Women Writers and the Mexican Revolution

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Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted either in part or whole as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. The work carried out herein is entirely my own. All work by others, to the best of my knowledge, has been referenced and acknowledged.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to explore how women are represented in novels written by women which have conflict as their central thematic concern. Consequently, it was necessary to examine the context in which these texts were written and how they compare to texts written by men based on the same period. As a result I studied the *novela de la revolución* as a genre in Mexico, accessing this material in Irish, British and Mexican libraries. Having established thematic predecessors, I approached the historical context which meant that for female authors writing about conflict and the Revolution was a rarity in Mexican letters. This meant a close examination of Mexican and international Feminism; the historical circumstances of both the writers and those who they were writing about; and issues surrounding national identity. Having established the context of the work I then examined each of the three texts: *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1964) by Elena Garro, *Hasta no verte Jesús* mío (1969) by Elena Poniatowska and *Arráncame la* vida (1986) by Ángeles Mastretta, which are the main focal point of this thesis. I explored how women were represented in the context of tropes, types and stereotypes previously employed, as well as studying the stylistic concerns of the writers.

In examining these texts I have discovered that there is considerable complexity to writing by women in Mexico. Each writer dealt with women's roles in conflict in distinct ways. Garro, Poniatowska and Mastretta wrote innovative, challenging and complex works. Their representations differ radically from those by the male authors who wrote *novelas de la revolución*. Garro, Poniatowska and Mastretta have implicitly challenged previous representations of women in conflict and have opened up the possibility for more complex representations of women in both war and peacetime.

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Introduction: Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls

Wars need explanations. As a result, fictions are created to resolve the terrible psychic damage and losses which befall the warriors, victims and survivors. The novel in Mexico was born of such circumstances. Immediately after the Revolution writers created fictions to explain the personal traumas experienced. Later fictions were written because the modern Mexican nation state emerged from the aftermath of the Revolution (1910-1917). Its origins in recent history, and the place the Revolution had centre stage in national discourse and politics, merited its re-examination in fictional form. Throughout the twentieth century, Mexican national identity has depended upon ever evolving attitudes to this conflict.[1] Artists and writers have engaged with the conflict, its aftermath and significance since the 1920s. Consequently, there have been many critical studies of this post-Revolutionary artistic production, as I shall examine in chapter 2.[2] While many critics have dealt with men's involvement in the conflict, few have examined women's roles. Many novels by men give accounts of men engaged in battle. In such novels, women either stay at home or join up as *soldaderas*. This term has been used as a synonym for prostitution when the reality was much more complex, as I shall show in chapter 4.

In fiction, men move freely in the public spaces to which conflict pertains and women are represented as shying away from it. In Mexican fiction, women are represented as belonging to the private realm of the home and domesticity while men belong to the public realm of work, the street, public office and war. How space is gendered, *vis à vis* the public/private, has been explored in detail by Jean Franco. I shall engage with some of her arguments in chapter 1, and, throughout this thesis, I shall examine the significance of her theories as they apply to women writers. In Mexico, women who move out of their designated space are reviled as *Malinche*

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[1] John Rutherford, in *Mexican Society during the Revolution: A Literary Approach* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1971) stated: "one clear result of the Revolution has been the growth of Mexican nationalism", 39.

[2] See for example Rutherford; also Adalbert Dessau *La novela de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico D.F.; Fondo de cultura económica, (1967) 1972), Luis Leal and Edmundo Valadés *La Revolución y las letras* (México; Instituto nacional de bellas artes, 1960), and Joseph Sommers *After the Storm: Landmarks of the Modern Mexican Novel* (Albuquerque; University of New Mexico Press, 1968).

figures, who have betrayed their sex.[3] *Malinche* was an Aztec princess who was the conquistador Cortes's lover and interpreter. She is a complex character who has been reviled as being complicit in the conquest of Mexico. In response to the limited dialectic of public versus private, from the 1960s on Mexican women writers began to write novels where male and female roles are less well defined. Given that conflict is considered to be a particularly male experience and pivotal to the origin of the contemporary Mexican novel, I have chosen to examine narratives by women which present significant female characters in conflict situations. Women are taken out of archetypal roles and shown to be able to act out new roles in the disruptive conditions created by conflict. I shall examine the diversity of behaviour and characterisation in texts by women where conflict gives women new freedoms as well as new limitations.

In *Women and War,* Jean Bethke Elshstain examined the extent to which conflicts have been represented in highly gendered ways in the Western tradition, that is from early Greece and Rome up to contemporary Europe and the United States. Mexico, through Spanish colonisation, has inherited Western attitudes in this regard. Bethke Elshstain declares that the Western tradition:

> ...assumes an affinity between women and peace, between men and war, a tradition that consists of culturally constructed and transmitted myths and memories. Thus, in time of war, real men and women - locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have complementary needs and exemplify gender-specific virtues - take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personaes of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls. Man construed as violent, whether eagerly and inevitably, or reluctantly and tragically; woman as nonviolent, offering succor and compassion: these tropes on the social identities of men and women, past and present, do not denote what men and women really are in time of war, but function instead to re-create and secure women's location as noncombatants and men's as warriors.[4]

Bethke Elshstain contends that during wartime men and women have been simplistically represented in terms of one-dimensional archetypes, what she calls "Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls". Women are traditionally represented in nurturing roles, and men are aggressors. Both male and female models are limited and limiting and, as Bethke Elshstain emphasises, unrealistic. Men and women do not

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[3] Sandra Cypess Messinger describes *Malinche* as "a historical figure who has become one of the major archetypes of Mexican and Latin American feminine imagery, a polysemous sign whose meanings, for all their ambiguity, are generally negative."

behave according to rigid pre-conceived gender patterns, particularly in times of conflict. There are models of behaviour to which individuals may be expected to conform. But, these have further variants depending on factors such as class, race, religion, sexual orientation or group dynamics. The multiplicity and complexity of lived experiences are so significant as to make stereotypes and pre-conceived notions redundant.

Bethke Elshstain also draws attention to the issue of the place of women in society. Women have been traditionally considered to belong to the private domestic space. Critics, such as the aforementioned Jean Franco, have adapted Hannah Arendt's examination in Western tradition of the positioning of men in the public sphere and women in the private to Latin America. Franco, in *Plotting Women,* describes how women are only permitted to inhabit the private sphere, that is the domestic space of the home, and how it is the only one in which women yield power.[5] As I shall later examine, this power is problematic and severely limited. The authors I have chosen all address the issue of women's place in society. I shall examine how they explore the limitations of women's lives both within the confines of the home and within rigid social roles. I shall also explore the representation of the consequences of venturing outside of these boundaries. While routine existence places severe limitations, these authors show how conflict in Mexico breaks up social patterns sufficiently to allow women to behave in an unorthodox fashion. The very public acts of conflict can also invade private spaces. As with Bethke Elshtain's characterisation of wartime roles in terms of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls, there are also rules which govern social behaviour in conflict, which I shall investigate throughout this thesis.

Although I am focusing on the characterisation of women in the texts, I wish to emphasise that this is not a thesis which strays into the 'images of women' style of criticism, which has been harshly criticised by Toril Moi, among others.[6] She declares that when critics pick and choose selectively what they use in texts "such a view resolutely refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex, 'over-determined' process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary

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[4] *Women and War* (Sussex, The Harvester Press, 1987), 4.
[5] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (London: Verso, 1989).
[6] For an example of such commentary see Charles Ramírez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 3.

determinants (historical, political, social, ideological, institutional, generic, psychological and so on)."[7] She is critical of limited, selective, and apparently arbitrary analysis of what a text may have to say when the critic does not provide the context in which the text was produced. With an awareness of this possible danger, in chapter 1 I have carefully provided a detailed introductory account of the historical and sociological context in which Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta were writing. Also, in each individual chapter, I give considerable space to the question of form and style in the novels.

Many critics use rigid and traditional paradigms when discussing texts written by women. Prostitutes are always *Malinche* figures,[8] single virgins are Virgin Mary figures, and so on. This practice seems merely to limit interpretations to the female characters' sexual behaviour, objectifying women as physical beings alone, and not exploring the multiple layers of a person's existence. Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta disrupt facile assumptions regarding women's behaviour. Their characters do not conform to stereotype and in many respects it is difficult to fit their respective styles of writing into generic types.

Both male and female roles within theories of nationality are interpreted and revealed through narrative. The texts I am concerned with in this thesis focus on a seminal moment in national formation in Mexico. Post-conflict Mexico is the moment of birth of the modern Mexican nation. Thus narratives which engage in the roles of the individuals affected by conflict, or who had direct roles in that conflict, play a necessary part in national identity. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community" and observes that "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[9] Later, I shall explore the limitations of Anderson's language when discussing this 'community'. But his view bears repetition, because imagination conjures up the real. A nation exists because it is first imagined. This may take many

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[7] *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, (1985) 1988), 3.

[8] According to Sandra Cypess Messinger in "The Figure of La *Malinche* in the Texts of Elena Garro" "Garro's thematic preoccupation with the presence of the past in the present time also informs her portrayal of women in that she characterizes Mexican women as *Malinche* figures", 133. Cypess Messinger is author of a book-length study *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: from History to Myth.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

forms of textual representation: novel, essay, film, poetry and so on. Often the imagined community can be a fantasy that exists only in Literature, or it can be a projection of many representations. What these women authors have imagined are the personal and individual lives behind the "imagined political community". Each narrative can be seen to be a reply to the critic Homi K. Bhabha's question when he pondered the representation of the nation: "How do we conceive of the 'splitting' of the national subject? How do we articulate cultural differences within this vacillation of ideology in which the national discourse also participates, sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another?"[10] The female authors conceive of, and represent, the individual situations and experiences which lie outside of a linear and homogenous vision of the nation. In chapter 2, I shall look at narratives by male authors who contest a unified national narrative, and do so from very different perspectives from those of women authors. Men became disillusioned with the roles ascribed to them, which were public and as active agents engaged in the conflict, whereas women have had no respected role in the conflict and, even when involved, are always outside of official narratives in this crucial moment of nation building. I deal with the complexities and problematics of gender and nation in chapter 1.

The novels I shall study are *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1963) by Elena Garro, *Hasta no verte Jesus mío* (1969) by Elena Poniatowska and *Arráncame la vida* (1986) by Ángeles Mastretta. I shall examine, chronologically, how these authors choose to represent women in conflict situations and how they implicitly contest and engage with previous representations of women. In chapter 2, I shall examine novels written by men to contrast their representations of women. I shall look at *Los de abajo* (1915) by Mariano Azuela, *Pedro Páramo* (1955) by Juan Rulfo and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) by Carlos Fuentes. All of these last three novels are chosen because they form valuable points of comparison with the texts by Garro, Poniatowska and Mastretta. The texts by Garro and Rulfo are frequently compared. The lyricism of their writing and the tense, claustrophobic atmosphere they create, as well as larger thematic and stylistic elements are significant points of comparison in the two novels. Poniatowska, like Azuela, focuses on the experiences of the common

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[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1996), 6.

[10] Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (London & New York; Routledge, 1990), 298.

soldiers. Both wrote about those who generally get hidden behind the numbers' game in battle. Their characters did not lead, nor leave their mark in history books. They fought the battles as underdogs. Mastretta and Fuentes wrote about the winners in the Revolution. Their characters succeed in amassing personal power and wealth as a consequence of the shifts in power relations after the Revolution. Women's stories have been marginalised, and even omitted, from historical and fictional accounts. Their narrative is invisible. Hidden behind the tales of battle and conflict, in which it was long assumed only men fought, are the accounts of the *soldaderas*, the women spies, smugglers, doctors, journalists and so on, as well as the stories of domesticity disrupted and lives lost, shattered or utterly changed as a result of the conflict. Women have had stories to tell. However, with the exception of Nellie Campobello's (which I shall deal with in chapter 1) they largely go untold. The authors I shall examine in this thesis have redressed this absence and recounted what women did, how they lived, survived and fought in Revolutionary Mexico.

In chapter 3, I shall examine Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. It is a highly experimental novel. The town, where all the events of the novel take place, is the narrator. The novel is set during the time of the Cristero Rebellion (1926 – 1929). It was a time when a group, claiming to fight on the side of the Catholic Church (the name of the battle originated in the slogan used by the pro-church warriors: "¡Viva Cristo Rey!"), fought against government troops which, ultimately, led to repressive laws against the Church in Mexico. It was a short-lived yet brutal war. Through the use of the town as narrator and the creation of strong female characters, Garro has created a unique and controversial representation of the Rebellion and of how individuals survived a war so soon after having endured the hardships of the Revolution. Garro shows great skill in creating a sense of estrangement with regard to aspects of our understanding of reality which are taken as givens in other novels. She creates a complex circular sense of time - more closely related to Mayan than European time - and in the novel, history casts a shadow on the everyday in a land where past, present, and future seem to intermingle. My project attempts to understand the space-time-historical context in which Garro has placed her characters in time of conflict.

In chapter 4, I shall study a text by Elena Poniatowska. She is a well-known journalist, novelist, author of short stories and politically engaged writer. She was born in France, of Polish descent, but moved to Mexico while she was still young.

Hasta no verte Jesus mío has been variously described as fictional autobiography and documentary fiction. It is a fictionalised re-telling of Josefina Borquez's (fictional name Jesusa Palancares) life. The bulk of the text deals with Josefina's experiences as *soldadera* during the Revolution. Very little has been written about the *soldaderas*. In texts by men, for example *Los de abajo* by Mariano Azuela, they frequently appear as cooks and willing sexual partners rather than the more complex reality which is portrayed in Poniatowska's text. Poniatowska's editorial and creative input are not clearly delineated in a text which rests uneasily between fiction and non-fiction. In the examination of this text I wish to study how Poniatowska creates a unique and challenging portrait of a woman combatant in the Revolution, who in turn plays with gender assumptions in Mexican society.

In chapter 5, I look at *Arráncame la vida*. It was Ángeles Mastretta's first novel, and established her reputation as a novelist in Mexico. Mastretta writes the story of Catalina Ascencio from her adolescence, when she meets her future husband Andrés Ascencio, through her marriage and up to her attainment of freedom on his death. Catalina tells the history of the Revolution as she accompanies her husband, who becomes a general and, consequently, she is in the unique position of privileged witness to the top hierarchy of the Revolution. She is not an active participant in the Revolution but she does acquiesce in her husband's involvement in dubious post-Revolutionary politics. Her complicity facilitates his quest for greater power and wealth. Mastretta represents a complex and ambiguous character who is compromised by her husband's criminal behaviour and is happy to reap the benefits. *Arráncame la vida* was a popular novel and thus is assumed to have no literary merit. The belittling of popular fiction is an issue worthy of some consideration. Popularity, in itself, is not a measure of worth. But it carries with it interesting reverberations, which I shall consider in my examination of the novel. Catalina writes colloquially and is often vulgar. Despite her husband's attempts to control her she does not comply, nor does she fulfil, the stereotypical role of passive victim.

In real conflicts there are no Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls. Hidden behind rigid stereotypes are people struggling to survive war and conflict. Textual representations of the Revolution produced its share of tropes, types and stereotypes. In the novels written by men, the way men were represented underwent constant revision, and was carried out in new and radically experimental ways. After all, the *novela de la revolución* has been credited as the birth of the modern Mexican novel.

Garro, Poniatowska, and Mastretta have written about women in innovative ways, as a counterpoint to the women characters in novels by many men. According to the critic and novelist Carlos Monsiváis, women in Mexican literature have been given the role of 'landscape' against which the male is illuminated.[11] Garro, Poniatowska, and Mastretta, place women firmly to the foreground of their texts. These authors also show that there is not a single female experience of conflict, but that there are experiences of conflict. The representation of conflict is in itself complex. As a result, I must also examine the forms and styles that the writers have chosen, and examine whether these have been successful in evoking the circumstances each writer purports to portray.

[11]Marcia L. Welles, "The Changing Face of Woman in Latin American Fiction." *Women in Hispanic Literature:Fallen Icons and Fallen Idols* edited by Beth Miller (University of California Press: Berkeley & London, 1983), 280.

Chapter 1

Tumulto y hojarasca: Gender, War and Nationalism in Mexico

Women were involved in the Mexican Revolution. This may appear self-evident when discussing internecine warfare: it was a war fought on many fronts with many different factions; battles occurred on homeground; and few were spared from engagement. Although the literature that has emerged which depicts the Revolution as both reality (the skirmishes, battles and bloodshed) and ideology (how it was engaged with on an official level) is rich and varied, women have largely been denied agency in what is the grand thematic concern of Mexican literature.[1]

Textual representations of Mexican conflicts have largely been told by men and about men. During the Mexican Revolution women and men were assigned specific roles in official narratives, even though the war provided women with many opportunities to step outside of rigid peacetime roles.[2] While many men, who had the prerequisite physical capabilities, were often forced to become warriors irrespective of their ideology, women were given new opportunities to move onto the battlefield and into other public spaces hitherto forbidden to them. Despite women's involvement in Mexican conflicts their stories have largely gone untold. Wars determine national narrative. A nation's stories are often told through a series of wars won and lost. National identity is then closely linked to violence. But these narratives often exclude women, denying them a place in the formative images of national identity. In this chapter I wish to explore the points at which gender representations, war and national identity collide, specifically as they apply to the Mexican Revolution.

In Mexican narrative the Revolution changed how writers imagined Mexico. The Revolution is a crucial moment in Mexican history, which many men, but few women have chosen to write about. Up to the early twentieth century writers still

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[1] I take my cue from Felipe Garrido, "¿Revolución en las letras?" *Revista Iberoamericana* LV.148-149 julio - diciembre (1989), who states that "La Revolución es un tema, no un género", 843, Marta Portal echoes this view in *Rulfo: dinámica de la violencia* (Madrid: Ediciones de cultura Hispánica, 1990), 21.

[2] María Elena de Valdés, *The Shattered Mirror: Representations of Women in Mexican Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998) has commented that "[i]n Mexico, rigid social roles control the action and speech of women", 2.

looked to Europe for inspiration and influence.[3] The Revolution changed this. Mexican writers found a new and uniquely personal experience which necessitated new forms of expression.[4] As I shall discuss in chapter 2, literary representations of the Revolution in the form of the *novela de la revolución* signalled a turning point in Mexican letters. The Revolution itself was also considered to be a rupture with an old order and the start of a brave, new, and radical form of governance. The fact that the Revolution resulted in one party rule for more than seventy years (up to the 2000 election) shows that it did not evolve or remain revolutionary, and instead the Partido Revolucionario Institucionalista (PRI) remained in power through a corrupt system of clientalism.[5] I shall not investigate the complex politics which kept the PRI in power. Instead, I am interested in the concept of the Revolution as a moment of national formation.[6] The Revolution inspired writers, artists, and academics to re-assess what it meant (and means) to be Mexican, taking this conflict as a new impetus for change and renewal. From early on in this project of self-reflection and analysis, many have been disillusioned with the promises not kept and the realities of post-Revolutionary politics, and in turn began to question the concept of nationhood put forward by official narratives. That this debate has been ongoing, and always critical, reflects that the concept of Mexican nationhood is ever-evolving, and is both contested and open to new forms.

I want to briefly examine the use of the word 'Revolution' in relation to the conflict (1910-1917). Revolution is an ideologically weighted word which suggests

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[3] See Luis Leal, "Mariano Azuela: Precursor de los nuevos novelistas" *Revista Iberoamericana* (1989) LV Julio - diciembre 148-149, 863 and Garrido, 841.

[4] By 'Mexican' I mean those who identify themselves with the Mexican state's definition of Mexican-ness. The Mexican is the progeny of the mix of Indian and Spanish (or more properly European, Asian and North African) races, which resulted in a hybrid, miscegenated race. There are others who live in Mexico, but who identify themselves as belonging to nations, which are indigenous to the territory that is now Mexico, and not as Mexicans. They have a diversity of cultures and cultural practices which fall outside of the remit of this study.

[5] Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World* (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1992), described how the Revolution became an institution "Mexico's revolution created a *sui generis* political system whose central players were the president and the Party of the Revolutionary Institutions. Both served the national state, which saved Mexico from internal anarchy and external pressure, making it possible for the country to develop in equilibrium, but at the price of postponing democracy", 322. Fuentes's reading of the value of Mexico's strong central government on the development of the nation state could be argued with. What is of interest is his presentation of the PRI, and their methods of governance, as necessary to the stability of the country.

[6] The governing party was formed in 1929 and was named the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), it was later renamed the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) and then named the PRI. See Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled* trans Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas

that the winners are on a higher ideological standing than the vanquished, and are progenitors of a dramatic and much needed change. I shall not examine the merits of either side in the conflict, I wish to merely reflect upon the language used subsequently. Revolution suggests inclusiveness; the fight is not represented as having been fraternal, as it would be if described as a civil war.[7] Margaret R. Higonnet explains these different perspectives:

> Depending on the position of the viewer, internecine struggle may appear to take one of two forms. Where the opposed groups are thought to be moral or military equals, an internal war is most likely to be termed a 'civil' war. Where one group is thought to be distinctly inferior in justification or strength, the struggle is termed a 'revolution', with the stress on reversal of a political order.[8]

Revolution is a conflict of the many against the few: a powerful oligarchy is overthrown by the masses. Such language brings together the nation in the aftermath of the conflict, despite the trauma of the actual conflict or the dissatisfaction with the methods employed. This point of view implies that only the reactionary - someone desirous of returning to the old status quo - could want to change the Revolution and its consequences. Revolution is a concept which can consolidate power and unite a country weakened by conflict, but the Revolution can also breed its own elite who wish to have the story told coloured by specific biases and excluding those who do not fit its vision.

Revolution brings the conflict home, so to speak. It is fought in the public spaces and places in which peace time routines take place. Yet, in the re-telling of war stories there is a separation of space into military and non-military zones because, according to Miriam Cooke, "people still need to believe in the separation of space into dangerous front – men's space and danger-free home - women's space....Certainties of space imported other assurances about identity in terms of

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Press, 1999), 100. See also Silvia Lorente-Murphy, "La Revolución mexicana en la novela" *Revista Iberoamericana* LV.148-149 Julio - diciembre (1989), 849.

[7] I use the word 'fraternal' advisedly, as there is no universal equivalent.

[8] Margaret R. Higonnet, "Civil Wars and Sexual Territories" in *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation* edited by Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 81. See also Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Viceversa* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) on contemporary theories of war and gender.

gender, class and nationalism."[9] When these well-defined gendered spaces are violated, as is frequently the case in times of conflict, the stories are re-cast in official war stories. The war story is the label given to the narrative frame in which accounts of war have been told:

> The war story gives order to wars that are generally experienced as confusion. It justifies not changing the rules, laws, and strategies of engagement....military historians force a grid on the anarchy [of telling a war story]; they arrange experience and actors into neat pairs; beginning and ending; foe and friend; aggression and defence; war and peace; front and home; combatant and civilian. Emphasizing that such splits occur, they explain women's need for protection as the reason men must fight. The War Story reinforces mythic wartime roles. It revives outworn essentialist clichés of men's aggressivity and women's pacifism.[10]

In Mexican literature both female and male novelists have vividly portrayed the chaos of war, unlike the official historical accounts which divide the places, actors and events of the Revolution into the quantifiable dyads detailed by Cooke. While male novelists have created very gendered divisions of space and combat, female novelists are more conscious of representing how these lines can be blurred during times of conflict. For example in the novels of Elena Garro and Elena Poniatowska women become actors in the conflict and are capable of violent acts. In the light of other representations of women in novels these characterisations are subversive.

An example of how the representation of women in national revolutionary art is reliant on either archetypes or the use of women as symbolic functions, is the sexualised image of Liberty as a woman in David Alfaro Siqueiros' mural *The New Democracy* (1944-1945) at the Palacio de las Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Liberty is a bare-breasted, muscular, woman of mixed race breaking free from her chains and reaching forward into the light (a brighter future). The chained woman was passive in the creation of the new democracy. She has had to be freed by others. In Siqueiros' mural, Liberty is an object of exchange to be fought over by men. Although she is a powerful-looking figure she has been passively waiting her freedom. Women can be the objects and the symbols in such imagery, but they are not the actors. To imagine

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[9] Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1996), 7.
[10] *ibid.*, 15.

this sexualised image replaced with a similar male image emphasises her gendered function in the image. If it were a man, it would either be homoerotic or would be inviting the female gaze (a notion inconceivable in the forties, and even now to many contemporary critics). This woman is both object of desire and symbol of a celebrated release from slavery into freedom. It carries a clear sub-text: the new democracy can be born of a former slave but it is to be run by men.

Patrick Dove recognised the muralists, among others, as being implicated in creating an imaginary for the post-revolutionary Mexico.[11] He discussed the originating myths the state ascribes to itself as a conscious effort of writing a new history:

> The state not only auto-reflexively nominates itself as the sovereign guardian of a now-unified *tierra*; at the same time, it adopts the ironic title of 'Institutional Revolutionary Party', through which it stakes an impossible claim upon the catastrophic movement of revolution or transition itself. Through a 'propiation' (seizing and making proper), the state would take ownership not only of the name ('Revolution'), but of *the very act of naming* that attains its figure in this event. In the contradictory assignation 'Institutional Revolutionary Party' can be heard the echoing of an anxiety that arises alongside the difficult thought of revolution: as a radical break, a turn announcing an absolute suspension of history, progress, law and rationality, revolution portends the collapse of the finite into the infinite.[12]

Revolution, through the official narratives or state-sponsored production, created a unified and contradictory sense of Mexican-ness. Dove sees Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* as representative of this hegemonic discourse. He explains:

> The discourse of *mexicanidad*, as an attempt to identify an essence that would lend credit to the post-revolutionary articulation of national unity (we Mexicans are united in so far as we can tell ourselves who we are), produces a redoubling of *lo mexicano*, into a reflecting subject and a reflected object.[13]

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[11] He also includes essayist Samuel Ramos, José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes and Octavio Paz, in Patrick Dove, "*Exígele lo nuestro*: Deconstruction, Restitution and the Demand of Speech in *Pedro Páramo*" *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 10:1 (2001), 29.
[12] *Ibid.*, 28.
[13] *Ibid.*, 29.

