuals, writers and literature. One of his essays, written at the time when Ana Guadalupe Martínez's book, *Las cárceles clandesinas*, was re-published in 1992, gives an insight into his views. The essay is not a critique of the testimony itself but of the prologue to it, written under a pseudonym by Joaquín Villalobos, which Castellanos Moya's deems outdated and irrelevant to the post-civil war period. Hence, he writes: 'La validez del texto de Ana Guadalupe Martínez, de su testimonio como prisionera-desaparecida en las ergástulas de los militares salvadoreños, está fuera de duda. […] Pero el prólogo […], y la mentalidad que expresa, debieron haber sido tirados al sitio al que pertenecen, al basurero de la historia' (1993: 69-70). This point is stressed when, talking about the limited publication of fiction during the Civil War, he states:

> Lo que sí se dio en este período de guerra fue la proliferación de libros testimoniales, *de innegable importancia histórica, aunque de dudosa calidad literaria*, cuyo objetivo central ha sido ratificar la justeza de la lucha, denunciar la crueldad del 'enemigo' y reivindicar la 'verdad histórica' de las fuerzas políticas a las que pertenecían los autores de tales libros […] en su mayoría, de izquierda. La proliferación de estos textos […] no justifica la actitud de desprecio al arte de ficcionar […]. (1993: 68, my emphasis)

So, while he is critical of the overstated claims about representing *the* truth he feels some testimonies make, he does not doubt their historical importance, which suggests he considers them as crucial as any other texts, including fiction, for establishing what can never be more than relative truths. In fact, in his essays Castellanos Moya shows enthusiasm and realistic optimism regarding the future of El Salvador. It will not be easy but a culture of peace can be created if all sectors of society are prepared to contribute to the creation of a new society (52-56). He states that one of the basic roles of the intellectual is 'la crítica del poder' (57) and that '[…] "repensar" el país, participar en su rediseño significa un reto y una responsabilidad concreta para el intelectual' (59). However, he also makes it clear that: 'La independencia del

[13] Carpentier puts it neatly: 'No creo que un novelista, por ser marxista, esté obligado a transformar sus novelas en púlpito o cátedra de marxismo. El marxismo en este caso debe ser algo subyacente que se manifieste, diríamos de manera más o menos directa' (1981: 70).

criterio es una condición *sine qua non* para el desarrollo de un pensamiento crítico que permita diseccionar el poder en sus distintas expresiones' (58). So, in terms not unlike those used by Dalton, Argueta and others in the 1950s, he goes on to say that the intellectual must be independent of political parties, ideologies and dogma, but that does not mean s/he should not be socially committed (59). The commitment in the post-civil war context is to creating an all inclusive national identity, for: 'La identidad no es propiedad de ningún gobierno, ni de ni[n]guna ideología, partido político o movimiento social. La identidad es incluyente, no reduccionista; abarca a las mayorías y a las minorías' (78-79). Literature can't feed the hungry nor prevent the explosion of bombs but it may well be able to: '[…] transmitirnos la experiencias ajena, darnos conciencia de que lo otro existe, y sobre todo preservar la memoria' (75). Hence, he goes on to state:

> Probablemente uno de los retos para la literatura en la post-guerra sea inventar el rostro del "otro" salvadoreño, ése que es algo más que guerrillero o soldado, ese ser envuelto en las pasiones y esperanzas que moldean al ser humanos desde siempre. Otro reto quizá sea ayudar a "preservar la memoria," a que la nación no olvide sus taras, esa irracionalidad que nos condujo a la conflagración. (75)

This shows that Castellanos Moya considers that literature can incite renewal and, perhaps, create a common memory that can reconcile the nation and allow people to live together in peace. This may seem idealistic, but he is aware it is a challenge and can't been based on any kind of dogma.

His criticism, though, is not just directed at the author of the prologue but more generally at the Left and the leadership of the guerrilla movement. Hence, he writes:

> El problema, en realidad, es que dicha visión no ha sido exclusiva de un solo líder, sino que a lo largo de las últimas décadas fue expresada por altos dirigentes de los grupos que conforman el FMLN. […] Cayetano Carpio [dead in Managua] […] cada vez que quería denigrar a alguien […] lo llamaba "intelectual" o "poeta." (1993: 64)

This, then, is a critique of a reactionary attitude that rejects all critical reflection that contradicts a given dogma. He argues that one of the signs of a nation's prestige and maturity lies in its ability to look openly and critically at its history and, thus, allow its writers to use it as raw material in their fiction, while: 'El desprecio a la ficción es consustancial a las mentalidades totalitarias y autoritarias. La ficción como ejercicio de libertad, como práctica de invención, asusta a quienes todo quieren controlar, a aquellos para quienes la imaginación debe "ajustarse a las necesidades de la revolución"' (67).[14] Thus, it is clear that, while we can justifiably use terms such as parody, irony and caricature when discussing the attitude of fiction writers to testimony, it is important to recognise that in most cases they are not condemning testimony per se but unsustainable claims made about it and about the role of literature generally by certain politicians and theorists.

It is not my intention to open up the debate on testimony but, before briefly discussing *Insensatez*, I want to make three points to clarify my position. First, I want to stress that, as many critics have argued (cf. Liano, Sklodowska and Arias, quoted above), testimony is not a

[14] Castellanos Moya criticises what he sees as the corrupt leadership of the FMLN, not the liberation struggle itself. His critique here, in fact, is quite similar to that expressed by El Turco in *La diáspora*.

literary genre and it is not new, as Beverley has tried to argue (1989: 12-13 and 24-25).[15] In fact, it is as old as humanity and comes in many different guises: in poetry, fiction, essay, autobiography and journalism, as well as in photography, dance, ritual, symbolic objects, etc., each with their particular characteristics.[16] Hence, the best way to conceptualise testimony is as a wide variety of *textual* practices that reflect the specific situations that gave rise to them and, therefore, have a testimonial function or value.[17] For this same reason, it needs to be highlighted that efforts made to canonise testimony were never totally successful, for many imminent critics, such as Liano, Sklodowska and Arias, never accepted arguments to that effect.

Second, no text can represent absolute truth. Liano is one of a number of commentators who warn against overstating testimony's ability to reproduce *the* truth, observing that: 'apenas la referencia empírica se convierte en configuración discursiva se opera en ella una primera transformación ficcional que la acerca al discurso literario' (2000: 216). In order to properly appreciate testimonies it is necessary to understand how human memory functions. Not only is it, as Primo Levi wrote, 'a marvellous but fallacious instrument' (1987: 11) but it is always mediated through an imaginative or creative process (see Hirsch 1996 and Astvaldsson 2011). Moreover, how witnesses view or interpret the (traumatic) events in their lives tends to change over time. A person's life can be likened to a text that is never fully completed, because there is always more to be added and what is said changes as individuals, their experiences and historical events throw fresh light on the past. Lynn Stephen illustrates this in her introduction to the testimony of the Salvadoran human rights activist María Teresa Tula, who every time they met had something new to add: 'Y siempre habrá más. Un testimonio, como el de la vida de una persona, nunca se concluye. Siempre está en proceso y cambio así como la perspectiva de cada individuo sobre su propia vida y la manera en la cual quiere relatarla al mundo exterior' (Tula 1995: 9). This indicates that debates about whether testimonies are always factually precise have a limited value: rather than expecting them to be 'true' in every detail, it is far more fruitful to consider them for their inherent and emotional truth. Thus, it is not really helpful to contrast the testimonies published during the years of armed conflict with imaginative literature of the post-war period and say that 'en la actualidad, es válido hablar de la novela como escritura que constata un movimiento hacia espacios donde se articulan discursos que reocupan el espacio de la subjetividad' (Ortiz-Wallner 2013: 58): the fact is that *all* literature is subjective.

[15] This is well established. For example, as Craft points out: 'From the time of the Conquest, in which testimonies were accorded legal standing, so that victims, through eyewitness accounts, could reclaim their due, testimonial narrative has expressed urgency, sought redress and justice, and challenged official discourse' (1997: 3). As Arias points out, the *Popol Vuh* is an example of a Central American testimony from the early colonial period (1998:2). For a thorough survey of and theoretical perspective on South American colonial testimonies, see Salomon (2000). Also, see Brotherston (1992), who covers most of the Americas.

[16] Candelario (2001) has highlighted the testimonial function of the visual images of tortured prisoners in Nicaragua. Silko (1981) experiments with the juxtaposition of texts and photographs and, in Silko & Wright (1986), also offers an insightful discussion on the relationship between photographs and spoken and written words. On other alternative forms of expressing identity, difference and resistance, see Vásquez (2002), Harvey (1997) and Rappaport (1997).

[17] In his study of South American colonial testimonies, Salomon shows how alphabetically written versions of the past drew on and related to other kinds of 'mnemonic practices' or 'legible remembrances,' some earlier and some contemporary to the written ones: for example, the past was encoded in 'bodily actions: dances with costumes representing ancient beings, or chants, or pilgrimages to origin places' (2000: 20). The same is true today.

The final point I want to make concerns aesthetic quality. As Sklodowska points out, if it tends to be absent from testimony, this is likely to be because the editors are often uncomfortable with the poetic language used by witnesses and, thus, tend to sanitise the text in order to maintain a desired 'transparency' (1992: 34). This attitude can be seen in the theoretical debate when an opposition is established between testimony, which should convey to the reader a message that is easy to understand, and fiction, which uses a poetic language that interposes itself between the reader and a 'true' understanding of the reality to which the text refers.[18] However, this creates a false problem that hoodwinks the debate on testimony and testimonial function in imaginative literature. To begin with, since testimonies are often associated with subjugated peoples, it can be seen to imply that aesthetics are an exclusive patrimony of the educated upper and middle classes and that poetic imagination is a gift denied to the oppressed.[19] Related to this is the suggestion that all human experiences can be rationalised and expressed in a simple-transparent language that effortlessly depicts reality and reveals an indisputable truth.[20]

This is not so and aesthetic perception and poetic language are essential tools that we all need in order to be able to tackle complex phenomena with which plain language and matter-of-fact discourse simply can't cope. Beverley seems to be bewildered by 'the excruciating detail [Rigoberta Menchú] uses […] to describe the torture and murder of her mother and brother by the Guatemalan army.' Curiously, he concludes that 'the narrative units' that best represent her 'skills and intentionality as a narrator' use a language that 'gives the episodes a hallucinatory and symbolic intensity different from the matter-of-fact narration *one expects* from testimony' (1989: 21, my emphasis). How are we to view this apparent contradiction? It is not difficult to see why many compilers, editors and narrators of testimony want to use a language that is simple and matter-of-fact: they tend to be political activists who want to get across an urgent denunciatory message. However, if we accept there is always a conflict between objective reality and any description of it, it follows that it is often difficult, if not totally impossible, for witnesses to fully comprehend and find the appropriate language in which to explain the terrible events they have experienced.[21] Thus, it is not that difficult to understand why Rigoberta finds herself 'compelled to' make use of a richly metaphoric and

[18] An example typical of this kind of argument can be found in Rivero (1987: 42-43).

[19] While people's capacity to express themselves aesthetically depends on many factors, class and ethnicity are only relevant in that they may influence the form of expression: they do not affect quality (for further discussion of this issue, see Astvaldsson 2006b: 86-89).

[20] In fact, subaltern and native peoples, perhaps more than those supposedly more advanced, are well aware that human life, behaviour and the world are vastly complicated phenomena. The present and future are understood in relation to the past, a complex reality to which true access can only be gained through insight, rituals and religious ceremonies that depend on the spiritual powers of people and divine being. It is not always necessary to articulate the experiences linked to these processes but when words are used they tend to be imbued with metaphors, symbols and images that bring to light perceptive thinking, creativity and wisdom opposite the challenges, wonders and complexities that humans have to face.

[21] Nevertheless, many testimonies show the imaginative, intuitive and creative capacities of witnesses and the poetic qualities of the language they use to depict their reality. A good example is found in Tula's testimony. As a human rights activist in El Salvador in the 1970s, she got to know Monseñor Romero, soon to become the country's most famous martyr, since he was close to her organisation and often attended its meeting. His assassination, therefore, came as a great shock and she describes the impact he, his teachings and his death had on her and her comrades. Of particular interest is how Romero's dead body becomes a symbol and repository of what he stood for. Standing next to it for a short moment Tula senses that he is still there, smiling, talking to her, and able to provide the love, wisdom, understanding and encouragement the oppressed received from him in life: 'Cuando yo lo ví (sic.) ahí parecía tener una sonrisa y podía oír que nos decía que siguiéramos adelante, que estaba con nosotras' (Tula 1995: 89-90). And, of course, he lives on in people's minds and in the images they keep in their houses throughout El Salvador today.

symbolically intense language when confronted with the almost impossible task of having to describe the torture and murder of her mother and brother.

Now, taking into account the profound scepticism Castellanos Moya has towards politics and towards the idea that literature should, or indeed can, play a political role, it is noticeable that his seventh novel, which to an extent deals with the relationship between politics, testimony and literature, should be entitled *Insensatez*. In this novel, written well into the post-civil war period, the author seems to be saying that, if used for the purposes of political propaganda, a testimony has limited meaning, while it has profound human and aesthetic values when used to express the emotional turmoil of the thousands of innocent victims traumatised by the extreme and *senseless* violence inflicted upon them in Central America during the twentieth century: experiences that, ultimately, cannot be expressed using a transparent, matter-of-fact language, because they don't make rational sense and thus don't have any simple explanation. In fact, in this novel Castellanos Moya, consciously or not, dramatizes the need that the victims have to use poetic language to describe their traumatic experiences. Focusing on the language used in each case, the novel sets up a striking contrast between the attitude and mentality of the anonymous narrator-protagonist, who has been hired by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala to correct the style of an extensive manuscript containing the harrowing testimonies of hundreds of survivors and witnesses of the Guatemalan Civil War, and those of the victims, Mayan indigenous people.[22]

The proof reader immediately becomes fascinated with the poetic quality of the language used by the victims, who often saw their whole family brutally killed before their eyes. Hence, he refers to sentences such as '*Se queda triste su ropa…*' or '*Las casas estaban tristes porque ya no había personas dentro…*' as 'versos que para mí expresaban toda la desolación después de la masacre' (30-31). We can assume that this poetic language reflects their native culture, i.e., how they relate to the living world they see themselves to inhabit, which again allows them to work through the trauma they have experienced using their intuition and creative imagination.

The poetic language used by the Maya clashes dramatically with the blunt, aggressive and often brutal language used by the protagonist when talking about his own situation. While clearly also traumatised by the violence he experienced in his own country, he gives little away and is caught up in a vicious cycle, unable to work through his problems. He has no clear principles or convictions, so no aims for which to fight. Working for the Catholic Church, which he hates – he describes himself as 'un ateo vicioso' (16) –, his main interest seems to be earning the money the job pays, despite the fact that working in the office he feels like an encaged animal (16). In fact, he repeatedly refers to being paranoiac, because he has a pathological fear that the military are looking for him: nothing indicates that they have any reason to suspect him of anything. Unable to work through his trauma, perhaps because he cannot find the language in which to exorcise his demons, he resorts to drinking alcohol and is obsessed with sex.[23] So, while he clearly admires the poetic language of the Maya, he does not really seem to be able to relate to their experiences and, ironically, it quickly becomes clear that all he can do is correct spelling mistake and syntax, perhaps making the

[22] It is clear from the context the novel provides that the manuscript referred to is the four volumes *REMHI Report* (1998), sponsored and published by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala.

[23] Like the male characters in *La diáspora*, the way in which he talks about women is degrading: they only serve as objects of his rather unsavory sexual desires.

text more palatable, easier to understand, for the target readership, outsiders to the culture of the victims.

Taking into account what he wrote in the essays published in the early 1990s (Castellanos Moya 1993), it is interesting that Castellanos Moya should use *Insenzatez* (2004), first published twelve years after the signing of the Salvadoran Peace Accords, to reflect on the differences in the language used by indigenous victims/survivors who in the post-civil war period are trying to come to terms with the horrors they witnessed during the long years of violence and that used by a westernised intellectual, also a victim of violence, who is unable to work through his trauma, perhaps, because he feels, like the author, partly responsible for what took place.[24] The former, who know the violence has no rational explanation, use their intuition and poetic language to try to come to terms with what happened, while the latter, wobbling around in his misery, 'sin lograr la concentración necesaria de una buena paja, porque de pronto se infiltraba en mi mente el nombre de Itzel, un nombre sin rostro pero através de vericuetos mentales despertaba mi morbo' (71), contemplates turning the tragedy into a novel, although he eventually realises the absurdity of such a project (74).

To conclude, I return to two questions posed at the beginning: What changes occurred and what are the similarities and divergences between the Salvadoran literature written during the 'guerrilla period' (Arias 2007: ix) and during post-civil war era? Did a precipitous fissure open up or are we rather talking about a long, on-going period of transition? What we have seen is that one of the key differences between the two periods is that initially the revolutionary struggle produced tangible hope of a better future – what many critics have chosen to define as a utopian vision. Even if we don't agree that utopia should be viewed in negative terms as unrealistic,[25] the fact is that, for many people, the hope created quickly turned into a nightmare, not only because the rebellion had failed but because the leaders of the guerrilla movements had shown themselves to be almost as corrupt and power hungry as those who headed the regimes their trying to topple: hence, the revolutionary ideals quickly faded or, worse, died. Moreover, if the repression that led to civil war had been ferocious and unjust and the political violence perpetrated against it initially seemed to be to be justified, in the post-war period the oppression not only continued to exist but was accompanied by increased and evermore senseless criminal violence that the armed struggle ironically helped to create. This, then, shows that, while changes took place, precipitous rupture did not occur but, rather, we are looking at an on-going period of transition in which the violence continued to prevail and tangible progress is difficult to identify.

Going back to the quote that inspired the title of this paper (see footnote 1), if Castellanos Moya is looking for a style in which to express the grim reality he is faced with, paradoxically, at the same time, he is also revealing both the testimonial value of his fiction and the limitations of language when it comes to conveying [traumatic] human experiences. In the end, then, for him, the role of literature is to express a series of human experiences whose formulation, ultimately, can only be expressed using poetic language. In this aspect, he would seem to coincide with his predecessors, such as Argueta, while a key difference is that he refuses to use literature explicitly as a platform for socio-political denunciation. That, though, does not mean that socio-political commitment is totally absent from his work but, rather, that it is not obvious but latent: perhaps he does not want to offer his readership false

[24] See Verduchi [n.d]: 3, quoted above.
[25] For a positive view on utopia, see Roa Bastos (1973) and Astvaldsson (2003).

hopes? The often surprisingly optimistic tone and idealism that characterises much of the work of his predecessors, and even some of his own early essays, has been replaced with a combination of scepticism and indifference, which is, I argue, what defines the attitude of his main characters and his literary aesthetic.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 10

RECONSTRUCTING THE PLOT OF HISTORY: THE LATEST PROPOSAL FOR THE HISTORICAL NOVEL BY CASTELLANOS MOYA*

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I

Walter Benjamin proposes an innovative way of understanding history, or rather, the relationship between the past and the present. He deliberately reverses the Nietzschean proposal that has become the formula used by the critical historian: that history is written from the point of view of the interests of the present.[1] For Benjamin, there is something more than a utilitarian appropriation of the archive, since the revolutionary historian, as he conceives him, does not reach out to the past to understand the present, but, rather, carries out the opposite exercise: explains the past taking as a point of departure the present because the past takes on full meaning from the demands of the present (Löwy 2005). In other words, history is ripe with experiences of loss waiting to be redeemed at those junctures in which new possibilities for emancipation emerge.

I believe it is possible to carry out this exercise through *Tirana memoria* (2011) by Horacio Castellanos Moya. This novel continues a family saga about the recent history of El Salvador that begins in 2003 with *Donde no estén ustedes* (2003). However, *Tirana memoria* is the first of his works that explicitly deals with historical memory as a problem. This is a novelty not only in this author's works but also in a corpus of recent Salvadoran novels, which earlier had the tendency to overlook this task.[2] In fact, most of the recent narrative production in the country has been temporarily anchored to the present and, in this sense, the

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[1] Nietzsche's criticism of romantic historiography can be found in Nietzsche (1991).
[2] I have examined this topic in '*Libro de los desvaríos* y los límites de la conciencia histórica en El Salvador.'

works by Castellanos Moya such as *Baile con serpientes* (1996) or *El asco* (1997) function as allegories of a present degraded by the ruins of the revolutionary project.[3]

Tirana memoria is woven around the events of 1944 in El Salvador, which gave way to a movement of civil resistance against the dictatorship of General Hernández Martínez. It was in this context that the famous 'sit-down strike' culminated with the tyrant fleeing the country, but without achieving the elimination of the military institution's control of the state that he had put into place. Martínez's overthrow through passive resistance marks an important moment in national history because it is one of the most spectacular instances in which a historical memory*demos* is constituted and politically manifested, that is, a heterogeneous collective that occupies public space and demands sovereignty over a corrupt, violent, and illegitimate state power. Until then, democracy had been a more or less abstract ideal that existed only in the programs and writings of an enlightened intellectuality. However, in 1944, the people took over the streets and created, for a brief period of time, a void that desacralized the monopoly of the powerful.

This is an experience that left a vivid imprint on the survivors of the period and that lingered for a long time in popular memory. However, with the passing of time it has faded away from the national political imaginary, becoming practically non-existent. This process of forgetting is surprising, especially among leftist circles, because the demarcations that conform the contemporary national political scene can easily recall 1944, surely more clearly than 1932, which Salvadorans have in mind when evoking the first half of the twentieth-century.

The inscription of dates on the calendar of the historical imaginary is something that deserves to be examined thoroughly. These milestones are precisely what contribute to shape the narratives that draw political scenes and, consequently, give shape to actors and itineraries of action. The Salvadoran left has invested an important amount of its intellectual energies in building as its foundational moment the events of 1932, the famous popular insurrection that ended up being drowned in blood and in genocidal actions against the Indigenous Pipil people of the Western region of the country.[4]

This effort is what characterizes the preservation of the events of 1932, especially the genealogy of the popular insurrection and of its most visible leader, Farabundo Martí, that the intellectuals of the *Generación comprometida* (Committed Generation) carried out. Let us

[3] I examine this topic in Roque Baldovinos (2004).

[4] In 1932 a popular insurrection took place in different regions of El Salvador, especially in the Western part of the country. This insurrection was led by the Salvadoran Communist Party, then, recently recognized by the law. The insurrection was violently suffocated by the government presided by General Maximiliano Hernández, who had reached power after a *coup d'état* that toppled the civilian democratically elected president, Arturo Araujo. Martínez was, in fact, Araujo's vice-president. With this *coup d'état* began a continued period of military governments that was prolonged until 1979. Hernández Martínez governed with an iron fist, prohibited all types of political opposition, and showed sympathies with Fascism in the first years of his government. He was also famous for publicly professing his religious and philosophical ideas linked to theosophy, which he shared with many intellectuals and artists, such as Farabundo Martí, the leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, who was killed by a firing squad during the repression of the 1932 insurrection. In 1944, Hernández Martínez had to abandon power after a series of civilian protests, known as the sit-down strike, which were the popular reaction to the brutal repression that the regime unchained after a failed *coup d-état*. The democratic forces that were the protagonists of the overthrow of the dictator gathered later around the figure of Doctor Arturo Romero. Eventually an electoral fraud imposed the military candidate, General Salvador Castaneda Castro, with whom the style of authoritarian governments controlled by the army continued. This marked, up to a certain point, the defeat of the popular movement which, nevertheless, continued to be active both clandestinely and under the limited forms of legality allowed by the dictatorship. The classic book about 1932 is by Thomas Anderson. Regarding the movement of 1944, see Parkman (1998).

remember the poetic and historical works by Roque Dalton or the biography of Farabundo Martí by Jorge Arias Gómez, which strives to turn this leader into a comparable figure to that of Augusto César Sandino (Dalton, Arias Gómez). This poetic historical effort invented an identity and a mission for the Salvadoran revolutionary left. This is an understandable gesture in the case of Roque Dalton and the communists of the early sixties. The Communist Party did not only have the duty of memory towards its founder but also the aspirations of being at the forefront of the revolutionary emancipation. The year 1932 reinforced this narrative by creating an antagonistic figure, the military dictatorship, and more precisely, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who not only was the first in a series of military presidents that followed each other in power until 1979, but he was also a contemporary and, for the most part, sympathizer of the fascist European dictatorships.

However, the history behind 1932 is quite complex. First, it contains an emancipatory impulse, the indigenous subject, whom the communist narrative was not able to understand and whom only the more recent historical research has emphasized. Secondly, its connection with the most recent anti-establishment movements is much more opaque than is claimed. The insurrection of 1932 was an aborted movement that was violently suppressed. And the most gravely hit was the effort for Indigenous claims. The indigenous component underwent a transformation from being organic to being a sort of empty signifier that embodied the people in rebellion. And many who called for the occupation of this place were those who, in their time, allowed themselves to be overcome by fear of the unexpected irruption of otherness and dazzled by the military dictatorship and its corporative promise. This is what happens to Pericles Aragón, one of the three protagonists of *Tirana memoria*.[5] This dark chapter in history is precisely erased from the revolutionary mythology of 1932.

It is important to emphasize that the insurrection of 1932 was defeated not only by its resort to physical violence but also through ideological means, among them, the successful and pioneering establishment of the ghost of communism in the political imaginary, with its doses of racism and neo-colonial paranoia. This ghost has, by the way, demonstrated a persistent efficacy up to the present. Thus, 1932 paradoxically became also a fundamental date for the Salvadoran right, since it marks for them 'the defeat of communism' and the continuity of an authoritarian and corporate vision that, not by chance, is presently revived at the inauguration of each political campaign of *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (ARENA), in a rally that takes place in Izalco, the central site of the events of 1932, especially the beginning of the great massacres of Indigenous people symbolized by the lynching of the Indigenous leader Feliciano Ama. It is not by coincidence that 1932 has become part of the right's imaginary and its anti-communist narrative.

Paradoxically, both the left and the right invoke the popular insurrection of 1932 as a central date in their mythological calendar precisely to conjure up the leading role of the people in history. In this way, 1932 has become the axis for two narratives that are ideologically opposed but that share the mistrust for the democratic political action. On the part of the right this is clear. Popular protagonism is evil because it is impossible. It is equivalent to returning to barbarism. Popular insurrection was the result of foreign intervention, of the malicious manipulation of naïve plebeian minds. The bloody suppression was nothing more than the application of the principle of the state sovereignty under extreme

[5] In fact, the intellectual complicity with Hernández Martínez's regime is put into evidence by Lara Martínez (2011).

conditions. It meant rescuing the national political body from foreign infection (Candelario 2002). It is not by chance that after 1932 Salvadoran artists and intellectuals invested so much in the representation of a folkloric vision where a harmonic national community is posed, which is expressed by the small peasant town where a naive and pacific national ethos exists in its purest expression.

The democratic suspicion of the left is, of course, subtler. From the perspective of the left, elaborated as we have shown by intellectuals linked to the Salvadoran Communist Party at some point of their political trajectories, 1932 emerges as the bitter lesson of revolutionary inexperience. It is the aborted emancipation due to the inability or impossibility of the political *avant-garde* to constitute itself as such, of a fatal lack of communication between leaders and the masses. In this way, it is read as a painful experience that only confirms the need for a conduction of the popular energies from the scientific socialism of the *avant-garde* political party.

The exhaustion of historical optimism of the revolutionary movements, the creation of a new political scene as a result of the Peace Accords, and, especially, the novelty of the triumph by democratic means of the options offered by the left through recent electoral processes, demand a revision of the historical mythology of the country, with the hope that in this process it might be possible to discern new course of action. Keeping the imaginaries of polarization alive has been the suitable formula for the continuity of the right and the authoritarianism of the left. The events of 1944 seen from the perspective of the urgency of the present open up a window in the historical past where in the midst of the lengthy lethargy of Martínez's dictatorship, sustained by conformism and terror, a vertiginous inflexion of historical time took place that opened up unprecedented possibilities for political renovation. 1944 is the history of how the ghosts raised by dictatorial power were conjured up and a *demos* took shape, a heterogeneous political collective at a moment that can be seen as inaugural for contemporary Salvadoran politics. The novel by Castellanos Moya allows us, in the Benjaminian manner, to glimpse this historical moment as part of the constellation under which we can illuminate the present. However, in order to perceive this lucidity, we also have to face the postmodern sense of catastrophe that impregnates Castellanos Moya's fiction. This might be seen as an antidote to naive optimisms and also as complicit with a pessimism that participates in the condemnation of emancipatory desire as totalitarian delirium.

This second possible reading is strengthened if we consider the contradictory cultural space in which the novel by Castellanos Moya is inserted. The need to open up a space for itself in a transnational literary scene marked by a market logic and the difficulty that this poses for the effectiveness of its narrative construction to intervene in the construction of the plot of historical memory in El Salvador in a relevant way. Let's remember that Castellanos Moya has been able to successfully place his works in the Iberian American literary circuit. This space allows for the notable visibility of his literary work, but also enables the stories about violence and abjection that are part of collective memory, when detached from the relevant cultural and historical contexts, to be trivialized as an expression of a new species of exoticism of abjection. In the contemporary transnational imaginary, what is exotic has been degraded to the point of ceasing to contain the euphoric promise of primitive redemption of Carpentier's concept of the *real maravilloso* or of García Márquez's magical realism. In these narrative configurations, a form of redemption opened up for humanity through a coat of primitivism. The new exoticism of abjection allowed the reader who places him or herself physically or imaginarily within the metropolis to delight in the picturesque spectacle of an

otherness that in its grotesque character allows for the tedium of organized life to be forgotten, but at the same time to be comforted by placing it on the other side of the global border of barbarism.

It would be important to ask ourselves up to what point the literary constructions of novels such as those by Horacio Castellanos Moya participate, along with a series of artistic and mediating narratives, such as the ones that sustain the mythology of gangs, in the effort of shaping for El Salvador a statute of the infernal epiphany of globalization. The present essay, in its attempt to re-establish a connection between Castellanos Moya's novels with the historical memory of El Salvador, strives to restitute its symbolic density, and in this way, to propose a way of resisting this type of confiscation of our reality.

II

The dialogue that Castellanos Moya establishes with history in *Tirana memoria* is charged with ambivalences, ironies, and desacralizing gestures. If there is anything we can be sure of, it is that it does not pretend to establish a new national epic to mobilize revolutionary energies as Dalton does in his epic anti-novel *Historias prohibidas del pulgarcito* or Benjamin does in his exploration of the aesthetics of fragmentation and the dialectic image (Benjamin 2006). Since the publication of his first novel, *La diáspora* (1989), Castellanos Moya has devoted his efforts to satirize Salvadoran nationalism and the erosion of revolutionary utopia. Castellanos Moya, therefore, is comfortable in the ironic and sceptical space of the novel. From that space he launches a proposal for the reconstruction of historical memory that argues for the reconsideration and revision of forgotten moments that have been reconstructed from a perspective tainted by the pessimism of catastrophe.

This can be observed even by considering the title of the book. The exercise of memory is not seen as a gesture of self-celebration and complacency, as might be expected in certain acts meant to commemorate historical memory which have become fashionable. I am referring to that commemoration that becomes conventional and repetitive. Paul Ricoeur called these excesses of memory 'abuses of memory' (2003: 81-124). The title warns us that the work of memory is not something that we should desire. Rather, on the contrary, it is something that we cannot avoid. It is an experience that is uncomfortable, painful, because it is the weight of determination from which we are unable to escape. The quote by Elías Canetti that opens the novel insinuates this as it closes by stating: 'Quizá por eso no es libre el hombre, porque queda demasiado de los muertos en él, y ese mucho se resiste a extinguirse' (11). This passage would seem to enter in contradiction with the Benjaminian vision of history: it expresses a desire to become emancipated from the past, from the weight that the dead exert over the living. Human beings would be trapped in a vicious circle of repetition that is desirable, but maybe impossible to overcome. Or, it could be instead that memory is the only way out of that circle, the only way to exorcize the weight of the past. We will see how the novel opens a debate related precisely to this dilemma: to break away from the determination of death that human action brings about, or to be a dumbfounded witness of human inability to extract lessons from history.

We must not forget, however, that the understanding of memory is carried out by Castellanos Moya as a novelist. That is, it is not expressed through concepts or arguments,

but rather through what is a characteristic of literary fiction: a space-time construction that frames itineraries executed by imaginary characters. For this reason, it is convenient to direct our attention to the writing of the novel, especially, to the unusually complex architecture of the plot, to the plays of the voices and the peculiar vision of historical time that is transmitted through its formal games.

The novel does not build a single linear temporal progression, but rather a game of counterpoints and temporal inflexions that are manifested in its chapter organization. It is composed by two parts separated by an important historical ellipsis. The first part is entitled 'Haydée y los prófugos.' It is strictly contemporary to the events of 1944, and it contains two stories as counterpoint. These are not told by different narrators. The first narration, which corresponds to Haydée, the female protagonist, tells of her family drama using the private language register of her personal journal. We know, through what she writes there on a daily basis, about her husband Pericles' prison days, and about the escape of her son Clemente, within the frame of the political conflicts of the time. It is quite significant that it is through this discursive genre and from the tonality of an intimate dialogue with herself that Haydée narrates the public dimension of the historical events. In face of the absence of a public space of enunciation, suppressed by the censorship and repression of the dictatorship, the consciousness of the events finds other channels, rumour and conspiracy, which are gathered in Haydée's diary. This is how we learn about the failure of the plot designed by the traditional political agents: politicians, intellectuals, and democratic members of the military. But the neutralizing of these subjects does not presuppose in any way the triumph of the tyrant. Inexplicably, a resistance movement of great reach begins to emerge. This is where the participation of non-traditional political subjects becomes crucial: women, particularly the relatives of those being hunted, young people, and the urban popular sectors. Haydée's story takes the pulse of that movement, of its almost spontaneous constitution where the participation of the marginal subjects is crucial and leads to the dictator's overthrow and to popular triumph.

The diary goes from being the expression of Haydée's intimate realm to becoming a historical registry. We have the mother who, once back in the private space, jots down on the page her pain over the family's suffering provoked by the political events. But slowly it becomes a sort of historical chronicle. Let's pay attention to how this game that oscillates between the public and the private is manifested through an entry in the diary corresponding to 10 April:

> ¡Condenaron a muerte a Clemente! ¡Y fusilaron al general Marroquín, al coronel Tito Calvo y a otros ocho oficiales! Las radios repiten una y otra vez la noticia. Es el acabose. Todos estamos consternados. (117)

Haydée narrates political events, her son's death sentence, and the execution of protagonists of the *coup d'état* attempt against the dictator. She comments on what the radio stations controlled by the dictatorship repeat, when in unison they repeat the official story. But surreptitiously she introduces a collective subject through her statement, 'We are all dismayed,' which slowly takes on strength in the narration. It is the voices of the witnesses of the political spectacle that slowly go on to occupy the central role in the resistance movement. We see this in her entry of 14 April:

> Doña Chayito pasó por casa a las diez de la mañana; traía la copia del comunicado escondida en el refajo. Me recordó que yo debía sacar el mayor número de copias posibles para repartir entre los conocidos, que era la única manera de darnos a conocer, que todas las imprentas están controladas por las espías del general. (161)

Censorship and repression lead precisely to the transformation of the private act of writing (in this case the handwritten transcription of the *communiqués*) and of talking with acquaintances into an act of political dimensions, into an act that contributes to the constitution of the *demos* of democratic resistance. In this narrative there is an inflection of the melancholy of loneliness rising to the epic euphoria that celebrates the triumph of the popular movement.

The parallel story is that of Clemente, her intellectual and bohemian son, who participates in the conspiracy to overthrow the dictatorship plotted by civilians and members of the military. When the plot fails, Clemente is forced to go underground and to embark on an escape full of adventures in order to free himself from the vengeful hand of the tyrant, who orders a firing squad to kill without hesitation the rebels that fall in his power and issues a death sentence against all the fugitives. In his escape, Clemente is accompanied by his friend Jimmy, a professional member of the army. The discursive genre of this episode is that of quite a sober narration, in the fashion of a cinematographic script, where the abundant and animated dialogues of the two main characters contrast with the objective and impersonal descriptions of the environment. As we are informed by a 'Note by the author' (357-58) that appears at the end of the novel, the narration is inspired by the testimony of a historical character.[6] The escape is something that, from the beginning, contradicts the construction of heroism. However, this could be alleviated and integrated into an epic narrative in the measure of its humanizing of the hero, turning him into a man of flesh and bones in his desire to avoid death and to survive in order to continue with the struggle. However, *Tirana memoria* points in a different direction:

> –Qué descaro. Grandes golpistas ustedes los civiles –dice Jimmy, indignado–. Mientras nosotros combatíamos, nos jugábamos el pellejo a tiros, ustedes en la gran fiesta dale que dale al whisky. Y todavía te atrevés a reclamar por qué las cosas salieron como salieron…
>
> –No jodás, Jimmy. Ustedes estaban peor que nosotros. Si tu tal coronel Tito Calvo llegó a la embajada gringa cayéndose de borracho cuando salió del tanque…
>
> –Vos no estabas ahí.
>
> –Pero me lo contó el cónsul, quien sí estaba ahí. Cayéndose de borracho y cagado del miedo, rogando que le dieran asilo. Y ése era el gran jefe militar –dice Clemen con desprecio–. No me vengás con sermones ahora. (71)

There is a visible ridicule of the characters supposed deeds. Besides, as the narration progresses, it accentuates the animosity between the interlocutors, which comes from the dislike and suspicion between civilian conspirators and the members of the military. But it is a petty conflict, full of envies originating from the mystification of power.

[6] The historical character is Captain Guillermo Fuentes Castellanos, even though the author says that none of the characters in the novel represents him or his companion.

The small world that creates the interaction between these two characters during their forced isolation becomes an indicator of the pettiness of the political world, of its removal from real life. This can be seen in the objective descriptions that accompany the dialogues. These paint with brief strokes a removed rural context, indifferent to the political plot and foreign to the urban characters. When the characters seek refuge at an isolated place along the coast to try to escape, they have an unexpected encounter:

> Una pareja de mujeres jóvenes camina por la playa con sendos canastos sobre sus cabezas; van descalzas, como si siguieran el hilo de espuma que dejan las olas en su retirada, estampando las huellas de sus pisadas sobre la arena mojada […]. Las mujeres caminan en dirección al muelle; una ráfaga de viento les unta los vestidos blancos al cuerpo. Pasan de largo (203-4).

These peasant women that pass by don't even provoke curiosity on the part of the protagonists. Being removed from urban space and entering the countryside is not an important experience, it does not provoke anthropological curiosity of any kind, as has been the topic of narrations about political escapes or guerrilla adventures. In the end, the characters are left at the mercy of the elements, in a coastal natural environment that is inhospitable and that does not generate the most minimal descriptive interest in the narration. This story is left unfinished. There is an ellipsis that takes us to the culmination of these characters' adventure. We only get to know that the fugitives have been saved because of what Haydée tells us in her section. In this way, the novel denies them their participation in the triumph of the movement, but more importantly, their perspective on the events.

The second part of the novel, titled 'El almuerzo,' is considerably shorter than the first one. It only takes up the last fifty pages, so almost comes across as an epilogue. Nevertheless, it is of vital importance for the peculiar construction of the sense of historical time of *Tirana memoria*. It forces us to take a sudden temporal jump of nineteen years. It deliberately omits the immediate failure of the movement of 1944, that is, the depressing succession of authoritarian military regimes that take over the country. This prolepsis takes us at once to the year of 1973, which also acquires a symbolic dimension in the novel because it situates itself explicitly as the start of the armed struggle that is part of the revolutionary movement of the 1970s and 1980s. But what could be announced as a moment of hope, of the historic vindication of a continually delayed redemption, is instead presented as the anticipation of catastrophe because for the protagonist's family it is time of devastation caused either by natural misfortune, as when illness takes Haydée prematurely, or by the sinister enigmas of local society.

The narrator of the second part is Chelón, a visual artist and old friend of Haydée's. He is a character clearly inspired by Salarrué, the great writer and painter of the first half of the twentieth-century in El Salvador.[7] This character is crucial in closing the novel with an aura of mystery and lyricism. His irruption creates an expectation that the novel has a poetically coded meaning. However, this character acts in contraposition to the protagonist of this story,

[7]Just as this character, Salarrué was 'pintor y poeta' (320), despite being known mainly as a writer. He lived his last years in *Los Planes de Renderos*, in a place that we immediately identify through the description that El Chelón provides about his neighborhood: 'en la cumber del cerro, frente a la última parade del autobus, a la entrada del parque Balboa' (310). His friends used to know him as 'El Chele,' because of his fair skin and his light hair color. This is a subtext that in spite of not defining the meaning of the text, it clearly enriches it and emerges as we read the novel keeping in mind its historical and geographical references.

Pericles, the father, who had been unable to act because he was imprisoned in the first section of the novel. Now that he finally has his moment, he is old, defeated, and suffering from an incurable illness. This is how his friend describes him after a phone conversation that opens this part of the novel:

> El viejo Pericles era apenas dos años mayor que yo y su turno estaba llegando. Percibí el desasosiego, la leve brisa que se colaba desde el patio. Me desperecé. Luego caminé hacia el estudio, el escritorio donde ahora escribo, a releer los apuntes de esa madrugada. Pensé que debería tener un espantapájaros para ahuyentar los cuervos de mi mente. (309)

It is under this premonition of the end that Chelón tells us in detail about the lunch at his house that Pericles attends as a guest. We know that he lives alone. His wife, Haydée has died of cancer; Clemente, his son, has been mysteriously murdered.[8] Chelón explains to us here that his death is due to personal matters and not to political circumstances, as everyone suspects:

> Le dispararon por la espalda una noche cuando salía de la sede de alcohólicos anónimos de la colonia Centroamérica. En el momento creímos que se podía tratar de un crimen político porque el país estaba revuelto por las elecciones. El viejo Pericles permanecía exiliado en Costa Rica; las autoridades le otorgaron el salvoconducto de retorno. Nunca capturaron al culpable y supongo que el caso está engavetado. Lo más seguro es que haya sido la venganza de un poderoso militar, según los rumores, un ajuste de cuentas por una puesta de cuernos. Desde joven, Clemente fue proclive a los enredos de faldas. (315)

We also know that Haydée's and Pericles' other children live in exile, in Costa Rica. During the lunch, Pericles informs his friends that the doctors have revealed to him that his cancer is terminal and that he has made the decision to not undergo treatment. A few days later Pericles kills himself. The lunch has been, in reality, his farewell.

The narration presents a few details to construct the atmosphere of this farewell. It is the dense and static atmosphere of the end of the rainy season. The wind is coming, the arrival of a new time: '[E]stábamos en los estertores de la época seca, con la tierra porosa y la vegetación marchita, y aún quedaba por lo menos una semana antes de la primera lluvia' (315). But this new time that approaches is not one of renovation, it is the time of the repetition that the two old friends discuss in relation to the esoteric ideas for which Chelón shows fondness. It is the repetition of a new cycle of violence, at least this is the premonition that Pericles manifests to his friend:

> –Nada bueno se nos viene encima… –comenté.
>
> –Aquí siempre las cosas son peor de lo que imaginamos […] Por suerte ya no me tocará verlo –agregó sin autocompasión, como si de verdad previera. (333)

The repetition of the natural cycles prefigures an inescapable destiny for the country, a sort of curse that Pericles' descendants will have to endure.

[8]His death is an important event in the previous novel of this saga, entitled *Desmoronamiento* (2006).

The chapter closes when Chelón describes his series of paintings of fallen angels. These paintings portray characters from daily life with wings. These are angels expelled from paradise and who now have to purge their destiny on earth. The last one of these paintings shows Pericles as a fallen angel:

> Recién he terminado el cuadro del viejo Pericles como ángel caído. Está sentado en la mecedora, en la terraza, como esa última tarde, con el vaso de whisky en su regazo, sujeto con ambas manos, y el puro en el cenicero, sobre la mesita; destacan sus gafas de carey y las alas le caen sobre los faldones de la guayabera blanca. Tiene un pequeño agujero en la sien derecha, del que mana un hilito de sangre. Su mirada me salió demasiado triste, acuosa, pero ya no la voy a corregir. Lo he pintado para mí, con mis últimas fuerzas; se titula EL ANGEL SIN OFICIO. Cuando lo vio terminado, Carmela lloró: 'A Haydée le hubiera encantado,' dijo. (355)

This is how the painter-poet ciphers history. He has confessed before that he could not do it in any other way:

> […] me dije una vez más que la historia de la familia Aragón no era material para un relato, sino para una tragedia, que yo nunca me atrevería a escribir, porque ya la vida me había pasada y de volver a vivirla quizá optaría por el silencio, tal como el viejo Pericles, pero sin su amargura. (318)

The description of the painting with which he finishes gives this narration the tone of an elegy that is unexpected in Castellanos Moya's novels, which are filled with dirty realism and cynicism. But this ending seeks to translate history into a hermetic allegory captured in Chelón's painting where Pericles appears as a fallen angel. This is what remains from all the vicissitudes of the characters of the novel. Everything else has faded away. The protagonists are dead and of Haydée's diaries we do not know anything.