The concept of *mexicanidad* or *lo mexicano* to which he refers was initiated by the publication in 1934 of Samuel Ramos' *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en México.*[14] Paz's later text was published in 1950 and can be considered central to the concept of *mexicanidad.* What both Ramos and Paz did is quite radical in its simplification of the Mexican into a series of characteristics, concerns and a delimited psychological profile, relative to similar projects in other nation states. Unlike the contention of Edward Saïd in *Orientalism* – to name but one of the many post-colonial theorists who have elaborated upon this theory – which maintains that a nation is created and defined most often by its other, Paz et al. have constituted Mexican-ness within strictly delineated parameters, which I shall examine in greater detail in this chapter.[15] Authors of fiction in Mexico have long been aware of the hegemonic discourse which grew out of the Revolution, and have attempted to create new spaces, and to open out the imagined Mexico, which, in turn should be a reflection of the real.

The critic, Jean Franco has perhaps been the most influential critic in combining feminism, post-colonialism and postmodernism in her critical writings about Latin American textual production. In *Plotting Women* she details three elements which are central to writing in Latin America: "Religion, nationalism, and finally modernization thus constitute the broad master narratives and symbolic systems that not only cemented society but plotted women differentially into the social text."[16] It is her contention that women were a corollary to nationalist discourse (following Anderson's theories which I will detail later in this chapter) and were functions of the hegemonic ideologies which existed in the different nation states in Latin America. In order to study texts which represent women in a time of national formation, it is essential to unpick the givens that lie behind the 'master narratives' and 'symbolic systems' implicit in their creation. Thus, I will examine three key concepts, and explore how they are relevant to the study of literature by women in Mexico. These are: gender, nationalism and woman as symbol.

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[14] See Henry C. Schmidt *The Roots of lo mexicano: Self and Society in Mexican Thought, 1900-1934* (London: Texas A&M U.P., 1978), x-xii.
[15] Edward Saïd *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991).
[16] Franco, *Plotting Women,* xii.

Gender

There have been women throughout Mexican literature who have sought to change the imaginary in order to contest rigid concepts of nationalism. Women, of course, are not the only ones to be excluded from this narrative and they have not always been. Not all women are subaltern. It is erroneous to suggest that women are a monolithic group who are united by common shared experiences. The life of an upper-class, educated woman is very far removed from the life experiences of the female servants who work for her. They may inhabit the same geographical location and have the same gender identity but their class is a greater dividing line between them. That aforementioned servant may have more in common with someone of the opposite sex than the woman for whom she works. Since such differences can exist, it is necessary to dwell on the validity of using gender as a marker for this study.

Gender can be seen as prescriptive. In other words a person's biological make up is often assumed to have a correlation with his or her abilities, desires, social responsibilities, and can determine the opportunities with which he or she may be provided. Naturally, there are other determinants, such as: class, ethnicity, family, social and political circumstances into which he or she is born, and so on. In the latter half of the twentieth century gender has been a contentious and difficult focus of debate.

For many years, investigations of, and theorising about, gender issues have been carried out by feminists. Two primary fields of thought emerged in feminism in the latter half of the twentieth century: French feminism and Anglo-American feminism. French feminism explores the polemic arising from Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that a woman is not born but made.[17] French feminists have principally employed semiotics, psychoanalysis and linguistics to explore whether woman is socially constructed or if there are inherent 'natural' qualities which determine female-ness. In chapter 4, I shall be exploring the significance of biology over what

[17] I use the term 'French feminism' conscious of the fact that it is a label attached by Anglo-American critical discourse to refer to three scholars: Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Kelly Oliver has drawn attention to the paradox of this label, as none of the three women is French and all are deeply uncomfortable with such a culturally nuanced title as feminism, in *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 163-164.

Judith Butler has described as 'performance' with regard to gender representations.[18] Anglo-American feminism has engaged with the concept of individual rights and demanded political reform, a consequence of its emergence alongside the civil rights movements of the 1960s. There are many different evolutions to these streams of thought. While I am drawing together a broad sweep in brief, all such movements have complexities which I do not have space for here. There were, and are, many dissenters, movements which emerged tangentially, and others which developed in direct opposition.[19] Many different, and alternate, forms of feminism have emerged at a local level in countries whose particularities have differed greatly from these two Western theoretical approaches.

The difficulties faced by feminist (and the much broader gender) theorists are akin to those which have confronted theorists in other fields: a disillusionment with the *grands récits* or meta-narratives. A disillusionment with the existence of absolute knowledge has led to an assertion that the period from the mid-nineteen nineties onwards is post-feminist. This assertion is disputable, and largely disputed, particularly by what are known as Third World feminists, that is, feminists from post-colonial and 'developing' nations. The Indian critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is an example of these so-called Third World feminists. She uses French Structuralist criticism to examine whether there can be a universal feminism.[20] She examines, as an example, the practice of wife immolation (suti) and asks can anyone from outside of Indian culture understand or judge this practice. Local practices and customs are accepted at a local level. But this may be because the local circumstances suppress or ignore any debates surrounding these practices. Civic and political rules combined with social structures and circumstances determine local behaviour. The principal concern when examining international civil rights are what rights are universal and what rights are Eurocentric, that is specific to European and American societies but

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[18] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

[19] Toril Moi, in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London &New York: Routledge, 1988) has given an overview of the differences and convergences between French and Anglo-American feminisms. She is heavily biased towards the French feminists. In her opinion "[t]he central paradox of Anglo-American feminist criticism are [sic] thus not primarily that it has remained within the lineage of male-centred humanism but that it has done so without sufficient awareness of the high political costs this entails...it is *in the end* not quite political enough", 87. Moi has over-determined Anglo-American feminism in the figure of the critic Elaine Showalter.

[20] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame" *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1987).

not applicable to other nations or ethnicities.[21] International feminism often parallels the debates carried out by post-colonial theorists. Both examine the binary opposition: margin versus centre, establishing the centre as possessor and as locus of power when those power relations are more complex. There are centres of power at the margin, and there are unequal power relations at the centre. A core belief in international feminism is that women who are already discriminated against in society become other at the margins. They do not have a voice, and therefore depend upon their views being mediated by women from outside cultures who in turn may not fully understand their individual lives and experiences. Within this debate is a suggestion of exclusivity of particular cultures and a privileging of direct lived experience over the possibility to communicate this experience to another. There is also a suspicion that some women may exploit others' lives to their own ends. I shall examine these contentions with regard to Poniatowska's text in chapter 4 and with Mastretta's wilful manipulation of historical fact in chapter 5.

In my study, I am conscious of over-generalising the experiences of individuals according to heteronormative discourses of gender. 'Woman', 'female' and 'feminine' have been queried (and queered) as terms which can no longer be taken as read by the critic. Critics such as Toril Moi, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and others have drawn attention to the slipperiness of such hitherto apparently self-evident categories. In chapter 4, I shall engage in a more detailed elucidation of the interstices and complexities of gendered and transgendered theoretical frameworks. Here, I want to examine the validity of using the term woman as a category and as a function. Woman is constituted of the two words 'female' and 'feminine'. They have often been treated as interchangeable terms. When unravelled, 'female' is understood to express biology, and 'feminine' the cultural aspects of womanhood. Moi elucidates: "though women undoubtedly are *female*, this in no way guarantees

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[21] For an insight into the debate on Eurocentism and Internationalism, see, for example, Val Moghadam, "Against Eurocentrism and Nativism: A Review Essay on Samir Amin's Eurocentrism and Other Texts" *Socialism and Democracy* Fall/Winter (1989) 81-104; *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* edited by Martha C. Nussbaum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Sarah A. Radcliffe, "(Representing) Post-colonial Women: Authority, Difference and Feminisms" *Area* 26:1 (1994): 25-32; *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* edited by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) edited by Valentine M. Moghadam; and Radhika Coomaraswamy "Are Women's Rights Universal? Re-engaging the Local" *Meridians: Feminism, Race and Transnationalism* 3.1 (2002):1-18.

that they will be *feminine.*"[22] But if, as Butler has suggested, the feminine is purely performance, what elements of this surface behaviour can we examine in the text as representational of woman? She cannot be seen only in binary opposition to man. His masculinity is no less fixed or pre-determined by biology. I am not examining the female-ness of women in this text (although it has its own inherent difficulties as an all-encompassing label), as that is taken as a given when characters are ascribed female names and given the appropriate pronominal address.[23] What I shall examine in this thesis are the various ways femininity is constituted in novels, firstly, and in brief, in novels by male authors and latterly, and in greater detail, in texts by female authors.

Latin American feminism, as theory, has largely been engaged with outside of Latin America, and particularly in the U.S. and European academies. One such theorist, who has garnered much attention, is Debra A. Castillo who decries the absence of an indigenous feminist discourse, in saying that "no particularized, clearly innovative theory has as yet emerged" in Latin America.[24] She is author of a much-lauded text, because, in her introduction, she provides an analysis of Latin American feminism. This introduction has served as a point of departure for more detailed interventions into feminist readings of writing by women. [25] Academics, she claims, critically engage with writing by women using Western theoretical frameworks. She continues, rightly, drawing attention to the inherent danger in this practice of borrowing from so-called 'first-world' theories: "to conscript other theories to fill in the gap, ironically, uncritically, and sometimes inappropriately...is one of the major unresolved issues of postcolonial feminist theory."[26] It is important to stress that the difficulty lies in the conscription "ironically, uncritically, and sometimes inappropriately"; not that outside theories are inherently invalidated because they are imported. There is little usefulness to be found in trying to assert a pure national or

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[22] Moi, *op. cit.*, 65.

[23] Butler, following Cartesian logic, in "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body are Mine" *Qui Parle* 11.1 Fall-Winter (1997):1-20, argues that speech acts and writing presuppose a subject, and imprinted in that subject is a body. Therefore the body is dependent on language, and language needs a body.

[24] *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (Ithaca & London; Cornell University Press, 1992), 1.

[25] For an example of how her theories have been received by others see *Latin American Women's Writing: Feminist Readings in Theory and Crisis* edited by Anny Brooksbank Jones and Catherine Davies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 207-9.

[26] *ibid.*, 33.

local theory. No theory is ring-fenced. Instead, theory must be employed intelligently, with an awareness of local praxis and experiences.

In her introduction, she gives an overview and analysis of critical theories, which are potentially useful to the feminist critic. While useful, her arguments can tend to be over-prescriptive and reductive, at times. As with her suggestion that there is a lack of "particularized, clearly innovative theory", she is both blithely ignoring the active, local, political and grassroots organisations which I shall mention later, and which have been examined by others in great detail;[27] and is also falling foul of that which she has criticised in others, namely using Western paradigms to measure non-Western theory and praxis. She appears to demand of Latin American feminists that they should act as if there were no theories of feminism outside of their own countries, and expect that they create new theories *ab initio*. Latin American feminism is plural and multi-faceted. It is made up of a mélange of local activisms, borrowings adapted to the local, reference to the metropolitan, theories which have grown from the ground up, as well as very agenda-specific politics. Spivak, in her essay "French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics", has drawn attention to the importance of an "exchange between metropolitan and decolonized feminisms."[28] Thus she is emphasizing that both Western and non-Western feminists can share knowledge and ideas in a mutually beneficial way. Outside of praxis, much of current Latin American feminist theory has been concerned with a direct engagement with what can be validly transposed and employed from international feminism, and how exactly local experiences of feminism can be defined.[29] Castillo appears to be searching for a body of work which will satisfy particular theoretical models, i.e. a

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[27] See a special report entitled "Latin American Women: The Gendering of Politics and Culture" carried out by *NACLA: Report on the Americas* July/August XXVII.1 (1993), which was published a year after Castillo's book but does refer to situations, theories and events covering the previous two decades. A previous *NACLA* report entitled "Latin American Women: One Myth - Many Realities" was published in 1980. See also, Francine Masiello, "Discurso de mujeres, lenguaje del poder: reflexiones sobre la crítica feminista a mediados de la década del 80" *Hispamerica* 15.45 (1996):53-60; *ViVa: Women and Popular Protest in Latin America* edited by Sarah A. Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (London: Routledge, 1993); and "Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms" Sonia E. Alvarez et al *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.21 (2002): 537-579, as examples of assessments of Latin American feminisms.

[28] This essay appears in *Feminists Theorize the Political* edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 56.

[29] For an example of such excursus see Raquel Olea, "Feminism: Modern or Postmodern?" *The Postmodern Debate in Latin America* edited by John Beverley at al (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995); and Claudine Potvin, "De-scribing Postmodern Feminism" in *Latin American Postmodernisms* edited by Richard A. Young (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997).

search for a feminism which clearly defines itself as set apart from metropolitan models. This is an impossible task. There is no monolithic, inclusive, single feminism in Latin America. There are many feminisms. Many set themselves apart as site specific, while others are concerned with seeking out what is useful in international feminism and employing it in the local.

Castillo also dubiously suggests that theory can only be applied through a search for the authentic:

> [b]ecause of the continuing fear of cultural imperialism in the postcolonial nations, critics as well as writers of fiction obsessively question authenticity and usability, both in theory and in practice. Thus, such qualities as honesty, inclusiveness, and wholeness of being are implicitly weighted as morally superior to, for example, aesthetic concerns, which are implicitly less honest, more selective, less useful or usable. The authentic has the generative and creative force of being able to cut through falsification and mere fantasy it represents as well a counterforce to both disorder and to the totalitarian imposition of order by violence.[30]

Here, she sets the authentic against what she calls the fantasy of aesthetics. In a wide sweep she assumes fiction concerned with aesthetics to be incapable of 'truth' - insofar as that is categorisable - and she privileges fiction which consider 'authenticity and usability' as 'morally superior'. This is a form of snobbery which aligns aesthetic concerns with totalitarian regimes and compares fictive acts of storytelling with some purer authentic layer of society.[31] This is pure fallacy. Is she suggesting that the critic's job is to examine texts in terms of how they conform to a rigid concept of authenticity and ignore aesthetics? In her introductory essay, which serves as a meditation on the intersections between theory and praxis, she wavers between the two, and concludes by suggesting rigid parameters for readings which she later employs with regard to specific texts. She suggests five strategies for classifying writing as well as reading: silence, appropriation, cultivation of superficiality, negation and marginality. These categories - from someone who sets out to query rigid formalism - are limiting and negative. Women's writing in Latin

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[30] Debra A. Castillo, *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism* (Ithaca & London; Cornell University Press, 1992), 33.

[31] Amy K. Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) contests the belief that politics and aesthetics are mutually exclusive, xv.

America (or even specifically in Mexico) cannot be easily condensed into strict frameworks. This is, in part, what I would like demonstrate in this thesis. I do not believe in an *'écriture fémenine'* nor a *'parler femme'* pace Cixous, nor is there a phallic Lacanian lack that women need to engage with. Instead, I juxtapose three disparate pieces of writing precisely to explore the differences. Each text is united by its common thematic concern. The individuated mode of representation of each writer shows that woman is not a monolithic essence, but a complex differentiated multiplicity. Why examine women in writing, then? I designate gender because what women in Mexico do have in common is a shared history of discrimination, albeit differently felt.[32] They have been denied agency in fiction, a concept I will explore in greater detail in chapter 2.

Mexico, due to its proximity to the United States, has been largely influenced by the aforementioned Anglo-American feminism. It has also maintained links to a pan-American feminism. The first Latin American Women's Congress was held in Mérida, Yucatán in January 1916.[33] In order to ensure women's participation in the Revolution promises were made that there would be radical reform after the Revolution, but change has been slow. Their involvement in the Revolution and the dramatic movement in population changed women's lives. These changes were not all positive as women also suffered great losses, and had to endure the difficulties of dramatic displacement from familiar settings to unknown places. Opportunities increased but so too did violence against women. Having few employment opportunities meant that the numbers of prostitutes increased dramatically.[34] In *Los*

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[32] Margarita M. Valdés, in "Inequalities in Capabilities Between Men and Women in Mexico" in *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* edited by Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), states that "women [in Latin America] are not functioning in many characteristically human ways because of local patriarchal social structures and because of the ancestral history of subjection: these have denied them the possibility of functioning in many different areas and have therefore kept their capabilities at a very low level", 428.

[33] Lillian Estelle Fisher, in "The Influence of the Present Mexican Revolution upon the Status of Women" *Hispanic American Historical Review* XXIII:1 (1942), 215; "Feminism-in-Nationalism: The Gendered Subaltern at the Yucatán Feminist Congress of 1916" Emma Pérez, *Between Woman and Nation : Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms and the State* edited by Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón and Minoo Moallem (Durham & London; Duke University Press, 1999); and Francesca Miller, "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena" *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America: Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America* edited by Emilie Bergman et al. (Berkeley, L.A.: University of California Press, 1990).

[34] Frederick C. Turner, in "Los efectos de la participación femenina en la revolución de 1910" *Historia mexicana* LXIV.4 (1967), 606-617; María R. González, *Imagen de la prostituta en la novela mexicana contemporánea* (Madrid: Editorial pliegos, 1996); and Debra A. Castillo, *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

recuerdos del porvenir Elena Garro showed that the life of the prostitute was both difficult and dangerous. Up to the late 1940s considerable efforts were put into the demand for suffrage, which was granted in 1947.[35] Later, according to Julia Tuñón Pablos "[d]uring the stability period [1954-1968], women had silently, but undeniably, taken part in public life; in the 1970s, they were unabashedly feminist."[36] Change was gradual. In the 1970s, influenced by U.S. feminism, women aligned themselves with trade union demands for improved conditions for factory workers. Several unjust laws, such as women having to get permission from their husbands to go out to work, were repealed to coincide with Mexico hosting the United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year in 1975.[37] In 1978 Alaide Foppa founded *Fem,* an influential feminist journal which continues to promulgate feminist opinion, and is a forum for feminist debate.[38] Throughout the 80s and 90s women's organisations have continued to work on a local and national level to demand political and social reform. Mexican society is still considered to be a society dominated by machismo. In Amy K. Kaminsky's words, "the culture that gave the world a name for masculine posturing has been resistant to feminism."[39] In principle, women have greater personal freedoms and rights than ever before but, in practice, they are still marginalised: earning less, getting lower standards of education and having less access to the written word. The turn of the century has seen women making greater encroachments into the creation of textual representations of women as real characters. By real, I mean characters who have complexity, depth, and bear comparison to actual lived experience, unlike the female characters in many Mexican novels who were mere backdrops to the male characters, or bore symbolic functions within the narrative. I speak of characters not as a return to the trope of assessing so-called 'images of women' referred to by Moi in her text, but as the referents which are

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[35] It has been suggested that women were given suffrage because of the political usefulness of their perceived conservatism. See Maxine Molyneaux, *Women's Movement in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[36] Tuñón Pablos, 106.

[37] For a history of Mexican feminism, see Marta Lamas, Alicia Martínez, María Luisa Tarrés & Esperanza Tuñon, in "Mexico Building Bridges: The Growth of Popular Feminism in Mexico" translated by Ellen Calmus in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* edited by Amrita Basu (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 324-343; and Margarita M. Valdés *op. cit.*.

[38] Brianda Domecq *Mujer que publica...mujer pública* (México: Editorial Diana, 1994), 102.

[39] Kaminsky *op. cit.,* xii.

but one aspect of studying a text. I will also be assessing the stylistic and aesthetic elements of the texts.

Nation

Spivak has said that a function of international feminism, and here she is also alluding to the feminist novelist, is "to change the imaginary in order to be able to act on the real."[40] As one of the founding members of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group she has been highly influential in disseminating the term subaltern and investigating its value with respect to women in so-called 'developing' nations. In Spivak's vocabulary the subaltern is the other, the ex-centric being who has been deprived of his or her place in the canon due to social, political, and economic disadvantage, and ethnic, class, and gender difference. In military terms, it refers to subordinate or lower-ranking officers and soldiers. In this study, then, the word subaltern can take on a more literal meaning apart from its general usage by post-colonial theorists.[41] Mexican women have operated in both senses of the term: they have been both marginalised and have fought as low-ranking soldiers (I will return to the representation of the *soldaderas,* as these women were called, in chapter 4). Inspired by the South Asian scholars, a number of Latin American academics have formed a similar group entitled the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group.[42] In their founding statement they declare that scholars in Latin American studies have "long worked with the assumption that nation and national are not popular, all-inclusive terms."[43] Later, they continue by agreeing with the axiom of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group "that the elites represented by the national bourgeoisie and/or the colonial administration are responsible for inventing the ideology and reality of nationalism."[44] They are clearly saying that the national narrative has been available to a small educated, privileged elite and that anyone outside of that has no voice or place in this vision. What they are also saying is that the nation and the

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[40] Spivak *op. cit.,* 145.

[41] I must also draw attention to the difficulties inherent in using the term subaltern without critical awareness of its ambiguities. The danger of privileging the voice of woman as subaltern, as Sara Suleri comments, "almost inevitably leads to the simplicities that underlie unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for 'the good" in "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition" *Critical Inquiry* 18 Summer (1992), 758.

[42] See John Beverley, Michael Aronna and José Oviedo in "Founding Statement: Latin American Subaltern Studies Group" *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995). This group is comprised of the editors and other academics.

[43] *Ibid.*, 137.

[44] *Ibid.*, 142.

national are contested terms. Being other to the central narrative of nationalism, which originated in European nationalism, the subaltern must either invent a new concept of nationalism or engage directly with the narratives and the symbols coming from the centre. Frequently, to be heard, the subaltern must use the tools of the centre. A clear, while complex, example of the subaltern being given a voice through the use of hegemonic form is Elena Poniatowska's text *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.*

Textual accounts of the Revolution determine national sense of self. When one gender is represented as having a lesser role in that conflict, it determines the role that gender has in the nation. In *La mujer en la Revolución Mexicana* Ángeles Mendieta Alatorre describes the place of women after the Revolution as imagined by official narratives:

> Después del tumulto que levantó hojarasca y polvo, ha vuelto la transparencia de la vida plena y México ha encontrado nuevamente en sus hogares, la llama encendida que una mano de mujer prende en el desvelo de las generaciones nuevas.[45]

She states, in rather poetic fashion, that women, having experienced the dramatic changes of the Revolution, were expected simply to return to their old roles. Although, officially, the Revolution would change men's lives, women should continue regardless. This seamless return to previous roles can be more easily achieved after nationalist wars, for example, conflicts against an external enemy, when the conflict is at a distance, than after an internal conflict, where the action takes place at women's front doors (to use a domestic analogy). Higonnet explains how such internal conflicts can serve as opportunities for women. In nationalist wars the image of women guarding the home has an ideological value which ascribes specific virtues to women and places them firmly in the domestic. Internal wars pull them into the conflict and makes them public actors:

> In all wars roles traditionally assigned to women are political in the sense that to maintain the hearth takes an ideological coloration. Yet *nationalist* wars against an eternal enemy repress internal political divisions and with them feminist movements. *Civil* wars [the Revolution can be categorised as such] by contrast may occasion

[45] Angeles Mendieta Alatorre, *La mujer en la Revolución Mexicana* (México: Biblioteca del instituto nacional de estudios historicos de la revolución mexicana, 1961), 17.

> explicit political choices for women. Once a change in government can be conceived, sexual politics can also become an overt political issue.[46]

She suggests that when there is a collective realisation that a dramatic social and political change can be brought about, so too other changes in the established order can be imagined, such as a change in fixed gender roles. But there are also considerable difficulties in changing these roles because there are fixed roles in war as well as peace. There are some critics who suggest, as Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott do, that "Women's inclusion as participants in wars of this century has blurred distinctions between gender roles in peace and war. War has become a terrain in which gender is negotiated."[47] Juxtaposed with the warring language used by political feminist movements, such as the suffragettes in England during World War I and their subsequent achievements, it is still not possible to draw a clear link between women's participation in war and social and political changes. In part this is because women's stories have not been told. They have not become part of the "imagined community" that is the nation.

I wish to step back a little and examine the concept of nationhood. Like time, an issue I shall deal in relation to Elena Garro's novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, it is a concept so ingrained in the Western psyche that there are few who question its validity.[48] Nationhood has its origins in the eighteenth century, the first boundary line was drawn in 1718 and from this developed a concept of 'natural' boundaries where inhabitants of certain territories should be governed by a sovereign ruler and should aspire to linguistic and cultural hegemony among its citizens.[49] Of course, not all

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[46] "Civil Wars and Sexual Territories" Margaret R. Higonnet, *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation* edited by Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 80 (italics in the original).

[47] Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1993), xi.

[48] Nation and nationalism is a complete area of study in itself and thus is accompanied by a rich variety of theories and theorists. As Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, in *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) detail in their study, there are four central contemporary theories in relation to the nation. They describe the theory I am using as "popular modernist". The other three are grouped under the titles: 1. Primordialists "who claim that nations are natural and universal, an 'automatic' extension of kinship relationships"; 2. Modernists "who see nationalism and nations as a phenomenon which is particular to capitalism"; 3. Marxist "who consider that nations are social, not natural", 23-24.

[49] See Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) for a complete analysis of the origins of the concept of the nation.

countries have aspired to this monolithic state apparatus but these are the terms under which many nations define themselves, even up to the present day. A nation is "a collectivity existing within a clearly demarcated territory, which is subject to a unitary administration, reflexively monitored both by the internal state apparatus and those of other states."[50] The concept of the nation in use today has its origin in Romanticism of the late eighteenth century. The nation is a concept and a set of physical boundaries, whereas nationalism is the sentiment which is either a consequence of the formation of these boundaries or the precursor to it. The political historian Anthony Giddens is careful to explicate the difference between nation and nationalism:

> Both the nation and nationalism are distinctive properties of modern states and in the context of their original emergence as well as elsewhere there is more than a fortuitous connection between them. There can be no nationalism, in its modern form at least, without the formation of nations, although the reverse relation is a more problematic one.[51]

The nation must be conceived or imagined in order to come into being, and that is the role of nationalism. It is the mode a nation has of imagining itself that becomes the shared culture. As Homi K. Bhabha says, "nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye."[52] Bhabha is using Benedict Anderson's concept of nation and nationalism, and it was Anderson who also explained the importance of the concept of nationhood, even in its contested form in a Revolution, to war and conflict. He explains that the nation:

> ...is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.[53]

For Anderson the concept of the nation developed from the growth in the printing press, that is from individuals' abilities to imagine it as an entity, write this down and

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[50] *ibid.*, 116.
[51] *ibid.*, 116.
[52] Homi K Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.
[53] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* (New York and London: Verso, 1996) 7.

then propagate these imaginings. The nation is a fiction, in the sense that although it can be physically mapped, the fact of these mappings is derived from a conceived reality. The map was imagined, and then made reality.[54] The novel is an integral part of the cultural practices essential to exploring what the imagined boundaries of the nation are, and that nation's nationalism.