III

Tirana memoria is structured in a complex logic and temporal architecture as three stories that can neither be completed separately nor come together into a globalizing arch-narrative. Both the family drama and this country's history are presented in a fragmented and elliptical way. As we have demonstrated before, each one of those parts has a protagonist that is part of a family triangle: mother, son, and father. Each part also has its own tonality, both because of the atmosphere that it recreates and because of the discursive genres that it evokes (diary, objective narration, and poetic reminiscence). The failure of the Salvadoran democratic movement is contrasted with the failure of the family romance that culminates with Haydée's and Clemente's deaths and Pericles' suicide.

However, as we have seen, the novel closes with the elegiac episode and it gives to us the allegorical figure of the fallen angel. In this way, it offers readers the possibility of establishing a link that has been broken with the past, the tragedy of the Aragón family as well as the episode of hope of 1944, and the present that takes off under the premonition of the civil war.

The enigmatic portrait of Pericles gives us a clue for part of the history that seeks closure. His contemplative face and his sad look suggest the loss of his dreams, of his political deed that ends in defeat. In this way, the novel presents the mourning of a traditional political subject incarnated by Pericles Aragón, and that is redoubled by the artistic subject of Clemente. Let us not forget that Clemente is presented to us as a failed writer, sunk in alcoholism and indolence. The choice of Pericles' first name is not by chance. It is a detail of the realism that alludes to the enlightened and anticlerical convictions of a generation that gave impulse to the liberal Salvadoran project. But it also has symbolic connotations. Pericles is the father of Greek democracy, a wise governor. Pericles Aragón embodies this ideal in his life trajectory from an illustrated member of the military, to an idealistic student of the law who was also a critical journalist, and culminating in his transformation into a communist militant. His trajectory is emblematic of the illustrated political Salvadoran subject and his way of conceiving politics. It is the ideal of an elite politics where self-sacrifice and the temerity of conspiracy have been the main form of ammunition. However, in the end, the novel presents this as a style of politics that failed enormously during the decisive moments of the struggle against the tyrant and that continued to sow failures in subsequent processes. It is a style of behaviour that his son Clemente emulates in a somewhat parodist manner, particularly as he strives to obtain recognition and a protagonist role. In this way, there is a patriarchal narcissism that removes them from the road to history. Let us remember that in the end, neither Pericles nor Clemente are protagonists of the history that they strive to unleash, they are not even its witnesses. The role of the witness and protagonist falls by chance upon Haydée, whose registry of historical times is lost or possibly survives, through the means of anonymous orality, the counter history that is, in the plane of reality, the prime matter of novels.

The sense of historical time that the novel poses is marked, therefore, by a vision of scepticism in the face of the great narratives of the political ideologies. This is especially the case in face of the metanarrative of politics with its emblematic figure of the progressive political conspirator, and the inevitable announcement of the arrival of the new times. These are the times that prefigure in the actions of the *demos*, particularly of Haydée and the true anonymous protagonists of the dictator's overthrow. Tirana memoria presents a saga that does not close as an epic, not even a Bildung. It is a lesson of history whose transmission is interrupted and that in any case is inscribed in the painting of the fallen angel as a cipher, as an allegory. There is a sense that life can only be restituted allegorically. Pericles becomes an allegory to be deciphered in a time to come, our present.

But this allegory offers us a double possibility of interpretation. There is, on the one hand, the most obvious one, the imminence of catastrophe: The death of the protagonists, their inevitable physical disappearance just like the natural cycles described above. It is a history without lessons. The blind inertia of a society marked by an original violence that it is not able to overcome and that marks each one of the episodes of the Aragón family saga. As we said at the beginning, Castellanos Moya's novels are marked by the resentment due to the loss of revolutionary utopia. In the end, this adventure seems to be marked by the same constitutive irrationality of a degraded humanity.

However, nihilism is completely impossible in literature. It is a desperate protest in the face of a desired redemption that is ultimately not enunciated. That is where the movement of 1944 acquires its epiphanic potency, as that instant in which a rupture with the cycle of violence is finally achieved, even if only fleetingly. That is the moment of the suspected

emergence of a new historical subject, the *demos*, which will also initiate the new historical cycle that is about to begin. It is a destiny that remains inaccessible to Pericles' intelligence and, in any case, to his friend as the writer of memories. It is with the addressee and the deciphering of the enigmatic story that the future lies. This is the way in which the history that the novel relives speaks about our present. The arrival to the state power of a political proposal that is able to activate memory and democratic aspirations and that can be traced to 1944 places the nation at a crossroads. The question is posed regarding whether this apparent rupture of a continuous line of authoritarian domination means the start of a new period for the country, of a new way of doing politics where the monopoly on the part of the excluding and violent elites is broken. Or should we wait for this new moment to become the continuity of the domination with new faces, the repetition of the politics of enlightened conspirators. In the end, Pericles' catastrophe and his world should also be read as the desire to start of a new cycle, one that is barely intuited, but no less real.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 11

CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD: CRIME AND TRAUMA IN RODRIGO REY ROSA'S *EL MATERIAL HUMANO*

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> [Los] cuentos de delito […] se sitúan más allá de la diferencia entre ficción y realidad; se sitúan entre texto y contexto, entre literatura y cultura. O, si se quiere, entre 'la literatura' y 'la vida' en uno de los espacios que las conectan. Porque 'los cuentos de delitos' son los cuentos que nos podemos contar entre nosotros, son 'las conversaciones de una cultura (Josefina Ludmer 1999: 15-16).
>
> Es posible que el antónimo del 'olvido' sea no el 'acto de memoria,' sino la *justicia*? (Yerushalmi, as quoted by Derrida 1995: 84).

INTRODUCTION

The Rosenberg case in Guatemala, as emblematic as the Dreyfus case was at the end of 19th century Europe, can be read as a symptom of the difficult and precarious processes of national reconciliation that have occurred in places like El Salvador and Guatemala. Using this concrete historical case and all the paranoid narratives that have been constructed around it, this essay studies the 'crime narratives' in Rodrigo Rey Rosa's *El material humano*. Through this novel I study how, within these narratives, we can find the tensions and conflicts present in Guatemala's post-war society. In the first part of my essay I will do a genealogy of crime as a narrative, rhetorical and ideological device in Western literature. The central part of the essay studies the crime narratives in the novel proposing this narrative form as a privileged space to read the traces of trauma left after an armed conflict such as Guatemala's. This essay, inspired by Josefina Ludmer and Roberto González Echevarría's work, proposes

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to think about the rich and tense relationship that literature and the law maintain in Latin America. Some of the questions that will guide my reflections are the following: 1) How can we narrate that which lives outside the law and of all legitimate spaces?, 2) What role do these crime narratives play in a national history and in the construction of a national identity?, 3) What is a 'political crime' and how does one narrate it?, 4) What relationship exists between crime, trauma and memory in post-war Guatemalan narrative? In the Central American case, the absence or, at least, the precarious nature of institutional and legal support for the processing of historical memory and the trauma of civil war allows for unresolved suffering to manifest itself through what is outside the law and legality: crime. Crime, then, becomes a privileged place to read the traumas and anxieties of the post-civil war period in Guatemala.

I

One could recount the history of Western literature through the many cultural, literary, political and economic changes that the concept of crime has undergone.[1] The *Illiad* tells us of the catastrophic consequences that Paris' crime brings to Troy: the kidnapping of Helen. Paris violates the sacred Hellenic law of hospitality by kidnapping Helen while he is Menelaus' guest. Hospitality had so much value for Hellenic civilization that, according to Odysseus, it is what distinguished, together with fear of the Gods, civilized people from barbarians[2] and the monsters.[3] Paris' crime constitutes, therefore, a transgression of one of the sacred principles of his culture and time.

Similarly, what makes something rotten in Denmark and puts time out of joint is also a crime. Crime in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* appears disguised as the past, as traumatic memory, and justice takes the form of prophecy, or utopia. It is this attribute that grants the work a profoundly modern character. But this work also marks the birth of an essential figure, the one who will become the mediator between crime and literature, between the traumatic past, the political entrails of the present and the promise of a future justice: the intellectual, the scholar: 'Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio,' says the ghost in *Hamlet*. It appears that to be able to speak to ghosts one has to know how to speak to the past, and the past, Marcellus seems to infer, speaks in a dead language: Latin. It is Horace, the scholar, who can address the ghost. Horace, the intellectual, the skeptic,[4] the one who believes only in what his eyes

[1] 'El "delito," que es una frontera móvil, histórica y cambiante (los delitos cambian con el tiempo), no sólo nos puede servir para diferenciar, separar y excluir, sino también para relacionar el estado, la política y la sociedad, los sujetos, la cultura y la literatura. Como bien lo sabían Marx y Freud, es un instrumento crítico ideal porque es histórico, cultural, político, económico, jurídico, social y literario *a la vez*: es una de esas nociones articuladoras que están en todos los campos' (Ludmer 1999: 14).

[2] 'Desde el comienzo mismo de la literatura, el delito aparece como uno de los instrumentos más utilizados para definir y fundar una cultura: para separarla de la no cultura y para marcar lo que la cultura excluye' (Ludmer 1999: 12-13).

[3] 'The rest of you stay here, my friends-in-arms./I'll go across with my own ship and crew/and probe the natives living over there./What *are* they – violent, savage, lawless?/or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men?' (Homer 1996: 192-96).

[4] 'Marcellus/Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy/And will not belief take hold of him/Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us./Therefore I have entreated him along/With us to watch the minutes of this night/That, if again this apparition come,/He may approve our eyes and speak to it./Horatio Tush, tush, 'will not appear (Shakespeare 2006: 1.1.19, 22-28).

can touch and can interpellate the ghost and the traumatic memory of crimes and injustice, is the one who can communicate with the ghost.

This mediating figure of the intellectual-scholar will become essential in the modern evolution of crime literature, whether it be in its manifestation in the detective novel or in the noir novel or thriller. However, with these types of stories, a new type of mystery is born. It is a mystery without a revelation, a profane mystery and one to which one can have access through doubt and suspicion. In *Hamlet*, modern literature is born with this displacement of the mystery away from the sacred to the political sphere. However, we cannot forget that the communicative attempt between Horace and the ghost fails: the ghost only speaks to his legitimate heir, Hamlet. The evolution of crime stories in modern literature is marked by the failure of the intellectual's language to speak with ghosts and profane mysteries imposed upon us by history. The relevance and importance that a filial language acquires, the heir's language of affect to unravel the plots and crimes of history, also marks the evolution of crime stories.[5]

Modern literature is born when the paradigm is displaced away from the temples and the oracles and begins to live in the prosaic world of the streets in the great urban spaces. This displacement of the sacred and the supernatural to the political and social sphere, from black or diabolical magic and prophecies to analytical reasoning, also situates crime center stage. The first great modern story (according to many critics, including Piglia and Borges) is also a crime story: 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' by Edgar Allan Poe. The indecipherable sign has been displaced away from the enchanted castles to the multitude or the unintelligible sound that all, independently of their maternal language, experience as foreigners, as the voices of the other.[6] However, the analytical mind of the detective, the new cultural hero, is now in charge of unraveling the mysteries: 'disentangle' is the word Poe uses. The detective produces rational explanations for a crime that is apparently impossible, absurd or monstrous: 'Tenemos, pues,' says Borges, 'al relato policial como un género intelectual. Como un género basado en algo totalmente ficticio; el hecho es que un crimen es descubierto por un razonador abstracto y no por delaciones, por descuidos de los criminales' (Borges 1996: 195). Crime, which is the new symptom, the new code for the social, is discovered by the perfectly analytical mind of a solitary and marginal man, the detective. The detective proposes a new method of reasoning to decipher the logic of the anomalous, of that which breaks with and violates the law.[7]

[5] For the importance of inheritance and the heir in Shakespeare, see Derrida (1995) and Avelar (2004). Derrida defines Hamlet's role as heir and the position that this role entails before the law in the following manner: 'Hamlet maldice el destino que le habría destinado a ser el hombre del derecho, justamente como si maldijera el derecho mismo que habría hecho de él un enderezador de entuertos, aquel que, al igual que el derecho, no puede venir sino después del crimen, o simplemente, *después*: es decir en una generación necesariamente segunda, originariamente tardía y, desde entonces, destinada a heredar. No se hereda nunca sin explicarse con algo del espectro (y con algo espectral) [...]' (1995: 35). It is not possible to explain yourself to the specter if you cannot find a language in which to speak to him and if one is not an heir. Ghosts speak a filial language, a language marked by affect.

[6] 'La lectura termina por identificar de un modo puro lo que podríamos llamar la voz del otro: la voz del inmigrante, del no francés (en un relato escrito en inglés). El género parece identificar al sospechoso como el otro que llega y habla una lengua que ninguno reconoce pero que para todos es extranjera' (Piglia 2001: 85).

[7] 'Las reglas del policial clásico se afirman sobre todo en el fetiche de la inteligencia pura. Se valora antes que nada la omnipotencia del pensamiento y la lógica imbatible de los personajes encargados de proteger la vida burguesa. A partir de esa forma, construida sobre la figura del investigador como el razonador puro, como en el gran racionalista que defiende la ley y descifra los enigmas (porque descifra los enigmas es el defensor de la

> The realist in murder [noir novel, the thriller] writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels [...] a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of moneymaking [...]
>
> It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world you live in [...] It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for so little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization. (Chandler 1950: n. p.).

This long quote from 'The simple art of murder, by Raymond Chandler, demonstrates the traits that distinguish the noir novel or thriller from the classic detective stories. The noir novel reads crime not in an analytical key but a political one. The detective does not limit himself to 'disentangling,' analytically, the mystery of the crime but condemns the society that has produced such an atrocity and unveils the power mechanisms that hide behind the crime, and the corrupt system of justice that is supposedly dedicated to investigating it. Thus, the noir novel is not limited to a study of crime but reflects critically upon the juridical-political apparatus of the State. Crime in this type of novel is a way to put oneself in the belly of the beast, to get inside power.[8]

II

The Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg gained notoriety when, in a pre-recorded video released on the day of his funeral, he accused the President of Guatemala and his wife of ordering his murder. Whatever the position one takes regarding the Rosenberg case, one has to accept that the mechanism that gave birth to the notion of the modern intellectual as a public figure who denounces the vast apparatus behind state power has changed radically. The first important change related to this case is that the victim and the witness who accuses those in power are the same person. The only irrefutable proof that Rosenberg has against the State appears to be his own life: his body, the *corpus delicti*, is the irrefutable proof of the criminal nature of power and the State. The very technology Rosenberg employs permits him to use a theatrical effect unthinkable in Emile Zolá's time during the Dreyfus affair. The accusing voice, thanks to the temporal magic of the video image, is a voice that comes back from death, giving testimony to a *fait complit*: 'Sadly, if you are hearing or seeing this message now, it is because I was murdered.' To watch the video, listen to the accusation, is

ley), está claro que las novelas de la serie negra eran ilegibles: quiero decir, eran relatos salvajes, primitivos, sin lógica, irracionales' (Piglia 2001: 60).

[8] 'Los relatos de la serie negra (los thriller como los llaman en Estados Unidos) vienen justamente a narrar lo que excluye y censura la novela policiaca clásica. Ya no hay misterio alguno en la causalidad: asesinatos, robos, estafas, extorsiones, la cadena siempre es económica. El dinero que legisla la moral y sostiene la ley es la única razón de estos relatos donde todo se paga. Allí se termina con el mito del enigma, o mejor, se lo desplaza. En estos relatos el detective (cuando existe) no descifra solamente los misterios de la trama sino que encuentra y descubre a cada paso la determinación de las relaciones sociales. El crimen es el espejo de la sociedad, esto es, la sociedad es vista desde el crimen: en ella (para repetir a un filósofo alemán) se ha desgarrado el velo de emocionante sentimentalismo que encubría las relaciones personales hasta reducirlas a simples relaciones de interés, convirtiendo a la moral y la dignidad en simple valor de cambio (Piglia 1995: 402).

the fundamental proof of the murder. The testimony of the voice that comes back from the dead is the best proof of the crime, like in *Hamlet*. The story is not so simple, however. Guilt seems to point in all directions: to the President and First Lady, as well as to figures like Luis Mendizabal and Mario David García, both friends of Rosenberg and apparently in charge of filming and distributing the accusatory video. Both Mendizabal and García are figures with an ample conspiratorial history linked to the Guatemalan Right. Due to the length of this essay it is not possible to disentangle all the plots and conspiratorial theories linked to this case.[9] What *is* essential to point out is the mutation that the testimony-*corpus delicti* has undergone in this case. More than a way to help us expose power plots, to discover the truth behind the manipulations, it becomes a mechanism through which all the State's power plots are woven, an enabler of all the paranoid plots that configure the fictional apparatus on which power is erected. In the *corpus delicti* we no longer find the truth that power masks or hides, instead it has become the source for its fictions. As a result, now every great modern political novel situates the origin of its fiction in the *corpus delicti* for which the law has been incapable of finding justice or restitution. At the center of the modern political novel we find the forgotten *corpus delicti*, the bodies that have never found the restitution and reparation justice demands.[10] One of the best modern political novels is *2666*, where the author, Roberto Bolaño, presents an endless list of police reports with descriptions of the assassinations of women in Ciudad Juárez. Another one of the great contemporary political novels in Latin America is *El material humano*, because it makes us go into an archive of horror, a place where many of the victims of Guatemalan history 'enjoy' the sad afterlife that a police report or file can grant them: a name, a description of physical characteristics and the circumstances surrounding the victims' alleged crimes.

III

> [...] between the obsessive memory of tradition, which knows only what has been said, and the exaggerated thoughtfulness of oblivion, which cares only for what was never said, the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying 'I' (Agamben 2000: 144).

What relationship exists between the need to have a document, a file for each dead person, for all the dead of history, and the massive extermination, the genocides that made the twentieth century among the most bloody in history? In *Mal de archivo*, Derrida articulates this problem in the following manner: '*Mal de archivo* recuerda sin duda a un síntoma, un sufrimiento, una pasión: el archivo del mal, mas también aquello que arruina, deporta o arrastra incluso el principio de archivo, a saber, el mal radical' (1997: n.p.). Rodrigo Rey

[9] The *New Yorker* magazine published an extensive article in April 2011 about the case. It can be consulted at the following link: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/04/04/110404fa_fact_grann.

[10] To delve deeper into the complicated relationship between justice and law, see Derrida (1995). The following quote is just one example of the multiple ways in which Derrida reflects on this problem: 'Hamlet maldice el destino que le habría destinado a ser el hombre del derecho, justamente, como si maldijera el derecho mismo que habría hecho de él un enderezador de entuertos, aquel que, al igual que el derecho, no puede venir sino después del crimen, o, simplemente, *después*: es decir en una generación necesariamente segunda, destinada a *heredar*. (1995: 35).

Rosa also begins his novel *El material humano* in an archive. It is the infamous secret Archive of the Guatemalan police, which was uncovered on 5 July 2005, when the government's human rights office (Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos) entered a munitions depot and found a vast collection of documents kept by the police for over a century. It is this archive that Rey Rosa enters, the archive (arkhé) where the principle and the law meet and where origins and power also coincide:[11]

> Comencé a frecuentar el archivo como una especie de entretenimiento, y según suelo hacer cuando no tengo nada que escribir, nada que decir en realidad, durante esos días llené una serie de cuadernos, libretas y hojas sueltas con simples impresiones y observaciones [...] Por mi parte, más allá de la información que esperaba obtener en ese laberinto de millones de legajos policíacos durante más de un siglo y conservados por azar, después de aquella visita inicial las circunstancias y el ambiente del Archivo de la Isla habían comenzado a parecer novelescos, y acaso aun novelables. Una especie de *microcaos* cuya relación podría servir de coda para la singular danza macabra de nuestro último siglo. (14)

The archive for Rey Rosa is the place where he goes because he lacks inspiration, when he has nothing to say. The dead or dried-up language of the writer, which fills his notebooks with notes because he cannot tell stories, encounters the dead language of the archive, a language that is born but never pronounced. The language of the archive lives in the virtual reality of a document, a police file, and is the language of all the dead, history's victims. How to write a novel about the encounter between these two dead languages: the notes in this writer's notebook, the pre-history of writing and the lapidary language of the police file, which is born as a posthumous word, destined to be secretly guarded, only made public as a threat or sentence, and revealed only when it is of no use because it comes too late?

Writing and the law meet in the beginning, in the *arkhé*, as ruined languages. But it is there, Rey Rosa appears to tell us, where he is going to discover his inspiration, his 'human material.' It is important to pay close attention to this phrase, which is also the title of his novel. The phrase appears in a book that records the activity for the year 1945, written by Benedicto Tun, the founder of the Gabinete de Identificación (Department of Identification), which was the origin of the police archive that the narrator-writer of this novel frequents. This book, a sort of memoir, written in Guatemala City in 1945, describes the various duties of this department:

> Dos son los campos amplios que se ofrecen al trabajo del Gabinete de Identificación. El primero es el material humano que ingresa día tras día en los Cuarteles de la Policía por delitos o faltas graves, y que hay necesidad de identificar por medio de la ficha, la cual constituye, por así decirlo, la primera página de la historia del reo, donde en lo sucesivo figurarán los datos de su reincidencia. El otro ámbito en donde actúa el Gabinete de referencia es el que toca a los laboratorios de la Policía Técnica propiamente, es decir, la pesquisa, por medios científicos hasta hoy conocidos y que se concretan, por una parte

[11] '*Arkhé*, recordemos, nombra a la vez el *comienzo* y el *mandato*. Este nombre coordina aparentemente dos principios en uno: el principio según la naturaleza o la historia, ***allí donde*** las cosas comienzan -principio físico, histórico u ontológico-, mas también el principio según la ley, *allí donde* los hombres y los dioses *mandan, allí donde* se ejerce la autoridad, el orden social, *en ese lugar* desde el cual el *orden* es dado -principio nomológico' (*Mal de archivo 9*).

> a descubrir al delincuente por las trazas que pueda dejar en el lugar donde opera; por otra, una vez descubierto o capturado, a suministrar las pruebas de su culpa. (57)

The 'Gabinete' is the threshold of the archive: the place where the body meets with the letter, where the human raw material encounters the penal code and where a file is established for conduct considered criminal. It is there that power produces its memory, its record of crimes and of potential punishments. There, at that place where the *corpus delicti* is discovered through his fingerprints and traces, is also the place where truth is produced and proven. All the knowledge that power has is guarded in the archive.[12] How can one write a novel about a place that not only guards but protects and hides the knowledge of power and preserves the memory of the state apparatus? How to do this in a country where the limits between legality and illegality, crime and law, political violence and civilian violence are almost impossible to distinguish?

The answer is one that I have already hinted at: the only possible entrance to the archive is through another archive. Archives communicate with each other secretly. In the concrete case of Rey Rosa's novel, it is the writer's own archive – his personal memories, diaries, notebooks – that grants us the road to the archive of power, the archive of the state. How is this transit achieved? How is the raw 'human' material, with which the novel is written according to the rules of fiction, similar to the raw material in the police files that has been molded to fit the logic of crime and punishment typical of such files?

The first similarity is strictly formal: they are all notes. The novel is divided into notepads and notebooks. The author opens the door to his raw material, the 'human material' that will then be formalized: fictionalized in the novel. In these notes we find mixed together the diary entries, notes about readings, which the narrator is pondering, and the notes that he took while visiting the archive. The similarities, however, cannot blind us to the obvious differences in the material in these notes. The diary is as heterogeneous as life itself: we find the minutiae of life itself, the memory of certain important moments in the author's life, details about his oneiric and sexual life. His reading notes reproduce, in a realistic fashion, the fortuitous regimen of actual reading. These notes do not try to produce a secret code for reading the novel but they do constitute a camera of echoes and murmurs that accompany the author's experiences and his problematic relationship with the archive. The heterogeneous nature of the material found in the archive has another nature. It is worth quoting some of the files that Rey Rosa finds in the archive to understand its logic, its peculiar construction of sense:

> I-Delitos políticos
>
> [...]
>
> Ávila Aroche Jesús. Nace en 1931. Moreno (186.mts). Marimbista. Soltero. Vive con su mamá. Fichado por limpiar botas sin tener licencia. En marzo de 1963 por hurto. En diciembre de 1962 por robo. En mayo de 1963 por secuestro.
>
> [...]
>
> Barrientos Luis Alfredo. Nace en 1924. Periodista. Fichado en 1956 por manifestante. En 1958 por propagar ideas exóticas.

[12] 'Writing is bound to the founding of cities and to punishment […]. The novel will retain from this origin its relation to punishment and the control of the State, which determines its mimetic penchant from then on. When the Latin American novel returns to that origin, it does so through the figure of the Archive, the legal repository of knowledge and power from which it sprung […]' (González Echevarría 3-8).

> [...]
> Cabrera García Leopolod. Nace en 1931. Fichado sin motivo en 1956.
> [...]
> Ochoa Santizo Jorge. Nace en 1943. Carrocero. Fichado en 1960 por sospechoso. Vive con su madre puta.
> II-Delitos comunes
> [...]
> Figueroa García Florentino. Nace en 1925. Lustrador. Vive solo. Fichado en 1945 (Gobierno de la revolución) por limpiar botas sin licencia.
> [...]
> Sarceño O. Juan. Nace en 1925. Jardinero. Vive con su hermana. Fichado en 1945 (Gobierno de la revolución) por bailar tanto en la cervecería 'El Gaucho' donde está prohibido. (21-24)

The laughable character of this system of classifying crimes, both political and common, does not take away the harsh reality behind this repressive apparatus. Many of these conducts, in spite (or perhaps because) of their trivial nature, were punished with the greatest violence. This law, despite being empty of normative content (because it is incapable of distinguishing between political and common crimes, eccentric behaviour and the transgression of the law, the conditions of marginal lives and the break from the principle that separates the just from the unjust in the social sphere) still has great power of execution. Its lack of legitimacy did not take away any of its efficiency as a mechanism of repression. The total classificatory chaos of this archive is equal to the extension of the repressive apparatus seen in all social spheres. Its chaotic character seems to justify the extension and magnitude of the repressive apparatus. The randomness of its classificatory system seems to reinforce the monolithic character of its normative system. The law lacks both sense and content: everything appears as a transgression, all behaviour is a potential violation of an inexistent code that can always be broken precisely because of its inexistence (and because of its always possible spur of the moment invention).

It is not easy to enter this type of archive and it is even more difficult to exit it: even the very concepts of inside and outside are erased when it comes to the archive. In various instances in the novel, the author compares it to a labyrinth or the fictional apparatus found in Franz Kafka's works, *The Castle* or *The Trial*, where it is impossible to say whether one is inside or outside, to know whether one is collaborating or resisting:

> Como en una parábola de Kafka, para ingresar en el polvoriento laberinto que es el archivo de la isla, bastó con pedir permiso [...] pululando por ahí más de un centenar de héroes anónimos, uniformados con gavachas, protegidos por mascarillas y guantes de látex – y vigilados por policías, por círculos concéntricos de policías, policías integrantes de las mismas fuerzas represivas que los activistas investigan. (143)

Everyone seems to work in this archive: both the ex-guerrillas, who investigate the crimes of the old regime and the old perpetrators, who watch those who are now their potential accusers. No one appears to be there without a concrete purpose, without a crime to unveil or to hide:

> Quiero ver de nuevo el lugar con la tropa de investigadores que me hacen pensar en personajes de Kafka [...] los viejos de pelo gris y hombros caídos, los revolucionarios frustrados que trabajan ahí por el sueldo pero también, con una especie de sordo ahínco porque quieren hacer hablar a los muertos. Porque casi podría asegurar que, como en mi caso, nadie está ahí (salvo tal vez la gente de limpieza y los contadores) de modo completamente desinteresado o inocente. Todos, en cierta manera, archivan y registran documentos, *por* o *contra* su propio interés. Con anticipación, y quizás a veces con temor también. Nadie sabe, como dicen, para quién trabaja –ni menos aún para quién trabajó. (85-86)

The nation's unconscious seems to find refuge there, the history of all its traumas reside there. And like in every other unconscious apparatus, it is very difficult to discern whether one works for one's benefit or for another's, whether the truth that will be unveiled will bring us glory or shame, punishment or forgiveness. Our own detective-writer – who initially arrived there to kill time during a period of dried-up creativity, to fill up a series of notebooks with material that would later help him write a novel – 'mi interés en el Archivo como objeto novelable' (61) –, who appeared to write an intellectual-police history of his country by tracing the history of artists and intellectuals who had been persecuted and who had collaborated with the different repressive regimes that had governed the country – suddenly discovers that in this same Archive he can find the clues to his own life, to a trauma that marked his personal story. In the Archive he discovers that he can find information about the intellectual and material author of the kidnapping his mother suffered some years back.

We cannot forget the lesson we learned from *Hamlet*. History's dead and the specters of a traumatic past only respond to an affective language, they only recognize their filial obligations. The double labyrinth comprised by the writing in the novel and the classificatory system of the archive only communicate with each other if we find a thread that includes a filial plot, if we uncover a point where the personal, intimate history is tied to the political history. The news reaches the protagonist of the novel in an indirect and dilated way through various encounters at different times:

> En 1994 yo volví a establecerme en Guatemala después de casi quince años de exilio voluntario y entre las nuevas amistades que entablé había algunos excombatientes guerrilleros. Un día, durante una larga conversación etílica uno de estos llegó a asegurarme que los secuestradores de mi madre fueron un grupo guerrillero urbano, efímero y prácticamente desconocido [...]. Debo decir que la posibilidad de que los secuestradores de mi madre fueran guerrilleros y no policías no dejó de desagradarme, pues, aunque nunca tuve vínculos directos con ninguna de las organizaciones revolucionarias, mis simpatías estaban con ella y no con el gobierno, y este hecho hacía inevitable reconocer que, ideología aparte, entre las filas insurgentes teníamos 'enemigos naturales.' Y ahora, la víspera de mi viaje [es decir unos once años después], una de mis amigas que fue 'cuadro de apoyo' de una organización guerrillera, me comunicó que existía el rumor entre algunos archivistas, de que yo estaba allí en busca de la identidad de los secuestradores de mi madre, que podrían estar empleados en el Proyecto de Recuperación del Archivo. (91-92)

The plot of this new mystery is as entangled as the crimes that are hidden away in this labyrinthic Archive. Another one of the possible clues that the protagonist receives is in a

dream: 'vago recuerdo de Roberto Lemus que trabaja en el archivo y es uno de los posibles secuestradores de mi madre' (125). He remembers conversations while intoxicated, vague recollections of dreams. Nothing can be proven in this Archive full of evidence, and danger always seems imminent. Perhaps it is because evidence abounds and yet nothing can be proven that danger always appears present.

For the protagonist-writer of the novel, this new discovery (like almost everything linked to the Archive) involves a shock to his moral convictions. Those he considered his allies, the guerrillas who accompanied him on the right side of history, may after all have been involved in his mother's kidnapping. As with all labyrinths, the Archive seems to hide a monster, but our narrator-author (our new Theseus) will remain clear of any possible blood. He went to the Archive to write, to find the human material for his fiction, and not to unravel the threads that muddle his personal history with his country's history.

> Éste era entonces el minotauro que me esperaba en el fondo del laberinto del Archivo. De tal laberinto, tal minotauro. Probablemente me tiene tanto miedo como yo a él. ¿Si lo atacara, me pregunto, se defendería? (177)

The Archive is not a history of heroes and traitors. All the ghosts of history sleep in the Archive, but it is impossible to unmask them, to discover their truth. The plots that entangle his personal history blur the frontier between truth and fiction:

> Me pregunto si en realidad he jugado con fuego al querer escribir acerca del archivo. Mejor estaría que un ex-combatiente, o un grupo de ex-combatientes, y no un mero diletante (y desde una perspectiva muy marginal), fuera quien antes saque a la luz lo que todavía puede sacarse a la luz y sigue oculto en este magnífico laberinto de papeles. Como hallazgo, como Documento o como Testimonio, la importancia del Archivo es innegable (aunque increíble y desgraciadamente hay quienes quisieran quitársela) y si no he podido novelarlo, como pensé que podría, es porque me han faltado suerte y fuerzas. (169)

It is important to note the profoundly ambiguous and ironic nature of this warning. The failure to put the Archive in a novel[13] (to fictionalize it), in this novel composed of notes, of

[13] When we speak of the failure to fictionalize the Archive we also have to assume the failure of the attempt to interpret it: Pero aún más, y ***antes aún***, «archivo» remite al ***arkhé*** en el sentido ***nomológico***, al ***arkhé*** del mandato. Como el ***archivum*** o el ***archium*** latino (palabra que se emplea en singular, como se hacía en un principio en francés con "archivo, " que se decía antaño en singular y en masculino: "un archivo,") el sentido de «archivo», su solo sentido, le viene del ***arkheîon*** griego: en primer lugar, una casa, un domicilio, una dirección, la residencia de los magistrados superiores, los ***arcontes***, los que mandaban. A los ciudadanos que ostentaban y significaban de este modo el poder político se les reconocía el derecho de hacer o de representar la ley. Habida cuenta de su autoridad públicamente así reconocida, es en su casa entonces, en ese ***lugar*** que es su casa (casa privada, casa familiar o casa oficial), donde se depositan los documentos oficiales. Los arcontes son ante todo sus guardianes. No sólo aseguran la seguridad física del depósito y del soporte sino que también se les concede el derecho y la competencia hermenéuticos. Tienen el poder de ***interpretar*** los archivos' (Derrida, *El mal de archivo*, 10). Rey Rosa's novel establishes an explicit relationship between the impossibility of accessing the Archive with the impossibility of interpreting or fictionalizing it. The protagonist is denied entry to the Archive throughout the novel and when he is finally allowed to enter it we understand that this is an extraordinary privilege, but he is still unable to interpret it: 'No convenía, por ejemplo-me dijo-que al referirme a lo que hacía en el archivo yo usara la palabra investigación. Nadie, aparte del equipo de la procoraduría, propiamente, tenía autorización para hacer allí cualquier clase de investigación' (87). But *El material humano* also tells us another story, one which lives in the perimeter of the law. It is the

human material, is what we have read. The modern novel legitimates itself by enunciating its failure. The failure of the novel-document, of the novel-testimony, is what gives birth to one of the best political novels written in Central America. This failure also points to the lack of an institutional and legal apparatus that can create the mechanism necessary to elucidate the historical truth that the Archive may contain. The novel that we read is also a testimony of this failure. One cannot forget that amateur and marginal characters like Dupin, Holmes and Marlowe have been the great protagonists of the best political novels of the twentieth century. *El material humano* is an exemplary case of this type of novel, the thriller, detective novel.[14]

However, we cannot rush to accept the failure that the author of this novel-diary-testimony announces. We must remember the warning that Rey Rosa gives the reader at the beginning of the novel: 'Aunque no lo parezca, aunque no quiera parecerlo, ésta es una obra de ficción.' This miscellaneous work composed of reading notes, the author's diary, and lists of police files found in an archive of horror, a work in the vicinity of an archive-labyrinth, proposes a new concept for fiction. It is a fiction that not only encompasses the necessary and the possible but also the impossible and the arbitrary.[15] Rey Rosa writes: 'Lo que puede ser pensado tiene que ser con seguridad una ficción' (170). By quoting Savater and rewriting Descartes, Rey Rosa seems to be telling us: I think and then I write fiction. But the fiction that the novel narrates is about an archive that cannot be accessed and from which people cannot escape. The fact that we cannot enter the Archive (the Arkhé in its double meaning of origin and order), which Derrida has so aptly described, prevents one from finding an exit (in this case, in its double meaning as end and purpose):

> –Sabés cómo podría terminar?– me dice [his daughter Pía].
> Niego con la cabeza.
> –Conmigo llorando, porque no encuentro en ninguna parte a mi papá –responde. (179)

The clues to deal with a traumatic past, with the ghosts that history imposes on us, are filial and affective, not analytical or experience based. As we saw earlier, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* provides us with this clue. No matter how many documents we research, how many truth commissions are started, we cannot restore a voice to history's dead. This fact does not mean burying the past or letting the dead bury the dead. One of the great lessons of *El material humano* is the importance of finding the right tone to question the voices that history swallowed. What is important is to know how to situate ourselves in front of this past in order to become its legitimate heirs. The image of the little girl (Pía), who, partly in jest, but also partly seriously, cries because she cannot find her father anywhere, despite having him in front of her and speaking to him, expresses better than any documentary proof the

story of the writer who, while circling the doors of the law, tears out a secret that no authority possesses or any interpretation explains: the sinister, spectral dimension that the spirit of the law has. It is the paranoid machinery that hides behind this power apparatus. To read more about this paranoid machinery, linked to the power of the state as a creator of fiction, see Ricardo Piglia (2009).

[14] The author writes that a friend of his tells him: 'lo que le cuento tiene elementos de un *thriller*, me dice' (122).

[15] In his *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that: 'It is clear, then, from what we have said that the poet must be a "maker" not of verses but of stories, since he is a poet in virtue of his 'representation,' and what he represents is action. Even supposing he represents what has actually happened, he is none the less a poet, for there is nothing to prevent some actual occurrences being the sort of thing that would probably or inevitably happen, and it is in virtue of that that he is their "maker"' (Aristotle 1451b).

complicated relationship that the present and the future of Guatemala have with the still open-wound of its past.

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III. GENDER, SEXUALITY AND RACE

In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 12

VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY IN THE POST-WAR NOVEL IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses the representations of sexuality and violence in two Central American post-war novels, whose main characters are portrayed as members of the guerrilla. *Sopa de caracol* (2002), by Guatemalan author Arturo Arias, and *Limón Reggae* (2007), by Costa Rican author Anacristina Rossi, present different ways of dealing with the disenchantment and impotence produced by the failure of the revolutionary processes of the late twentieth century which attempted to change the inhuman poverty and social inequality in the region. Published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, these novels show that, despite the Peace Accords of the 1990s, violence and injustice continue to threaten the fragile stability of these small republics.

The texts employ different narrative strategies to show the impossibility of reconstruction after the catastrophe of war. Arias uses aesthetics of the grotesque to present the abjection of an inhumanly lucid character who, without sentimentality evaluating his acts, reveals his past as a clandestine leftist guerrilla member. Sexuality appears as a carnivalesque space in which the unconscious taboos and social norms that govern our lives are broken. Dominated by an underground sexuality, the novel describes a journey towards the desubjectivation of the main character, who says in the last chapter: 'Me dejo llevar suavemente (…) te admito que estoy sorprendido y conmovido por la pérdida de los más elementales indicadores de identidad. Yo no sé quién soy… ' (Arias 2002: 276). Rossi, on the other hand, despite the harshness of her text, saves the ideals of the revolution, sex being a vehicle that enables subjective reconstruction. As in Arias' novel, eroticism and sex are a space that permits depersonalization and loss of identity, but in Rossi's novel this allows the protagonist to

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transcend identity and go beyond violence. Hence, the paper considers the position of the novel as utopian.

The paper will analyse these two manners of tackling the problem of the subjective reconstruction after the war, through the aesthetics of carnival and the grotesque in the first novel and utopian idealization in the second. Starting with their titles, both texts establish intertextuality with the musical traditions of Central America and the Caribbean. Sopa de caracol (conch soup), a dish from Belize and the name of a very popular song, is a leitmotif through Arias' novel, while reggae plays a major role in Rossi's.

SOPA DE CARACOL: THE UNBEARABLE SADNESS OF CARNIVAL

Arias' novel is built as a carnivalesque text. The plot develops during a banquet which starts with the introduction of the menu. The chapters follow the progression in which the different courses are offered to the guests. The narration moves on as delicacies and spirits – products of culinary syncretism between Central America and Europe – are served and consumed. It is a polyphonic novel, with dense intertextuality, as any novel using the carnivalesque view should be. Street language, the idioms of Central American Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese and English créole from Belize mix with popular Central American music and 'classical' texts. Julia Kristeva, reading Bakhtin, remarks that:

> In the scene of carnival, language is parodied and relativised. Its representational function is rejected (this provokes laughter) but not completely […]. Vicious (meaning ambivalent), at the same time representative and anti-representative, the carnivalesque structure is anti-ideological, anti-Christian and anti-rationalist. (1997: 15)

From the beginning of the novel, 'Introduction to the Menu,' Arias' text plays continually with the representative structures of language, in a systematic attempt to break logic and univocal meaning to make way for the festive madness of signs. One of the novel's main features is the 'indestructible linguistic vitality,' which Bakhtin associates with carnivalesque cosmovision:

> Ya afirmaba el poeta que bailar es encontrar la unidad que forman los vivientes y los muertos. También sé que las partes son algo más que el laberinto de la oreja. La explicación más simple del círculo hermenéutico es que para entender una solitaria parte hay que ilusionarse con la creencia de comprender el todo. Para agarrar ese elusivo toldo carente de verdades absolutas, de conocimientos objetivos, de significados estables, toldo disfrazado de todo y no de toro, hay que captar las pletóricas partes platónicamente preñadas de significantes pedantemente putones. El todo, el toldo, puede ser un menú. (9)

This fragment shows a general characteristic of the novel: words are often ordered according to their sound, producing surprising meanings. The signifier prevails over the signified to interrupt the logical order the reader expects. The drive disrupts the logos (understood as reason, law and language). This festive use of language makes a counterpoint to the violence and sadness of narrated events. On the other hand, as Kristeva has remarked: 'The carnival questions God, authority and social law; it is revolutionary to the extent it is

dialogical. It is thus not surprising that, because of this subversive property, the term carnival has a pejorative and caricaturesque sense in our time' (1997: 14).

Thanks to the translation of Bakhtin into French, English and Spanish, carnival, turned theory, is often fashionable today. However, this is not necessarily true for literature, where its excesses are not always condoned. When assessing the reception of Arias' novel by the public this 'excessive' aspect of the novel should be considered. Although not the subject of this paper, this must be mentioned, since a certain silence in critical discourse on this text might be explained by the novel's 'Sadean' logic. It must be noted that Sade's and Arias' works have one thing in common: they were produced during a convulsive period – revolutionary or post-revolutionary – and deal with savage human intimacy from the point of view of an ethics of pleasure instead of an ethics of moral duty. The dialogical discourse of the carnival, based on an ethos of pleasure, can be seen as opposing the monologist discourse of the epic, based on an ethos of moral duty. The transgressive potential of Arias' text must be read not literally but in its capacity to disrupt the social norms that our times impose upon our bodies. Perhaps what astonishes the reader is the display of a mind that dares to go beyond established truths to represent the inferno of intimacy.

Bakhtin's[1] appreciation of the comical popular culture of the Middle Ages can illuminate the concept of carnival in modern texts:

> The essence of these phenomena has not yet been discovered. They were studied only from the viewpoint of cultural, aesthetic and literary rules of modern times, without situating them in the period to which they belong. On the contrary, they were modernised, which explains why they were distorted. (1998: 23)

This error noted by Bakhtin occurs frequently in carnivalesque readings imposed onto contemporary texts when they are interpreted as responding to the logic of the medieval carnival. Certain facts make this interpretation impossible. First, the social tissue and the collective phenomena of the Middle-Ages differ completely from those of today. Their counterpart, the individual, is also not comparable to the individual of today. Second, and most important, if, as Bakhtin says, the carnivalesque view opposes the feudal state and the church, institutions that have vanished or radically changed today, a question arises: to which institutions is the carnivalesque view opposed today?

From Foucault's[2] theorisations on power as a process that norms the life of the subjects to turn them into their own guardians, one could conclude that carnival exerts its power of transformation and destruction over the decentred centre of human subjectivity. Thus, the transgressive operation of a carnivalesque view today would be to oppose social laws and hierarchies by destroying the way they operate intimately, subjectively. It is the interiorisation of the norm and the constitution of subjectivity that would be transformed. Thus, in modern carnivalisation disguise and role swapping (the fool turned king) are not enough. Instead, identity, a powerful institution, is disrupted: sexual identity, in the case of Arias' text[3].