Mary Louise Pratt has taken issue with aspects of Anderson's theory. In her opinion, "Anderson's three key features of nations (limited, sovereign, fraternal) are metonymically embodied in the finite, sovereign and fraternal figure of the citizen-soldier."[55] She continues, emphasising that it is the gender of this soldier which is the focus of her interest:

> [Anderson's] own terms make clear, however, that the issue is not simply that women 'don't fit' the descriptions of the imagined community. Rather, the nation by definition situates or 'produces' women in permanent instability with respect to the imagined community, including, in very particular ways, the women of the dominant class. Women inhabitants of nations were neither imagined as nor invited to imagine themselves as part of the horizontal brotherhood[56]

In her view, the nation is an exercise in male bonding: a brotherhood of (un)equals. Women can only operate as functions, and are necessarily excluded from this camaraderie. The language Anderson uses not only excludes women from the discourse of nationalism. They are also rendered invisible in the pseudo-neutrality of employing male-gendered language. Pratt's critique undermines Francesca Miller's vision of Latin American feminism as "a sisterhood, of an imagined community."[57] Pratt brings Anderson's contentions further, and engages with the concept of the emplotment of women in "patriotic speeches, in sculpture, in poetry, novels, and plays" where "female icons are used to symbolize the nation - symbolizing, often enough, that which is at stake between warring groups of men."[58] Therefore, if

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[54] In Jean Franco's words in *Plotting Women* "The nation may have been a fictional addressee, but by dint of being addressed it took on reality", *op. cit.*, 79.

[55] "Women, Literature and National Brotherhood" *Women, Culture and Politics in Latin America: Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America* edited by Emilie Bergman et al (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 50.

[56] *ibid.*, 50-51.

[57] "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena" in Bergman et al, 21.

[58] Pratt, 53. See also *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings* edited by Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp (London: Arnold, 1997) who coincide with this critique of nationalism as higly gendered: "Symbols of national identification have become naturalised into landscapes of everyday

nations are the sum of their war stories told to create a sense of a horizontal comradeship, this unity is highly gendered, excluding women or representing her as a symbol for whom or over whom the war must be won. War stories become either repetitions of the Trojan war, where warriors must fight for yet another Helen's love, or alternatively, an account of the protection of the domestic, where women and children are the innocent victims who need to be saved from a brutal regime. The historical accounts of the Revolution stray from these dual options to an extent, as it was a war fought on the home front, with women living, fighting and dying on the battlefield. Much of the early fiction written about the conflict employed this highly gendered vision of national struggle. In chapter 2, I shall examine the representation of women in war stories by men, as tropes in the narrative at the service of an ideologically weighted vision of both the battlefield and post-bellicose Mexico.

America - particularly Latin America - does not unproblematically accept its existence as an easily constituted place. It is a highly contested space, with recent histories of the creation of sometimes random and oftentimes highly contested national boundaries. In 1961, writing nearly two decades before Anderson, the historian, Edmundo O'Gorman, claimed that America had been invented and not discovered: "the clue to the problem of the historical appearance of America lay in considering the event as the result of an inspired invention of Western thought and not as the result of a purely physical discovery."[59] America, according to O'Gorman, was invented; that much of what was known about America was derived from the early explorers' fabrications based on a need to impress their benefactors in order to obtain more financial support; and European writing which ascribed to it the quality of being either a utopian paradise or as a land inhabited by savages. America was a fiction long before it was colonised by Europeans, and fictional accounts have been integral to the exploration of American identity.

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life, through repeated performances as mundane as sports spectatorship, or overtly nationalist as paying tribute to national heroes....Along with this has been the naturalisation of a particular national citizen", 396. They continue: "the reproduction of national norms has tended to reinforce certain gender relations", 397. For further discussions on this gendered national citizen see also Anne McClintock *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), Daniel Balderston "Poetry, Revolution, Homophobia: Polemics From the Mexican Revolution" *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* Sylvia Molloy and Robert McKee Irwin eds. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998) and Tamar Mayer ed. *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[59] Edmundo O'Gorman in *The Invention of America* (Westport, Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 4.

Another academic who re-worked old myths and fictions about Latin America in order to show how the fictions can be re-appropriated by Latin American intellectuals was Roberto Fernández Retamar. In his essay "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America" Retamar examines how the character Caliban, from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, works as a symbol of the imagined savage inhabitant of the Americas. He expresses - with some discomfit - that the peoples of Latin America are the progeny of the coloniser and as such have inherited European culture: "For it is the colonizer who brings us together, who reveals the profound similarities existing above and beyond our secondary differences."[60] It is problematic to create an impression of inclusiveness and sublimate these "secondary differences" entirely. But, it is important to note that Retamar is attempting to map a unifying concept of Latin American culture and the way it conceives itself, and how it has been seen from Europe and the USA. He is struggling against the impression that "our [Latin Americans'] entire culture is taken as an apprenticeship, rough draft or a copy of European bourgeois culture."[61] In his opinion the inhabitant of the land is Caliban, who has been taught the language of the master, and is forced to communicate in another's tongue and can learn to use it against his master. In *The Tempest* Caliban curses the colonizers. He employs the tools they have imposed on him:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you
> For learning me your language.[62]

For Retamar, the native intellectual is Ariel whose choice is either, to serve Prospero "at which he is apparently unusually adept but for whom he is nothing more than a timorous slave, or allying himself with Caliban in his struggle for true freedom."[63] Retamar considers that the Latin American intellectual should make the latter choice, and cease to serve the master but become the ally of the slave (Caliban). This Cuban Revolutionary is calling for Latin Americans to attempt at, what he calls:

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[60] Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, translated by. Edward Baker, foreword by Frederic Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 7.
[61] Retamar, *op. cit.*,5.
[62] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), 39 and, see also, Retamar, *op. cit.*, 14.
[63] Retamar, *op. cit.*, 39.

"making *our own* history".[64] In using the word 'making' he is referring to the construction of a new political order, which also requires the imaginings of himself and others in order to create a theory for it.

There is a similar argument made by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard in *America,* a text which is a series of meditations on "America". Although he is travelling through the USA, he is following in a long tradition of writing about America as a locus of European neurosis and fantasies, which can be read in texts such as *The Tempest*, and is engaging with the concept of America since its colonisation by Europeans. For Baudrillard, "America is neither dream nor reality. It is hyperreality. It is a hyperreality because it is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved."[65] Later in the same text he says:

> What you have to do is enter the fiction of America, enter America as fiction. It is indeed, on this fictive basis that it dominates the world. Even if every detail of America were insignificant, America is something that is beyond us all...[66]

He is addressing how America was a fiction before it was a place. It had been imagined and then colonised and divided into separate nations, and each of these nations had to be imagined before they came into being.

The novelist Carlos Fuentes, in response to Gabriel García Márquez's Nobel prize speech, wrote about the invented America. For Fuentes, America was "discovered because invented because imagined because desired because named, America became the utopia of Europe. The American mission was to be the other version of a European history condemned as corrupt and hypocritical by the humanists of the time."[67] Later in the essay, he further explores this concept of America as Europe's utopia:

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[64] *ibid*, 41 italics his.

[65] Jean Baudrillard, *America* translated by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989), 28. Similarly, the historian James W. Ceaser has said: "As a symbol America is identified with images that represent at best simple half-truths and at worst grotesque caricatures of the real character of American life. But for those who employ this discourse, accuracy is irrelevant: America is a prop for carrying on a different discussion. In order for the symbol to bear its theoretical weight and to perform its function, America must be a certain way, whether it truly is so or not." See *Reconstructing America: the Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), 245.

[66] Baudrillard, *op. cit.,* 29.

[67] Carlos Fuentes, *Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America* (Liverpool; Liverpool University Press, 1987), 4.

> ...utopia persisted as one of the central strains of the culture of the Americas. We were condemned to utopia by the Old World. What a heavy load! Who could live up to this promise, this demand, this contradiction: to be utopia where utopia was demolished, burned and branded and killed by those who wanted utopia: the epic actors of the Conquest, the awed band of soldiers who entered Tenochtitlán with Cortés in 1519 and discovered the America they had imagined and desired: a new world of enchantment and fantasy only read about, before, in the romances of chivalry. And who were then forced to destroy what they had named in their dreams as utopia.[68]

In his reading of the conquest Fuentes creates an image of conquerors who were carrying out their own quixotic adventure. Their imaginations were fuelled by chivalric novels and dreams of utopia. They at once delighted in the strange and demolished it because of that strangeness. America was utopia because of its otherness. All the while difference was only allowed according to Europe's needs. Fuentes' arguments are deliberately sweeping and he creates an image of the conquistadors as almost boyish adventurers, impelled to travel out of a thirst for the new. In this way his argument may seem facile. What is of interest here is his contention that the imaginary - whether that is fiction or myth – was central to the creation of America.

It is probably useful to remember that while there were many indigenous ethnic groups who had inhabited the Americas for many years with their own boundaries, these are not reflected in where the frontiers were drawn by the colonisers. So in order for each country to exist, and a nation to be formed, the space and culture had to be plotted (pace Franco) and then mapped. This plotting frequently occurs through the novel and other fictional forms. The novel is another European import which is accompanied by its own problematics of displacement. Latin America, and specifically Mexico, has adopted a form which had developed to describe a very different reality to its own. Consequently, the novel had to be adapted and developed so that it would be specific to the locality. In early Mexican writing those writers who best emulated European forms had little merit. That is they did not accurately represent Mexican reality. Rosario Castellanos expressed this opinion when she wrote that when Western models of writing have been employed its

[68] *ibid.*, 4.

"transplante a México no ha sido casi nunca feliz."[69] Frederic Jameson believes that the consequence of adopting "western machineries" to a developing (he uses the term Third-World) nation such as Mexico engenders its own techniques of narration.[70] He claims that all Third-World literature is allegorical "particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel."[71] He calls these "national allegories" saying that Third-World texts "necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*"[72] Jameson, as a Marxist theorist, reads the personal as political. He has expanded any reading of (what he calls) Third-World texts from their being mere reflections of society's ills to allegory. In allegorical tales the characters have a symbolic function. They act out an imaginative reconstruction of a significant moment in the past or the recent past. Ileana Rodríguez in *House/ Garden /Nation* wrote about how such national allegories have been constructed by Latin American writers.[73] Texts such as Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* construct gender in very specific ways. [74] Woman functions as a symbolic representation of apposite loci. She either represents home as a space of safe, civilised domesticity or the external physical landscape.[75] The domestic woman must be safeguarded, and is the pristine, virginal spouse (either present or future). Like the eponymous Doña Barbara, the figure of woman as landscape is a dangerous seductress. She must be conquered and tamed in a direct parallel with the need for the man to conquer and tame the external, physical natural world. In contrast, male characters have complexity, and they are the characters with whom the reader is expected to identify.

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[69] Rosario Castellanos, "La novela mexicana contemporanea y su valor testimonial" *Hispania* 2:XLVII (1964), 223.

[70] The use of both terms "developing" and "Third-World" are problematic. Both are suffused with weighty ideological stand-points. I have yet to encounter a term which does not suggest either inferiority or an idea that a specific pattern of global economic growth is inevitable.

[71] Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" *Social Text* Fall (1986), 96.

[72] *ibid.*, 69 italics his.

[73] *House/ Garden /Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in Postcolonial Latin American Literatures by Women* translated by Robert Carr and Ileana Rodríguez (Durham &London: Duke University Press, 1994).

[74] Rómulo Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1981).

[75] Tuñón Pablos expresses this opinion quite succinctly: "Women, like nature, are admired yet feared, sublimated yet despised. Human spheres have been dichotomized and stereotypes have been imposed: the ideal is for men and women to cease to be potentially complete persons and to limit their activities

The simplified allegorical dialectic of man (civilization) versus woman (nature) is the narrative struggle to create a nation out of empty space. It is not only gender which is problematically drawn, but racial and class differences are also ignored.[76] In the imaginative construction of the nation, only white, privileged males have a real depth of characterisation, and are represented as central to the development of the narrative. Women never go beyond being functions within an allegorical tale. The man must struggle to manage a symbolic woman/land, a challenge the projected reader is expected to understand.

Jameson's theory of Third World literature as necessarily allegorical has proved controversial. It has been challenged on many different levels, most notably by the critic Aijaz Ahmad. He objected principally to the term 'Third World' and the idea of a coherent body of work labelled 'Third World literature'. The 'Third World' "is even in its most telling deployments, a polemical one, with no theoretical status whatsoever."[77] With regard to literature he states: "[t]here are fundamental issues - of periodization, social and linguistic formalities, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production, and so on - which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism."[78] He also criticises Jameson for imposing a gendered, and racially specific reading on post-colonial writing, and implicitly suggesting that so-called Western writing has a greater degree of homogeneity than is in fact the case. Thus, if Jameson's essay has been so severely criticised, what is the validity of referring to it at all? I suggest that its usefulness is in that he has drawn attention to the allegorical in writing, and brought it back as a subject for discussion. That not all literature is allegorical, but much of national literature is, is a point well-made by Doris Sommer. She also queried Jameson's theory, and engaged with his suggestion that allegories 'reveal' truth. Instead, in her opinion they 'construct it with all the epistemological messiness that

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to the capacities that have been assigned to their genders; this dichotomization has crippled both genders", xiv.

[76] Doris Sommers has said that "the pretty lies of national romance are similar strategies to contain the racial, regional, economic, and gender conflicts that threatened the development of new Latin American nations. After all these novels were part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation" *Foundational Fictions,* 29.

[77] Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory' (1987)" in *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* edited by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 377.

[78] *ibid.*, 377. For further details on this debate, see Michael Sprinker, "The National Question: Saïd, Ahmad, Jameson" *Public Culture* Fall 6.1 (1993): 3-29.

using language implies."[79] The suggestion here is that allegory does not have a clear message which is implicit in the text, lurking beneath the narrative waiting for the intelligent reader/critic to unravel it. Instead, it is messy (to use Sommers' term), with many layers of meaning, and open to interpretation depending on the reader, and the context in which it is being read. In her study, just as Franco has done in *Plotting Women*, she examines literature with national themes and concerns as allegories. Allegories depend on a code and a set of symbols. Therefore, here I will examine some of these symbols as they refer to women in Mexico.

Woman as symbol

Jameson's concept of novel as national allegory has a clear resonance with regard to how women are represented in Mexican literature. Women are other to the story of national formation. They function as symbols, not authentic characters. They are territory to be conquered, or mothers for future generations, but have not been represented as being either active participants in the formation of the future nation state, nor do they have any voice in how it is developed. Woman is typically either virgin or whore. The critic Luis Leal concisely summed up this representation of women in Mexican literature:

> The characterization of women throughout Mexican literature has been profoundly influenced by two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: that of the woman who has kept her virginity and that of the one who lost it.[80]

The figures of the Virgin of Guadalupe (virgin) and *Malinche* (whore) have been much discussed elsewhere.[81] Both have been examined, theorised, and reinvented to the extent that there are now multiple readings and understandings of their value as iconographic symbols.

Malinche, or Malintzin as she is also known, is a cloudy figure whose later interpretations bear more weight than what is actually known about her as an historical figure. The critic, Rachel Philips, has written that "little is really known

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[79] Sommers, *op. cit.*, 42.
[80] Luis Leal, "Female Archetypes in Mexican Literature" in *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols* edited by Beth Miller (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1983), 227.
[81] See for example Jean Franco's Introduction to *Plotting Women, op. cit.*.

about her. Thus, most of the written portraits turn out on closer examination not to be portraits at all but mirrors in which are reflected the faces of the writers themselves."[82] In the chronicle by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, she was described as an Aztec princess who became the interpreter and lover of the conquistador, Hernan Cortés.[83] For Octavio Paz she is 'la chingada', eternally blemished for being victim of rape and bearing the first true Mexican. She thus becomes the mother of all Mexicans. In this sleight of hand Paz both celebrates and denigrates the conquistadors for this violent act. He claims that it was a necessary act carried out in order to bring into being the contemporary Mexican who consequently must now bear the weight of this original sin.

Malinche as mother is an inversion of the Christian tale of the pure virginal Mary who, untainted by sexual intercourse, bore the son of God, Jesus. In both stories woman is a conduit for the male. They have had little choice but to accept their fates. In 1531, on Tepeyac hill a site previously dedicated to the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an indigenous peasant Juan Diego. Carlos Fuentes considers the interpretation of this apparition as political, evangelical and psychological syncretism. For him, it was a move which solved the "problem" of "the legitimation of the bastard, the identification of the orphan."[84] From having *Malinche* as a mother the Mexicans now had the Virgin:

> From Babylon to Bethlehem, in one flash of political genius, whore became virgin and *Malinche* became Guadalupe. Nothing has proved as consoling, unifying, and worthy of fierce respect since then as the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico.[85]

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[82] Rachel Philips, "Marina/*Malinche*: Masks and Shadows" *Women in Hispanic Literature: Icons and Fallen Idols* edited by Beth Miller (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1983) 98. Jean Franco, who described Malinche as a "mythic scapegoat", in *Plotting Women, op. cit.,* echoed this view: "The scarcity of documentation enables her to become a literary function (the 'helper' of the hero story), the medium-translator (traitor) of conquest and the flawed origin (mother) of a nation who would make her the symbol of the schizophrenic split between the European and the indigenous", xix.

[83] The account of this relationship can be found in the chronicle by Bernal Díaz del Castillo in *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico: 1517-1521* translated by A. P. Maudslay (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996).

[84] Fuentes, 144.

[85] *Ibid.*, 146.

She is the idealised woman: virginal, passive, and untainted by sin. Fuentes makes great claims for the Virgin of Guadalupe. She did function to consolidate religious worship, but it is rather facile to meld two such opposite figures.

Octavio Paz, in his essay "Los hijos de la Malinche" explores the *Malinche* myth. Paz's essay is full of brash declaratory statements and sweeping generalisations, in that it is an attempt to include and homogenise in the face of diversity. For Paz, woman is an elusive being. In contrast to the defineable Mexican macho, she is "el Enigma...Cifra viviente de la extrañeza del universo y de su radical heterogeneidad."[86] If woman is merely a 'cifra viviente' the worker is but a function: "reduce todo su ser a fuerza de trabajo, transformándolo por este solo hecho en objeto....Es un trabajador, nombre abstracto, que no designa una tarea determinada, sino una función."[87] Both women and worker are subaltern; they are other. For Paz, *Malinche* is 'la chingada' "la Madre abierta, violada o burlada por la fuerza," by the Mexican whose identity lies "en la violenta, sarcástica humillación de la Madre y en la no menos violenta afirmación del Padre." [88] In an ambivalent celebration of male violence against woman, Paz considers the verb 'chingar' to be masculine. For him: "En suma, chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro. Es un verbo masculino, activo, cruel: pica, hiere, desgarra, mancha. Y provoca una amarga, resentida satisfacción en el que lo ejecuta."[89] Man has two choices: "la vida es una posibilidad de chingar o de ser chingado" and women can only ever be 'la chingada'.[90] Man is actor and woman is victim. Paz's reading of the *chingada/Malinche* differs from Fuentes' syncretism. They still both view women as symbols. For Paz woman can only be a whore placing a considerable judgement on victims of rape, whereas for Fuentes *Malinche* has been sanctified through the Virgin of Guadalupe and has become pure again. Both writers are judging women in terms of their sexual behaviour. To be respectable and good is to be untouched and virginal, to be sexually experienced (albeit involuntarily) is to be condemned and shameful. Rather than being comparable to the Virgin, *Malinche* is an Eve figure who is culpable for the downfall of the Mexican: "especially when she is viewed as the originator of the Mexican people's fall from grace and the procreator

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[86] Octavio Paz, "Los hijos de la Malinche" in *El laberinto de la* soledad (Madrid: Catedra, 1993), 203.
[87] *ibid.*, 205.
[88] *ibid.*, 217.
[89] *ibid.*, 214.
[90] *ibid.*, 216-217.

of a 'fallen' people."[91] By becoming 'la lengua' (Cortés' term for her) she is speaking for herself and the invaders and has denied what is perceived to be her "primary cultural function", that is maternity.[92]

Motherhood has a very specific cultural value. In conflict the mother belongs to the domestic space. She waits for her son to return from the front. In Franco's words: "Women were especially crucial to the imagined community as mothers of the new men and as guardians of private life, which from Independence onwards was increasingly seen as a shelter from political turmoil."[93] By way of example, I shall briefly examine the representation of motherhood in an early *novela de la revolución* by Nelly Campobello. *Las manos de mamá* and *Cartucho: relatos de la lucha en el norte* by Nellie Campobello are idealised accounts of women's role in the Revolution, particularly that of mothers.[94] These novels were originally published in 1931 and are the first *novela de la revolución* by a woman author. Both are written in a child's voice, purportedly narrated from memory by Campobello. They have a photographic - or even cinematic - quality.[95] Campobello is capturing many moments which have the cumulative effect of creating a sense of what it was for that child to live during the Revolution. Conflict, gunshots, violence, bloodshed are part of her normality and her play. The novel is divided up into short chapters, few are more than a page in length. She juxtaposes the everyday with the events she witnesses of the war as it happened around her. In a section entitled "el ahorcado" she states that "Sandías, todos comían sandías" while they watched a man being hung (*Cartucho,* 912). 'Todos' would appear to refer to the other children from the town. The image is shocking in the juxtaposition of the banal and the terrible. In "Los tres meses de Gloriecita" she recounts the support Pancho Villa's troops had in the town. The inhabitants "ayudaban a Villa. Le mandaba cajones de pan a los cerros, café, ropas, vendas, parque, rifles de todas marcas" (*Cartucho,* 924-925). The town is under siege, with

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[91] Norma Alarcón, "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" in Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan eds. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 111.

[92] *Ibid.*, 113.

[93] Franco, *Plotting Women,* 81. This is a reading echoed by Molyneux, 168.

[94] Nellie Campobello, *Cartucho: Relatos de la lucha en el norte* in *La novela de la revolución mexicana Tomo 1* Antonio Castro Leal, (Madrid & Mexico: Aguilar, 1960) and *Las manos de mamá* (México: Grijalbo, 1997).

[95] Doris Meyer comments on the "montage-like images" employed by Campobello to portray "the dramatic psychological effect of war's intrusion into, and disruption of, normal life", in "The

Villa as its protector. He is portrayed as a gentleman, tipping his sombrero to a woman who gives him her rifle (*Cartucho,* 925). Despite this glorification of Villa, when the enemy do enter the town, they hug, kiss and cuddle the eponymous three month old Gloria. By doing this they show their humanity. They are not the rumoured men who "Matan, Saquean, Se roban las mujeres. Queman las casas..." (*Cartucho*, 924); instead they soften at the sight of a baby (*Cartucho* 61). In Campobello's two novels men yearn for the domesticity the women have. To be at home even in a town under siege represents normality and stability. Women continue with their everyday routines, occasionally interrupted by conflict and collusion with the Villistas. In "Las mujeres del norte", women are witnesses and mothers; they live to remember the conflict and those who died in it (*Cartucho*, 938-939). They are not actors but observers.

Irene Mathews, the translator of the English language version of *Las manos de mamá*, calls the text a poem.[96] This overstates its lyricism. It reads as a eulogy to Campobello's mother and how she survived the Revolution. It is idealised and often fanciful. It is divided into short sections of different lengths. The titles of each section signal a glorified image of motherhood interrupted by conflict: "Cuando la busqué allá donde la vida se le ofreció deshecha por los estragos de los rifles" and "Los hombres dejaban sus cuerpos mutilados, en espera de la caridad de estas flores sencillas." Others are simply entitled "Amor de ella", "Su Dios", "Su falda", and so on. These metonyms are simple and powerful evocations of her mother and of more universal, idealised images of motherhood. In the section "Gente de tropa", which is worth quoting in full, is a celebration of idealised motherhood and an exalted portrayal of the troops. The mother is not only the child narrator's protector; she is also a mother to the troops:

> Se dedicaba con verdadero amor a ayudar a los soldados no importaba de qué gente fueran.
> - ¿Para qué levantó esos hombres? ¿No sabía usted que son enemigos?
> - Míos no son, son mis hermanos.
> - Pero son unos salvajes. ¿Usted protege a los que asaltan?

Dialogics of Testimony: Autobiography as shared experience in Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho*" in Brooksbanks Jones and Davies, *op. cit.,* 54.

[96] *Cartucho* and *My Mother's Hands* translated by Doris Meyer and Irene Mathews (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

- Para mí ni son hombres siquiera - dijo ella, absolutamente serena -. Son como niños que necesitaron de mí y les presté mi ayuda. Si ustedes se vieran en las mismas condiciones, yo estaría con ustedes.

Insistía en hacerla creer que aquellos hombres eran unas fieras. ¡Como si fueran desconocidos! Eran soldados inmaculados de la revolución. Los bandidos estaban parados allí, gritándole a mamá, vestidos a la inglesa y con engarces de plata en todo el cuerpo.

Nuestros muchachos, los guerreros altos, de cuerpo dorado, fueron siempre protegidos por ella.

¿Cuántas cosas hizo en bien de ellos?

Dios lo sabe, ella y ellos lo saben. Los que fueron son, los que lo ignoran, no eran, y no haber sido es como no ser; porque así son estos negocios que el alma gira: no siendo cuando se debe haber sido, es no ser cuando no hay necesidad de ser (*Las manos de mamá*, 43-44).