[1] Bakhtin insists on historising the carnivalesque phenomenon and argues that with romanticism and the vanguards carnivalesque cosmogony is degraded and loses much of its regenerative power.

[2] Foucault (1990: 24) proposes that: 'We must imagine and build what we could be to get rid of that double political coercion of modern power structures of individualisation and totalisation'. Besides, we must not forget that, for Foucault, the body and sexuality are very dense spaces, inhabited by diverse instances of power.

[3] Arias explores that destabilised sexual identity in more depth in his last novel, *Arias de don Giovanni* (2010), by using a transsexual as his protagonist. For an analysis of this text, see Karen Poe Lang (2014).

In *Sopa de caracol* the transgressive potential reaches its maximum in two fundamental scenes: that of sexual intercourse between the narrator and his female dog, and the orgy at the end of the novel. What makes these scenes transgressive is not the concrete actions they involve but the subjective position from which they take place, and the point of view of the narrator: beyond good and evil.

Concerning the first scene, the protagonist/narrator explains his relationship with Amaranta, his Golden Retriever bitch, by his loneliness. The scene is narrated to parody the importance of pet dogs in United States households. There is a subculture of luxury and fine restaurants for dogs that make these animals live much better than the children of the poor in the Third World. Also, Hollywood has established the stereotyped image of the U.S. typical family: two children and a dog. That is why the scene with Amaranta takes place not in Guatemala, Mexico or Rio de Janeiro – the other localities of the novel – but in San Francisco.

What is most subversive in this scene is that the protagonist/narrator says he found true love in this relationship, something he never found in his former relations with women. The text perverts the romantic conception of love that has marked western art and culture for centuries by presenting the possibility that such love might exist between a person and an animal.

> Quebramos el ambiente con nuestra propia música en la cual los ladridos y aullidos se anudaron pulverizando juntos las paredes en su ascenso hasta las maltratadas capas de ozono desde donde anunciaron un nuevo amanecer cultural para la armoniosa fusión entre animal y hombre.
>
> Habría sido un matrimonio perfecto de no excedernos en el abuso de la pasión. (236-37)

Like in all romantic love, the end comes from without, from the intervention of society. Due to slight negligence, Amaranta is taken away from her owner and adopted into a 'good' family that will not do dirty things to her. The protagonist/narrator says: 'Fue así cómo perdí al que pudo ser el gran amor de mi vida.'

Another subversive aspect of the text is that it presents bestiality as something natural, and in an almost bucolical atmosphere of respect and love between consenting partners. The narrator's regard does not condemn the man nor victimize the animal:

> Obviamente el acercamiento con Amaranta fue cada vez mayor. Ya no concebía la posibilidad de dormir sin ella pero no era lo único que ya no concebía. Como concebía muchas cosas decidí poquito a poco concebir más todavía porque de concebir se trataba aunque con ella no pudiera concebir cachorros y en la concepción se me iba la imaginación. Al fin, era una perra grande y pensé no sin razón que era capaz de mayores compromisos que a lo mejor respondían a las apasionadas esperanzas de ambos. [...] Empecé por explorar sus resquicios con la debida prudencia y recato, apenas tanteando o, si prefieren, tentando, para indagar los milagros de la elasticidad.
>
> [...] La tentación de hundirme en tan tentadora brea se me hacía irresistible y ya no sólo con los dedos. La tumescencia atronadora exigía mayores empréstitos que redituaran ganancias líquidas. Amaranta ni se quejaba ni objetaba a tanta y tan súbita atención
>
> Pasó entonces que entré por la puerta grande con Amaranta y fue grandioso por su deleite. (235-36)

In the cultural and medical texts of our times, bestiality is generally presented as a sexual perversion committed by mentally retarded or infamous persons who do not know what they are doing. *Sopa de caracol*, on the contrary, presents a harmonious and even desirable union between a lucid and intelligent university professor and his bitch, who seems to acquiesce and maybe even enjoy the situation. Thus, Arias poses one of the most radical discoveries of psychoanalytic theory: the Freudian verification of the lability drive (labilidad pulsional), i.e., that the sexual drive does not have a defined object. Because of this aspect of the human condition, one of the fundamental tasks of all cultures has been to channel sexual energy into socially acceptable tracks, according to the customs and laws of the historical moment. Arias' novel ironically challenges that normalising enterprise.

The other scene that openly challenges the foundations of our society is the orgy in the last chapter (named 'Sopa de caracol'). Here the *sopa de caracol* or conch soup, food and music, plays two important roles: as an aphrodisiac and as a stimulus to dance.

> Oigan el tiempo se paró. Estamos ya en el espacio de lo sagrado, en la mística unión con el cosmos que sólo puede conseguirse con la sopa de caracol.
>
> [...] Parecen coro griego hablando todas al mismo tiempo. Ni consigo distinguir entre sus voces. Es juego. Todo es juego. Intoxicación y locura. Celebración de orificios y protuberancias. La entrada al paraíso. Les dejo que me pinten la cara media vez que no se les ocurra rasurarme el cuerpo. (267)

This scene can be interpreted as a re-reading of Euripides' *The Bacchantes*, the classical Greek tragedy presenting the orgiastic rites of the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine, festivity and forests, which shows him as a master of mask and disguise.

For Nietzsche the festivities to honour Dionysus (those idealised orgies) are at the onset of Greek tragedy. The images of the Greek gods 'speak to us about a religion of life and not of duty, in which all existing things, both good and bad, are divinised' (2000: 251-52). It is possible to see in the Nietzschean view of Dionysian art an antecedent of carnivalesque cosmogony.

In addition to the relation between carnival and Dionysian ritual, there is an aspect of the Nitetzschean vision that can help us understand the uses of ritual in *Sopa de caracol*. For Nietzsche:

> [...] in the self-oblivion produced by the Dionysian states, the individual, with his limits and measures, perishes […].
>
> The ecstasies of the Dionysian state, with its annihilation of the common barriers and limits of existence contains, while it lasts, a lethargic element in which all personal experiences of the past are submerged. (2000: 258-59)

Arias' novel is exactly the story, created by Rodrigo, a former revolutionary, of his vicissitudes in the revolutionary organisation. His tasks, always peripheral to the battle site, are reduced to the 'dirty' work of support for the guerrilla. Now a well-to-do lecturer at a mediocre United States university – thanks to a picture (pure simulacrum) where he appears dressed as a guerrilla – and on the verge of losing his job because of an entanglement with a student –, he invites his possible allies to a dinner party at his house. But behind this apparent

motive is hidden a true descent into his own interior hell, narrated with irony that is both cynical and brutal, and devoid any sort of sentimental complacency.

Sopa de caracol confronts the reader with the depersonalisation of the protagonist, who, as well as having his monologue,[4] is the narrator of the novel. In a text of immense sensuality, the narrator, like Pentheus, pursues his own downfall, in a Dionysian state that allows him to surpass his limits of self-oblivion, where all the horrible experiences of his past are submerged. In the novel, all the elements of the Dionysian ritual are present in their modern version. The wine, the food, the dance and the music produce the condition of inebriation and exalted mood of the narrator and his audience, made up, in the final scene, by women.

In *The Bacchantes*, Dionysus, by means of contrivances, persuades Pentheus, King of Thebes, to attend, as observer and disguised as a woman, the ritual of *The Bacchantes*:

> Dionysus (with imperious authority, countermanding Pentheus' orders)
> Stop! Do you want to see them sitting together on the mountains?
> Pentheus (as if under a spell)
> Yes indeed: I'd give much gold to do so.
> Dionysus
> What? Have you conceived such a strong desire for this?
> Pentheus
> It would, of course, distress me to see them drunk.
> Dionysus
> And you would gladly see what pains you?
> Pentheus
> Yes, I would gladly see them, but sitting quietly under the fir trees
> (Euripides 2002: 89).

As in *The Bacchantes*, in Arias' novel the protagonist seeks his downfall, but unlike the Greek text, there is no God moving the strings. Rodrigo is completely alone and like any modern person, accountable for his own acts. Both texts reach their climax with an orgy and end after the orgy comes the moment of truth. In *The Bacchantes*, whose true protagonist is Dionysus, Agave, mother of Pentheus, discovers that, in her fury, she has killed not a lion but her son.

The orgy in *Sopa de caracol* presents a remarkable difference with the Greek text. Despite similar elements, such as the fact that Rodrigo dresses as a woman and is the target of the women's fury, the rite does not end with his physical death but with that of his sexual identity:

> Al carajo mis pudores. Pudieron más los pedos que los malos olores. Espanto de cara que tengo, por mucho que la pintés no será sino un esforzado palimpsesto, Amapola Ojo Alegre. Voy a quedar linda, eso sí. No lo niego, mis queridos andróginos. [...] La verdad, me sacude la ambigüedad, las mariposas amarillas vuelan dentro de la panza y no alrededor de mi cabeza, porque las estrellas del champán flotan allí, el esplendor de verlas hombres, de ser mujer, la muerte de las identidades sentenciadas, anatematizadas, cortadas, el falo fenece como los fenicópteros fenicios en el farniente, fenómeno de feria, fermento de feligreses férreos cuando no funestos. (267-68)

[4] For Bakhtin, a monologue can be dialogical (as in Arias' novel) and a dialogue can be monological.

While the men sleep, the women, dressed as men, change names: Rosa becomes Roso, Amapola, Amapolo, and the protagonist is feminised without altogether losing his male attributes. That is, he becomes an androgynous:

> Qué escándalo. El Amapolo Ojo Duro rehace el mundo con su falo artificial. Lo rehace a su imagen y semejanza, sin mí, lo reconstituye en la destrucción de las viejas creencias, las derruidas racionalizaciones que empujaban su lógica hasta barroquizar la cerebralidad, la irracionalidad de la razón. Voy a ser celebrado. Déjenme respirar profundo, acosadores. Contradicciones sin fin. Me excito con Amapolo.
>
> Lo admito. (267-68)

When he dances upon the table dressed as a woman, Rodrigo himself becomes the last course to be served that night. But his transformation is not limited to his dress, since he, as the narration progresses, is feminised without altogether becoming a woman.[5] His sexual identity sinks into a pool of vagueness, while he is raped – with a huge and artificial phallus – by a group of women possibly inflamed by the story they have just heard. In this sense, Rodrigo is an inverse Scherazade. While she narrates to save herself, Rodrigo does it to lose himself:

> El animal que pierde su verdad soy yo. Me voy a morir descuartizado conforme intensificás esta vibración indefinida que resuena más allá de mi muerte. El dolor es exceso, un cuchillo romo tijeretea mis nostalgias, mi virtud, mi sentido de mí mismo, mi respeto, ay, Amapolo, me sacás lágrimas (...) dolor que invita a mi rendición, a entregarme, fundiéndome con el onírico falo del Amapolo Ojo Duro, fundiéndome con los jirones de risas que resuenan en el centro de mi frente como estallidos de granadas, me sumergen en un terror extrahumano ajeno al sentimiento maternal, incomprensiblemente penetrado, inefable, irrealmente poseído, ahh, ahh, rápido, rápido, rapidito, dale, dale, dale, apretame las caderas, sí, no me jalés tanto el pelo, sí, ayy, ayy, me voy a venir, me voy a venir cabrones, ¡me voy a venir! (278-79)

Anal rape replaces the protagonist's death: he simultaneously enjoys and suffers until he reaches orgasm. Thus, Arias' novel drives a nail (from a phallocentric perspective) into the dissolution of sexual identity. We see in his text a subversion of the carnivalesque model which, for all its transgression, has always left unharmed the fundamental elements of phallocentrism. Perhaps, it may be useful to remember that in ancient Rome some of the fundamental rites of carnival consisted in the exhibition of an erect phallus being paraded in a cart all through the city (Quignard 2000).

As Bakhtin often showed, carnival was associated with fertility and birth, and huge phalluses would represent procreation. Despite the transforming power of carnival, this can be considered its conservative aspect. The 'problem' of a passive, penetrated and thus feminised man has a long history. In classical Greece, the words *Katapugon* or *Kinaidos* meant, among other things, shameless, obscene, and licentiousness against nature*;* and, according to its etymology, from under, from behind, the buttocks, the ass, he whose buttocks show under his dress. The Latin term *cinaedus* expresses phobia of sexually deviated men, who inspired terror to the ancient Romans. It crystallises, according to Quignard (2000:23), in the psychical

[5] For a different interpretation of this scene, see Adrian Taylor Kane (2009) and (2014).

organisation of the concept of *obsequium*, Latin antecedent of the Christian notion of guilt. According to Halperin:

> Antiquity made of the kinaidos a potential threat for the masculine identity of any man and constituted a complete inversion of the interiorized gender hierarchy that structured and defined the norms of masculinity and preserved it from the multiple temptations of effeminacy. (2004: 33)

In the nineteenth century, this fear regarding masculine passivity, represented by the anal penetration of a man, was denominated sodomy (a term derived from the vocabulary of Catholic Church) and saturates the medical and legal documents of European hygienists and alienists of the period. Curiously enough, though, in Bakhtin's reading of carnival there is a total silence on this subject. It seems that, for him, the anus only played an important role in carnival cosmology as an opening to the world, as a passage of the faeces.

In his reading of Rabelais, Bakhtin dedicates some interesting pages to ass wiping objects. These objects, which are initially associated with the upper part of the body (the head), like handkerchiefs and ear muffs, are degraded to do this dirty task. In Bakhtin's interpretation, what is degraded and debased is always the object, not the subject of the action. Arias' novel, on the contrary, brings onto the scene one of the most haunting male fantasies in the history of sexuality of phallocentric societies and one that, it would seem, not even the carnivalesque view dared to represent. The anal penetration of the protagonist, which destroys the last remnants of his masculinity and machismo, is a mirror into which no phallocentric society has ever wanted or been able to look.

LIMÓN REGGAE: THE UTOPIAN REINVENTION OF SEX

Limón Reggae is a devastating text. Placed in a location that Ernesto Cardenal called 'the dubious strait' (el estrecho dudoso), the novel unveils history in the Central American isthmus at the end of the twentieth century, particularly Costa Rica and El Salvador. The narrative follows a chronological order (beginning in 1971 and ending in present) but there are leaps, lacunae, flash backs, silences.

The lucidity of the novel hurts. No politician remains clean, no corruption untold, no violence unnamed. This is Rossi's most political text. However, this paper will not dwell on that aspect. Instead, it will focus on something that can be perceived as an erotic utopia of sorts, and which can be considered one of the most innovative aspects of this novel. The political subject will be indirectly addressed from that place where the bodies, pleasure and sex resist power and are reinvented in an imaginary space – one could be tempted to say at the margins of western 'civilization.'

Limón Reggae shows two opposing views of sexuality. The first is a conventional one, within accepted social parameters, which is dull and unsatisfactory for the protagonist. The second can be called erotic utopia, and is the one this paper addresses. It could be thought of in the light of an endeavour that Leo Bersani calls the redemptive reinvention of sex, which he defines as follows:

> The immense theoretical corpus of contemporary discourse that argues in favour of a radically revised imagination of the capacity of the body for pleasure – a discursive project that includes Foucault, Weeks and Watney – has as a possible condition a certain negation of sex as we know it, and an often silent accord on a sexuality that would be less problematic, less corrosive socially, less violent, more respectful of 'personality' than it has been in a phallocratic culture. (1999: 54-55)

Rossi's novel is bent upon the task reinventing sex, not from any theoretical point of view but from the dermis of its characters. The strategy used is to aesthetise sexuality, converting bodies into spaces for eroticism and pleasure beyond genitality. This is sex in open or semi-open places where rain, menstrual blood, wind, sea breeze and humidity invade the erotic space and produce new ways of enjoying the body. For example, during a night of downpour Fernando lures the protagonist out of her hammock:

> Ruedan a la lluvia, el aguacero los cala pero están hirviendo, es un agua de fuego lo que los empapa. Los colochitos de Aisha alisados por la lluvia y chorrean sobre su rostro, su cuerpo resbaloso se frota contra el cuerpo excitado de Fernando y sus manos ávidas se hunden en ella. Es como si el aguacero al golpearlos exacerbara su hambre, son dos animales que se devoran locos debajo del chubasco amordazándose uno a otro con el hombro o el brazo o la mano para no aullar de alivio, de amor, de placer. (180)

Rossi's sexual utopia seems to evade the problem of violence inherent to sex. In her erotic descriptions she uses aggressive verbs such as 'hitting,' but since they are performed by the rain upon both male and female bodies the verb loses its human connotation. The verb 'devour' is shared by both partners, thus situating them both at the same level. This means there is no hierarchy subordinating femininity to masculinity. This is fundamental if we think of MacKinnon's criticism of pornography, which, according to Bersani, could be applied to sexuality in general. MacKinnon writes:

> Pornography turns sex inequality into sexuality and turns male dominance into sex difference. Put another way, pornography makes inequality into sex, which makes it enjoyable, and into gender, which makes it seem natural.
>
> [...] Pornography in this view is a form of forced sex, a practice of sexual politics, an institution of gender inequality. From this perspective, pornography is neither harmless fantasy nor a corrupt and confused misrepresentation of an otherwise natural and healthy sexual situation. It institucionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, fusing the erotization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female. (1987: 3 and 172)

What can be seen as innovative in the erotic proposal of *Limón Reggae* is that, by emptying eroticism of its violent content and by permitting sex to be an experience of dispossession for women as well as for men, it deconstructs the masculine-feminine hierarchy within the heterosexual couple. In Rossi's proposal, the counter model, what has to be rejected of sex as we know it today, is not only its violence but mainly its dullness: what has to be rejected is mechanical, frigid, boring sex. Perhaps because of this, in the novel, redemptive sex is not eternal. It inevitably ends in ascesis and renunciation.

In the text, sexual utopia appears twice. First with Fernando, the guerrilla partisan, and then with Raymond, a young afrolimonian man. In both cases it is a sexuality that goes beyond sex understood in its narrow sense. This means it includes genitality, but is never just centred around it. Sexual relations are overridden by eroticism; they take place literally at the edge of a cliff and, in the case of the love scenes in the guerrilla camp, under the approaching shadow of death.

Commenting on Marguerite Duras' novel, *Le Navire Night*, Jean Allouch (2004: 67) suggests it shows a sexuality which is allergic to daylight (of black orgasms, according to Duras) where the identity of each person is notoriously fictitious, a territorialized sexuality that permits drifting, since its territory is an abyss.

The sexual utopia proposed in *Limón Reggae* shares some traits with Durasian Navire Night sexuality. First, it is anonymous. Laura is a young leftist woman who accepts to take care of a wounded guerrilla in a clandestine security house. She can only go out every fortnight to the nearest village and she cannot speak to anyone. Of Fernando nothing is known. Their private life, their real names, their history, their past, their personalities are excluded from the relationship for the effects of security. The only thing about Fernando that Laura knows is that she wants him madly: she wants to get lost in his brown sugar skin. It is she who initiates sexual contact:

> El no se mueve. Está dormido. Laura se abre la blusa y se sube la falda y se pone encima de Fernando, sin pesar sobre él. Desliza la punta de la lengua por el centro de la espalda, desde la nuca baja despacito. Fernando la siente, se despierta pero apenas se mueve, murmura 'Aisha' con voz ronca, 'Aisha mi amor' mientras la lengua mojada y tibia llega al coxis y se hunde, lentamente, entre las nalgas. Laura ignora por qué hace eso, nadie se lo ha pedido, nadie se lo enseñó, todo su ser lo quiere. Prueba el agujerito dulce, eso la vuelve loca, hunde la lengua más adentro, se lo quiere comer, '¡Aisha!' gime Fernando pero la deja hacerlo. Hasta que no puede más, Fernando grita, se voltea, tiene los ojos nublados, la agarra y la besa larguísimo, le termina de abrir la blusa rogando 'Deme sus chiches, deme' saca los pechos largos, erectos, puntiagudos, los toca, los besa, sigue por el vientre, le sube la falda, 'anda sin nada,' gime, 'quiero verle la pupusa.' A Laura la palabra la excita tremendamente, sí se la va a enseñar, se pone de cuclillas sobre su cara y se la enseña, 'está bonita, rebonita,' gime Fernando y la tantea despacio con la lengua. [...]
>
> Fernando está rendido, totalmente abandonado y eso la transforma a ella también. (122)

The fluctuation of the feminine name is noteworthy: for Fernando she is Aisha, for the omniscient narrator it is Laura. This is a woman who takes the initiative, who straddles her lover, penetrates his body, but without violence. The text de-phallicises the penis which, at least in this scene, is absent and phallicises feminine attributes (erect breasts and penetrating tongue). This phallisisation is non-authoritarian, devoid of aggression, practiced with sweetness and changes the male character into a receptor who surrenders: abandons himself. This happens in most sex scenes in the novel.

Aisha and Fernando separate without any certainty of ever meeting again. Their identities and their names are fictions. They have no information to seek each other out. But they will meet again. Years later, in a guerrilla camp, Fernando/Rodrigo shows up. Aisha has now been

in the guerrilla for some time and works as a translator of press releases. She must escort Fernando to an important political meeting in Belize. This means going back to her beloved Caribbean, the sea that rocked her childhood, but this time with Fernando.

> Los muslos de Fernando tiemblan de deseo. 'Aisha, cipota,' le dice, y la lleva a la cama. La desviste. 'Cerrá el mosquitero,' dice ella, 'hay murciélagos.' Fernando se rie despacio, suave, 'ay cipota, como si en las cuevas donde nos refugiamos no los hubiera por miles, como si nuestra vida no fuera entre bichos y alimañas;' ella rie también y después se ponen serios y comienza el abandono. Fernando es un hombre rendido, enamorado, vulnerable, sin mando ni control. Se entregarán de esa forma todos los hombres de ese país, se pregunta, o todos los guerrilleros.
>
> Despierta porque en la ingle algo le cosquillea. ¿Otra vez un murciélago? No, no es un murciélago, es un líquido grueso que sale de su vientre con un gran envión y corre por sus muslos. Despierta a Fernando. 'Mi amor, estamos empapados, me vino la regla.' Fernando abre los ojos, mira su reloj, dice 'Apenas son las doce, no se preocupe' y la abraza más fuerte. 'Pero Fernando estás empapado.' 'Cipota mi amor, es muy rica su sangre, no se mueva, no se mueva, está tan calientita.' (174)[6]

The text insists on the sexual vulnerability of men and, although he is not passive, Fernando's sexuality leads to surrender, loss of command and control. This trait will appear also in Raymond, the young rastafari. In this sense, the novel responds to the following statement by Bersani:

> Phallocentrism is precisely that: not mainly denying power to women (though it has always led to that, everywhere and at all times) but not wanting to recognize the value of powerlessness, for men as well as for women. (1999:58)

The novel seems to suggest that the only way to escape phallocentrism is to territorialize sexuality on the margins of patriarchal society. This 'liberated' and fictitious territory enables men to experience sex as an act of dispossession, of losing oneself. The text proposes two such spaces: the Caribbean coast of Central America and the mountains that safeguard the guerrilla. Sex between Laura and Fernando occurs in a clandestine house, in a jungle seaside in Belize and in a guerrilla camp. Sexual utopia can only happen at the margins, at the edge of the establishment, precisely in that symbolic space which received the name of 'territorio liberado' – liberated territory – and through which liberation from injustice and inequality would come.