The mother is apolitical, basing her judgements on emotions. She is the archetypal self-sacrificing mother. The soldiers are variously barbaric "salvajes...los que asaltan"; infantilised "como niños"; and sexual objects "los guerreros altos, de cuerpo dorado". Her mother's reaction is presented as a natural instinct to nurture others: "Si ustedes se vieran en las mismas condiciones, yo estaría con ustedes." Campobello's representation of her mother and the soldiers conforms to what Jean Bethke Elshtain describes as a construct of the war story. Men and women are ascribed specific roles in accounts of the war:

> Men see edifying tales of courage, duty, honour, glory as they engage in acts of protection and defense and daring; heroic deed doing. Women see edifying stories of nobility, sacrifice, duty, quiet immortality as they engage in defensive acts of protection, the nonheroics of taking-care-of.[97]

Campobello's mother and the soldiers she portrays conform to the gender specific roles described by Bethke Elshtain. The final sentence of "Gente de tropa" is rather convoluted and puzzling. Campobello appears to be suggesting that there are definite moral judgements to be made. Her mother had to protect these "soldados inmaculados" because that is what is right and correct. It suggests that she is merely fulfilling her duty as a mother.

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[97] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), 165.

By writing in a child's voice as Juan Rulfo did in "Es que somos muy pobres"[98] and Rosario Castellanos did, less successfully, in *Balún-Canán,* Campobello evokes very specific attitudes to childhood innocence.[99] The child appears to be outside of the conflict insofar as he or she has no power to influence the action. He or she can only bear witness. There is an assumption of directness and honesty in this child's voice. The child is not suspected of collusion with any side in the conflict because he or she is supposedly outside of politics. This is where the author is manipulating the reader. The child is an artifice, even in the autobiographical voice Campobello employs.[100] The child is constructed by an adult who will have his or her views fully formed, coloured by memory and the subsequent interpretations put on those memories. Campobello's child narrator celebrates Villa because that is the judgement made by the adult author. She also idealises her mother and remembers the events in a particular light, because the adult author has developed that attitude and formulated her memories to fit her opinions. What is unique in Campobello's novels is the attempt to portray the sense of growing up through the Revolution, and to convey what it was like as a witness to the bloodshed. The child narrator coincides with many adult narrators whom I shall examine in later chapters, in that she represents the chaos of war, the apparently arbitrary manner in which people were killed and possesses little understanding of the machinations of war. As if to warn the reader of the possible pitfall of believing these stories to be entirely accurate, Campobello writes in an epigraph: "A mamá, que me regaló cuentos verdaderos en un país donde se fabrican leyendas y donde la gente vive adormecida de dolor oyéndolas" (*Cartucho*, 897). It is a contradictory statement which also foregrounds her mother as an authority, having access to "cuentos verdaderos" in a country of inventions. It begs the question: if she is mediator for her mother's truth, can she be believed?

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[98] Juan Rulfo, "Es que somos muy pobres" *El llano en llamas* (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 1993).

[99] Rosario Castellanos' *Balún-Canán* was translated as *The Nine Guardians* by Irene Nicholson (Malta: Readers International, (1959) 1992).

[100] To add a further layer to how this child's voice is used, Meyer has drawn attention to the fact that while Campobello portrays her autobiographical persona as between the ages of six and ten, she herself was in her teens at the time of the Revolution. Meyer interprets Campobello's intent to "use the young child's 'I' (eye) as the filter for a more direct testimony, one that draws the reader into her response to the Revolution", 53.

The female intellectual also has a model: Prospero's daughter, Miranda. With Ariel implicated in the colonial process as the coloniser's mouthpiece, and Caliban as the untameable native scholar, Miranda has a complex role as mediator between the two. In order to describe another aspect of female subjectivity Joanna O'Connell used another character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Miranda. She is:

> born into the family of the masters, the slaveholders, the landowners, those who hold the magic books, those who represent themselves as the forces of civilization in the face of native barbarism, yet she is not entitled to agency.[101]

Miranda is educated and privileged, "And yet, her exclusion or subordination, while real, is ambiguous, given the ways her privileges are grounded in the persistence of colonial relations."[102] O'Connell employed the character of Miranda precisely to invest the readings of the relationship between Caliban/Ariel/Prospero with a female character. Yet she is problematic in more ways than those O'Connell suggests.[103] Like the writers of the texts I shall examine later on, Miranda has access to the written word in a way that both men and women from deprived backgrounds do not. Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta have had the privileges of financial security and educational advantage like Miranda. Reminiscent of *Malinche* as Cortés' tongue (lengua), it was Miranda who taught Caliban to speak, out of pity. Although she makes it clear that she does not consider him anything more than an inferior being, she is implicated in the colonial dominance of Caliban:

> I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other: when thou didst not (savage)
> Know thine own meaning; but wouldst gabble, like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known:[104]

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[101] Joanna O'Connell, *Prospero's Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995), 1-2.
[102] *ibid.*, 2.
[103] See Lisa Hopkins, for a discussion of Miranda's role as colonizer in "The Gaze Returned: Shakespeare's Admiring Miranda" *Gender and Colonialism* edited by Timothy P. Foley et al. (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995), 37.
[104] Shakespeare, *op. cit.*, 38.

Miranda is implicated in the ideology of the coloniser and has sublimated the sexist attitudes of her father who considers her inferior. She is passive, gratefully accepting Ferdinand's offer of marriage.[105] To compare contemporary women to such female characters and invest old symbols with new meanings serves to explore hegemonic models of feminine behaviour. Ultimately, it is limited because it results in prescriptive representations of women denying them agency and the distinct and individual complexity allowed to male characters.

There is a long tradition of women writing about political and social conditions in Mexico. One of the first writers in Mexico, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) was also one of the world's first feminists. Her strident rhetoric and poetry were filled with analysis of colonial society and her demands for change. One of her poems which is most often quoted by feminists is entitled "Arguye de inconsecuentes el gusto y la censura de los hombres que en las mujeres acusan lo que causan", or better known as "Hombres necios", in which she accuses men of hypocritically judging women by impossible standards. She says that such men condemn women although they are behaving in the same way as men:

> hombres necíos que acusáis
> a la mujer sin razón,
> sin ver que sois la ocasión
> de lo mismo que culpáis:
> si con ansia sin igual
> solicitáis su desdén,
> ¿por qué queréis que obren bien
> si las incitáis al mal?[106]

She accuses men of demanding that women be their moral guardians. They blame women for succumbing to temptation and they claim that women are not only letting themselves down. They are also made responsible for men's behaviour. She is questioning the inequality of placing greater demands and limitations on women's behaviour than on men. This contradictory approach to male and female behaviour is central to the gendered division of space in Mexican literature. As is clear further on

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[105] *ibid.*, 64-65.

[106] *Sor Juana para Universitarios* edited by María Dolores Bravo Arriaga (México, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1996), 55-56.

in the poem when she asks who is more at fault, the prostitute (public woman) or the client (public man):

> ¿O cuál es más de culpar,
> aunque cualquiera mal haga:
> la que peca por la paga
> o el que paga por pecar?[107]

Space and territoriality are gendered. They are also central to the idea of nation and nationality. Nations are formed from the establishment of boundaries. Jean Franco has explored the concept of the gendered division of space as it applies to Mexico (which I shall explore in detail in chapter 5, with specific reference to Mastretta's novel). Franco adapts Hannah Arendt's investigations of the origins of the Western understanding of the public and private. Arendt traces it back to Ancient Greece and Rome:

> The private realm of the household was the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed.[108]

This was the woman's domain. She was responsible for the care of the household and the education of the children. On the other hand in the public realm "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity."[109] The public is where the man operates. He is responsible for the family's reputation. He must control them and present an image of responsibility and show self-control.

Franco examined this concept of public and private and related it to the layout of the Mexican house. The outer walls are thick with small windows facing out onto the street, and the rooms are laid out to look inwards at a patio. Franco suggests that this architecture creates a type of domestic prison, where the inhabitants are discouraged from venturing out into the street.[110] For "when a woman goes public,

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[107] *ibid.*, 57.
[108] Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 45.
[109] *ibid.*, 50.
[110] Jean Franco, "Killing Priests, Nuns, Women and Children" *On Signs* edited by Marshall Blonsky (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 418.

she leaves the protected spaces of home and convent and exposes her body on the street or in the promiscuity of the brothel."[111] During the Revolution women were given the first opportunities to escape this rigid and prescriptive concept of gendered spaces. Women were needed outside of the home in order to be able to work, fight, smuggle, nurse and so on. The problem still faced by women who went into the public sphere is that "those women who began to show up in places deemed inappropriate to their sex" became stigmatized.[112] For this same reason the Mexican journalist and author, Brianda Domecq, entitled her book of essays on women writers *Mujer que publica...mujer pública*. By writing, a woman enters a public domain and she draws attention to herself, consequently making herself morally suspect. The lack of a tradition of women writers has also been considered a drawback to women writing. They are further disadvantaged because the recurring literary themes were predominantly "centred on the drama of male enterprise or impotence, the search for male identity that depends on the allegorization of women characters in their virtually invariant positions of mother, prostitute or love object."[113] The representation of women was limited and there was a social stigma attached to being a women writer.

Franco claims that this all changed in the nineteen seventies. This was due to the authoritarian regimes of the 70s and the "extreme hardships caused by debt crisis and neoconservative policies."[114] As a result women "altered tradition by casting themselves as a new kind of citizen and also by appealing beyond the state to international organizations."[115] As a result of international solidarity, and a realisation that public policy affected private domestic life, women became organised and moved into the public sphere. Franco claims that, subsequent to these changing attitudes, there is now "an unprecedented demand" for works by women which will reflect this new change in status.[116] There are ever-growing numbers of women writers, many of whom are writing about themes which address hegemonic attitudes to women and their place in the national narrative.

Writing texts using archetype and symbolic characters is limited. It serves to elaborate national themes but does not play out specific, personal and individual

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[111] Jean Franco, "Self –Destructing Heroines", *Minnesota Review* V:22 Spring (1984) 105.
[112] Castillo, *op. cit.,* 1-2.
[113] Franco, "Self–Destructing Heroines", *op. cit.,* 105.
[114] Franco, *Going Public, op. cit.,* 66.
[115] *Ibid.,* 67.
[116] *Ibid.,* 69.

stories. Male writers have created and written male characters imbuing them with rich complexity, while creating female characters who are little more than structural devices. Writing about Revolution has long been considered the prerogative of male writers. Such Revolutionary texts have placed women in the backdrop. There are women who have changed this, and changed perceptions of what women's roles were in the Revolution. I shall discuss in greater detail in later chapters what those roles were, and how stereotypical imagery of women has been challenged by the textual representations of Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta. Each writer subverts the tropes of traditional representation of women in the Mexican novel. The imaginary is an integral part of a nation's self-perception. Thus, through their writing, women have presented new ways of being and new ways of perceiving the role of women in the nation.

Chapter 2

The *novela de la revolución*: Genesis and Exegesis

In chapter 1, I detailed the theoretical paradigms under which gender, nationalism and woman as symbol are to be considered in this thesis, and how they intersect with theories about war. In this chapter, I shall examine the literary precursors to Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta, in order to understand the context in which they were writing. From the publication of the first Mexican novel, *El periquillo sarniento* by Fernández de Lizardi in 1816, and throughout the nineteenth century, "the novel in Mexico grew as any young child does - slowly, tentatively, and quick to imitate its elders."[1] This quotation from Walter M. Langford prosaically indicates the limitations of the early novels. The first novels were overly imitative of European forms, and in the opinion of some, such as Castellanos quoted in chapter 1, were failures. The Mexican Revolution brought about a change to this limited aesthetics, and became one of the most abiding themes in Mexican writing.

Mexico, and the imagining of Mexico, changed dramatically as a result of the Revolution. The *novela de la revolución* has two distinct phases: the first lasted from 1915-1947 and the second from 1947 onwards. The earlier date (1915) is the date of publication of Mariano Azuela's *Los de Abajo* and the later (1947) corresponds to Agustín Yañez's *Al filo del agua*. Yañez's novel is considered, not only to have inaugurated a dramatic change in the representation of the Revolution, but also to have marked the birth of the contemporary Mexican novel. The Mexican Revolution lasted from 1910-1920. It was a violent war, with many factions and fronts which resulted in millions dead, some as a result of the armed struggle, and many more as a result of diseases and starvation. Another consequence was the dramatic displacement of the population. Mexico changed from having a largely agriculturally-dependent rural population to having most of the population living in large urban centres. This study does not allow for a lengthy investigation over the already well-trodden, analysis of the political causes, development, and consequences of the Revolution. Here, instead, I shall refer, in brief, to critic Joseph Sommers's overview of the Revolution. Sommers divides the Revolution into three separate phases:

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[1] Walter M. Langford, viii.

1. 1910-1920 : violent overthrow of the [Porfirio] Díaz dictatorship. This was followed by the tragic internecine warfare between rural Revolutionary generals – Villa, Carranza, Obregón, and Zapata – a phase characterized by the struggles inherent in the genesis of a new order.

2. 1920-1934: dominated by presidents Obregón and Calles. Counterrevolutions [the most significant of these is the Cristero rebellion (1926-1929), the period during which Elena Garro set her novel] were repulsed, national power was consolidated, and the first fruits of revolutionary reform were realized.

3. 1934-1940: presidential term of Lázaro Cárdenas was marked by sweeping reform and radical reforms in all aspects of Mexican life.[2]

The *novela de la revolución* as a label has been most usually employed to refer to a genre. But, I must agree with Felipe Garrido on this and refer to it as a theme. Using the term 'theme' draws attention to the fact that many *novelas de la revolución* were written using a wide variety of generic types: biographical writings, eye-witness accounts, and a large variety of imaginative representations in novel-form. The Revolution itself was the strong narrative link between these texts. Such novels also had other common thematic concerns, which I shall discuss later. The critic John Rutherford stresses that the Revolution was an important "phenomenon"[3] in Mexican literature: "Even the novelists who show the greatest disenchantment with the Revolution have contributed towards its establishment as a firm, unforgettable milestone in the collective memory of Mexico."[4] The Revolution changed how Mexico was imagined. Many novelists believed that it did not result in a change for the better. It was a violent, bitter and bloody battle which they explored through fictional representations.

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[2] Joseph Sommers, *After the Storm: Landmarks of the Modern Mexican Novel* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 5-6. I recognise the difficulty of privileging one writer over the multitude of critics and historians who have written about the Revolution. What Sommers is delineating here is a generally accepted historical outline of the principal phases of the Revolution. It is possible to come across many other versions. As Thomas Benjamin has stated in his recent text, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), "critics did not repudiate the historic revolution but rather the continuing revolution: la Revolución hecha gobierno", 157.

[3] John Rutherford, *Mexican Society During the Revolution: A Literary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), ix.

[4] *ibid.*, 68.

To add to Sommers's tripartite structure of the Revolution, Adalbert Dessau describes three types of novels which emerged immediately after the Revolution:

> 1. la transposición literaria de recuerdos personales
> 2. la reproducción e interpretación literaria de la revolución
> 3. la reproducción literaria del carácter nacional mexicano captado antológicamente...[que] no intenta ya representar la realidad sino su reflejo en la conciencia.[5]

The authors of the *novelas de la revolución* aspired to national and personal analysis and self-reflection. The Revolution was an attempt to break with the past which resulted in considerable loss of life and subsequent disillusionment. Through their writing, novelists strove to come to terms with the physical and psychological traumas experienced at a national and local level. Official versions can be told in historical texts, whereas alternative histories can be forged in the personalised accounts of the events and experiences as told in the novel.[6] As Dessau suggests, the novels captured personal accounts which otherwise would have been lost in a country attempting to recover from the trauma of the Revolution.[7]

The period Dessau refers to is the immediate aftermath of the Revolution when there was an immediacy to the writing. The experiences were firsthand and the new nation was still trying to establish its sense of identity. Thus the early novels served to purge the dreadful memories of the conflict while attempting to make sense of it on a personal and ideological level. These novels' primary function was that of remembering the recent past. The period up to 1947 is described by Sommers as "literary nationalism".[8] The novelists attempted to forge a sense of identity through an exploration of the lived experiences of themselves and others. Rather than result in a monolithic, and agreed upon, approach to the revolution, the novels created a new

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[5] Adalbert Dessau, *La novela de la Revolución mexicana,* translated by Juan José Utrilla (México D.F.: Fondo de cultura económica, 1972, 405-406.

[6] Thomas Benjamin in *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) details the creation of the 'master narrative' of *la Revolución* as it was adopted by official discourse "that created, shaped and is the nation of Mexico", 14. He briefly contrasts this 'official' version with Azuela's novel, which I examine later in this chapter, 38.

[7] Rutherford echoes this sentiment, when he says: "It has been remarked that the novels of the Mexican Revolution have considerable documentary value....There is a great store of otherwise inaccessible information here, if a satisfactory method of extracting and evaluating it can be evolved", vii.

dialectic which was highly fragmented and diverse.[9] Marta Portal details the disillusionment felt by the authors with the Revolution:

> ni todo lo anterior a la Revolución es condenable, ni la Revolución ha calmado las esperanzas del pueblo ni siquiera ha cumplido sus fines más inmediatos, ni todo lo indígena es admirable, ni los caudillos fueron siempre héroes o siempre bandidos,... ni los rasgos negativos de la masa son definitivamente negativos.[10]

In the aftermath of war there is a danger that the victors will glorify the distant past and condemn the recent past.[11] The Revolution did not solve the problems endured by the poor and disenfranchised, caused by many years of *porfiriato*, while they were the ones who fought and died in large numbers. Individual soldiers did what they had to do to survive, often joining forces out of expediency rather than conviction. Novelists, through their writing, implicitly queried the absolutes produced by the propaganda of war, subverted the rhetoric of the post-Revolutionary government and presented very individual and divergent responses to the Revolution. Portal continues:

> Los novelistas mexicanos viendo la institucionalización de las ideas revolucionarias por el poder, quisieron seguir siendo fieles en su obra al impulso generoso que provocó el movimiento revolucionario y a su espíritu primero. Las últimas generaciones de escritores más sutilmente, ven que recoger el espíritu aquel de forma <<ortodoxa>> es hacer el juego a los políticos que hace demagogia, porque, alejado en el tiempo y en el espacio que lo originaron, se ha vuelto contra su propia esencia: *cambio, rebeldía, novedad.*[12]

Portal suggests that these novelists were carrying through the work and original ideals of the Revolution: change, rebellion and innovation. This perhaps claims a greater heterodoxy than is ever the case among novelists, and also indicates Portal's own ideological belief in the possibility and desirability of revolution. Central to this

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[8] Sommers, *op. cit.*, 5.

[9] Carol Clark D'Lugo in *The Fragmented Novel in Mexico: The Politics of Form* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997) claims that "one of the constants within narrative discourse in the Mexican novel of the twentieth century is fragmentation", xi.

[10] Marta Portal, *Proceso narrativo de la Revolución mexicana* (Madrid: Catedra, 1981), 15.

[11] "Al hablar de Historia en México, no puede uno referirse a una historia, sino a varias", in the opinion of Alicia Oliviera de Bonfil "La iglesia en México: 1926-1970" in *Contemporary Mexico* edited by James W. Wilkie et al. (Berkeley &London: University of California Press, 1976), 297.

statement is the anti-establishment impulse among novelists rather than any single, easily-identified ideological strand common to all. The novelists attempted to detail, and explore, the individual experiences of the Revolution and the disenchantment felt by many with post-Revolutionary Mexican politics.

The *novelas de la revolución* worked as a mode of writing about the Revolution as individual experience. This case is succinctly stated by Clara Pasafari in her overview of the Mexican novel:

> A partir del primer decenio de nuestro siglo [veinte] trabaja una generación de escritores en cuyas obras se va a estructurar claramente la novela latinoamericana moderna a través de un esfuerzo sostenido por enfocar la realidad en sus aspectos socioeconómicos y políticos de profundidad.[13]

She reads the Mexican novel as having an influence on writers throughout Latin America. Authors wrote to focus on reality and personal truths about the Revolution. The realities which have been represented are multiple, heterogenous and malleable, and have, in turn, been creatively inscribed into different generic forms. Then, what sort of truth(s) have these fictional texts told? Many of the early texts are highly personal accounts told by first-hand witnesses or soldiers. Later texts have a more implicitly dialogic function: they engage with the proliferation of other versions, and detail the disillusionment felt by many with the Revolutionary process, both as conflict and political struggle. The Revolution had many different aims and degrees of radicalism. Thus the place within all of it for women differed according to individual leaders, groups, political policies, expediency and needs. In turn, the way women's roles were elaborated within a text depended upon the male writer's own attitudes to women, as well as the way he witnessed or perceived their roles in the conflict and afterwards.

Despite the disparity of the politics, and, perhaps, because of the shared desire to subvert established history of the Revolution, there are common thematic and stylistic elements in the *novelas de la revolución.* These are: the aforementioned

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[12] Portal, *Proceso, op. cit.,* 20, italics in original.

[13] Clara Passafari, *Los cambios en la concepción y estructura de la narrativa mexicana desde 1947* (Santa Fe, Argentina: Universidad nacional del litoral, 1968), 16.

disillusionment with the results of the Revolution[14]; a representation of time as circular - for some the Revolution destroyed belief in the possibility of progressive time; the use of the vernacular as opposed to stylised novelistic language; the exploration of death; the centre/periphery axis of town versus city; the experience of displacement and migration and gendered experiences of war. I shall be dealing with some of these elements separately throughout this thesis. But, of particular significance here is how male-biased many early representations of the Revolution were. Except for the autobiographical novels of Nellie Campobello - which I have already discussed in chapter 1 - the majority of novels up to Elena Garro's novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (1964) dealt with male-centred versions of the experiences of the conflict.

As I examined in chapter 1, representation of war, and particularly Revolution, is highly gendered. Revolution is a dramatic and inclusive form of war. All wars pose a threat to conventional existence, and there is always a possibility that the enemy may attack locally. But, Revolution in the form of the civil disorder and strife as experienced in Mexico, directly disrupts 'normality'. Everyday routines become tied into a need to survive, to kill rather than be killed. Revolution is a war brought home. This experience of domestic warfare brings the concept of gender into play. In wars where the front is distant, the domestic is a safe space guarded by women to where the men wish to return. In Revolution the war takes place on the homefront. Men, women and children are affected by the revolution, whether through direct engagement with the conflict or as displaced persons whose lives are changed from their pre-war existence. In this chapter I shall examine texts by three celebrated and illustrative male writers - who could be described as canonical - and study their representations of women during the Revolution. These writers and texts are Mariano Azuela *Los de abajo*, Juan Rulfo *Pedro Páramo*, and Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. The selection of these texts is not arbitrary. Each has connections with the texts by female authors which I shall explore throughout this chapter. The works by the three authors chosen had a significant impact on the development and changes to the *novelas de la revolución* which I shall also trace in my discussion.

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[14] John Rutherford considers that the common strand in all *novelas de la revolución* was a pessimistic conclusion: "that the Revolution had not made any important changes and that Mexican society was,

Los de abajo

Writing about war in its immediate aftermath is difficult, when doing so about a civil war is as if both the writer and the community are reflecting upon themselves. Azuela wrote about the war as a survivor and witness. He is described by Juan Loveluck as one of the 'novelistas-testigos' of the Revolution.[15] *Los de abajo* was written in the field and edited in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. Azuela escaped into the United States of America clutching a sheaf of paper containing early versions of the novel.[16] He fought on the side of the Villistas. Thus his account necessarily reflects this experience. Azuela is part of a generation of writers who needed to write their experiences. They wrote about the Revolution as a form of therapy, according to Portal: "Del 28 al 40, la Revolución es el tema monolítico de esta narrativa: escritores de raza y literatos improvisados necesitan contar su experiencia de la Revolución."[17] This need to write can be contrasted with Josefina's distrust at having her story told in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.*

Mariano Azuela wrote the first *novela de la revolución* in 1911 called *Andrés Pérez, maderista.*[18] The first novel is largely forgotten. Instead, Azuela's second novel *Los de abajo* is generally counted as the first *novela de la revolución.* It has been described as follows: "La obra de Azuela tiene un valor trascendente porque supone la irrupción en la literatura mexicana de un nuevo modo de novelar."[19] The novel is episodic in nature – as the subtitle in the original suggests "cuadras y escenas de la revolución actual" – and it is divided in three parts. The first begins with the attack on Demetrio Macías' home by Porfirian soldiers, "federales", and his subsequent flight and involvement in the Revolution. In the opening sequence his apparel and accommodation are established to be those of a poor farmer. He is described as "alto, robusto, de faz bermeja, sin pelo de barba, vestía camisa y calzón de manta, ancho sombrero de soyate y guraches."[20] Azuela describes the inside of the house in almost anthropological detail:

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after so much suffering and bloodshed, as corrupt and unjust as ever", 67.

[15] Juan Loveluck ed. "Forma e intención en La muerte de Artemio Cruz" in *Novelistas hispanoamericanos de hoy* (Madrid: Taurus, 1976), 254.

[16] Introducción by Marta Portal in Mariano Azuela *Los de abajo* (Madrid, Catedra: (1915) 1997) 13.

[17] Portal, *Introducción, op. cit.,* 14.

[18] *ibid.,* 18.

[19] Portal, *Proceso, op. cit.,* 78.

[20] Mariano Azuela, *Los de abajo* (Madrid, Catedra: 1997), 76. Hereinafter page numbers in parenthesis will refer to this edition.

> El cuartito se alumbraba por una mecha de sebo. En un rincón descansaban un yugo, un arado, un otate y otros aperos de labranza. Del techo pendían cuerdas sosteniendo un viejo molde de adobes, que servía de cama, y sobre mantas y deteñidas hilachas dormía un niño (76).