In this quest of reinventing sex, no less significant is the reinvention of language – or languages, to be more precise. The novel is a 'Babel hereuse,' to use Roland Barthes' expression. The characters use English, Mekateliou (Creole English from Limón) and Salvadorean and Costa Rican Spanish in a cultural and sometimes sexual communion that takes place in language, but never in politics. Rossi uses Central American idioms to reinvent and multiply erotic possibilities. Changes in idioms and language let us know in which country the action is taking place or to which Central America country a character belongs.

[6] It is worth insisting in the 'naturalisation' of sex, in the sense Allouch gives to that word: to return something to nature, depriving it of its signifying value. Menstrual blood, deprived of its ancestral symbolic connotations and turned it into a taboo, recovers its natural properties. Blood does not mean anything, it just warms Aisha's partner. See Jean Allouch (2004: 23).

The idioms of the other's language produce a strange intimacy that is best manifested in erotic scenes, like the one where the narrator says that:

> Laura lo ama por decirle pupusa a su sexo, una cosa rica y tibia y comestible, en cambio sus compatriotas le dicen 'mico,' un animal ridículo y chillón, o 'sapo,' un bicho frío, desagradable, quién va a querer besar un sapo, aunque aquel chavalo bueno, de la espalda pecosa, le decía mi 'empanadita.' (122)

What Laura loves is a foreign, alien proximity, how her mother tongue can acquire new tones, new meanings, new nuances. She loves how the Spanish of her childhood can re-name her body, reinvent her sex.

As indicated, the instability of first names is also notable. Laura's first love is an afrodescendant named Percival. Even very young, he changes his name to Ahmed, to leave behind a name that symbolises colonization. The guerrilla member Fernando/Rodrigo goes from one name to another. For the protagonist this naming dance becomes a never ending game. She opens the novel with the name of Laura. A Costa Rican of Palestine origin, she renames herself Aisha. She thus leaves behind a name imposed by her parents to adopt one that symbolises her mixed origin. Aisha is her first war name in the guerrilla, the one which best expresses her rebellious spirit, her need to change the world. Aisha is also the name she chooses for her first full-fledged erotic experience. Afterwards she will be called 'compañera Anaís,' and Salomé when she kills a traitor to the revolution. She will also use the name Roxana and when she has reached her limits, Laurencia. Laurencia is almost like going back to her first name, and it will be her last one and will help her to lose herself in pleasure, to forget violence and hopelessness and, perhaps most important, to herself.

This is also a polyphonic novel, traversed by a diversity of voices, different accents and the intertext of reggae. This Caribbean music enters the text at least in three ways. First, through fragments of the lyrics of several songs. These have a powerful effect on readers used to hearing that music: they will inevitably hum the tune. But Reggae has also an intellectual function, best shown in discussions between some of the characters. Finally, it structures several sections of the text. For example, Chapter 12 is subtitled Redemption Song, to honour one of Bob Marley's lyrics. But the subtitle is not decorative, its function is fundamental since it marks the moment when Laura/Laurencia decides to enjoy her last passionate love and live with Raymond in Limón. This love goes against two worlds, that of the 'white' middle classes of the Valle Central, who are deeply racist, and that of the afrodescendant families of Limón. Raymond's family opposes his union with a 'paña' (person who speaks Spanish) to the point of excluding him from their community.

It must be said that this passionate love is not courtly love (amour courtois) which erotises transgression. It is not a sexuality fuelled by the obstacles that separate the lovers. It is also not structured on the courtois axis. Sexuality is just there, present. The characters are outside of the conventional sexual structure almost unwittingly, and sex, like Marley's song indicates, plays a redeeming role. It delivers Laurencia from her wounds, it cures the pain that tortures her body and her soul, and it permits her to forget her story.

This is made possible because one of the main strategies of the text, to reinvent sex, consists in separating the death drive from the erotic drive. Cruelty and degradation happen in a very precise point which the protagonist calls 'eso' ('that'). 'Eso' appears in the children's eyes when they bleed cats to death, in soldiers' eyes when they impale babies to punish the

parents, but it is never present in the space this paper calls sexual utopia. It could almost be said that in this novel violence permeates everything but sexuality. When some sign of aggression appears in sex, the text – as mentioned above – immediately saturates it with natural connotations and separates it from 'eso' which is too human. Social violence and what the novel calls 'eso' seem to take another path, different from sexuality. That is why sexuality can be considered utopian, but a productive utopia that reinvents a sexuality leading to an experience of profound dispossession, an almost absolute abandoning of self.

Thus, the text raises several questions. Is it perhaps inevitable that all experiences of self-abandon (loss of the self) are rooted in masochism and violence? Is it possible to think about sex as a metaphor, i.e., as a space beyond violence? Can sex have the function of pacifying 'jouissance,' of playing with it? The text seems to say yes to these questions. But, for this to be possible, an inner change is necessary. The novel argues that only when the person or individuality are subdued, when the communal link has been redefined, this erotic experience of losing oneself, transcending the limits of the ego, can lead not to annihilation but to a redeeming transformation of both partners.

Against psychoanalytic theory, *Limón Reggae* dares to propose sexuality beyond aggression by aesthetising and fictionalising identities. Bersani, in one of the few texts in which he mentions Lacan, also thinks the possibility of going beyond 'jouissance,' not by erasing it but 'playing to the side of it' (2005: 76-77). To supplement it with a pleasure that would be more productive and less intense.

The characters in *Limón Reggae* are in a certain sense the 'aesthetised subjects' of Bersani, because one can see their sexuality as de-phallicised. But at the same time they are not, because aesthetised eroticism does not deprive sex of intensity. The difference seems fundamental, because the novel reinvents sex without abandoning physical sex or without excluding it from itself. The latter tendency can be seen in Bersani's reading of Almodóvar (2005: 98-103). There, sex inevitably drifts towards something else, for example, towards an erotic of conversation.

The novel, indirectly and from the space of sexual utopia, radically questions the values of individuality and identity that support the capitalist system. These values are to be destroyed. For this, it is necessary to live at the margins. This allows thinking new forms of sociality and suggests that perhaps in a not too distant a future multiple and fictitious identities could be imagined. This ex-centricity of erotic space is evident in the last sexual encounter narrated in the novel. A devastated Aisha returns to Costa Rica. She has lost to the Salvadorean army her adopted son, Toño, who was her only constant and true affection. The excessive violence she has gone through has made her ill and she lies in bed for two years with a depression. And then, one morning she gets up and decides to face the world again. She cuts her hair, buys new dresses and returns to Limón, a beautiful but very poor and neglected part of her country.

Her first encounter with Raymond is propitiated by reggae. They dance, they are strangers but they madly want each other. When Raymond asks her name she answers 'Laurencia,' bestowing on herself the grand luxury of forgetting her past, of starting anew. Later that night they stroll along the beach and sit down facing the sea:

> Aisha mira su boca carnosa y muy bien dibujada que ya no sonríe, tiene el dulce temblor grave de un hombre excitado y el deseo vela sus ojos brillantes, y su cuerpo alto y fuerte está abierto, receptivo. Raymond le dice 'Laurencia' y le toma la barbilla. Le

> acaricia la cara con ternura. Le acaricia la boca con sus dedos, despacito, largo rato, y el cuerpo de Aisha se hunde en un suampo. Aisha lo toca a él y su piel lisa y perfecta se entrega a sus dedos exhalando un perfume parecido al bairrún [...]
>
> Raymond la besa y sus besos al principio son cautos pero se van convirtiendo en los de una persona que está entera en sus besos, atrevidos, profundos [...] Raymond la acomoda sobre su cuerpo excitado y murmura 'lovely sistah.' ¿Yo, su hermana?, piensa Aisha. Los dos están atrapados, hundidos en un suampo, les cuesta respirar. Aisha recibe incrédula el empuje de su hombría sobre el amontonamiento de deseos y de sed y sabe sin ninguna duda que son dos extraños hermanos. (200-01)

Raymond wants to be initiated into Rastafarianism. He condemns capitalism, which he calls Babylon. Later he will admit to Laurencia that what made her so attractive to him was his conviction that she was out of Babylon. And he was right. Aisha is his sister in desolation, but also in resistance. After her life in the guerrilla, this strange woman is incapable of living in San José, she cannot stand the capital. That is why her relationship with Raymond must be kept within the bounds of Limón. She does not want to live with him in San José or in New York. She does not want to form a family and have children with him even though she thinks she loves him. Their love does not – or cannot – have a future. It is territorialized sexuality and possibly if it leaves the margins the pleasure will vanish, eroticism will be lost.

From the point of view of political utopia, Rossi's novel is a sad, disenchanted text that reflects the impotence of those social groups which in the 1970s and 80s tried unsuccessfully to change unfair social structures to build more habitable and fair societies. In view of current continuing poverty, injustice, misery and desolation, the sexual utopia of *Limón Reggae* delineates an impossible place where bodies and their pleasure resist the bloodthirsty powers of these small republics and, thus, re-create and re-name themselves to offer us an ephemeral abyss of light.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 13

OTHER SOCIETIES, OTHER MEN: MASCULINITIES IN RECENT CENTRAL AMERICAN NARRATIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The study of masculinity in Latin America is fairly new. According to Mara Viveros Vigoya, the first studies date from the late 1980s. These works 'describe men as having gender and producing gender' (2003:27) from a point of view that approaches 'the relational concept of gender' (2003:27), as well as dealing with matters relating to identity and inequality (Gutmann 2003:1). An important theoretical premise, derived from a certain feminist tradition, defines masculinity as a field which 'tiene como objeto de estudio a los hombres y lo que éstos hacen como referentes más próximos al problema de la dominación masculina' (Careaga y Cruz Sierra 2006:9).[1] However, as Robert A. Nye notes, current tendencies are centred more around power imbalances among men, products of racial, sexual and class conditions; the practices that reinforce dominant masculine codes, the deconstruction of masculine/feminine binaries, or 'the scrutinizing of male bodies for insight into the mysteries of masculine engendering' (2005:1938).

Nye points out that the most recent analyses on the theme of masculinities '[emphasise] the adaptive nature of masculine identities' (2005:1939), which is to say that identity is not ahistorical, but is subject to a series of transformations depending on the contexts in which the relations between men, and between men and women, take place. Nye introduces the notion of crisis to describe this constant questioning of what it is to be a man, as well as the strategies of adapting to changes and to the negotiating of rearticulated relationships and spaces of power.

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[1] This is a key concept for the French sociologist Pierre Bordieu, whose book, *Masculine Domination*, takes up the notion of doxa to analyse the perpetuation of conditions of domination, symbolic violence and culture as a social order dominated by the masculine principle.

Meanwhile, Gutmann identifies four possible concepts of masculinity. He sums up the first as 'anything that men think, say and do' (2003:3). The second, based on the first, emphasizes those characteristics that distinguish men as such. In this sense, masculinity is related to some form of power or intensity, which can reach varying levels in different situations. Gutmann also contemplates the possibility that masculinity is a quality that some men possess in greater measure than others, whether for biological reasons or as the result of some personal attainment. His last concept includes a component of negotiation in which women contribute towards formulating the masculine.

Looking at all the different possibilities of approaching the theme of masculinity, some common threads emerge. Domination continues to be a central issue, which not only affects women in their relationships with men, but also men themselves. In the face of dominant masculinities the question arises of how to articulate alternative identities and subjectivities, which propose varying degrees of dissidence and negotiation, as much between genders as within groups of the same gender. Regarding Latin America, Gutmann highlights the idea of masculine hegemony as an organising criterion for all men, which is often expressed in terms of homophobia, machismo, misogyny and violence (2003:3). Masculine hegemony is not only normative but is also performative, so that, just as it determines relations with women, other masculinities are marginalised and/or subordinated. Masculine hegemony, in the words of Robert Connell, 'no es una cuestión de jaloneos entre grupos ya formados, más bien es una cuestión de formación de tales grupos' (quoted in Ramírez Rodríguez 2006:41). Also proposed is the notion that men should be seen as subjects of gender - both as bearers and propagators of gender. In this sense, masculinity would be conditioned by social, cultural and economic elements that transcend individuality and the biological body. This means that, a person can be a man in their own right, but more so in relation to a collective. Thus, we can apply Burin and Meler's ideas on the instability of the concept of gender, which is relational, historical, social and interdependent on other variables, including ethnicity and social class (2000:24).

Taking this discussion on masculinities into account, I am interested in tackling the change in the notion of the masculine in Central American narratives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For this purpose, in this article, I explore forms of representation in stories by the following authors: José Ricardo Chaves (Costa Rica), Guillermo Barquero (Costa Rica), Jacinta Escudos (El Salvador), Luis Pulido Ritter (Panamá) and Francisco Méndez (Guatemala). In my analysis, I propose that, in the Central America of recent years, we can find not one but multiple masculinities which are linked to factors such as violence, the city and the exploration of the body.

THE PROMISES OF THE NEW SOCIETY

In an article published in *Iberoamericana*, Werner Mackenbach and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner study the connections between violence and narrative in recent Central American literature. Taking Héctor Leyva's doctoral dissertation, *Narrativa de los procesos centroamericanos 1960-1990* as a point of reference, Mackenbach and Ortiz state that '[el] dominio de la violencia [pasa a ser] … una manifestación estética' (2008:82), not merely of denunciation but also of subjectivity, within a context in which, '[e]l fin de las luchas

armadas y los procesos revolucionarios significó el cambio hacia nuevas formas asimétricas de negociación tanto políticas como civiles, en el espacio público como en el privado' (2008:83), as much with the urban and political setting as with others who inhabit the same space, including 'el concepto de ciudadanía e identidad, pero también con su propio cuerpo' (2008:86).

Leyva's dissertation relates the narrative of violence (novels written by guerrillas and/or testimonial narratives) with concepts such as heroic death. He cites a passage from Omar Cabeza's book, *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde*, in which the narrator describes how he could only overcome being apart from his lover because he was *plomo*, 'una palabra que sustituye uno de los lemas centrales del movimiento sandinista: "*P*atria *l*ibre *o mo*rir." ' For Leyva, this constitutes an example of 'una metáfora, a lo mejor inconsciente pero certera, que describe la concepción cerrada, militarista y patriarcal de la 'nueva' nación y del hombre "nuevo"' (quoted in Mackenbach and Ortiz 2008:864).

I am interested in extricating some of these aspects, such as the question of subjectivity, with regard to the protagonists of the narratives chronicling political violence and testimonial texts of the 1980s and the subsequent narrative production. Taking masculine subjectivity into account, one could think more in terms of continuity than rupture, as well as consider the contradictory vision of a new society based on the masculine attributes of the traditional revolutionary. On the other hand, we can already identify various forms of negotiation at every level - including that of the body - within post-war societies, albeit asymmetrical negotiations. Thus, there is a change in attitude, which Mackenbach and Ortiz Wallner tend to define as disenchantment (2008:83), although we shall go on to see how this also indicates that the post-war brought about an opportunity for negotiations that had been going on since before the ceasefires, or for new subjects.

In their testimonial text, *No me agarran viva. La mujer salvadoreña en lucha*, Claribel Alegría and D. J. Flakoll present us with a perspective of what the new societies would be like, with particular regard to gender relations and the formation of alternative masculinities, which would result from the social and political change brought about by the triumph of the insurgent groups in El Salvador. The book, which was first published in 1983, tells the life story of Eugenia, a guerrilla combatant who has already died, from the perspectives of those who knew her. The voices of various individuals are brought together: her sisters, her husband and members of the organisation that Eugenia belonged to. The idea of family is under constant examination throughout the testimonies. The protagonist comes from an urban, middle-class family, in which the mother passes on Christian values, while the father, despite his own religiosity, transmits progressive values. The entry into rebel groups of a Marxist bent impels a change in Eugenia's conception of the notion of family. In fact, her future husband, Javier, also plays a prominent role as the transmitter of revolutionary values. However, for the protagonist, the collective itself becomes a kind of nucleus that combines the values of the traditional 'family' institution, with those of the new society.

Among Eugenia's letters included in the book, we find love, sacrifice, freedom and tenderness. In contrast, Javier, the most present masculine voice throughout the narrative, maintains a discourse that is bereft of feelings; he focuses on the political struggle as the factor through which relationships are mediated. It is the women who provide the reflections on gender. There is a small section in *No me agarran viva* in which gender roles and what is expected of men is discussed. When commander Nadia describes the participation of women in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, she defines the statutory basis as equal

with regard to rights and duties for men and women, but also recognises that the history of inequality determines the potential for change over theoretical discourse. According to Nadia, it is not just the same level of participation that is needed, but also equal rights, opportunities and duties. Marta and Ondina, Eugenia's sisters, have a positive view of the relation between political change and power relations among men and women. They, like Commandant Ana María, recognise the change in the fact that men can take care of the children and do the household duties usually attributed to women. Ultimately, the move towards socialism in the political system is seen as the best way to overcome sexism and male resistance to change in the intimate space of the home, mainly because it is within the public sphere of political and military leadership that the greatest progress seems to have been made.

No me agarran viva has been widely studied[2] from at least two interconnected angles, firstly, in terms of its formal structure and how it was written in the context of the testimonial production of Central America at the time. The book relates the vicissitudes of a woman who has already died and whose subaltern condition is determined more by her gender than social class. In this sense it is important to remember that Eugenia is not a representative of an underprivileged class or grouping, whose voice is rescued by an interlocutor, but rather a middle-class woman who is radicalised as a result of her religious and political formation. Alegría and Flakoll fictionalise the account of Eugenia's death and reconstruct the trajectory of her life as a revolutionary on the basis of the recollections of the people around her. This hybrid writing strategy is less typical of Central American testimonial narratives of the 1980s than it is of the chronicle, especially by authors such as Elena Poniatowska.[3]

The second critical angle is concerned with gender relations, particularly the figure of the warrior hero and his textual idealisation. If armed struggle constitutes the only possible means of change, the participating men and women are modelled on the basis of certain revolutionary archetypes, which Padilla describes as 'the figure of the romanticized guerrillero inspired by Che Guevara' (2005:55), the so-called *hombre nuevo* 'dedicated to the struggle, dedicated to the people, a selfless hybrid of the militant fighter and sensible priest' (2005:59). Treacy, in turn, affirms that Claribel Alegría uses strategies derived from hagiography - the writing of the lives of the saints - which suggests a parallel between military triumphs and ethical development, as well as narratives of martyrdom (1994:84), in which the individual is willing to give everything, even their life, for their ideals. The women in the struggle will be part *hombre nuevo* as well as *madre nutricia*, and with their comrade partners would become the parents, as Padilla would say using the terms of certain leftist ideologies, of a new liberated generation (2005:63).

As we shall see shortly, there are changes in the representation of masculinities in post-war literature. Nevertheless, these transformations are found far from what a text like *No me agarran viva* proposes. While the revolution and the desired ideological and political changes were not realised, this does not mean that we cannot expect new forms of masculinity, at least in literature.

[2] See, for example, Rodríguez, 1994 and 1996, Treacy, 1994, and Padilla, 2005.

[3] The chronicle shares with testimony the objective of 'giving a voice to those who have none' and, in the case of *No me agarran viva*, the urban atmosphere that provides the backdrop to the political-revolutionary portrait. Published in 1988, Elena Poniatowska's *Nadie, nada. Las voces del temblor* deals with the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. The book combines various genres to convey concrete realities and incorporates journalistic techniques - mainly interviews - in order to allow the direct participation of characters from less privileged social classes.

POST-WAR MASCULINITIES

There is no simple, and probably not even a single, answer to the question of when masculinities alternative to those that correspond to the aesthetic and political aims of the revolutionary project emerge in Central American literature. For example, in Costa Rica there is evidence of new representations of the masculine dating back to the earliest work of José Ricardo Chaves,[4] his short-story collection, *La mujer oculta* (1984). The title story has been analysed in terms of 'la incomunicación entre la pareja [que] va más allá del plano sexual: se trata más bien de la imposibilidad del personaje masculino de aceptar las características femeninas que existen en la psique de todo hombre' (Rojas and Ovares 1995:243). It is possible, however, from the point of view of analysing masculinity, to consider alternative readings, both with regard to the subjectivity of the masculine character and in his relationship with the female character.

I differ from Rojas and Ovares over the assertion that 'La mujer oculta' is a story about lack of communication. I believe it deals more precisely with the theme of fear of the other and the questioning of gender boundaries. It is a story that describes an impossible attempt to merge both genders within a single being, which is ultimately resolved through murder and transvestism. 'La mujer oculta' opens as a portrait of a couple, a man and a woman who are getting ready to go out. While the female protagonist becomes transfixed: '[f]rente al espejo se descubre hermosa, deseable, y esto la hace sentirse bien' (1984:11), her husband observes her and feels proud of her. Both maintain '[u]na comunicación secreta' (1984:12), expressed in terms of mutual desire. She represents a prototype of femininity based on beauty and normative roles of domesticity and the possession of material objects. He, in turn, is representative of a traditional masculinity, in opposition to the femininity of his wife: 'Es él un hombre joven, de unos treinta años,' the narrator tells us, 'descuidado en el vestir, como corresponde a un hombre-hombre, a uno que, como él, estima que la belleza sólo es compatible con lo femenino' (1984:13). His problem does not reside in his passive contemplation of his wife's beauty, but rather in using his wife as a means of expressing something that he is denied socially.