Thus he has established Demetrio's origins. He is a poor farmer, who up to this moment is scraping a living on poor agricultural land on the side of a mountain, and who, due to the simple incidence of the arrival of the federales to his home, is forced into becoming a soldier in the Revolution. In the second part of the novel the mood changes. The aims of the Revolution are no longer clear to the soldiers. They have changed sides so often they no longer care for whom they fight. They are hungry and fatigued from constant fighting and having to survive on their wits. In an exchange with one of his subordinates after the defeat of Pancho Villa, Demetrio is asked whom he wishes to join:

> -Bien, ¿y de parte de quién se va a poner?
> Demetrio, muy perplejo, se llevó las manos a los cabellos y se rascó breves instantes.
> -Mire, a mí no me haga preguntas, que no soy escuelante... La aguelita que traigo en el sombrero usté me la dio... Bueno, pos ya sabe que no más me dice: <<Demetrio, haces esto y esto... ¡y se acabó el cuento!>>(192)

He has become disillusioned with the Revolution, and as he later reiterates, he is simply a tool for others. The loss of faith in the Revolution is a common theme in many *novelas de la revolución*. As with characters in other *novelas de la revolución*, another soldier Valderrama expresses his opinion that the Revolution does not serve his interests nor the interests of the citizens. Instead, it is a power struggle with devastating consequences for the individual soldiers:

> -¿Villa?...¿Obregón?...¿Carranza?... ¡X... Y... Z...! ¿Qué se me da a mí?...¡Amo la Revolución como amo al volcán que irrumpe! ¡Al volcán porque es volcán; a la Revolución porque es Revolución!... Pero las piedras que quedan arriba o abajo, después del cataclismo, ¿qué me importan a mí?...(198)

Valderrama's attitude is presented as a representative view of the common soldier. He is purportedly a thrill seeker who derives similar pleasure from the Revolution as

he would from a volcano. This analogy is, at best, ambivalent. Comparing the Revolution to a volcano functions to represent its chaos and destructiveness. But how far can the analogy go? Is it possible to suggest that it possesses a certain natural beauty when viewed from afar? Or can only those individuals prepared to risk all confront it? Perhaps these and other rhetorical questions can best be answered with an assessment of Azuela's style. He was not a stylist *per se*. He was more concerned with the narration of the events. His style is more reportage than adept fictional representation. The language employed is concise and colloquial. He seeks to represent the common soldier and their experiences as he had witnessed them as a medical officer in the field. *Los de abajo* reflects Azuela's opinion of the Revolution: "fue un mundillo de amistades fingidos, envidias, adulación, espionaje, intrigas, chismes y perfidia."[21]

The final part of the novel deals with the immediate aftermath of the Revolution. It shows that the characters are now tired of fighting and their final, longed-for return home is marred by what they find there. Life does not go on as normal at home. Instead their families are also subject to the kind of attacks they as soldiers have inflicted on others. Other characters such as Luis Cervantes seek to profit from the Revolution. Azuela shows this in a letter written from the United States of America by Luis to one of his former comrades, Venancio. Luis attempts to convince Venancio that, instead of studying for a degree in medicine, he should give Luis the money to invest in a business proposition. Luis is representative of the new educated middle class who would profit most from the Revolution and benefit most from the new shifts in power (193-194).

As a character Demetrio is rather one-dimensional. He is the accidental soldier who becomes a leader of his battalion, and maintains his integrity in the face of the chaos of war, despite the corruption of those around him. Any apparent wrong-doing on his part is justified through the narrative. For example, the taking of a lover, a decision which is deemed appropriate, given that he suspects that his wife had been, killed by the federales. That she is later found to be still alive, having lived out the Revolution back on the mountain is glossed over as irrelevant. She is simply the good wife who has guarded the homestead. The woman safe at home, where home is a

[21] "Habla Mariano Azuela" in *La novela de la Revolución mexicana* edited by Rogelio Rodríguez Coronel (La Habana, Cuba: Casa de las Américas, 1975), 159.

conceptual space romaticised and protected from harm, is a trope repeated incessantly throughout the reportage and representation of war, and one which is problematic when the war is fought on the 'homefront'.

Azuela does confront the disparity between Demetrio's perception of how his wife is and how, in reality, she survived the war. He remembers her and his farm in a romantic glow:

> Pensaba en su yunta: dos bueyes prietos, nuevecitos, de dos años de trabajo apenas, en sus dos fanegas de labor bien abonadas. La fisonomía de su joven esposa se reprodujo fielmente en su memoria: aquellas líneas dulces y de infinita mansedumbre para el marido, de indomables energías y altivez para el extraño. Pero cuando pretendió reconstruir la imagen de su hijo, fueron vanos sus esfuerzos; lo había olvidado (176).

His animals, his wife and his son are conjured up simultaneously. All are possessions which can be considered using similar language. These thoughts run through his head while he admires the peace of the countryside when the other soldiers are asleep. Azuela describes an idyllic pastoral scene.

The reader is not presented with any contradiction between the fact that he was just asleep beside his lover Camila, (who, unlike the idealized portrait of his wife, does not show 'altivez para el extraño'), and the fact that he was thinking about his home. Meanwhile, Camila throughout is presented as virtuous.[22] Of course, these apparently disparate standards follow their own internal logic. First of all, Camila is taken involuntarily out of a homestead where she has been treated badly. In some sense she is saved by the soldiers. Secondly, this is the frontline of war, a space where conventionally accepted rules governing behaviour are not relevant. In contrast, Demetrio's wife is at home, a sacred space where social mores must be upheld. If they were not, according to Demetrio's world view, chaos would ensue.

Later in the text Demetrio is confronted with reality. His wife has had to endure much to survive the war. In some ways Azuela is confronting the myth of the domestic as a safe space. Azuela's suggestion of the invasion of the domestic by

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[22] Portal in *Introducción* sees Camila "la muchacha aldeana que <<se roba al paso>> el militar revolucionario" as a precursor to Regina in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and Julia in *Los Recuerdos del porvenir, op. cit.,* 44. In *Proceso* she further elaborates on this contention that there is a link between Camila-Regina-Julia as 'la robada', *op. cit.,* 290-292.

conflict implicitly functions as a criticism of the Revolution. If women and children in the domestic space are not protected then it follows that the war was universally damaging. Men can withstand conflict if the women are safe at home, holding the fort as it were. On his return Demetrio is shocked by his wife's appearance and upset at the lack of recognition from his son:

> La mujer de Demetrio Macías, loca de alegría, salió a encontrarlo por la vereda de la sierra, llevando de la mano al niño.
> ¡Casi dos años de ausencia!
> Se abrazaron y permanecieron mudos; ella embargada por los sollozos y las lágrimas.
> Demetrio, pasmado, veía a su mujer envejecida como si diez o veinte años hubieran transcurrido ya. Luego miró al niño, que clavaba en él sus ojos con azoro. Y su corazón dio un vuelco cuando reparó en la reproducción de las mismas líneas de acero de su rostro y en el brillo flamante de sus ojos. Y quiso atraerlo y abrazarlo; pero el chiquillo, muy asustado, se refugió en el regazo de la madre (206).

Demetrio's reaction is to run away. If home is not what he imagined and remembered it to be, then the value of his fight is undermined. If his wife and son cannot be protected, and if it too is a place which has witnessed and experienced conflict, there is no place to seek refuge.[23] He is battle weary with no place for respite.

Azuela fails to supply us with a representation of what Demetrio's wife and son experience. His wife is not even given a name. Readers can only draw their own conclusions as to her experiences of war. Evidently Demetrio's primary upset is that what his wife experienced is similar to that which he inflicted on others. Therein lies his problem: his wife may have been with other men or she may have been one of the 'mujeres haraposas' forced to steal from the dead. She can no longer be imagined as the woman of 'líneas dulces y de infinita mansedumbre para el marido, de indomables energías y altivez para el extraño'. Ending the novel with Demetrio's death enables Azuela to avoid confronting the complexity of this issue. Demetrio, never has to deal with his wife's unknown past. Instead, like many women after the Revolution,

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[23] Portal in *Proceso* describes the role of the wife in the *novelas de la revolución*, she is: "La legítima, es la mujer sufrida, paciente, recatada, canal de acceso al futuro, a la continuidad de la especie; y, en las crisis históricas, sociales o geológicas, la <<mujer fuerte>> que salva y conserva hogar y casta, y mantiene, siendo su centro, la cohesión familiar...ella representa la continuidad que debe ser resguardada", 289.

Demetrio's wife is left a widow. *Los de abajo* is a less mature novel because of this absence.[24] The resolution shows Azuela to be a man of his time. He is unable to imagine that a man would be satisfied to live at home with a wife who has been sullied by her experiences of war.

There are two principal female characters in the novel: the childlike naïf Camila and the volatile, dangerous la Pintada. They are versions of the much discussed dichotomy: virgin/whore, or, symbolically, in Mexican imagery, Virgen de Guadalupe/*Malinche*. The two characters are problematic versions of this duality. Camila is a reluctant companion to the men, whereas la Pintada is represented as the fallen woman who relishes the action and violence of the Revolution. La Pintada is divisive and sexual. Camila is an innocent corrupted by the incidences and circumstances of war. She is largely silent except for some few expressions of fear, wordless tunes and simple statements of love to Luis Cervantes (Azuela's fictional alter ego). Her first appearance in the novel is to Demetrio. Her arrival is surrounded in a dreamlike aura:

> Distinta oyó la voz femenina y melodiosa que en sueños había escuchado ya, y se volvió a la puerta.
> Era de día: los rayos del sol dardeaban entre los popotes del jacal. La misma moza que la víspera le había ofrecido un apastito de agua deliciosamente fría (sus sueños de toda la noche), ahora, igual de dulce y cariñosa, entraba con una olla de leche desparramándose de espuma (98).

This is a pastoral scene. The sensuality of the "agua deliciosamente fría" and the suggestiveness of the "olla de leche desparramándose de espuma" presents her as a combination of idealised object of desire who can quench the basic thirsts, and a somewhat angelic image of woman. She is desired, but can control her impulses.

In contrast, la Pintada is represented as desire run amok.[25] She is portrayed as being unnatural in her excess, and is violent, lascivious, and manipulative. La Pintada

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[24] Marta Portal sees Demetrio's death as an inevitable end for him as the hero in the narrative, "porque es precisamente el símbolo de su consagración como héroe – caudillo de la Revolución. Si en el sentido literal parece que su destino biográfico se acaba, supone, en cambio, su entronización intemporal en el ámbito inefable - <<como portico de vieja catedral>> - donde sólo cabe lo más excelso de la gloria humana", 76.

[25] In Rodríguez Coronel Azuela claimed that La Pintada was the result of a chance meeting with a woman "Sentada sobre una mesa de pino, las piernas colgando, lucía unas horribles medias de algodón azul con ligas solferinas abajo las rodillas. Tenía fama de lúbrica y se contaba que había provocado

is a *soldadera*, able to fight, drink and brawl like the men. These are all characteristics which are presented negatively. Her strength and ferocity are shown when she attacks Demetrio because of her jealousy of his relationship with Camila:

> La Pintada, a fuertes empellones, lo hacía retroceder.
> - ¡Pero tú qué!... ¿Tú qué?... - ululaba Demetrio irritado.
> La Pintada metió la pierna entre las de él, hizo palanca y Demetrio cayó de largo, fuera del cuarto.
> Se levantó furioso.
> - ¡Auxilio!... ¡Auxilio!...¡Que me mata!...
> La Pintada cogía vigorosamente la muñeca de Demetrio y desviaba el cañón de su pistola.
> La bala se incrustó en los ladrillos. La Pintada seguía berreando (157).

A later description reinforces this image of a violent and dangerous woman:

> La Pintada azuzó su yegua negra y de un salto se puso codo a codo con Demetrio. Muy ufana, lucía vestido de seda y grandes arracadas de oro; el azul pálido del talle acentuaba el tinte aceitunado de su rostro y las manchas cobrizas de la avería. Perniabierta, su falda se remangaba hasta la rodilla y se veían sus medias desvaladas y con muchos agujeros. Llevaba revólver al pecho y una cartuchera cruzada sobre la cabeza de la silla (160).[26]

Riding astride the horse, carrying a gun, being inattentive to her appearance, and being able to keep apace with others, are all seen as failings. They are masculine ways of being in the context of war, which are deemed inappropriate in a woman. In chapter 4, I shall be examining the difficulties experienced by a woman, such as La Pintada, who transgresses gender normative behaviour. In Azuela's pen, women who assume masculine performativity are negative and deserve to be punished. La Pintada's infamy can be seen clearly when contrasted with the description of Luis's fiancée:

> Todos se volvieron hacia ella, que abría sus grandes ojos azules con azoro.

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muchos lances sangrientos. Era la única mujer entre aquellos soldados", 62. In contrast, he says that "Camila y las demás mujeres fueron de mi mera invención y como las necesité para la contrucción del libro", 163.

[26] 'La avería' refers to the skin condition formed as a result of contagion by syphilis.

> Tendría apenas catorce años; su piel era fresca y suave como un pétalo de rosa; sus cabellos rubios, y la expresión de sus ojos con algo de maligna curiosidad y mucho de vago temor infantil (154).

Aside from the considerable difficulties in the fact that the reader is being actively encouraged to join in the male gaze, when the object of that gaze is so young and even infantilised in the description, there is a stark contrast between the descriptions of the two women. Where la Pintada is older and experienced, Luis's fiancée is young and innocent, and in turn, while la Pintada is dark-skinned and marked by disease, Luis's fiancée is fresh-faced, fair-skinned, blond and blue-eyed. More importantly, la Pintada is considered to be a threat to the rest of the battalion, while the younger girl is just the sum of her physical beauty. She is said to be "una muchacha de rara belleza" (154). In these passages Azuela clearly establishes that, in a woman, innocence, youth and sexual inexperience are desirable traits, while the opposite are repulsive, unnatural and morally suspect.

The stark differences between Camila and la Pintada are most evident in part two, chapter twelve, in the lead up to the fight scene which results in Camila's death. On arrival at a new destination, Cuquío, Camila and la Pintada have a vicious altercation. That night Camila stays awake crying and in a prescient statement declares: "...pero ya lo ha estado viendo...¡Esa mujer!..."(182). Demetrio declares that he will dispatch la Pintada immediately, to which Camila becomes soothed, and stops crying. Shortly thereafter, as la Pintada approaches, Demetrio tells her to leave and her response is to shout profanities at all present "con tal energía y novedad, que la tropa oyó injurias e insolencias que no había sospechado siquiera"(182). La Pintada is therefore cruder than the troops with whom she has travelled. This detail moves her to another plane of existance. She is as she is: totally outside of the average soldier's experience of woman. Her otherness is absolute. She then attacks Camila. The description of her movements emphasizes her physical strength in a negative fashion. The other soldiers want her gone "¡A todos nos tienes hartos!" (183) and the reader is encouraged to view her as a threat:

> El rostro de la Pintada se grantificó. Quiso hablar, pero sus músculos estaban rígidos.
>
> Los soldados reían divertidísimos; Camila, muy asustada, contenía la respiración.

> La Pintada paseó sus ojos en torno. Y todo fue en un abrir y cerrar de ojos; se inclinó, sacó una hoja aguda y brillante de entre la media y la pierna y se lanzó sobre Camila.
>
> Un grito estridente y un cuerpo que se desploma arrojando sangre a borbotones.
>
> - Mátenla – grito Demetrio fuera de sí.
>
> Dos soldados se arrojaron sobre la Pintada que, esgrimiendo el puñal, no les permitió tocarla (183).

She is quick, strong and vicious. Two soldiers are unable to stop her. Indeed no one dares intervene, as she subsequently takes flight "Nadie se atrevió a detenerla" (183). She is dangerous and unnatural, and is someone even these men, who are well used to battle, dare not tackle. The implicit message is obvious: sexually voracious women who dare take on men's roles and battles are aberrant, and, although such types may emerge in battle, the desireable women are those such as Camila who perish in the harsh conditions of war.

Women are often compared to animals. For Luis Cervantes, the medical student and writer, Camila who cares for him when he is ill, is an "especie de mono enchomitado, de tez broncínea, dientes de marfil, pies anchos y chatos" (101). This contrasts with the idealised picture of Camila in Demetrio's eyes. Luis is thus shown to be an outsider who appreciates sophistry and artifice over the natural beauty and homeliness of Camila. His judgement is also racist, as the woman he later chooses is, as I have already described, a pale-skinned beauty, unlike the darker Camila. The comparison to animals is a dubious trope which, as it is employed in this novel serves to denigrate the subject. Camila is seen to be a being of a lesser order. While Luis's character is implicitly critiqued through his assessment of her, she is also aligned with other negative images of women.

Later in the novel, on describing the aftermath of a battle, among the bloody, dead bodies, "mujeres haraposas iban y venían como famélicos coyotes esculcando y despojando" (143). The women are represented as disgusting creatures, who prey on the dead, rather than people who are driven by the circumstances of the war to extreme and unsavoury behaviour. In the first chapter of the second part there is a dramatic contrast between the description of the men and the women. Men and women are in a tavern, comparing stories and socialising. The men are braggarts and dirty, but presented as survivors swopping war stories:

> Hombres manchados de tierra, de humo y de sudor, de barbas crespas y alborotadas caballeras, cubiertos de andrajos mugrientos, se agrupan en torno de las mesas de un restaurante (145).

In contrast, the women are once again reduced to the status of beasts:

> Se arrebatan las palabras de la boca, y mientras ellos refieren con mucho calor sus aventuras, mujeres de tez aceitunada, ojos blanquecinos y dientes de marfil, con revólveres a la cintura, cananas apretadas de tiros cruzados sobre el pecho, grandes sombreros de palma a la cabeza, van y vienen como perros callejeros entre los grupos (146).

La Pintada is variously described as "esa sierpe" (167) "un alacrán" (177) and "chinche" (183). When women are corrupted by experience and by the tragedies they witness during the Revolution, they are no longer desirable. They are morally denigrated, and there appears to be no redemption. While men can flee the country, manipulate the situation to their own end or continue to fight to the death, women have no option but to die alone and in misery.

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Pedro Páramo

Pedro Páramo is a short, complex and haunting novel. From the opening paragraph, the themes of death, loss and mourning are established: "Vine a Comala porque me dijeron que acá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo. Mi madre me lo dijo. Y yo le prometí que vendría a verlo en cuanto ella muriera."[27] In typically oblique and suggestive fashion, the reader is also presented with the focus of the narrator's quest while not getting to know even the narrator's name until later in the novel.[28] It is a novel which defies easy categorization.[29] The story is told through a series of narrative shifts. The text is broken into short, self-contained sections with multiple narrators. Juan Preciado is the principal narrator whose story is intercut with other voices and accounts, which, in turn, are narrated in the first-person. Rulfo builds a

[27] Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (Madrid: Catedra, 1999), 64. Hereinafter numbers in parenthesis will refer to this edition.

[28] The principal narrator Juan Preciado is named for the first time on page 109 shortly before he dies on page 125.

bleak, nightmarish atmosphere through clues, allusions to death and dying, and his technique of shifting voices.[30] The reader must actively unravel the mystery of Pedro Páramo's story and unpick the stories of the other voices in order to discover the narrative gaps. Juan's declaration that "cada vez entiendo menos" enunciates clearly the complexity of the novel: neither the principal narrator (nor indeed could it be said the reader) can be confident of understanding the events in the novel (120). Rulfo teases more than he reveals. The result is a mysterious, dense, poetic text which is open to multiple interpretations.[31]

Pedro Páramo opens with the account of Juan Preciado's arrival in Comala and his explanation that he is returning to find his father (Pedro Páramo), having been instructed to do so by his mother on her deathbed. Various hints are provided to Juan and the reader that something is amiss. Gradually Juan realises that everyone in the village is dead, and in this realisation he dies, only to continue the story from the grave. While alive, he converses with the dead believing them to be alive. Juan, and his quest to find his father, is a clever device used to gradually unravel the story of the town to the reader. His quest becomes ours, as we discover the power and corruption of Páramo and how he exploited the turmoil of the Revolution to his own ends.

Even though Juan may be assumed to be the protagonist, as we are first brought into the narrative through his point of view and he is the oftentimes narrator, Rulfo said that he intended Comala as the protagonist of the novel:

> Se trata de una novela en que el personaje central es el pueblo....Es un pueblo muerto donde no viven más que ánimas, donde todos los personajes están muertos, y aún quien narra está muerto. Entonces no hay un límite entre el espacio y el tiempo. Los muertos no tienen tiempo ni espacio. No se mueven en el tiempo ni en el espacio. Entonces así como aparecen, se desvanecen.[32]

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[29] Ciaran Cosgrove in "Abstract Gestures and Elemental Pressures in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*" *The Modern Language Review* 86 (1991), describes *Pedro Páramo* as a "chameleon text [which] refuses circumscription", 79.

[30] Rulfo described the structure of the *Pedro Páramo* "Yes, there is a structure in *Pedro Páramo,* but it is a structure made of silences, of hanging threads, of cut scenes, where everything occurs in a simultaneous time which is a no-time. I also pursued the goal of allowing the reader the opportunity to fill these empty spaces. In the world of the dead the author could not intervene", in *Inframundo: The Mexico of Juan Rulfo* (Mexico: Ediciones del norte, 1983), 16.

[31] In an interview with Joseph Sommers, "Juan Rulfo: entrevista" *Hispamerica* II.4-5 (1973), Juan Rulfo states that it was his intention to conceal more than reveal: "Creo que no es una novela de lectura fácil. Sobre todo intenté sugerir aspectos, no darlos", 104.

The town as protagonist - a trope brought further in Elena Garro's novel - allows for the multiple narratives and a polyphonous effect in the novel. All the town's inhabitants are dead souls which facilitates the evasion of conventional novelistic time.[33] In the novel, Comala is described in ghostly and sinister terms:

> Este pueblo está lleno de ecos. Tal parece que estuvieran encerrados en el hueco de las paredes o debajo de las piedras. Cuando caminas, sientes que te van pisando los pasos. Oyes crujidos. Risas. Unas risas ya muy viejas, como cansadas de reír. Y voces ya desgastadas por el uso. Todo eso oyes. Pienso que llegará el día en que estos sonidos se apaguen (107-8).

That this is said by Damiana Cisneros to Juan, shortly before he realises that she is dead, adds to the horrific atmosphere. It is a town in which "Todo parecía estar como en espera de algo" (68); time is at a standstill "El reloj de la iglesia dio las horas, una tras otra, una tras otra, como si se hubiera encogido el tiempo"(79); and where "no vive nadie" (70). Comala can be read as a metaphor for Mexico, not only during the Revolution but also preceding, and subsequent to, the Revolution. Rosario Castellanos suggested as much when she said of *Pedro Páramo:*

> ...la historia por lo pronto, no existe y si existe carece de dinamismo. El tiempo transcurre, naturalmente, y su transcurso acarrea acontecimientos que, por importantes que parezcan no alteran las estructuras profundas de la realidad en que el mexicano viene viviendo desde épocas inmemoriales.[34]

It is Mexico in a microcosm, represented as trapped in a terrible cycle of violence, with no possibility of progress, and where "todo consiste en morir" (74). A meditation on the relationship between death and memory in Rulfo's posthumously published notebook explains why the characters in the novel are dead: "La muerte es inalterable en el espacio y en el tiempo...[en la muerte] no tengo sentimientos. Sólo

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[32]Sommers, entrevista, *op. cit.,* 104-105.

[33] This is an issue I shall explore in greater depth in relation to Elena Garro's novel in chapter 3. Passafari describes the novel in the following terms: Rulfo in Pedro Páramo "borra las fronteras entre la vida y la muerte, entre el pasado y el presente, nos sumerge en un mundo subterráneo, hecho de puro recordar, y paulatinamente nos interna en un caos alucinante donde los muertos reviven su vida y la de los otros y vuelven a juzgar, implacables, las acciones de los hombres", 80.

[34] Rosario Castellanos, "La novela mexicana contemporánea y su valor testimonial" *Hispania* 2. XLVII (1964), 225.

recuerdos. Malos recuerdos."[35] Through death there is a disruption of conventional novelistic time.

Juan Rulfo, in an interview with Joseph Sommers, recognised the importance of the *novela de la revolución* as history. The ambiguity of the Spanish word 'historia' – which can mean both story and history – notwithstanding, he clearly states the importance of the novel in his understanding of the Revolution:

> La novela de la revolución mexicana me dio más o menos una idea de lo que había sido la revolución. Yo conocí la historia a través de la narrativa. Ahí comprendí qué había sido la revolución. No me tocó vivirla. Reconozco que fueron esos autores, hoy subestimados, que realmente abrieron el ciclo de la novela mexicana.[36]

The Revolution is referred to briefly in the novel. It is first told from the point of view of the townsfolk, and later as the event which was manipulated by Páramo to his own ends. Thereby reinforcing several theses Portal has suggested that are common to many *novelas de la Revolución*: that time is cyclical, not progressive; history does not exist; and also that power and wealth stays in the hands of the same few, namely Páramo and his ilk. In Dorotea's words, the Revolution meant poverty and loss to the people of Comala:

> Recuerdo días en que Comala se llenó de 'adioses' y hasta nos parecía cosa alegre ir a despedir a los que se iban. Y es que se iban con intenciones de volver. Nos dejaban encargadas sus cosas y su familia. Luego algunos mandaban por la familia aunque no por sus cosas, y después parecieron olvidarse del pueblo y de nosotros, y hasta de sus cosas. Yo me quedé porque no tenía adónde ir. Otros se quedaron esperando que Pedro Páramo muriera, pues según decían les había prometido heredarles sus bienes, y con esa esperanza vivieron todavía algunos. Pero pasaron años y años y él seguía vivo, siempre allí, como un espantapájaros frente a las tierras de la Media Luna.
> >>Y ya cuando le faltaba poco para morir vinieron las guerras esas de los 'cristeros' y la tropa echó rialada con los pocos hombres que quedaban. Fue cuando yo comencé a morirme de hambre y desde entonces nunca me volví a emparejar (150).

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[35] *Los cuadernos de Juan Rulfo* edited by Yvette Jiménez (México: Ediciones era, 1994), 30.
[36] Sommers, entrevista, *op. cit.*, 104.

This is an account of hope dashed. The Revolution had promised to overthrow the 'espantapájaros' Páramo. Yet he lived, and was even revived by the subsequent *Cristero* Rebellion. Revolution and conflict, instead of overthrowing Pedro, has benefited him. In contrast, others, such as Dorotea, simply give up and die. The poor lost their families, the men were killed, and finally those left behind also died, unable to wait any longer.

Dorotea blames Susana San Juan – arguably the most fully fleshed-out female character in the novel - for Pedro's behaviour. "Y todo por las ideas de don Pedro, por sus pleitos de alma. Nada más porque se le murió la mujer, la tal Susanita. Ya te has de imaginar si la quería" (150). Susana is a complex and problematic character. She is introduced as "La última esposa de Pedro Páramo. Unos dicen que estaba loca. Otros, que no"(147). Such ambiguity regarding her sanity and her actions lingers over the character. Susana's behaviour is observed and commented upon, similar to the way Julia Andrade is observed in Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. Unlike Julia, Susana speaks for herself but her speeches are often meandering meditations on desire with fluid meaning. She is a sensual woman who outwardly rejects certain authority figures, such as the priest and her father. Yet, she becomes Pedro's wife. Much can be read into her change of loyalties, which I shall explore later. First I shall examine her denial of her father. To be with Pedro she rejects her father (Bartolomé), as he disapproves of Pedro. He describes Pedro as "la pura maldad" (153). In a dialogue which Susana (having only recently been introduced into the narrative) asks "¿Y yo quién soy yo?" (153). This is not a plot device utilised to provide background detail on a character, but an existential question on Susana's part. Bartolomé replies:

> - Tú eres mi hija. Mía. Hija de Bartolomé San Juan. En la mente de Susana San Juan comenzaron a caminar las ideas, primero lentamente, luego se detuvieron, para después echar a correr de tal modo que no alcanzó sino decir:
> - No es cierto. No es cierto.
> - Este mundo, que lo aprieta a uno por todos lados, que va vaciando puños de nuestro polvo aquí y allá, deshaciéndonos en pedazos como si rociara la tierra con nuestra sangre. ¿Qué hemos hecho? ¿Por qué se nos ha podrido el alma? Tu madre decía que cuando menos nos queda la claridad de Dios. Y tú la niegas, Susana. ¿Por qué me niegas a mí como tu padre? ¿Estás loca?
> - ¿No lo sabías?
> - ¿Estás loca?

- Claro que sí, Bartolomé. ¿No lo sabías? (153-4).

Crucially, in this conversation Susana denies both her father and a God to whom the father allies himself in rather self-aggrandising style: Bartolomé is both father and "la claridad de Dios". Susana rebels against his possessive "mía", and asserts her freedom from him and the world he believes in. She concedes that she must be considered insane, as it is seen to be insanity to deny her father, his way of being and his belief system. Her denial of Bartolomé is echoed later in her rejection of padre Rentería. He approaches her to give her the Last Rites:

- He venido a confortarte, hija.
- Entonces adiós, padre – contestó ella -. No vuelvas. No te necesito.
  Y oyó cuando se alejaban los pasos que siempre le dejaban una sensación de frío, de temblor y miedo.
- ¿Para qué vienes a verme, si estás muerto? (162).

In a footnote to the Cátedra edition 1999, the editor José Carlos González Boixo explains the importance of the father-priest confusion: "Susana cree estar hablando con Bartolomé. La identificación Bartolomé-padre Rentería simboliza un doble rechazo al autoritarismo tanto físico como espiritual" (169-170). Former foci of power are denied. But, by denying the priest-God-father Susana is fated to be trapped in her grave unable to gain salvation.

Susana can be read as a symbol of the Revolution, as a break with the old: a denial of old ways and old powers. She is attractive, elusive and dangerous, and ultimately dies, unable to breathe under the new regime personified by Pedro. Susana is also represented as having had/desired a physical relationship with Florencio. In reported speech, Juan recounts what he hears from Susana's grave:

> Dice que ella escondía sus pies entre las piernas de él. Sus pies helados como piedras frías y que allí se calentaban como en un horno donde se dora el pan. Dice que él le mordía los pies diciéndole que eran como pan dorado en el horno. Que dormía acurrucada, metiéndose dentro de él, perdida en la nada al sentir que se quebraba su carne, que se abría como un surco abierto por un clavo ardoroso, luego tibio, luego dulce, dando golpes duros contra su carne blanda; sumiéndose, sumiéndose más, hasta el gemido. Pero que le había dolido más su muerte. Eso dice (169-170).

Rulfo's complex, highly suggestive and poetic language is evident in this passage.[37] Susana's physical attraction to Florencio is for "*el otro deseable*".[38] She does not necessarily want a real person. The mediated description of their lovemaking is the expression of her repressed desires. Rulfo uses domestic ("pan") and agricultural ("surco abierto") imagery in a highly sensual way. Yet, it is infomation given to us by Juan. Both reader and narrator are implicated in a voyeuristic way in Susana's memories. The technique of reportage employed by Rulfo, emphasised by the 'eso dice', serves to highlight that we are privy to very private moments in the characters' lives.

Susana's poetic, sensual language can also be read as a demonstration of her descent into madness. Here, a problem arises as to how normality can be diagnosed, when talking about conversations, soliloquies, monologues and diatribes which are taking place beyond the grave. Our point of reference can only be that of other characters who appear to act as if death is but a continuance of life, and who suggest that Susana is other to their apparent sanity. Thereby, an otherworldly community is created, with life as its only experiential truth. Susana's lack of interaction with other characters, and her gradual, total self-absorption are key to critical assessments of her madness. Thus, "the language of Susana San Juan is moving inward as she recedes further and further into the closed world of her mind. She goes from external sensations of the body to her inner voices until she becomes immersed in the phantom world of her closed mind."[39] Whereas, Pedro's discourse moves in the opposite direction, towards the object of his gaze: "not as a person, but as a creation of desire to possess and consume."[40] María Elena de Valdés suggests that Susana attains freedom through her madness. She is able to escape inwards, away from society and its rigid constraints, and continues this escape after death.

Pedro, as her husband, has significant power over her. Theirs is a relationship which can be paralleled with the failings of the Revolution. She breaks with the inherited systems of the past, as personified in both her father and padre Rentería, but

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[37] Cosgrove has examined, in detail, the language employed in this section, with particular reference to 'surco' as a fertile sexual metaphor: "the poeticity of this passage is guaranteed by the predominance of the three elements perhaps most constitutive of poetic discourse: symmetry, repetition, and simile", 84.
[38] Bastos and Molloy, *op. cit.,* 22, italics theirs.
[39] María Elena de Valdés, "Sexuality and Insanity in Rulfo's Susana San Juan" in *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* Spring xviii.3, (1994), 495.
[40] *ibid.*, 495.

needs to replace these with another one in the figure of Pedro. He, ultimately, leads to her downfall, while he clings to his memory of her. That the dream of the Revolution was an impossible one can be read in the statement by Pedro that Susana was "Una mujer que no era de este mundo" (179). To him, she was "la criatura más querida por él sobre la tierra" (165). But one which he would never truly know: "¿Pero cuál era el mundo de Susana San Juan? Ésa fue una de las cosas que Pedro Páramo nunca llegó a saber" (165). They are too different: he is not prepared to open himself up to her needs and wants, and she is unable to share her inner life with him. In the novel, the Revolution was a failure. Firstly, because of the inability of the participants to truly establish a firm purpose, rather than the form it took as personified in the mercurial, unknowable Susana, and secondly, because of their inability to create new and fairer structures of power. Pedro's collapse in the end suggests some hope: [Pedro] "Dio un golpe seco contra la tierra y se fue desmoronando como si fuera un montón de piedras" (195).[41] This image of a pile of rubble is similar to the 'piedra aparente' employed later by Elena Garro in her novel as a stasis which denies the possibility of Revolution and reiterates the stagnancy of such imagery. Pedro may have crumbled but there is little space for optimism in the novel, as the rest of the inhabitants of Comala are already dead.

Joanna R. Bartow compares Susana to the two principal female characters in *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. At first she compares and contrasts how collective memory works, given that the towns are the protagonists of both novels. Then she discusses the female characters. She states that:

> ...the female protagonists of *Pedro Páramo* and *Recuerdos* are motivated by distinct remembrances of their isolated pasts that place them in a problematic position *vis-à-vis* the collective: a position that can be interpreted as both liberating and ultimately defeating. Susana San Juan, Julia Andrade and Isabel Moncada are outsiders who isolate themselves from the social collective through their individual memories and thoughts in an attempt to alleviate their subjugated position. Yet they remain connected to the collective since they indirectly determine the towns' destinies and they remain dependent on men from their pasts for their liberating moments. They have in common a position of subjugation and suffering because of a loss or prohibited love, and each becomes an impenetrable enigma for the man

[41] See Cosgrove for a reading of the 'paradox' of the last sentence as simultaneous end and continuance, *op. cit.*, 80.

> that desires her for her unattainable past. Their madness is the community's perspective on their entry into a world outside of authority – both the authority of the caudillo figure and that of collective, moral, authorial discourse. In this mad behaviour are rooted myths of originating females which in these texts break with myths of originating males or patriarchal interpretations of myths such as that of the *Malinche*.[42]

I shall be discussing Garro's novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir* in chapter 3. The two principal characters are established early on as apposite women whose fates' overlap in complex ways. Susana, Julia and Isabel's actions have determined the fate of the town. As a result, they are central to both novels' narratives and, in turn, the fate of the towns and their inhabitants. Bartow is suggesting that these three characters evoke mythical imaginings of women, such as the *Malinche*, but they are not *Malinche* figures. Their behaviour is transgressive, and consequently labelled as mad.[43] The three women are, at once, ex-centric, yet central to the narratives. That is, they behave in ways which are considered to be outside of accepted normative behaviour for women. They can be read as mythical figures, such as Eve or *Malinche*, insofar as they brought about the downfall of their people, "encarnan la culpa."[44] Susana is blamed by others, as we have already seen, and she is a physical, as opposed to an intellectual, being. As *Malinche*, it is her sensuality which is her downfall. Although she is apparently driven mad by the conflict between betrayal of others and what are represented as her indulgence of her physical needs.[45] In Portal's words: "En la visión descarnada de Juan Rulfo, la mujer es un placer que se fuerza o se viola, o bien, lo que más se quiere pero que nunca se conoce. O medio, o ensueño, nunca fin en sí misma."[46] Rulfo's Susana is limited, insofaras she is a medium or

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[42] Joanna R. Bartow, "Isolation and Madness: Collective Memory and Women in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* and *Pedro Páramo*", *Revista canadiense de estudios hispanicos* 18.1 (1993), 8. In contrast to this opinion Rafael Hernández-Rodríguez suggests that "el verdadero problema que plantea Rulfo en su novela es la imposibilidad de comunidad, la cual puede verse en términos de la oposición entre comunicación y la comunión" in "*Pedro Páramo* y la desintegración de la comunidad", *BHS* LXXVIII (2001), 625.

[43] Bastos and Molloy state that, although there are many transgressive acts by various characters in the novel such as the incestuous couple and Eduviges' suicide, Susana's is on a different plane because it is "el paso de la cordura a la insensatez", 4.

[44] Portal, *Proceso, op. cit.,* 295. See Sharon Magnarelli *The Lost Rib: Female Characters in the Spanish-American Novel* (London & Toronto: Bucknell University Press, 1985) for a study on Susana San Juan as a possible Eve figure. In her discussion she links Eve's original sin with death, 80-81.

[45] Bastos and Molloy consider Susana's madness as "no es necesariamente pérdida de sentido es, sobre todo pérdida de un sentido único", *op. cit.,* 8.

[46] Portal, *Proceso, op. cit.,* 296.

object of love or desire. As I shall explore later, this is too limiting a reading for Garro's women. For Bartow the significant difference between Garro's and Rulfo's representation of women lies in "Garro's subtle rewriting of the *Malinche*'s story throughout *Recuerdos* [which] makes possible a reinterpretation of the final confession of guilt, isolation and madness from the perspective of frustrated desires in the face of imposed limitations."[47]

The type of collective memory Bartow describes is significant, thematically, in *Pedro Páramo*. Patrick Dove, in his essay on *Pedro Páramo,* suggests that: "To name the past is both to give (or return) to the past its meaning and to delimit its encroachment upon the present."[48] This statement sums up the contradictions inherent in the novel. Rulfo is both questioning the hegemonic discourse which surrounds the Revolution, and is limited by that quest. His form and style are radical, and can be considered a turning point, from a naturalistic discourse to a fragmented, experimental style, which opened up Mexican letters to the possibilities of new ways of writing. At the same time the female characters operate as functions within this narrative, as mere figures which "generan segmentos narrativos".[49]

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La muerte de Artemio Cruz

There is a certain degree of dissension surrounding the term *novela de la revolución.* Many critics believe that it only existed in the period up to 1947, with Agustín Yañez's *Al filo del agua* marking the birth of the modern Mexican novel.[50] Whereas, others such as Walter M. Longford believe that the early period was crucial to the later development of more complex *novelas de la revolución*:

> The novel of the Mexican Revolution, for all its accumulation of titles, authors, and approaches, may not have produced many truly outstanding works until 1947 and later, yet its importance in the evolution of the novel in that country is undeniable and indeed crucial. It gave a special identity to the Mexican novel, it turned the form,

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[47] Bartow, *op. cit.,* 13.

[48] Patrick Dove, "*Exígele lo nuestro*: Deconstruction, Restitution and the Demand of Speech in *Pedro Páramo*", *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 10.1 (2001), 25.

[49] Bastos and Molloy, *op. cit.,* 3. They begin their essay with a quotation from Rulfo who said of Susana in an interview: "Esto no es un personaje", and that she serves as an "hilo conductor que permite orientarse dentro de la acumulación de motivos, de un medio auxiliar cuyo fin es clasificar y ordenar los motivos particulares", 3.

[50] Agustín Yañez, *Al filo del agua* (México: Editorial porrua, (1947) 1969).

> content, and inspiration of the nineteenth-century novel, and fomented a climate of openness which made possible the later advances which have brought the present-day novel into the mainstream.[51]

That both *Los de abajo* and *Pedro Páramo* are literary accomplishments is a moot point for Longford, and one which I have already discussed. After 1947, the *novela de la revolución* developed exponentially, that is stylistically, thematically, and in volume of production. A significant marker in the next period of the *novela de la revolución* is Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962).

Comparison has been drawn between *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and *Pedro Páramo*. Sharon Magnerelli has claimed that both novels

> ...might be described as the story of the death of the cacique, who, in spite of having destroyed the lives of all those who surrounded him, still never realized fulfillment because he never fully conquered or possessed that ideal woman who eternally escaped him.[52]

In her reading, the women (or it could be argued, particularly in the case of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, generic woman) become central to the narrative. She is a unit of exchange, a thing to be owned and consumed. Irvine D. Soloman takes this reading a step further: "*Artemio Cruz* is not about the struggles of a power-crazed *cacique,* but rather about the subjugation and degradation of women....[who] are depicted as literary victims, brutalized by a system of male superiority, oppressed by the natural order of male dominance."[53] This statement shifts the focus too much towards the women in the novel. The title and narrator determine the central axis around which the story necessarily revolves. But, it is a clear indication of the centrality of the female characters in the novel. I shall examine how these characters are represented by Artemio-as-narrator, and how his relationship with women (woman?) can be read as an allegory of his relationship with the Revolution and Mexico.

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[51] Walter M. Longford, *The Mexican Novel Comes of Age* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 44-45. Marta Portal makes reference to a statement by Carlos Fuentes where he suggests that the *novela de la revolución* ended with *Pedro Páramo*, whereas she suggests that it is an ongoing project.

[52] Magnarelli, *op. cit.,* 100.

[53] "A Feminist Perspective of the Latin American Novel: Carlos Fuentes' 'The Death of Artemio Cruz'" in *Hispanófila* 97 septiembre (1989), 71.

The narrative of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* is prefigured by the title of the novel, i.e. it is Artemio Cruz's fictional autobiography, recounted as he lies terminally ill in his hospital bed. Artemio's account is self-consciously flawed; he does not trust his own memory: "En tu penumbra, los ojos ven hacia adelante; no saben adivinar el pasado."[54] Also, illness and the morphine he is administered suggest that he is not an entirely reliable narrator. His confident, authoritative voice in the beginning of the novel is reduced to a rambling stream-of-consciousness towards the end of the novel. Snippets of remembered songs from his youth, prayers in Latin, images of his own funeral, existential meditations on life and death, lists of adjectives conjuring up images of florid, ornate architecture and so on, are juxtaposed in a confused and sometimes confusing way (248-291). An example of this is a passage in which Artemio shifts from prayers in Latin, memories of Laura to lush descriptions of furnishings:

> ...requiem æternam, dona eis Domine
> de profundis clamavi, Domine
> la voz de Laura, que hablaba de estas cosas, sentada en el suelo, con las rodillas dobladas, con el pequeño libro encuadernado entre las manos [...] los sillones de damasco, los sofás de terciopelo, las mesas de refectorio, los cilindros y las ánforas... (248-249).

The development of Artemio's character in the novel is a study in how a confident, and financially and socially successful patriarch comes to terms with the compromises he has had to make, and the people and lives he has damaged in order to survive the Revolution and prosper in the new post-Revolutionary Mexico. The novel, in its representation of the corruption required to be successful in post-Revolutionary Mexico, is comparable to *Arráncame la vida* by Ángeles Mastretta. Alongside the memories of his involvement in the Revolution, a large body of the text is taken up with his relationships with women: his wife Catalina, former lovers Regina, Laura, and Lilia, an unnamed indigenous woman he raped, and his daughter Teresa. Carlos Fuentes has created a character compromised by his actions and involvement in the Revolution. I shall explore Artemio's character, in brief, and examine how women are represented in the novel in the context of the Revolution.

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[54] Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978), 13. Hereinafter the numbers in parentheis will refer to this edition.

In the opening paragraph of the novel Artemio details his pain and the loss of power he has over his own bodily functions, thus establishing the perspective from which the novel is narrated (9). Throughout the rest of the novel, his memories are interspersed with reminders of his physical degeneration. His present state is established as that of a dying man, and his first step back into memory is made by imagining his past self as a twin of his present sick self: "El otro. Artemio Cruz. Su gemelo. Artemio Cruz está enfermo. El otro. Artemio Cruz está enfermo: no vive: no, vive. Artemio Cruz vivió" (12). He describes his present state in terms of bodily functions: "Como un odre vacío y arrugado....un depósito de sudores" (14). By the end of the novel, he portrays himself negatively, seeing himself through his regrets, and the choices he cannot go back and change. In his own words, he addresses himself:

> Tú no serás Artemio Cruz, no tendrás setenta y un años, no pesarás setenta y nueve kilos, no medirás un metro ochenta y dos, no usarás dientes postizos, no fumarás cigarillos negros, no usarás camisas de seda italiana, no coleccionarás mancuernillas, no encargarás tus corbatas a una casa neoyorquina, no vestirás esos trajes azules de tres botones, no preferirás la cachemira irlandesa, no beberás ginebra con tónico... (247).

He continues to detail his possessions: the cars he owns (Volvo, Cadillac, Rambler truck), his favorite painting (a Renoir), his breakfast ("huevos poché y tostadas con mermelada Blackwell's"), and his reading habits (the property pages of the newspaper and Life and Paris Match magazines). The sum of his life is first identified with his physical weight, size and age and then with the external manifestations of his wealth: his clothes, the cigarettes he smokes, what he drinks, and his daily habits. As he considers the other routes his life could have taken, he reminds himself that his choices are what led him to his present position of privilege, albeit tainted with reminders of his mortality: the false teeth and debilitated body.

His attitude to the women he claims to have been in love with can be summed up in a declaration he makes midway through the novel: "Regina...Laura...Catalina...Lilia...nadie te dará más, para quitarte más, que esa mujer, la mujer que amaste con sus cuatro nombres distintos" (122). For him, the four women are one woman. He denies them agency. They do not have autonomy from each other, but are merely the same woman in different phases of his life. His

relationship with each woman differs, depending on his age. The relationship with Regina is recounted as innocent young love, Lilia and Laura are physical, and passionate, love affairs, and Catalina is his wife. He is capable of idealising the relationships with the other women, because they are distant. His wife has been his longtime companion, and due to the nature of longstanding relationships, she cannot be idealised. To him, she is real and is given greater complexity as a character than the others. His wife, Catalina, and his one-time lover Regina are the most significant female relationships in the novel.[55] They function on a largely symbolic level. Regina and Catalina are central to his attitude to the Mexican Revolution. Regina is representative of his (and arguably others') idealistic early hopes and dreams for the Revolution, and Catalina represents the loss of hope and gradual bitterness and disillusionment with the aspirations of the post-Revolutionary period.

Artemio traces his relationship with Catalina from their first meeting to her hospital bedside vigil. As with all stories within the narrative, it is told in a non-linear fashion, intercalated with stories of other loves, his experiences of the conflict, his post-Revolutionary ambitious chicanery and so on. When he first meets Catalina, we follow his gaze from her hair "liso y castaño", "ojos, labios, senos duros y suaves, de una consistencia alternada entre el desamparo y el rencor...tobillo delgado" (40). Later, in a narrative shift which is ongoing throughout the novel, the third-person narrator tells us "avanzó hacia él una carne de oro pálido" (40). She is the sum of his physical attraction to her. He looks at her and sees her as an enigma:

> Los ojos de ella sólo le devolvían ese extraño mensaje de dura fatalidad, como si se mostrara dispuesta a aceptarlo todo y, sin embargo, a convertir su resignación en la oportunidad del propio triunfo sobre el hombre que de esa manera silenciosa y sonriente empezaba a hacerla suya. Ella se extrañó de la fortaleza con que sucumbía, del poder de su debilidad (41).

Her weakness is a form of entrapment. This is redolent of what critic Josefina Ludmer calls "tretas del débil". It is a term she uses to describe the tools of the weak

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[55] Judith Payne, "Laura's Artemio: Failed Sexual Politics in *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*" in *Hispanófila* 112 septiembre (1994) claims that Laura is Artemio's only true relationship, as she is truly independent and can never possess her, 65-76. I contend that he sees his wife in the same terms. She can be beholden to him as his wife, and all that this constitutes for him in terms of ownership, but he never gets to know her, or possesses her fully.

to undermine the strong by "using space allowed by the dominant culture in order to subvert it and create another space within it."[56] It is ultimately passive, and is a tool employed for survival rather than change. Catalina maintains the status quo while gaining a greater power over her personal circumstances.[57] Artemio is afraid of her silences and, as we shall see further on, he imposes meaning on them. The use of the third-person narrator allows Fuentes the possibility of observing Catalina, not only from Artemio's point of view, but also as an observer. Her reactions can be described, but her thoughts are not available to us as readers. The narrator is biased towards Artemio's point of view, as the situation is not gauged from her perspective. We do get a record of her air of resignation and fatality, and Artemio's physical attraction to her, but no insight into her thoughts. She is a physical being who serves as a unit of currency her father parts with as a prize to Artemio for having visited them with stories of both the war and of her brother. Artemio remembers their meeting and recounts stories of their life together, finally marking his bitterness towards her and his daughter, both of whom he sees carving up his assets before he is even dead.

He reacts with anger when he overhears them discussing whether he has drawn up a will. As an internal monologue, he declares that he has saved them from "la pinche clase media" (120). In his opinion, he has acted like a real man by compromising himself and them:

> con güevos, jugándosela, rompiéndose la madre, exponiéndose a ser fusilado por los de arriba o por los de abajo; eso es ser hombre, como yo lo he sido, no como ustedes hubieran querido (120).

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[56] Catherine M. Boyle, "The Creative Force in Marginality – Women in Latin American Writing: Through the Body and the Word into the Centre" *UCG Women's Studies Centre Review* 1 (1992): 111-112. Josefina Ludmer describes the function of the 'treta del débil' as a ruse which "separa el campo del decir (la ley del otro) del campo del saber (mi ley) combina, como todas las tácticas de resistencia, sumisión y aceptación del lugar asignado por el otro, con antagonismo y enfrentamiento, retiro de colaboración" in "Tretas del débil", *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas* edited by Patricia González y Eliana Ortega (Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1985), 51.

[57] In Lanin Gyurko's words: "mired in anguish and indecision, Catalina is incapable either of accepting the challenge of the new life that the man whom she regards with both fear and awe now offers her, or of severing the marital relationship", and, later: "Instead of seeking freedom, Catalina chooses to define herself only negatively, through a lifelong desire for vengeance on Cruz", in "The Image of Woman in Two Novels of Carlos Fuentes", *Research Studies* 43.1 March (1975) 6-7. See also Lanin A. Gyurko, "Women in Mexican Society: Fuentes' Portrayal of Oppression" in *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 3 (1974-1975): 206-229.

He says that:

> yo les di la riqueza sin esperar recompensa, cariño, comprensión... obligadas a respetarme como no hubieran respetado mi mediocridad, ah viejas ojetes, viejas presumidas, viejas impotentes que han tenido todos los objetos de la riqueza y siguen teniendo la cabeza de mediocridad (121).

His anger at Catalina and his daughter Teresa, centres around the compromises he believes he had to make in order to improve their wealth and status. While, in the end, they only value him for this wealth and do not appear grateful enough, nor do they love him more for this financial security.

In contrast, he declares that what he had with Regina was true love. "Yo lo tuve todo, ¿me oyen?, todo lo que se compra y todo lo que no se compra, tuve a Regina y me amó, me amó sin dinero, me siguió, me dio la vida allá abajo (121)." With Regina, it was young love, and principally physical attraction, not a life of compromise and sacrifice for a family who he now believes do not appreciate him. His love for Regina is easy to idealise but it is also clear to see, through the flashbacks, that it is portrayed to be an intense, and fleeting, love affair. Much space is taken up with descriptions of their love making narrated in the third person, as if by some independent observer. However, clearly again, it's principally from Artemio's, now nostalgic, point of view.

Memories of Regina are interpolated with descriptions of war. She is represented as his safe haven away from the conflict:

> Ya en otras ocasiones alguna orden imprevista, la necesidad de dar caza al enemigo, durante varias semanas. Pero ella, como una gaviota, parecía distinguir, por encima de las mil incidencias de la lucha y la fortuna, el movimiento de la marea revolucionaria: si no en el pueblo que habían dicho, aparecía tarde o temprano en otro....y acabarían por encontrarse de nuevo, como ahora. Ella tendría el cuarto listo, con frutas y comida, y la falda estaría arrojada sobre una silla.