The wife comes from a lower middle-class family, in which the father exercises total control over the children, to the point of assigning them roles: the virtuous woman, the hard-working man without vices (i.e., a good provider). In terms of gender and sexuality, the father 'lo que no resistiría, sería tener un hijo playo o una hija puta' (1984:19), two evils that threaten the traditional sense of honour. The husband makes no comment; he hides a secret desire to dress in clothes that emphasise his body, that reveal his physical form rather than express neglect; he longs to show off his beauty, something that does not form part of the dominant code of masculinity.

The narrator uses dreams to reveal the desires and rebellion of the female protagonist. Indeed, she starts to have nightmares in which certain opposites merge, and, hence, what the dream produces is a like portent of a tragic situation yet to come. The story questions the oppositioning of man and woman and favours a grey area where people are not clearly identified by their gender, which the narrator describes as 'algo más, una ambigua

[4] In general, Chaves is seen as a pioneer in his portrayal of individuals whose masculinity does not follow the pattern of white, heterosexual and reproductive, which served as the prototype of the Costa Rican man for most of the 20th century.

identificación con el sujeto de nuestro placer, un hollar el sendero de lo indistinto: hacerse un poco mujer, el hombre; y un poco hombre, la mujer' (1984:16). It also warns that those who dare to venture into this region, where gender differences do not exist, will be punished. He is afraid; she is not, since the transgression threatens to undermine her marginal status. He, in turn, understands that his position of power would be jeopardised by any attempt to transgress the hetero-masculine norm.

The dreams and the nocturnal space, in general, provide clues regarding the title of the story. It would perhaps be more appropriate for it to be called 'Cuerpos ocultos,' given that the story not only refers to the possibility of an inner femininity but also the possibility of an inner masculinity. In the bedroom, the man's body is seen from her perspective. Almost throughout the entire narrative he is asleep, exposed and vulnerable. She dreams of naked bodies and of herself as a kind of remnant (margin) that is transformed into a body (centre, domination). In the nightmare, human bodies appear 'dormidos … inconcientes … muertos' (1984:22), while a horse is, by way of opposition, a 'cuerpo animal, tibio, en medio de la soledad de la playa de las tumbas' (1984:23). The animal is possibly a representation of lust (Biedermann 1996:77), desire and the instincts, including the feminine within the masculine (Cirlot 1971:152).

The woman begins a nightly ritual: she wanders naked about the house and the adjoining workshop where her husband works as a mechanic. During the day each space reflects the gender division, but at night, during the hours of sleep, they become grey areas where there are no strict divisions. The fact that she enters the workshop naked is important. Not only does she invade the masculine space while showing off her true self, but she also uses the tools as if they were sexual organs to pleasure herself. Naked as she is, the woman transgresses the dichotomies of male-female, man-woman. She enters exposed, without shame, and this transgression sparks a sense of self-discovery. Hence, she wants to be free, to abandon the home, experiment with her sexuality, with the masculine aspect she holds within her. When her husband becomes aware of this, a battle ensues. As was said earlier, he does not dare to transgress the roles, but instead tries to make her return to her previous space, to the norm. When she refuses and announces that she is leaving, he declares that he will never let this happen, reasoning in the following manner:

> Sos mi otro cuerpo, el cuerpo que nadie ve, aunque lo estén viendo. Escondido, aunque sólo yo lo sepa. En vos respiro, en vos me agito, en vos deliro… ¿Cómo voy a dejarte ir? No; no saldrás a la calle, nadie descubrirá tu desnudez, que es mi desnudez, pues si te ven, me ven; no te vas a ir. (1984:29)

This quote reveals that the man is clearly aware that he projects his feminine side onto his wife, who is hidden away for only his sake. His fear of society is stronger, to the extent that he would rather kill his wife than let her leave.

After killing her, the man goes back to the ritual of using clothing to cover-up his identities. Paradoxically, this time he puts on one of his wife's dresses. He then goes out in an act that makes public the feminine side he previously hid. Now that his wife no longer lives, there is no one onto whom he can project his desire, so the man cross-dresses and goes to the police station to hand himself over amidst great clamour and jeering.

'La mujer oculta' can be read as a story about the tensions between a hegemonic masculinity - patriarchal, provider, contained in the expression of desires, paranoid even - and

subaltern masculinities, marginal, whose transvestism - and I do not refer necessarily to the climax of the story as much as to the transvestism of the 'hombre-hombre' - reach a point of crisis in the face of transgressions.

Other forms of masculinity are found in stories about subjects who not only expressly renounce to be part of a capitalistic-production apparatus, but also question hegemonic models of masculinity. In these narratives there is no familial project, like we see in *No me agarran viva*, instead we find men who are not fertile, not only in a biological sense, but also with regards to masculine ideology or a concrete political project. In a revealing article, Claudia Ferman calls certain writers whose work shares the aforementioned characteristics, 'los nuevos crueles.' The term is adapted from what Ana Inés Larre Borges has described as 'la estética de la crueldad,' understood as 'una serie de expresiones/prácticas expresivas que se estructuran en torno a escenarios asociados con la violencia en sus más variadas expresiones' (quoted in Ferman 2004: n.p). Ferman departs from the model formulated by María Milagros Pérez for the Puerto Rican case. This model, called the post-work society, is based on changes in social structure and the relationship between the individual and work production, resulting from recent developments in the terms of international economic exchange - due to the general phenomena of globalisation and free trade agreements in particular - as well as new rationales of domestic production, which deprive individuals of a framework for the present, the notion of a future or the promise of social mobility. The exclusion of people from different labour markets manifests itself in new subjectivities whose 'reclamo de derechos, placeres, dignidad personal y autovaloración están fuera de la estructura del trabajo asalariado' (2004: n.p.).

In this context, Ferman finds a space in which nomadic writing is produced, texts which implicate 'un lenguaje transnacional [...] que no se propone en la tradición del realismo documental' and whose protagonists are the city and the human body, while at the same time 'la vicisitud del protagonista/narrador está en el centro, y la historia se cuenta por medio de un multifacético vocabulario de violencia' (2004: n.p.). The violent environment, detached from meaningful projects of production, has generated stories about the use and abuse of the body. However, there is nothing in Ferman's analysis that relates directly with either the end of the wars, the failure of the revolutionary projects[5] or the relationship between Central American authors and the market.[6]

In the face of an attitude that favours the collective as an expression of identity, or the myth of the warrior hero, found in the Central American literature of previous decades, in stories such as 'Morgan,' by Francisco Alejandro Méndez, or 'Fantasía de un ilegal con el carnicero de la esquina,' by Luis Pulido Ritter - which are both analysed by Ferman as prototypes of 'los nuevos crueles' - we find solitary male characters, drug addicts, who are idle or exist beyond the regular labour market. The first angle would refer to the possibilities of bodily experimentation, so for this reason, as well as 'Morgan' I will also look at 'Pequeña biografía de un indeseable,' by Jacinta Escudos.

The character and narrator of 'Morgan,' a story by the Guatemalan Francisco Alejandro Méndez, is somewhat emblematic of a form of masculinity in which the use and abuse of the body is taken to the limit. Ferman refers to the story in the following terms:

[5] For a discussion on the possibilities of reading post-war texts from the point of view of the failed revolutionary projects, see Mackenbach 2004.

[6] Arturo Arias has made some sharp observations on these relationships (2010). It is also important to consider the reflections of authors like Volpi (2009), or those that appear in the compilation, *Palabra de América*.

> [...] tratamiento vandálico del cuerpo, violencia psicopática, drogas; y en el interior de una práctica social cotidiana constituida en el estar anímico, el ocio, la estimulación permanente y la ocupación agresiva del espacio en un desplazamiento constante. (2004: n.p.)

The character is nameless and without any defining physical features; instead it is the cat Morgan who, as a kind of parodic double of the narrator, appears as a concrete figure. The cat is identifiable by his alcoholism, ugliness and savagery. He can live alongside humans, but never as a pet and only in a violent relationship. Unsurprisingly, the descriptions of the cat always contain something negative: 'Un ojo ciego, que en lugar de pupila tenía aún los restos del comillo de un perro callejero' (1999:341); '[s]entí al demonio en persona' (1999:341); '[n]unca nadie me había amenazado así dentro de mi casa. Eso me gustó' (1999:343).

Without any defining physical or moral traits, the narrator simply acts, although, it could be said, with considerable procrastination. He watches the worst films on television, consumes drugs, alcohol and tobacco, does not wash, feels no loyalty towards his friends - who also lack names or anything that would endow them with any definite corporeality. He is integrated into the market because he writes a column for a magazine. About this he says: 'El mismo pusher me traía la plata, porque los artículos salían con un seudónimo […] Yo no tenía ni la menor idea de cuánto me pagaban por cada artículo' (1999:344). There is obviously an element of parody here; we are presented with a columnist who does not leave the house or engage with society, who depends on a drug dealer to supply him with, not food or any other basic necessity, but drugs and alcohol - in fact, for him salary is measured in bottles of beer - and whose public name is also false.

For this male character, the body merely exists to consume intoxicants. On the other hand, reality is just a banal circumstance. There is no project of economic production or family-oriented reproduction, no ethical purpose, no women, not even the mention of the sensory experience of drugs. Even the exercise of the intellect is futile. In stark contrast, the cat-double is concrete and becomes the object of the narrator's projected desire for death, a death that he nevertheless does not dare to consummate with his own hand. The pusher would be the ideal candidate to kill the cat, but he always refuses, which incites insults from the narrator: 'le dije que era un cobarde' (1999:342), '[l]e pregunté si lo mataría o no o que se fuera a la mierda. Se largó' (1999:343). Why the pusher? Maybe because he represents the death of the protagonist in the long term, when his body can take no more drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

At the end of the story, the narrator goes with the cat and his friends to the beach. The partygoers all end up either in hospital or unconscious through intoxication. Morgan, always drunk, jumps off the balcony. Shortly afterwards, the pusher declares that he has finally decided to kill the animal. At this point a kind of moral to the story becomes apparent: no one else is going to put an end to your body, ultimately you have to do it yourself. Of course, the moral is ironic: the narrator takes a friend's car and leaves without paying for the holiday, probably to carry on drinking and taking drugs until he drops.

'Pequeña biografía de un indeseable,' by the Salvadoran Jacinta Escudos, could be considered as the reverse of the story 'Morgan.' The central character, Caquita Miranda, is, amongst other things, a drug dealer, whose body is subjected to countless assaults that he always manages to overcome. Like 'Morgan,' the story is narrated in the first person, but with a notable difference. The most important is the fact that he does not abuse himself, this

always comes from outside. Then there is also a familial context that determines the fate of the character.

The narration begins shortly after Caquita's conception. His mother, Lina Miranda, is just seventeen years old, and from the start embodies anti-values: her passion is for sex, she does not want to have children, not even develop any maternal affection towards the child she has conceived but tries to kill it, finally abandoning him to her extended family. The narrator describes the occasions in which Lina tries to get rid of the child: a failed attempt at an abortion, she puts on a belt so her belly cannot be seen, 'provocarse accidentes, golpes, [tomar] brebajes extraños hechos con hierbas y raíces' (2002:309), until the baby is finally born and Lina dumps it in a latrine. As well as being physical, Lina's rejection of the child is verbal: she curses her carelessness for letting herself fall pregnant, she curses the existence of the foetus, she cries from the sheer rage she feels towards him (2002:309); she does not hide her contempt (2002:310). Caquita tells of his connection with these events and attitudes:

> Adentro, yo me daba cuenta de todo. Es bastante simple de entender: estás amarrado a tu madre y te da aire, comida. Sangre. Sin ella no se es nada. Por el ombligo me entraba su comida, su oxígeno, sus recuerdos obscenos, sus maldiciones revueltas con café y azúcar. (2002:310)

The traditional role of the mother is questioned completely: Lina not only transmits her feelings of rejection onto the foetus but also incubates in him her marginal condition. But even in the midst of the most atrocious feelings and conditions, Caquita always survives. At the age of thirteen he discovers who his mother is and becomes aware of the farce that his family life has been. He runs away to the city where he becomes a criminal. He adopts the masculine model of the ruffian, 'con el puñal en la chaqueta, no siento miedo. No me importa nada' (2002:314). He bears the mark, it can be said for sure, of someone who has emerged literally from shit.

For Caquita, the hostility of the world begins with the maternal figure and so, defending himself from aggression determines his relationship with the world. Political projects simply do not exist in Caquita's case, perhaps because the family, the quintessential foundation of society, holds absolutely no value for him. Caquita is not the type of man who comes from a privileged line of masculine hegemony. Although, even as a youth he adopts the most traditional masculine role, he is dogged by the secret of his origin, which is metaphorically stuck to his skin.

The stories, 'Fantasía de un ilegal con el carnicero de la esquina,' by Panamanian Luis Pulido Ritter, and 'Deselección antinatural,' by Costa Rican Guillermo Barquero display various similarities. Among these is the use of the dismemberment and disarticulation of the male body as a metaphor for change, and the use of extreme forms of aggression as a vehicle for the consummation of desires. 'Fantasía' revolves around two basic ideas: illegal immigration and the craving for meat. The first determines the other to a certain extent: we are told that, since he has lived away from his own country, the protagonist '[ha] dejado de comer los tres golpes al día' (459). This is an ironic take on illegal immigration. The protagonist never explains his reasons for leaving and seems to bear no affection towards his place of origin. As an immigrant, his problem is the lack of any work that pays a decent wage, enough for him to be able to eat meat - there is no allegation of discrimination or the poor living conditions of undocumented immigrants. Despite these limited opportunities, the

protagonist manages to survive off 'los trabajos de negro que realizo, como modelo para pintores, y traducciones infames del español al inglés' (459). In addition, he wears elegant clothes and, so, 'no parece ilegal,' and his migratory status makes him attractive to women who think that being with him is 'como enamorarse de un pirata' (459).

The dismemberment at the hands of a butcher can be seen as a projection of the protagonist's desire. From the story's title, the reader enters a world of vague realities: this, along with the ironic tone of the narrative, make us think that the long scene in which the protagonist sees himself converted into meat for sale does not have a denunciatory aspect. The preparation of the body to make it ready for display in the butcher's shop is painless and actually suggests the transformation of the undocumented subject into a desirable subject, fit for consumption. Perhaps this is the only way in which the monetary value actually measures up to the immigrant's expectations regarding the worth of work.

In 'Deselección antinatural' the narrator is also conscious of a process of his dismemberment; there is no grieving for the losses and he carries out tasks typical of a person with an artistic sensibility - in this case a painter who also writes but refuses to do poetry. The progressive loss of parts of his body is observed with neither surprise nor pain, but there is a need to communicate the experience. While the immigrant in Pulido Ritter's story looks for work as a butcher's assistant, Barquero's character becomes a postman, despite the fact that less and less of his body remains. The protagonist does not deliver the letters, instead 'llegaba hasta mi habitación y pasaba el resto del día revisando, abriendo, rompiendo, leyendo, sobresaltándome y releyendo, anotando y cabeceando, cansado y narcotizado por las malas noticias, los desengaños y las mentiras tan, pero tan amargas' (2009: n.p.) that he finds in the letters. Having spied on someone else's mail, he creates his own argument about the truth of human suffering, which is not found in the body as much as in relationships with others. At the same time this highlights the power of the word as the ultimate vestige of people's lives.

In 'Deselection,' the body is reduced until it is almost nothing. At the end, what may remain is 'objeto de exhibición en una morgue o una universidad, objeto de culto' (2009: n.p.), a kind of remnant that links the human and the non-human. Nevertheless, as in 'Fantasía,' the protagonist of Barquero's story also dreams of transcendence; this is why he constructs a literary discourse, which is all that remains of him at the end.

Both stories show masculine figures that are reduced until we see their essential core: to be an object of desire, despite their fragmented state and the impossibility of reconstruction as a human being. In these stories we find a strong sense of human beings as solitary individuals without social projects or traditional gender roles. As they are being dismembered, both characters bear witness to and try to explain themselves as individuals and as men. Both view themselves as marginalised, reduced in power in their relationships or in their sense of gender identity.

CONCLUSION

The stories analysed point towards what Mabel Burin has identified as a crisis in masculinity, which consists of a sense of rupture from a previous condition of equilibrium accompanied with a subjective experience of suffering. It includes the possibility of agency, of taking up a critical position regarding the previous equilibrium (2000:123). Mara Viveros

defines the crisis in masculinity as 'the clash between attributes culturally assigned to men and subjective reactions on the part of men to important social, economic, and ideological changes that support this gap' (28). The post-war narratives discussed provide a stage for this crisis, for the reformulation of roles and for a multivalent space where ideas about the masculine can be channeled in new directions.

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In: Violence and Endurance
Editor: Astvaldur Astvaldsson
ISBN: 978-1-63485-078-0

Chapter 14

ABJECT GUERRILLERAS: RE-DEFINING THE 'WOMAN WARRIOR' IN POST-WAR CENTRAL AMERICA

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The figure of the female militant or *guerrillera* became a pivotal icon of the armed struggles that took place in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador during the 1970s and 80s. The importance and popularity of this image of female subjectivity is not surprising since, first and foremost, it was representative of the historical reality. Women from various walks of life constituted not only a necessary segment of the Left's armed ranks but were also a fundamental base of support for popular struggles and activism.[1] The figure of the *guerrillera*, however, also had a key ideological function. She was a synthesis of the various discourses of national liberation, sacrifice, and erotic politics that characterized Central American revolutionary movements. She was the combatant willing to risk her life in order to free her country – embracing and affirming the belief 'patria libre o muerte' – as well as the 'new woman' of the struggle who, along with her male compatriot or partner, could engender the 'new' citizens of the liberated nation to come.

Literary works that were produced during this period, and which were also marked by the same discourses of nation and martyrdom, played a fundamental role in the construction and promotion of this figure within the popular and revolutionary imaginary. Numerous poems were dedicated to *la compañera*, or female companion 'in arms,' exalting her womanly qualities, in particular, those which linked her in an idyllic manner to the land or to the domestic space of the home. The poem, 'Compa guerrillera' written by 'Julio,' the nom de guerre of an anonymous male combatant, provides a notable example of this tendency:

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[1] Several studies have been produced that focus on women in Central America's revolutionary movements, including those by Vásquez, Ibáñez, and Muirguilday (1996), Randall (1981) and (1994), Luciak (2001), and Peláez (2008).

> Muchacha guerrillera de mi pueblo
> estás aquí, allá, en todo lugar,
> en la cocina, en la clínica,
> en las montañas, en las compañías (Alegría and Flakoll 1996: 42).

This type of praise and rendition of the *guerrillera* – in large part, a patriarchal construct – appeared alongside texts written by female authors who attempted to provide a more complex portrait – one that would not only render visible the internal struggles of female combatants but also the obstacles they confronted on various 'battlefields,' meaning the nation and its microcosm, the home. Texts that bear mentioning within this latter group include the pseudo-testimonio, *No me agarran viva: la mujer salvadoreña en la lucha armada* (1987) by Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll; *La mujer habitada* (1988) by Gioconda Belli; and the poetry collection penned by Ana María Rodas, *Poemas de la izquierda erótica* (1973). All three works, which garnered recognition both regionally and internationally, promoted an understanding of the *guerrillera* that allowed for a broader discussion concerning women's oppression and gender inequality. With regard to the last two, they also established a necessary base for exploring female eroticism and sexuality.

Still, despite the feminist undertone that marked many of these representations of the *guerrillera*, none of them necessarily broke with the phallologocentric ideal of the armed militant or with the heteronormative and socialist-based notion of coupling fomented by national liberation movements. Exploring these limitations and inherent contradictions with regard to the construction of a female revolutionary subjectivity is one of the main concerns of this analysis. My intention, however, is not to do so by solely focusing on the literary works of this era but to use these earlier visions of the *guerrillera* as a jumping-off point for rethinking the significance of this conceptualization of womanhood in the post-war period – a moment in Central American history in which the notion of armed struggle, as well as of revolutionary heroism, have lost their symbolic capital. The questions I seek to answer are those having to do with the relevance, if any, of the *guerrillera*, or in broader terms, of the woman warrior, in the post-war era. How, for instance, has this image of female agency (and violence) been hindered or transformed by the development of a feminist movement with a clearly defined agenda concerning gender equality and women's rights, and which has openly begun to contest the sexism of previous revolutionary ideologies and practices?

Thus, this analysis also includes an examination of the literature written by Central American women authors in the post-war period, specifically, the short story collection, *Mujeres que cuentan* (2000). This anthology, the first of its kind produced in Guatemala, includes contributions from many of the country's well-known female writers, as well as younger and upcoming voices. In its pages, it is possible to discern not only the footprints of the *guerrillera* of the revolutionary past but also new articulations of her as a self-liberating 'woman warrior.' As I argue, these contemporary manifestations serve as a striking counterpoint to those that came before, giving way to a re-definition of the *guerrillera* as an abject being who empowers herself (rather than the revolution) through the use of violence.

Perhaps one of the most well-known cultural studies on women in Central America's armed movements is Ileana Rodríguez's *Women, Guerrillas, and Love* (1996). A central focus of Rodríguez's analysis is the peripheral position women occupied by contrast to that of the male militants within the movements. According to Rodríguez, this power differential is transmitted and inscribed in the very language of revolutionary ideology since:

> [t]he narrative of the revolution is a narrative of the construction of self first as *guerrillero*, and then as vanguard, party, leader, and government. All those subject positions could then be formulated in a masculine I, aiming at narrating a collective subject that does not include women' (1996: xvii).

The centrality of the masculine I or 'Subject' is all the more apparent when one considers the intersections between politics and eroticism, specifically what Rodríguez denotes as the 'revolutionary couple.' This 'amorous' coupling combines a 'burlesque erotica' with 'masculine patriarchy' since the *guerrillera* is seen as a being the one who needs to be liberated – like the nation and the masses – by the male militant (Rodríguez 1996: 94-96). Not surprisingly, in many revolutionary narratives women constitute the object of desire of the male combatant, a means which facilitates his own self-construction as the 'I' of the struggle (Rodríguez 1996: 103). Even in texts which attempt to depict women as equal participants in revolutionary movements, such as Alegría and Flakoll's *No me agarran viva*, this form of patriarchal privilege and female subordination is not necessarily destabilized given the reiteration of the trope of the revolutionary couple within the same narrative (Rodríguez 1996: 162).