She is his escape from the war. She acts as a salve to his sensual deprivation in the conflict. She provides him with food, comfort and sexual gratification. She waits for him, naked, ready to pleasure him: "lo esperaría así, lista como si no quisiera perder un minuto en las cosas innecesarias (65)." The opening of the novel establishes that this text is told from Artemio's point of view. Therefore, although the use of the

third-person narrator can often give the impression of omniscience, in this novel it appears as if it is a device employed by Artemio in his personal narrative to give a false impression of neutrality. An example of this is the description of Artemio's preparation for battle: "Él se envolvió en la manta azul, porque el viento helado de esas horas desmentía, con un rumor de rastrojo agitado, el calor vertical del día. Habían pasado toda la noche en campo abierto, sin comer" (170). This passage emulates the reportage style, language, and details provided, used by writers such as Azuela. Artemio's shifts in narratives appear as attempts to con the reader into believing that what is being told has greater authority. In fact, it is the story told from Artemio's point of view.

La muerte de Artemio Cruz shares many thematic concerns with other *novelas de la revolución.* Artemio recounts the chaos of war and the lack of ideology on the part of many of the soldiers who fought in it. Many are drawn into the conflict to defend local interests, not out of an interest in national politics:

> ...lo malo era que la mayor parte de la población andaba en armas y casi todos eran campesinos, de manera que faltaba quien se encargará de aplicar los decretos del general. Entonces era mejor que la quitaron en seguida el dinero a los ricos que quedaban en cada pueblo y esperaran a que triunfará la revolución para legalizar lo de las tierras y lo de la jornada de ocho horas. Ahora había que llegar a México y correr de la presidencia al borracho Huerta, el asesino de don Panchito Madero (70).

This is similar to the perspective given by Jesusa in the Elena Poniatowska's novel *Hasta no verte Jesús mío,* which I shall examine in chapter 4. In contrast to Jesusa, Artemio is of the privileged class who benefitted from the aftermath of the Revolution. He, cynically and single-mindedly, advances his own ambitions, with little care for the consequences to others. In the novel, women function as symbols of Cruz's relationship to the Revolution and its aftermath. Regina stands as a symbol of a more idealistic time before he felt he had to compromise himself to succeed. Donald Shaw describes her as "la hembra sin complicaciones."[58] After losing her he started on a new path of self-advancement. His declaration that Regina "me amó sin dinero, me siguió, me dio la vida allá abajo" is as much about the loss of self and a

[58] Donald L. Shaw, *Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana* (Madrid: Catedra, 1981), 103.

yearning for more innocent times as it is about anger at his wife and their loveless marriage. Regina becomes "esa memoria dulce y amarga" of times past.

As with Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, which I shall explore in greater detail in chapter 3, time is cyclical. It is dealt with in a more realistic fashion in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, in that it is thematic rather than stylistic. The Revolution is shown to defy expectations of progress. In Joseph Sommers words: "the process of history is seen as cyclical, involving a pattern of convulsive change which in the end proved to be tragically repetitious."[59] The Revolution did not change anything. Cruz, and corrupt men like him, gained and retained power and money. In the novel, Cruz's relationship with Regina compares with the idealism and innocence of the early Revolution, while his relationship with Catalina symbolises loss of innocence, the hard and bitter lessons of life in post-Revolutionary Mexico. This is explicated in an exchange with his wife, where he interprets her look, and sees in it the disillusionment of their lives and loss of innocence. In an internal monologue, he interprets her look to mean the following:

> ¿Crees que después de hacer todo lo que has hecho, tienes todavía derecho al amor? ¿Crees que las reglas de la vida pueden cambiarse para que, encima de todo, recibas esas recompensas? Perdiste tu inocencia en el mundo de los afectos. Quizás tuviste tu jardín. Yo también tuve el mío, mi pequeño paraíso. Ahora ambos lo hemos perdido. Trata de recordar. No puedes encontrar en mí lo que ya sacrificaste, lo que ya perdiste para siempre y por tu propia obra. No sé que de dónde vienes. No sé qué has hecho. Sólo sé que en tu vida perdiste lo que después me hiciste perder a mí: el sueño, la inocencia. Ya nunca seremos los mismos (114).

This extract could read as a meditation on the disillusionment of a generation with the ideals of the Revolution. These are Artemio's words, and what he sees mirrored in his wife's face. He pines for Regina, and the past feelings of hope and idealism, of a time before he became embittered.

In the novel, women are symbols of Artemio's beliefs and ideals. In turn, they are symbols of innocence and, latterly, loss of that innocence in Mexico. What they are not is well-developed characters. The narrative perspective is purely that of Artemio. From multiple (that is first-, second-, and third-person) narratives he tells

[59] Sommers, *op. cit.*, 155.

his story and, using this technique, Fuentes creates tension and draws the reader into an otherwise unsympathetic character.[60] But, he fails to flesh out the female characters. They function as symbols and as mediums for the expression of Artemio's personal beliefs.

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Conclusion

The female characters in these novels are akin to what Teresa de Lauretis described as the male/female dichotomy in mythology:

> [The male] is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death, she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix, and matter.[61]

The parenthetical 'it' is highly resonant in this segment. Its usage quite succinctly extirpates meaning from the often polemical writing on gender issues. What is at issue here is not just the politics of everyday life of women. It is about how they have been either omitted from accounts of the major formative national events such as war and Revolution, or they have been mere functions within the narrative, as has been seen in the novels I have examined. This begs the question: what if 'she' was replaced with an 'it'? Does that 'it' more accurately describe the female character in these novels? Also, how far removed is the 'she' in the text from the 'she' in reality? This is more than a mere pronominal game. Men have had characters who act as mirrors of their reality: acting out their aspirations, failings, complexities and exploring their emotional depths. Although, it can be argued that the gender of the character is not a prerequisite for a human understanding of their plight, adventures or situation, the very invisibility of real female characters is troubling. This is particularly so when the only representations of women are as bodies, images, and

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[60] Shaw describes the function of the episodic and fragmented style of the novel as follows: "El orden de las varias secuencias narrativas responde a la precisa intención de Fuentes de crear, por una parte, una cadena de causas y efectos (la riqueza de Artemio en 1941 se explica por su matrimonio en 1919 y éste por la pérdida de sus ideales en 1913 y 1915 y, por otra parte, una serie de yuxtaposiciones y contrastes (la traición de 1915 - el suceso determinante de la trama - está intercalada entre dos secuencias que manifiestan de modo paralelo la abyección de Artemio frente a Lilia y Laura) que integran un consciente diseño formal de gran eficacia", 104.

[61] Teresa de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric: Considerations on Representations and Gender" in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* edited by Nancy Armstrong & Leonard Tennenhouse (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 251.

soul-less creatures, lacking depth or complexity, rendered into cliché, or having merely contrastive or symbolic roles. In chapters 3, 4 and 5 I shall examine how women novelists have redressed this gendered representation.

Chapter 3

Questioning Universal Givens: Time, History and Truth in Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*

Los recuerdos del porvenir is a novel with conflict as the central defining event, with women as protagonists, and as central characters, when in previous representations they had either been omitted or created as simply secondary characters who had largely metaphoric roles.[1] Elena Garro, in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* has taken on the challenge of representing conflict, using a highly experimental form and disrupting conventions of time in the novel. In this chapter I shall study Garro's formal experimentation. It illuminates and problematises women's representation in the *novela de la revolución*.

Elena Garro was born in Puebla in 1920. She originally wanted to become a ballerina and worked as a choreographer in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.[2] She later became a writer, starting out in journalism and then writing novels, plays, short stories and screen plays. She was married to the Nobel prize winning poet Octavio Paz, living with him in Paris, Spain (where they joined the International Brigade (1937-38)), Berkeley, San Francisco, New York, Japan and Switzerland (where she accompanied Paz in his academic and diplomatic career). After their divorce (1959) she lived in Paris and Spain for a time, and returned to Mexico where she was implicated as a collaborator with the government against the student movement of 1968 and went into self-imposed exile in Paris, Spain and the United States of America, returning to Mexico in 1991.[3] She was a controversial figure

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[1] Elena Garro, *Los recuerdos del porvenir* (Madrid: Ediciones siruela, 1994). Hereinafter numbers in parenthesis refer to this edition.

[2] Michèle Muncy, "The Author Speaks..." an interview with Elena Garro Paris, May 1986 in Anita K. Stoll ed. *A Different Reality: Studies on the work of Elena Garro* (London and Toronto: Bucknell U.P., 1990), 23-35; *Women's Fiction from Latin America: Selections from Twelve Contemporary Authors* edited and translated by Evelyn Picon Garfield (Detroit: Wayne State U.P., 1988), 69; *Voces femeninas de Hispanoamérica* edited by Gloria Bautista Gutiérrez (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); and Patricia Rosas Lopátegui, *Yo sólo soy memoria: biografía visual de Elena Garro* (Monterrey: Ediciones Castillo, 2000).

[3] In an interview with Lady Rojas-Trempe she has commented on the fallout on her career after 1968, saying: "A mí por habladora ¿sabes? Me ha ido muy mal", in "Elena Garro dialoga sobre su teatro con Guillermo Schmidhuber" *Revista Iberoamericana* 55. 146-147 enero-junio (1989), 688. For further details of the contradictory versions of Garro's involvement in the events of 1968, see "Encuentro con Elena Garro" by Verónica Beucker in *Elena Garro: lectura múltiple de una personalidad compleja* edited by Lucía Melgar and Gabriela Mora (Puebla, México: Benemérita universidad autónoma de

because of the press vilification of her involvement in the student movement. She was deeply insecure about her work. *Los recuerdos del porvenir* was written while she was in convalescence in Berne, Switzerland in 1953. As a result of Paz's early encouragement, she published it in 1963. The manuscript had remained hidden in a trunk for the intervening years. This was to be a pattern for Garro as she bore rejection badly, and some manuscripts remained unpublished until after her death in 1998.

Los recuerdos del porvenir is divided into two parts.[4] The protagonist of the first part is Julia, General Rosas' lover. She is a shadowy presence who is rarely seen because of Rosas' jealousy. Little is known about her origins and any appearance in public is much commented on (27 and passim). Felipe Hurtado, another character shrouded in mystery, arrives in the town and, at the end of the first part, the two leave together under mysterious circumstances: "el tiempo se detuvo en seco. No sé si se detuvo o si se fue y sólo cayó el sueño que no me había visitado nunca....En verdad no sé lo que pasó" (149). Julia has the power to make time stand still to facilitate her escape. Ixtepec, the town and narrator, is shown to have limited knowledge of what has transpired within its boundaries.

Isabel is the protagonist of the second section of the novel. She is a member of the local oligarchy, and Ixtepec appears, at first, to have greater insight into her thoughts. She too becomes the General's lover and lives in the same hotel as the prostitutes, hoping to help save her brothers' lives. She is at first "la hija ingrata" (255) for defying convention, who later becomes "la diosa vengadora de la justicia" (274) when the reasons for her actions become clear. Her end is ambiguous, and Ixtepec casts doubt over the veracity of the story (which it reports) that she has been turned to stone. Garro uses the framing device of the love stories to explore the effect that conflict has on the townsfolk, particularly on the women who are traditionally seen to have passive roles in conflict.

Puebla, 2002). Also in Melgar and Mora, see Patricia Vega's first-hand account of Garro's return to Mexico "Elena Garro o la abolición del tiempo", *op. cit.*.

[4] For brief discussions of the plot, see J. Malpartida, "Los 'recuerdos del porvenir' - Elena Garro" *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 529-30 (1994):306; R.G. Feal, '"Recollections of Things to Come" - Elena' Garro *Hispania* 72.1 (1989): 165; A. Ryan, '"Recollections of Things to Come" - Elena Garro' *Review-Latin American Literature and Arts* 39 (1988):68-69; and D. Kirk, 'Recollections of Things to Come - Elena Garro" *New York Times Book Review* (1987): 20.

Los recuerdos del porvenir falls within the parameters of the *novela de la Revolución*. Insofar as Garro employs the Revolution as a central thematic concern, similar to those novels I have already discussed in chapter 2.[5] Up to the 1960s such novels largely dealt with the experiences of males of all classes, political beliefs and rank, but neglected to portray women accurately. Women characters were represented as mere shadows of the men they accompanied.[6] In Elvia Montes de Oca Navas' words:

> En la novela de la Revolución Mexicana la mujer aparece como un ser sin nombre ni rostro, anónimo y secundario, aunque siempre presente: la compañera inseparable del soldado con quien comparte su destino; un "artefacto masculino" que se toma y se abandona cuando ya no es útil ni necesario; un ser sin ubicación propia.[7]

As I have discussed in the first two chapters, women were represented as secondary figures who acted as the embodiment of evil or good. They were just siphons, mythical figures or archetypes. Previous *novelas de la revolución* have created a false impression of what women did do in the Revolution, as I have already examined in relation to novels by Carlos Fuentes, Mariano Azuela and Juan Rulfo. Garro took on the difficult task of explaining how Mexicans, embodied in the population of Ixtepec, survived the Revolution and the *Cristero* Rebellion.[8] Garro showed considerable

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[5] Portal *op. cit.*, 223.

[6] Montes de Oca Navas says that, although in reality women fought alongside men, "en la narrativa aparece este personaje como deslucido, atrás del hombre, perdido en su sombra", in *Protagonistas de las novelas de la Revolución mexicana* (Toluca: Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura, 1996), 136.

[7] *Ibid.*, 136.

[8] Her decision to set the narrative during the time of the Cristero rebellion is also significant, as it is usually treated as a footnote to the Revolution. Many historians, even those with right wing sympathies, such as Jan Bazant, prefer to ignore or gloss over the Rebellion as an insignificant event. In two sweeping statements Bazant summarises the Rebellion calling it a "guerilla war in which schools were burned and ninety priests were shot or murdered marred the rest of the Calles administration", see *A Concise History of Mexico: from Hidalgo to Cárdenas 1805-1940* (London & New York: Cambridge U.P., 1977), 168. He later explains it away, saying that in 1928 "The Revolutionary energy of Mexican workers [which] had in the meantime found a new outlet in terrorist activities against the church", Bazant, 167. In contrast, Garro protrays the causes of the Rebellion and the reaction of the people to be much more complex. Garro is redressing the bias which the critic Alicia Olivera de Bonfil has said is typical of literature written about this period: "se hayan hecho por lo menos dos tipos de historias: la que nos dan los católicos, propiamente dichos (aunque dentro de este grupo existan diversas corrientes) y la que nos da la corriente contraria, que generalmente son versiones más bien antclericales que anticatólicas", in *Contemporary Mexico: Papers of the IV International Congress of Mexican History* edited by James W. Wilkie, Michael C. Meyer and Edna Manzón de Wilkie (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 297. Although, in *Los recuerdos* the town largely favours the church, its stance is more antimilitary, and the violence they have inflicted on the town, than pro-clerical. This invasion is described as a physical invasion like a

innovation in the creation of rounded and complex female characters, after nearly forty years of inadequate representation by others in the *novela de la revolución*. The unsettling of rigid, stereotyped characterisation is not the only innovation Garro has employed in order to portray the disruption of everyday life that conflict represents. She is conscious of the difficulties related to capturing adequately a truthful picture of conflict, given that the events are not just coloured by the attitudes of the different sides. There is also considerable significance in who the teller of the tale is. In the novel, conflict is shown to shatter the everyday understanding, and fictional norms, of time.

Elena Garro's novel *Los recuerdos del porvenir* demands that the reader question the essential nature of basic givens in everyday life, such as: time, the fantasy/reality dyad, the nature of, and possibility of, writing the nation and the validity of claiming an historical truth. Each of these concepts is interrelated and I shall consider them in relation to her novel. Also, in my discussion I shall focus on two key aspects: the context in which they are mediated through the town as narrator and how women are implicated in the conflict in a way which draws attention to how history is written and interpreted.

When *Los recuerdos del porvenir* was first published in 1963, Elena Garro, through her novel, implicitly questioned the role women had in two much recorded and interpreted conflicts in Mexican history: the Mexican Revolution and, chiefly, the *Cristero* Rebellion. Due to its brevity, the *Cristero* rebellion is seldom dealt with in historical accounts. Yet it resulted in a pivotal change in the relationship between the Catholic church and the Mexican state. David C. Bailey in *¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church and State Conflict in Mexico* described the *Cristero* Rebellion as the "climax" of "the longstanding enmity between Mexican Catholicism and the Mexican State."[9] The Rebellion was short-lived, lasting only three years, but led to a decisive separation of church and state. From early colonial

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rape: "Eran gobernistas que habían entrado por la fuerza y por la fuerza permanecían," *Los recuerdos*,15.

[9] David C. Bailey, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church and State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), xi. There are varied accounts of the Rebellion and much of what has been written is quite partisan. See J.A. Meyer, "La Cristiada" in *Extremos de México* (México D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1971) 225-240, and for a literary overview, see "La iglesia en México: 1926-1970" Olivera de Bonfil *op. cit.*.

times the Catholic church was a "powerful presence" in Mexico.[10] In 1826 Catholicism came under state protection, but over the centuries its fate was mixed, particularly under Benito Juarez's Liberal rule. The 1857 Constitution reduced the powers of the church, having already in 1855-1857 passed laws to reduce its economic and political powers by curbing its right to land ownership and access to wealth. Although some Catholic clerics backed Francisco Madero in 1911, the Church hierarchy was seen to be on the side of Díaz.[11] In December 1916, at Querétaro when the Constitutionalist movement created the 1917 Constitution, they limited and eliminated clerical involvement in public and political life e.g. clerics could not vote or join political parties, and education was secularised.[12] In reaction to these measures Catholic groups organised. Some were armed and carried out protests: erecting statues, storming churches, and holding marches.[13] As a result of an escalation of these activities, on February 17th 1926, the government Minister Adalberto Tejeda imposed article 130 of the constitution which ordered the expulsion of foreign clerics and the closure of convents and monasteries.[14] Later, in the same year, further articles were amended to the constitution which meant greater restrictions on the church. In reaction, the bishops voted to stop all public worship throughout Mexico, and called for an economic boycott to reduce consumption to a minimum. There were continued outbreaks of violence and disturbances, and priests were arrested and executed. As a result, Pedro Quintanar declared the start of the Rebellion. The Rebellion was patchy and often disorganised. The church and state's attempts to negotiate frequently collapsed.[15] The revolt collapsed by May 1929.[16] The *Cristero* Rebellion was a defeat for the church. It led to a separation of church and state, and reduced the status of the church in Mexico.

Ixtepec Narrating

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[10] Bailey, 4.
[11] *ibid.*, 18.
[12] *ibid.*, 23-24.
[13] *ibid.*, 33-64.
[14] *ibid.*, 64.
[15] There were "Feminine Brigades" who obtained and manufactured ammunition to distribute to the troops. Bailey mentions this briefly, saying that they were well organised clandestine organisation, 162, 236 and 291.
[16] *ibid.*, 244.

Garro represents the conflict in a highly subjective manner. Garro's subjectivity is not unusual. What is unusual about Garro's novel is that the town Ixtepec is the narrator who mediates this perspective. Marta Portal described Ixtepec as a "sujeto múltiple y totalizante"; it is multiple but I would not agree that it is totalising.[17] It is not all-seeing and all-knowing. It does not always tell what happened as a witness, but as a record of somebody else's version. A good example of this is the arrival of the "forastero" Felipe Hurtado. He is an enigma. When he is with the hotel owner, Don Pepe, cigarettes appear in his hand as if they had appeared out of nowhere: "Según se supo mucho después, don Pepe notó que los había extraído del aire" (44). If Ixtepec knows more it is not clear, but the reader is left with Don Pepe's version of events. Likewise, Julia's disappearance is shrouded in an air of mystery: time stands still in the town, and they remain suspended in night and movement is paused, until Julia and Felipe are at a safe distance (150).

The subject position of Ixtepec is never clear-cut. The narrative first person shifts from singular to plural. Portal explains the narrative "yo" of Ixtepec, saying that it works as a "contrasentido emocional: el yo confesional aleja y deteriora la comunicación, en tanto que los pronombres de la tercera persona operan con mayores posibilidades evocativas y solidarias".[18] Rather than having an intimate and personalising effect, which is the usual result in first person narratives, Ixtepec as narrator distances the reader, and the use of the first person plural pronoun has a universalising effect. It is more inclusive. 'I' the village is not as convincing as 'We' the people of Ixtepec. There is a different tone in two separate descriptions of Julia: "Desde la tarde que la vi desembarcar del tren militar, me pareció mujer de peligro" (42) and "En aquellos días Julia determinaba el destino de todos nosotros y lo culpábamos de la menor de nuestras desdichas" (27). The second "nosotros" carries with it the democratic power of the majority, which appears to have more authority than the first singular pronoun opinion of Ixtepec. Although the 'I' is part of the 'we', and the 'we' is the town (as is the 'I'), the 'we' is the voice of the people and the 'I' is the voice of the narrator, Ixtepec. Ixtepec uses the 'we' as a universalising voice. For example it says that "Su presencia no nos era grata" (15). It is apparent from this statement that the town has a definite ideological stance in the conflict. This attitude

[17] Portal, *Proceso op. cit.*, 224.
[18] *ibid.*, 225.

would appear to be pro-church and against the government forces who are represented as outsiders. In *Los recuerdos del porvenir* Garro has opened up the meanings of the overlapping pronouns leaving no space for absolute authority.

She also disrupts any assumptions the reader may have regarding whom Ixtepec is speaking for. The 'we' refers to 'mi gente'. But, even more problematically, there is a constant slippage as to who 'mi gente' are. In the opening pages of the novel Ixtepec says:

> Mi gente es morena de piel. Viste de manta blanca y calza huaraches. Se adorna con collares de oro o se ata al cuello un pañuelito de seda rosa. Se mueve despacio, habla poco y contempla el cielo. En las tardes, al caer el sol, canta (12).

This clearly refers to the indigenous. When Ixtepec refers to 'mi gente' who "aceptó la idea de la fiesta para el general Francisco Rosas", it is only referring to the elite who will be attending and not the servants who have to work to prepare for it. Ixtepec also refers to those who are looking forward to the play organised by Hurtado in Doña Matilde's house as 'mis gentes'. This clearly refers to those who will attend as spectators: "Era muy dulce saber que podíamos ser algo más que espectadores de la vida violenta de los militares" (125). The 'we' has moved from being the indigenous to signifying the upper class. There is also a significant point made here regarding the behaviour of the people in the first part of the novel. They are spectators: moving their gaze from the army to each other to the play. In a declaration of this passivity Ixtepec says in the early part of the novel "me vi invadido por el miedo y olvidé el arte de las fiestas" (14). Later in the novel, Ixtepec/we become capable of organising a party. This change does not happen unaided. It takes the influence of the outsider, Hurtado, for the townsfolk to consider themselves as active players in the events that are happening around them. There is then a shift in the narrative. The characters move from spectatorship to action.

There are distinct gender divides in the behaviour of the characters in the real drama of the war. The men who become actors, such as Juan and Nicolás, Isabel's brothers, have to leave the town, while the men who stay behind remain passive observers. Martín can only control subjective time: his past, present and future. Tomás Segovia and don Joaquín are portrayed as pathetic creatures who cry and fuss at the party looking to the women for comfort and decisions (204, 211 and passim).

In contrast, women are active. The very respectable doña Dorotea and the prostitutes, in an unlikely alliance, help save the priest from the army; women organised the party which was meant as a ruse to distract the army; and Isabel becomes the principal actor in the second part. Ixtepec is an unreliable and highly subjective narrator with whom Garro implicitly questions what is essentially knowable and who can speak for whom.

A more problematic aspect of the novel is not Ixtepec-as-narrator, but whom Ixtepec (Garro) has chosen as the protagonists of the period of time it is narrating. The novel is set during the *Cristero* Rebellion and has as its principal characters the women of the brothel ('cuscas'); the invading soldiers, in particular the general Francisco Rosas; and the Moncada family, principally Isabel and her brothers Juan and Nicolás. The novel, which Fernando Alegría described as "la voz de un pueblo iluminado, hallado y perdido" excludes the story of many.[19] Ixtepec is not an omniscient narrator as it fails to know what goes on outside of its own boundaries. The Zapatistas for example flee the town and go to "un lugar invisible para nuestros ojos" (15). It is subjective and objective at once, and object and subject of its own narrative. It's subjective, because it is narrating its own story, while this story also belongs to others; and it's objective due to the specific and complex relationship between space-time-memory of the town, which is there beyond and before the time of the narrative. Thus, it is capable of a distance and knowledge that encourages the reader to realise that the story is not unique but part of a multiplicity of other voices and stories from which it has distilled this one to narrate. This signifies that the present war is the return of yet another conflict to a place which has already seen many.

Ixtepec also provides its own analysis of its inhabitants' attitude to one another. There is a strong racial divide between its peoples:

> A los mestizos, el campo les producía miedo. Era su obra, la imagen de su pillaje. Había establecido la violencia y se sentían en una tierra hostil, rodeados de fantasmas. El orden de terror establecido por ellos los había empobrecido. De ahí provenía mi deterioro. <<¡Ah, si pudiéramos exterminar a todos los indios! ¡Son la vergüenza de México!>> Los indios callaban....Cuando se reunían [los mestizos] se miraban desconfiados, se sentían sin país y sin cultura, sosteniéndose

[19] Fernando Alegría, *Nueva historia de la novela hispanoamericana* (Hanover: Ediciones del norte, 1986), 277.

en unas formas artificiales, alimentadas sólo por el dinero mal habido.
Por su culpa mi tiempo estaba inmóvil.