A brief discussion of Belli's *La mujer habitada* helps to ground many of Rodríguez's arguments, while also allowing for new ways of thinking about the role and representation of the female combatant during the revolutionary period. One can argue that, in many ways, Belli's novel brings to the fore the importance of the *guerrillera* as a model of Nicaragua's Sandinista movement, as well as the archetype of the indigenous woman warrior. The novel centres on Lavinia, an upper-class socialite who undergoes a process of politicization which ultimately leads her to become a clandestine *guerrillera*. Although the main impetus for Lavinia's transformation is her romantic relationship with Felipe – a prototype of the guerrilla hero – her political awakening is also the consequence of metaphysical forces. Lavinia's body is inhabited by the spirit of Itzá, an indigenous woman and warrior who lived during the conquest of the New World. Thus, through the "union" of these two women, Belli affords not only a syncretic vision of the *guerrillera* and her indigenous ancestors but also of history, since the Sandinista insurgency is, likewise, depicted as a continuum of the struggles initiated by the indigenous peoples against the Spanish *conquistadores*.

Undoubtedly, the synthesis of Lavinia and Itzá can be understood as Belli's attempt to undermine a history of battle and resistance in which men have been privileged and granted recognition as the true heroes. However, this feminist refashioning of 'History' does not meet its intended aim within the novel due to the problematic construction of the revolutionary couple and the inferior place Lavinia continues to occupy within it, despite her agency as a militant. On more than one occasion Lavinia is angered by the realization that she is a modern Penelope, a shelter for her wayward *guerrillero*, Felipe. On account of her love for him and sexual desire, she is unable to challenge this dynamic (Belli 1988: 92). It is partly Lavinia's need to contest the notion of herself as a submissive woman that drives her to join the armed movement without telling Felipe. This act of 'rebellion' and, by extension, the critique of sexism that Belli elaborates, however, loses much of its fervour at the close of the novel.

After Felipe dies, having been shot due to a misunderstanding with a taxi driver, Lavinia takes his place in a secret mission to ambush and capture General Vela – a character in the novel who recalls the real life figure of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, dictator of Nicaragua until 1979 when the Sandinistas overthrew his government. In what seems like a modern twist

on the classic duel, Lavinia, with 'Madzen' in hand, and General Vela, face-off. Although Lavinia is wounded in the process, she manages to stay alive long enough to kill General Vela. This scene of ultimate sacrifice and heroism is significant because it underscores the notion that the *guerrillera* (Lavinia) can and does determine History, but only following the death of the *guerrillero* (Felipe). Moreover, she does so in a role that has been predetermined by men, once again reaffirming the secondary status of women in the 'battlefield' of the nation.

In many ways, Lavinia remains little more than a literal and symbolic substitution for Felipe. Armed with her machine gun, it is difficult to ignore her phallic power, and when compared to that of Felipe's accidental and un-heroic death, Lavinia's is the more honorable of the two. Yet, this performance of heroism or, more specifically, of the role of the *guerrillero* by Lavinia does not necessarily contest the superiority of the masculine 'I' in the narrative of the revolution. To the contrary, it works to re-inscribe that same power. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity, one can argue that Belli's attempt at an alternate re-signification of the *guerrillera* is incapable of transcending the gendered power relations it aims to destabilize since it remains dependent upon and is determined by them (1993: 241).

Another key aspect of the *guerrillera*, related to this first, and which Belli also makes a point of stressing, is her representation as a feminine and sexual being. The woman warrior in this novel is not only the object of desire of the male combatant (notably, this is a position that Lavinia enjoys and from which she extracts a modicum of power) but is also an individual who desires to be a mother and a *compañera* (in both the battlefield and the bedroom) to a man. Even though Lavinia rejects the traditional role of housewife exemplified by her friend Sara, she acknowledges her own yearning to be a mother. While making love to Felipe, Lavinia is suddenly overpowered by her maternal desires: '[s]u vientre se creció en el deseo de tener un hijo. Lo deseó por primera vez en su vida con la fuerza de la desesperación' (Belli 1998: 114). This desire to procreate is one Lavinia must give up, constituting yet another of the many sacrifices she is forced to make for her country. It is also a sacrifice she shares with Itzá, as she too denies herself the joy of motherhood so as not to give birth to future slaves for the *conquistadores* (Belli 1998: 115). Consequently, the desire to be a mother is posited in the novel as an innate yearning that all women share. Little or no possibility exists of a woman who does not have this desire or who does not imagine herself in a heteronormative relationship.

Mary Jane Treacy (1994) makes a similar observation with regard to the portrayal of the female militant, 'Eugenia,' in Alegría and Flakoll's *No me agarran viva*.[2] However, Treacy's analysis is especially revealing in that it suggests that the depiction of the *guerrillera* as both mother and wife serves a specific ideological function:

> The idealization of Eugenia as a warrior/housewife brings the guerrillera back into the feminine domain where she is less likely to challenge conservative notions about women's nature or to disturb the reader as an example of the monstrous woman warrior. Alegría comforts her reader with the thought that if Eugenia does fight and kill, at least she remains a 'real woman' dedicated to home and family (1994: 83-84).

[2] 'Eugenia' is the *nom de guerre* of Ana María Castillo Rivas**,** the *guerrillera* whose politicization and militancy are the subject of Alegría and Flakoll's text.

As Treacy posits, the emphasis on the traditionally feminine aspects of the female combatant is an ideological recourse meant to off-set her 'masculine' attributes, including her use of violence and the ability to kill. Not to do so, would transform the *guerrillera* into a true 'deviation' and call into question gendered social norms.

Treacy's allusion to the concept of the monstrous *guerrillera* calls to mind the problematic representations of another primordial archetype of the woman warrior, the Amazons. According to Richard Lane and Jay Wurts (1998), the Amazons were conceived of as 'an alien-other woman warrior' within Greek mythology since they hailed from a foreign culture and because they had a matriarchal government that was intimidating to the patriarchal society of the Greeks. As such, Greek theologians fabricated a series of legends known as the *Amazonomachy* or 'The War between the Greeks and the Amazons,' in which the Amazons were depicted as able warriors, but also as women with strange or supernatural characteristics. Moreover, in these legends, the Amazons lose battles against their Greek adversaries – reaffirming the notion of women's subordination to men as well as the imminent threat of punishment to any woman who does not allow herself to be dominated or submit to patriarchal law (Lane and Wurts 1998: 40). Consequently, the depiction of the woman warrior as a being that must be sublimated lest she turn into an aberration is not a novel idea.

Tracing the genealogy of the Central American *guerrillera* back to that of the Amazons is a key digression for it is this depiction of the woman warrior in *excess* or as aberrant that surfaces and dominates in the short stories included in the anthology, *Mujeres que cuentan.* The fact that these stories are all authored by Guatemalan women writers also allows for an understanding of the authors themselves as another type of female warrior. As Lucrecia Méndez de Penedo suggests in her introduction to the anthology, the stories by these women are 'transgressive' in that they present a vision of women that goes against expected gender norms and social behaviors. Women appear as unsatisfied individuals who are only at peace when they are able to take some form of revenge, be it through covert or open means (Méndez de Penedo 2000: 10). By the same token, these narratives also serve another critical function, that of reinterpreting and rewriting the literary canon according to the 'sabor y antojo' of the female authors (Méndez de Penedo 2000: 11-12). In keeping with Maxine Hong Kingston's conceptualization of the 'storyteller woman warrior,' these Guatemalan writers can also be understood as bellicose women, fighting to carve out a space for themselves with their words.

While many of the stories included in the anthology would provide for an equally provocative reading, here I concentrate on the short but structurally complex piece 'Cajita china, Una tecuna moderna, Perpetuus Horror' by Aída Toledo. In this story, women are combative individuals engaged in battles to liberate themselves from the confines of the 'home front,' and by extension, Central American post-war society. As I noted, the construction of the masculine 'I' as central to revolutionary ideology, as well as the discourses of national liberation and martyrdom, censured the ways in which the woman warrior or *guerrillera* was represented in many of the literary works produced during the period in question. In fact, what resulted was an image of the woman warrior which was not too threatening, one which did not constitute a 'true perversion' of gendered norms and which continued to uphold traditionally feminine attributes such as maternity and domesticity.

However, in Toledo's short story, which is no longer invested in and therefore not limited by the same political ideologies of the past, another type of woman warrior rears her head.

She is the monstrous woman warrior, an abject being who, following the theories of Julia Kristeva, is a 'jettisoned object' which '[l]ies outside, beyond the set [the union of ego and superego], and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game' (1987: 230). Stated another way, she is the personification of a certain 'uncanniness,' familiar in some opaque and forgotten way (Kristeva 1987: 230), which has emerged anew in the post-war era and is no longer content being hidden in the shadows. Thus, in Toledo's story the reader confronts an 'anti' version of the woman warrior of the past, one which has been there all along and which has no regard for the ideal of the 'revolutionary couple' or its romanticism. Similarly, this alternate woman warrior is capable, in many instances, of using violence without any sense of remorse and for individual gain.

Understanding this manifestation of the woman warrior as abject requires a brief contextualization of the historical period from which the story by Toledo and the collection, *Mujeres que cuentan*, emerges. Social and political changes in the post-war period, especially those that directly affect women, have given new meaning to the notion of the nation as a 'battlefield.' The development of feminist movements in Guatemala and El Salvador following the signing of the Peace Accords in both countries (in 1996 and 1992, respectively), signals a definitive change in how many Guatemalan and Salvadoran women view their social and political roles in society, as well as their activism. Women have begun to mobilize around issues related to reproduction, political representation, and human rights for sexual minorities. Many organizations have, likewise, been established that are dedicated to fighting sexual oppression and domestic violence.[3] The feminist movement in Nicaragua, which is rooted in the Sandinista revolutionary movement, is characterized by similar projects and initiatives, many of which were difficult to advocate during the period of war given the patriarchal and limiting discourses previously mentioned.

Changes such as these have also been accompanied by a series of 'countermoves,' such as an anti-feminist backlash and the reaffirmation of ultra-conservative values (Kampwirth 2008). Most alarming, however, is the escalation of violence against women, especially in countries such as Guatemala which has one of the highest rates of femicide, a crime that according to Diane Russell can be understood as '[u]na forma de terrorismo que funciona para definir los límites entre los géneros sexuales, implementar y reafirmar la dominación del hombre y convertir a todas las mujeres en seres crónica y profundamente inseguros' (as quoted in Sandford 2008: 62). Given such developments, both positive and negative, one can argue, as does Karen Kampwirth (2004), that the female militants of the revolutionary period have become feminist *guerrilleras* in the post-war era – a notion that correlates with my positing of the figure of the monstrous woman warrior or abject *guerrillera* that contests previous constructions of female subjectivity and activism.

Toledo's 'Cajita china, Una tecuna moderna, Perpetuus Horror' underscores this tumultuous reality for Central American women – in particular, the forms of physical and mental abuse endured by many women within the space of the home, and on a larger scale, the structural violence imbedded in the patriarchal institution of the family. It also, however, reveals the ways in which women have redefined the terms of liberation and struggle so as to meet their own needs and demands as women. The story is comprised of three different

[3] In El Salvador, the organization Women for Life and Dignity (las DIGNAS) is at the forefront of these issues. Counterparts in Guatemala include the Organización de Apoyo a una Sexualidad Integral frente a la Sida (OASIS), Lesbiradas, and Mujeres Somos. The organization Puntos de Encuentro provides support and services for gay and lesbian youth in Nicaragua.

'flash' o 'micro' fictions, each related in a different narrative voice and perspective.[4] The first 'Cajita china,' begins with the following negation by a first person narrator: 'Este relato no es mío, en él una mujer le escribe al padre de su hijo, le reclama que piense que ella lo malcría. El niño por su parte es una larva, no tiene forma humana, no habla, babea todo el tiempo, se saca los mocos, se arrastra, ellos viven en una ciudad asediada por el odio' (Toledo 2000: 35). The anonymous narrator informs the reader that she knows these intimate details about this other woman's life because she has read her letters. It is unclear, however, how she has come to acquire these letters or why she is reading them. The narrator further reveals that the woman who has penned the letters hates the man to whom she has sent them, and that he is 'cruel, calculador y sádico' (Toledo 2000: 35).

As the title suggests, this micro-fiction is characterized by a series of narrative layers, much like a Chinese box that contains within it other boxes, each decreasing in size. In this case, the narrative layers the reader must 'uncover' are intended to lead him or her to a 'centre,' one which unveils the narrator's opinions regarding the precarious position of the woman whom she is writing about. According to the narrator, the woman writing the letters is destined to lose the power her writing affords her given that, as her son grows into an adult, he will take that power from her. She will then exist, as the narrator states, in the 'margins' (Toledo 2000: 35). This observation by the narrator is one which speaks to the narrator's own concerns with losing her voice and agency since she too believes that this is her fate:

> Bien se ve que estar en los bordes es un símbolo en este estilo en este libro y en nuestras vidas, en donde una/otra mujer (como yo) que escribe, pierde el poder paulatinamente, asediada por un ente larva que la arrastra hasta los límites, en donde no le queda (no me queda) más que como loba, aullarle a la luna (Toledo 2000: 35).

Notably, in this statement, the line between the narrator and the woman she is writing about becomes blurred. It is difficult to know for certain if the narrator, who affirmed that this story was not about her, is being truthful; if she and the woman writing the letters are not one and the same. After all, the last lines of the story being told by the narrator are almost identical to the sentiments expressed in the other woman's letters. There is, however, one key difference. The larva-like entity, which in the woman's letters initially stood for her son, is redefined by the narrator as an allegory of masculine power and of a patriarchal system that not only feeds off of women but also contributes to their marginalization within the domestic space and the cultural sphere. In so doing, the narrator underscores the parallels that exist between the lack of voice and power many women experience in their position as wives and mothers and that of the woman writer who also exists on the fringes and whose frustration is evoked by the narrator's self-description as a she-wolf howling at the moon. To speak of the limitations imposed on women by domesticity and by patriarchy, and to do so in a way that expresses a woman's resentment, especially with regard to motherhood, casts the narrator as a

[4] Flash fiction or micro-fiction can be loosely defined as fiction that is extremely brief in length, yet still contains all the basic elements of a short story, such as plot, conflict, and a protagonist. Although there are no specific guidelines regarding length, recent anthologies have focused on short stories with a particular word count such as 55, 69, and 100. Further reading and working definitions of this genre can be found in Thomas, Thomas, and Hazuka (1992), Stern (1996) and Epple (1990). Epple's book draws attention to the emergence of these works within Latin American Literature.

storyteller woman warrior who seeks liberation through her words and who challenges a pivotal attribute of the *guerrillera* as envisioned within the armed movements.

The role of the woman writer is less central in the second micro-fiction, 'Una tecuna moderna.' Narrated in both first and third person, this account relates the experiences of María, a woman married to a veteran of the Guatemalan civil war, whom she decides to leave. By way of María's sentiments toward her husband and her views about her marriage, Toledo elaborates a poignant commentary regarding the institutionalization of violence in Guatemalan society, stemming, in part, from the years of armed upheaval. As the narrator discloses, 'María lo dejó [her husband] porque no se llevaban bien. Nadie se puede llevar bien con un hombre que grita tanto y siempre quiere tener la razón y que además irónicamente siempre me dice que es feminista' (Toledo 2000: 36). These sentences draw attention to two significant aspects of María's situation. One, that the narrator speaking is María herself, as evidenced by the shift in narrative voice from third person in the first sentence to first person in the second sentence and, two, that María is aware of the fact that her husband is not as progressive or liberal as he thinks, especially when it comes to women.

María (as narrator), likewise, stresses the fact that aside from being a harsh man, her husband has certain likes and dislikes. For instance, he likes that María has blues eyes and blonde hair, an inclination that María sarcastically refers to as 'ese problema antiguo, que se remonta a los orígenes de la conquista' (Toledo 2000: 36). María's commentary with regard to her husband's 'fondness' for her 'anglo' features gives way to a broader critique of Guatemalan society. Her husband has internalized the colonialist preference for white culture and, by the same token, the rejection of indigeneity, which in a country such as Guatemala which has an indigenous majority is especially significant.

The most provocative revelation, however, that María divulges about her relationship is why she loved her husband: 'María lo amaba, tenía por él esa admiración que causan los heroes, porque él había estado en una guerra, larga inútil, para los que no la vivimos' (Toledo 2000: 37). Once again, there is a notable shift from a third to first person narrative voice in María's description. By contrast to her husband, María is among 'those of us' who did not experience the war. She also expresses her cynicism regarding that same past when she refers to the civil conflict as 'una guerra inútil,' as well as her disillusionment with her husband. Despite having fought in the war (it is suggested that he did so believing it would lead to a greater good and as part of the opposition), María realizes that her husband is still a man capable of oppressing her. This realization demystifies the image of the *guerrillero* or 'New Man' idealized during the revolutionary period, showing him to be an ordinary man who fails to question the patriarchal system that endows him with a privileged position by comparison to his female counterpart. Moreover, the male figure in María's account is not represented as an erotic entity that inspires desire and tenderness in his wife as he did in Belli's novel.

Perhaps the most critical challenge to the revolutionary ideals of the past, and one that signals the central conflict of this second micro-fiction, is María's decision to leave her husband, an act that paradoxically transforms her into 'una tecuna moderna' (Toledo 2000: 36). María's positing of herself as a 'tecuna' is a clear reference to María Tecún, a pivotal character in Miguel Ángel Asturias's seminal novel *Hombres de maíz*, first published in 1949.[5] María Tecún is an indigenous Guatemalan woman who also chooses to leave her

[5] It is, likewise, possible to draw a connection between both of these characters, the María of the present narrative and María Tecún of Asturias's novel, to another key figure of Guatemalan history, the indigenous hero, Tecún

husband, Goyo Yic. As a consequence, she and other women who follow in her footsteps become known as 'tecunas,' women who turn their backs on their social responsibilities and prescribed gender roles. According to Michele Shaul, however, the role of María Tecún and of other 'tecunas' in Asturias's novel is of essence since it is a necessary catalyst for change in the male characters, particularly Goyo Yic, María Tecún's husband who spends most of the novel searching for her and is reunited with her in the end. As Shaul argues, these woman '[…] propulsan a sus esposos hacia una necesidad de examinarse con respecto a su estado como individuos y su tratamiento de sus esposas' (2004: 95).

The María narrating the present account, like her predecessor, also makes a choice to become a 'tecuna,' though it is uncertain whether or not her decision will have the same effect on her supposedly forward-thinking husband. What is clear is that by opting to leave, she foments her own self-preservation. She refuses to be a resigned wife or an abnegated mother, roles which defined the *guerrillera* of the revolutionary popular imaginary. María, then, comes to represent another type of woman warrior – one who subverts the images of the past.[6] By the same token, Toledo's textual reference to Asturias's character and canonical novel, exemplifies the earlier point made by Méndez de Penedo with regard to the revision of the literary canon.

'Perpetuus Horror,' the last of the three micro-fictions included in this story, is the most explicit with regard to the representation of patriarchal power and domestic violence. As the title suggests, the protagonist exists in a constant state of terror due to the mental and physical abuse perpetrated against her by her husband. The only way that she is capable of enduring and, to a certain extent, of escaping the abuse is by retreating into her own mind and thinking about her past lovers: 'Cuando él empezaba a vociferar, yo siempre pensaba en otros hombres…Si sus gritos empezaban con mierda, inmediatamente traía de golpe a Manuel, azotando mi memoria' (Toledo 2000: 36). Similarly, when her husband throws household items at her, 'irremediablamente recordaba a Antonio' (Toledo 2000: 36-37). The narrator's imagination, however, does not only afford her a means of escape but also an avenue for conveying the true horror she confronts at home. In her mind, she envisions her husband as a monstrous being: 'Entonces, él se acercaba arrastrando su enorme cola dinosáurica. Lento bramaba y su pequeño hocico reluciente se tornaba enorme y me enseñaba los dientes, bañándome con su saliva verde y apestosa' (Toledo 2000: 37).

Unlike the María of the previous account, this last protagonist does not have the ability to transform herself into a 'tecuna moderna' given the extreme state of terror in which she lives. Her condition is more akin to that of the first narrator, existing on the margins and feeling the need to howl her pain at the moon (Toledo 2000: 36). Furthermore, upon closer inspection, her imaginary escapes also prove to be problematic as they are suggestive of a complex history of domestic abuse. Her memory and description of Antonio, for example, betrays the fact that he was often violent during their lovemaking (Toledo 2000: 37). The implication here is that the narrator's current relationship is not the only one characterized by abuse – and understood in broader terms, that domestic violence is yet another form of everyday oppression that marks women's livelihoods. It is a horror that is perpetuated on a general level and one that many women find difficult to confront or escape. Consequently, at the end

Umán, who died fighting against Pedro de Alvarado, the *conquistador* of Central America. Aside from the obvious use of the name 'Tecún', both women can also be construed as figures of resistance (like Tecún Umán) in the face of oppression – in this case, patriarchy and the traditional institution of the family.

[6] I am indebted to Arturo Arias for helping me re-think the analysis of this second part of Toledo's short story.

of this micro-fiction, which also marks the end of the longer story, the protagonist is cornered by her husband while she attempts in vain to retreat into an imaginary 'hiding place' that can protect her from the reality closing in on her.

'Cajita china, Una tecuna moderna, Perpetuus Horror' gives way to a vision of the domestic space as the new battlefield for women in the post-war period. Although, in 'Perpetuus Horror' the narrator remains a victim, unable to ultimately escape her situation, the narrators of the other two micro-fictions do achieve a certain degree of 'liberation,' thus evoking a new notion of the woman warrior. The narrator of 'Cajita china,' also a storytelling woman warrior, openly expresses her resentment at being relegated to a secondary position within the family and within the cultural sphere. She is conscious of the possibility that she can lose the power she derives from her writing – the limited source of agency she possesses. Similarly, María, the 'tecuna moderna,' rebels against the socially prescribed role of the good and accommodating wife placing her own needs above her matrimonial duties. Together, these 'mujeres que cuentan' underscore a complex female subjectivity that speaks to the changes women have undergone and are living in post-war Central America; a subjectivity that puts into question what was previously understood as abject and needed to be repressed. However, as I have been arguing, understanding this possible interpretation is not just a question of contextualizing the present struggles of Central American women. Rather, it is necessary to look to the past, to the fabrication and promotion of a revolutionary female subjectivity that, though limited, paved the way for these alternative notions.

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