The mestizos are guiltily aware of their ancestors' misappropriation of the land, and they blame the indigenous who, by their presence alone, remind the mestizos of the past violence. Yet Ixtepec gives voice to the mestizos and the indigenous are silent, shadows even ghosts. Consequently, the violence carried out by the mestizos on the indigenous is being repeated by the narrative violence of Ixtepec (Garro) who denies them their story. The mestizos, having robbed others, may be, according to Ixtepec, without their culture and country, and have stopped time through their violence, but the indigenous are outside of the narrative and can inspire little sympathy other than as victims. Garro has thus aligned Ixtepec with the coloniser and not the colonised. Ixtepec is implicated in this story of conquest and murder, while also being victim of others' violence. The arrival of Francisco Rosas can be likened to rape, since we ascribe human characteristics to the town as narrator. The soldiers "habían entrado por la fuerza y por la fuerza permanecían" (15).

"Tiempo inmovil" is a recurrent theme in the novel. Time is stultifying. Change is needed so that they may break out of the static time caused by the violence of the conquest. Ixtepec and its inhabitants wait passively for outside news to break it out of its "hechizo quieto" (36). Ana, Isabel's mother, lies in bed feeling "asfixiado por el tiempo quieto que vigilaba las puertas y las ventanas de su casa." She remembers her childhood and recalls the hopes she had for change, which the Revolution promised (37):

La premonición de una alegría desbarataba uno a uno los días petrificados. La Revolución estalló una mañana y las puertas del tiempo se abrieron para nosotros. En ese instante de esplendor sus hermanos se fueron a la sierra de chihuahua y más tarde entraron ruidosos en su casa, con botas y sombreros militares. Venían seguidos de oficiales y en la calle los soldados cantaban *La Adelita*.

Que si Adelita se fuera con otro
la seguiría por tierra y por mar,
si por mar en un buque de guerra
si por tierra en un tren militar...(37).

Although Ana is from the North, Ixtepec uses the word 'nosotros' referring to the aspirations of the Mexican people for change with the Revolution. Time would be altered. Ixtepec is not an isolated town, but feels solidarity with those outside of its

physical terrain. Ana's memory of the war is as a passive observer. She waited while her brothers went away to war; she watched the soldiers in the street, but she is not part of the war. For Ana and her mother and sisters the men fought in the Revolution. By including a verse of *La Adelita,* Garro is reminding the reader that there were other women who had different roles in the Revolution. *Soldaderas* like *La Adelita* played a part in the conflict. *La Adelita* is an idealised version of the textual Jesusa whose story, in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío,* I shall examine in chapter four. The verse sung by the soldiers represents *La Adelita* as a playful and elusive woman who is still subject to male gaze and is to be pursued by these soldiers. Garro draws attention to a very stereotypical image of women's involvement in the Revolution: either waiting in the home or accompanying the men as companions. This image contrasts with the representation of the female characters in the novel.

The aim of the Revolution was to shatter the petrified time they had lived in. Instead, their hopes of freedom were soon dashed by personal losses and the political corruption of post-Revolutionary politics. Garro presents a negative portrait of post-Revolutionary Mexico, far removed from the versions as represented in official narratives which claim it as progressive and genuinely revolutionary. In Ixtepec's opinion, the Revolution was a lost opportunity. Where it could have resulted in a break away from rigid historical time, it failed. Instead, it was but a brief respite and, ultimately resulted in a return to political, and temporal, stasis:

> Antes de cumplir los veinticinco años sus [Ana's] hermanos se fueron muriendo uno después de otro, en Chihuahua, en Torreón, en Zacatecas; y a Francisca, su madre, sólo le quedaron sus retratos y ella y sus hermanas enlutadas. Después, las batallas ganadas por la Revolución se deshicieron entre las manos traidoras de Carranza y vinieron los asesinos a disputarse las ganancias, jugando al dominó en los burdeles abiertos por ellos. Un silenco sombrío se extendió del Norte al Sur y el tiempo se volvió otra vez de piedra....Quizá aún podía suceder el milagro que cambiara la suerte de sangre que pesaba sobre nosotros (37-38).

Garro, through Ixtepec and Ana, is making a very bleak reading of the Revolution. Their desire for change was shattered, and all they now do is passively wait for another break from old time. Ana hopes for an earthquake to break the silence and stagnancy (38), and her son shouts out: "Yo no quepo en este cuerpo" (37).

Garro views history as myth. According to Bautista Gutiérrez, myth has an important role in Mexico and that Garro uses it to explore:

> ...la herencia mexicana a través de mitos, y que la literatura es la expresión mitológica de una cultura. El mito permite al escritor explorar todos los aspectos y niveles de la realidad haciéndola universal y veraz. El mito también permite al mexicano resolver algunos conflictos de su herencia dualista, por medio de la reconstrucción mítica de una realidad objetiva. [20]

To mix telling the history of a conflict with myth (storytelling) has the function of assisting in the quest for an objective truth. In turn, writing history as a mythical process draws attention to writing as a fictional artefact not as truth telling. According to many contemporary historians, history is not truth telling but a story told from a specific perspective which is necessarily exclusive. The historian Hayden White describes the selection and description of one chronicle and series of events over another in history writing as "emplotment".[21] Hayden White writes in a footnote that:

> The events reported in a novel can be invented in a way that they cannot be (or are not supposed to be) in a history. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the chronicle of the events and the story being told in a literary fiction....Unlike the novelist, the historian confronts a veritable chaos of events already constituted, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting a story of a particular kind. That is to say, he "emplots" his story".[22]

White's theory suggests that writing fact and fiction are similar exercises, perhaps with different intentions. While the historian's intention is to provide factual information, the novelist deliberately creates an imagined reality, albeit one that may be factually based. The fiction writer has no obligation to be absolutely consistent with facts, while the historian does. White's theory reflects a postmodernist suspicion

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[20] *Voces femeninas de Hispanoamérica* edited by Gloria Bautista Gutiérrez (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 130.

[21] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe.* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins U.P., 1993), 6.

of any writers' claim to be the bearer of universal truths. Naturally, Garro is writing fiction, and consequently, she has the freedom to invent, to twist the facts as they suit her novel and the process of conscious storytelling. But, when dealing with a complex historical event such as the Mexican Revolution, rather than simply the narration of personal incidents in the lives of individuals, there is a certain responsibility to be consistent with actual historical truths. Of course, as White would understand it, there are no fixed historical truths, just versions of history constituted from the information at hand to the historian. In turn, Garro has to contend with the many fictional accounts of the Revolution and the popular and official versions of the Revolution which exist in Mexico.[23] Consequently, the act of writing a fictional account of such a significant historical event, is necessarily problematic for the writer. Throughout the novel, Garro shows that she is aware of this difficult relationship between historical verity and the act of fictional creation. By employing and foregrounding the fuzzy lens of memory - "yo sólo soy memoria y la memoria de mí se tenga" (12) - Garro is drawing attention to the historical novel as a highly subjective retelling of events.[24]

Public/Private Women

Garro uses the domestic or private space and problematises it by investing her female characters with a challenging complexity. As I have already discussed in chapter 1 and as I will further develop in chapter 5, Jean Franco, in *Plotting Women,* has observed how women in Mexico are only permitted to inhabit the private sphere, that is the domestic space of the home, and how it is the only one in which women yield power. This power is problematic and severely limited, as all spaces are governed by rules and assumptions.

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[22] *Ibid.*, 6.

[23] Again, Olivera de Bonfil explains the difficulties faced when talking about history in Mexico: "Al hablar de Historia en México, no puede uno referirse a una historia, sino a varias, según el sentido que se le dé a la palabra: entre otras, la que han hecho los vencedores y la que han hecho los vencidos. Y esto sólo en términos generales, ya que hay otras: por ejemplo, las que han sido elaboradas en cada una de las numerosas localidades que existen en la República mexicana y que al hablar de su propia región o de sus héroes particulares, apartan versiones diferentes a las que nos dan las historias nacionales", in Wilkie et al. *op. cit.,* 297.

[24] James Mandrell, "The Prophetic Voice in Garro, Morante and Allende" in *Comparative Literature* Summer 42.3 (1990) 227-246 reads *Los Recuerdos* as a dystopian historical novel which implicitly

> ...the term 'private' covers so many contradictory meanings...it refers to the feminine space of reproduction as against the masculine space of production; it refers to private life as the space of the self as against social space, to private enterprise against the state, domesticity as against action in the world, a household or private space as against public sphere.[25]

In a macho world women have become prisoners in their own homes. Franco has drawn attention to the way public and private spaces are imbued with meaning. A woman's space is in the private and when she transgresses this space, she becomes a public woman, implicitly a prostitute. Garro breaks down this dyad and examines the limitations of women's lives irrespective of space. Julia is a 'public woman' who is represented in a sympathetic light. In contrast, Isabel is first shown to be uncomfortable in the private spaces of her prison-like home, and is vilified by the community when she later moves into the public sphere and acts to attempt to save her brothers. The reader gets access to the private insecurities of Garro's female characters because Ixtepec is a witness to all aspects of their lives. It is not just a public space; it is also privilege to the private spaces. This is manifest in different ways in the narrative. The widow Elvira becomes obsessed with her mirror image because, whilst married to her husband, she "había olvidado hasta de su propia imagen" (30). Doña Matilde cannot leave her house and grounds, and fears going to funerals because she laughs at the faces of the dead. Marriage had destroyed her confidence: "De joven, doña Matilde fue alegre y turbulenta....Los años de casada, el silencio y la soledad de una casa hicieron de ella una vieja risueña y apacible. Perdió la facilidad para tratar a las gentes..." (54). She has been pacified and domesticated, thus making her socially inept. Marriage is represented negatively for women. They become trapped and insecure, losing their sense of self. Through the character Isabel, Garro explores the dual self caused by societal expectations of women's behaviour, also exhibited in other female characters. She experiences a doubling of her self: on the one hand she must conform to external social normative codes of behaviour and on the other she has an internal desire to express her individuality. Ixtepec is witness to and tells of Isabel's two selves:

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calls for radical social change through the use of Ixtepec as the subjective mediator of the narrative of history.

[25] Jean Franco, "Afterword: From Romance to Refractory Aesthetic" in Brooksbank Jones and Davies, *op. cit.*, 231

> ...una que deambulaba por los patios y las habitaciones y la otra que vivía en una esfera lejana, fija en el espacio. Supersticiosa, tocaba los objetos para comunicarse con el mundo aparente y cogía un libro o un salero como punto de apoyo para no caer en el vacío (31-32).

Isabel is divided into two: one present and the other absent. She tries to use the physical objects around her to cling to the present "mundo aparente". As an inversion of accepted perception of reality, the physical world around her is only an apparent reality, which functions to keep her two selves connected. Her split personality is caused by a society which insists on rigid conformism. She has become divided by a need to present one outside self, while knowing that she has other needs, both physical and intellectual, which if revealed to the outside world would counter social mores.

These women may hide in their homes, wander secretively around their gardens, or perform silent and mysterious rituals, but Ixtepec is party to these and invites the reader to observe and realise the significance of this behaviour. They are all women who have created ways of surviving the strict social limitations placed on their lives by society's rules. It is in the time of conflict, when these rules have broken down that individuals, such as Isabel, escape the strictures of their existence. But her escape has ambiguous results. She becomes General Rosas' lover. He later kills her brother, and she turns to stone (or maybe not).

The ending is left deliberately ambiguous, as the reader is brought back to the beginning of the narrative and reminded that this is fiction. Thus we must struggle to comprehend the significance of this fantastic ending.[26] The final passage of the novel is a transcription of the inscription on the stone declaring itself to be Isabel Moncada. Isabel had disappeared and in her place is the "piedra aparente" of the opening passage which is revealed to be flesh turned stone:

> Soy Isabel Moncada, nacida de Martín Moncada y de Ana Cuétara de Moncada, en pueblo de Ixtepec el primero de 1907. En piedra me

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[26] Daniel Balderston, "The New Historical Novel: History and Fantasy in *Los recuerdos del porvenir*" *BHS* LXVI (1989) claims that Garro's use of the fantastic "call the reader's attention to the mediate character of literature, as Borges would say, evoking, not direct impressions of past experience, but a reflection of and on it...the presence of the fantastic elements...break the seemingly historicist and realist scheme of *Los recuerdos del porvenir*", 42.

> convertí el 5 de octubre de 1927 delante de los ojos espantados de Gregoria Juárez. Causé la desdicha de mis padres y la muerte de mis hermanos Juan y Nicolás. Cuando venía a pedirle a la Virgen que me curara del amor que tengo por el general Francisco Rosas, que mató a mis hermanos, me arrepentí y preferí el amor del hombre que me perdió y que perdió a mi familia. Aquí estaré con mi amor a solas como recuerdo del porvenir por los siglos de los siglos (300-301).

The inscription raises more questions than it answers, and is a deliberately ambiguous and fantastic ending to the novel. From whose point of view is this written? Although it is in the first person, and, even given that it is the ending to a novel which has pushed out the realms of the possible, can the reader really accept that it is an inscription by Isabel? If not, who decided to provide this version of events and why? It appears to be a further displacement of responsibility. If Julia was the focus of the town's attention and a focus for its anxieties in the first half of the novel, Isabel can be blamed in the second half for the death of her brothers and the shame brought upon her family. From the events in the novel, the reader knows that it was the involvement by Juan and Nicolás in the rebellion which brought about their deaths. The invocation of "la Virgen" seems misplaced and biased. Isabel – although she fulfills her weekly duty by attending mass - did not show any particular evidence of being religious. Thus, it would appear that the inscription was written by someone who was pro-church in the rebellion, and wished to provide a didactic moral parable, using Isabel's story as a lesson in the consequences of immoral behaviour. On the stone, she has been cast as a *Malinche* figure who can be blamed for the downfall of her family because of what is suggested is her sexual amorality and lack of self control. This is a simplistic assessment, as I will examine later. She has become the symbolic focus of the failure of the Rebellion. Through this inscription Garro shows how accounts can change and events can be interpreted to suit the teller. Isabel has become the culprit who can be blamed for the town's failure to break out of the eternal cycle of wars. But the events in the novel do not appear to measure up to what has been inscribed on the stone. Garro is thereby drawing attention to the tensions between the actual events, as they occurred in the novel, and the 'official' history as inscribed on the stone.

Garro writes to contest traditional views of women's behaviour. Sandra Cypess Messinger explains Garro's aim in writing:

> Her women struggle toward new possibilities by attempting to abolish the older, limiting pattern of behavior and thereby become independent of previous cultural structures. The attitude implicit in her texts is that transformations of reality are possible and new patterns of behavior can be formed.[27]

The conflict in Mexico breaks up social patterns sufficiently to allow Isabel to behave in an unorthodox fashion. But, there are also rules which govern social behaviour in conflict as Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood explain:

> Powerful discourses of nationhood link women and men to the nation in highly gendered ways, simultaneously fractured through complex relations of sexuality. Being one key effect of power, gendered bodies are subject to the creation of 'nationalized' behaviours and representations...However, the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities existing in the national space provide no closure for official accounts of 'national' men and women, being constantly reconstituted and reformulated"[28]

As I examined in chapter 1, concepts such as the nation and nationality, because they are called into question by war, are necessarily given strict definitions by each side in a conflict. But it is male roles which are directly identified with the conflict. For example, in the revolution there were the Zapatistas who figured as poor farm labourers touting guns for the first time; the Villistas who were professional bandits turned war heroes and so on. Women, on the other hand, did not have easily identifiable models to follow. Instead, they have specific responsibilities to the cause. Radcliffe and Westwood continue to explain:

> In early [Mexican] nationalism, indigenous femininity symbolized treachery and conquest of nationhood, with the rich imagery of La *Malinche* simultaneously representing gender, 'race' and colonial subalternity. By the time of the Mexican revolution, women generally were perceived by the revolutionary spokespeople to be the ones 'taming' rebellious and unruly men.[29]

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[27] Sandra Cypess Messinger, "The Figure of La *Malinche* in the Texts of Elena Garro," in Stoll, *op. cit.*, 134.
[28] Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), 134.
[29] *ibid.*, 136.

Garro does not conform to this notion of women as having an ability to 'tame' men. In particular, in the character of Julia, the reader is continually reminded of how her relationship with General Rosas is a source of constant disquiet to him: "Era ése su dolor irremediable: no poder ver lo que vivía dentro de ella" (82); and "oyó venir a ese mundo vasto que se escondía detrás de su frente. Su frente era un muro altísimo que la separaba de él" (83 and passim). Julia disquiets him due to her independence and silence.

While men are unproblematically associated with the nation and nation-building, women's role is different:

> Although at times becoming icons of Latin American nations, female subjects remain associated with the maternal attachments and private spaces through which women have experienced familial and wider power relations....The paradox of being both at the centre and at the margins of the national imagined community simultaneously disempowers women and offers them the fragile possibility for re-imagining and re-positioning themselves.[30]

It is therefore problematic that many critics use rigid and traditional paradigms when discussing Garro's work. Prostitutes are always *Malinche* figures.[31] Single virgins are Virgin Mary figures. This practice seems merely to limit interpretations to the female characters' sexual behaviour. Have Isabel or Julia become *Malinche* figures simply by becoming General Rosas' lovers? Their relationships with him would appear to be much more problematic than the *Malinche* myth would allow. A better interpretation is that Garro is playing with this rather conservative reading. The *Malinche* figure has multiple meanings, which can be too easily applied to any female behaviour that can be described as exceptional and, as a consequence, it is not a very useful tool for extirpating meaning.[32] Instead, using these figures merely serves to cloud meaning in another layer of myth and stereotype. According to Sandra Cypess

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[30] *ibid.*, 158-159.

[31] Sandra Cypess Messinger describes *Malinche* as "a historical figure who has become one of the major archetypes of Mexican and Latin American feminine imagery, a polysemous sign whose meanings, for all their ambiguity, are generally negative." According to Sandra Cypess Messinger in "The Figure of La *Malinche* in the Texts of Elena Garro": "Garro's thematic preoccupation with the presence of the past in the present time also informs her portrayal of women in that she characterizes Mexican women as *Malinche* figures", 133. Cypess Messinger is author of a book-length study *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: from History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

[32] Others such as Carmelo Virgillo and Naomi Lindstorm would disagree with this viewpoint, *Woman as Myth and Metaphor in Latin American Literature* (Colombia; University of Missouri Press, 1985).

Messinger's definition of *Malinche,* she always bears negative connotations. But neither Julia nor Isabel is portrayed purely negatively. They are, in fact, described quite sympathetically by the narrator, Ixtepec. Ana Moncada blames Julia for being a bad influence "¡Julia tiene la culpa de que los niños se vayan tan lejos y solos en medio de los peligros de los hombres y las tentaciones del demonio!" (27). Two pages later she is "la querida de Ixtepec" (29). The very temporality of "en aquellos días" suggests a later change in attitude, as is revealed subsequently in the novel, when the inhabitants help her escape (148-149).

Garro places a problematic figure at the centre of the first part of the novel. Julia is a radical central character. She is admired by the women and desired by the men. She becomes a metaphor for the town's silent resistance to the General and his occupying troops. Although she is the General's lover, he does not have any power over her, and, ultimately, she escapes. While her actions are aspirational, (she manages to do what others in the novel wish to do and escapes) what is known about her is only what Ixtepec observes. The narrator watches her behaviour, wonders at her, but does not get inside her mind. But, as Debra A. Castillo has pointed out, Julia's "unknowability, her unreality feed her attraction."[33] She is all the more desirable because she keeps her distance from others. Thus, she can be invented by others to be what they need her to be: victim or temptress, beautiful object, or the one responsible for the terrors inflicted by the soldiers.

Garro's representation of the other 'public women', the prostitutes is also sympathetic. She does not condemn their behaviour. Instead she portrays them as victims of circumstances. They are from deprived economic backgrounds, and had no options but to become prostitutes. The numbers of prostitutes increased dramatically after the Revolution because of the large displacement of population, increased number of women as sole earners in families and the slow economic development in the period after the Revolution which failed to provide alternative sources of income.[34] In *Los recuerdos del porvenir* the prostitutes are prisoners in the brothel, a fact brought home to them after a failed attempt to emulate Julia's actions:

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[33] Debra A. Castillo, *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 84.

[34] Due to the illicit nature of prostitution, and the shame felt by many forced in such employment, it has proved difficult for historians to calculate accurately the numbers working in prostitution. For further details on prostitution during and after the Revolution, see Castillo, María R. González *Imagen de la prostituta en la novela mexicana contemporánea* (Madrid: Editorial pliegos, 1996); Frederick C.

> Y miraron los muros del cuarto que las tenía prisioneras. No podían escapar a sus amantes. La nostalgia por la libertad que unos momentos antes las había dejado perplejas se volvió intolerable y el Hotel Jardín [the brothel] las llenó de terror (243).

Julia is shown to be exceptional and the other women cannot escape. Her departure affects the women's lives. They avoid any contact with General Rosas' and they all become depressed, no longer wanting to sing or talk (153-155). The prostitutes are shown to have very little solidarity among themselves. They are jealous of Julia, and one of the women, Luisa, tries to get Julia in trouble (128). Although they are accompanying the soldiers, the prostitutes are shown to have more in common with the people of Ixtepec than the soldiers. They help save padre Beltrán. Although, while doing so La Luchi realises that her life is worth little and is easily sacrificed by others who need her help: "¿Qué vale la vida de una puta?" (230). In the novel, Garro draws attention to the difficult lives these women live, as well as introducing greater complexity into their characterisation.

The doubling of the two narratives allows, even encourages, comparison between Julia and Isabel. The two narratives are concerned with their different relationship with General Rosas. From the beginning of the novel, Julia is presented as both desirable sexual being and focus for the town's frustrations at its inability to act. Isabel's physical attributes are not dwelt upon. While Isabel is meandering through her house, rejecting her mother's plans to marry her off and observing her brothers as they leave for battle, we gain some insight into her character. Yet, Julia is unknowable. According to archetype, she should be the fallen, powerless, public woman sor Juana defended in "Hombres necios". Instead, Julia "refuses to be 'seduced' by the general's power, while the respectable, upper-class woman Isabel 'prostitutes' herself for power, becoming a substitute for Julia with whom Rosas is obsessed".[35] Jehenson suggests that Isabel then becomes a "latter-day Malinche".[36]

Turner in "Los efectos de la participación femenina en la revolución de 1910" *Historia mexicana.* V:LXIV:4 (1967): 603-620; Shirlene Ann Soto *The Mexican Woman: A Study of Her Participation in the Revolution, 1910-1940* (Palo Alto: R and E. Pubs, 1979); Angeles Mendieta Alatorre in *La mujer en la Revolución mexicana*, (México: Biblioteca del instituto nacional de estudios historicos de la revolución mexicana, 1961); and Anna Macías *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982).

[35] Myriam Yvonne Jehenson, *Latin American Women Writers: Class, Race, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 130.

This is a limited reading. Isabel's action is not a betrayal, although it is subsequently re-inscribed as such on the 'piedra aparente'. It appears to be her attempt to battle both the social mores - sleeping with the enemy as an act of rebellion - and a failed attempt to save her brothers' lives.

Both Isabel and Julia go against the status quo. Isabel goes to live with General Rosas while Julia leaves him to gain freedom. I have already examined the mysterious circumstances of Julia's departure. Yet, she remains present to Rosas when he is with Isabel: "La silueta rosada de Julia se interpuso entre él y la joven [Isabel] que lo miraba rencorosa, adivinando sus pensamientos" (252). His first reaction, when he wakes up beside Isabel is to send her home. But it is made explicit that Isabel has a symbolic function in Rosas's plans. She is his. He controls Ixtepec because he has total control over the Moncada family: "Juan estaba muerto y Nicolás en la cárcel...pensó [lying in bed, with Isabel beside him] en el triunfo total sobre Ixtepec" (252). Isabel's subversive act does not liberate her. For the town she becomes a symbol of their defeat. The hotel owner declares "¡Sucedió algo terrible!" (244). In contrast, Julia's escape gives the town hope. As characters who capture the imagination and attention of the town because of their uniqueness, they also function symbolically in the text for the inhabitants of the town. This is not to say that they are just symbols. Instead, it is because of their complexity and the fact that their actions and behaviours fall outside of the norm, they both represent change and release from the town's captors. To an extent this is also a result of the doubling technique. Julia is admired from afar, and is seen as belonging to Rosas. Then she escapes, giving hope to the town. Subsequently, Isabel is seen to dance with the General, and then goes to live with him. Although she is not shown to be subject to the male gaze and voyeuristic commentary to the same extent that Julia is, we are told that she is beautiful (245) and has many male admirers (see for example 204). Therefore, for the town Isabel is one woman replacing another of roughly equivalent worth. Implicitly, where Julia succeeded Isabel too shall succeed. But the ending belies this hope. Isabel's petrification is stasis for the town. She cannot save anyone, nor can she escape from the town. She chose Rosas. She is sleeping with an enemy who neither respects nor desires her. She is a mere substitute who can be cast aside when she has outlived her usefulness. Therefore, Garro draws attention to the limitation of woman

[36] *ibid.*, 130.

as symbol. The reasons for Isabel's actions are never fully known. But it appears evident that she is acting out of personal interest: either an aborted attempt to save her brother or out of love for Rosas.[37] She does not have the town's interest at heart. Garro is employing female characters who could have been cast as *Malinche* figures. Through various narrative and stylistic techniques - the narrative doubling, the ways in which the town places their hopes on Isabel, and Rosas' claims to have power over the town through control over Isabel - Garro subverts the traditional symbolic representation of women in Mexican literature.

How violence is acted out by Rosas on the townsfolk is tied to the two women differentially. If Julia is read as the "concrete embodiment of an unspeakable real invading the heart of the town" and Isabel becomes her "displaced representative", then, the way Rosas reacts to their presence/absence in his life is significant.[38] Rosas takes out his frustrations at being unable to possess Julia, "no logra penetrar en la intimidad espiritual de su amada, e intenta la búsqueda desesperada de ella a través de la violencia".[39] He takes out his amorous frustration of others "particulariza la violencia en los lugares transitados por su querida".[40] In contrast, Isabel makes herself available to him. She is knowable, which is not what he wants of her. Implicitly, Garro is saying that one woman cannot replace another. They are not akin to commodities or units of exchange. Isabel may take Julia's place, but she is not Julia. Nor does Rosas accept her as an equivalent. The violence acted out on her brothers is outside of her control, and is carried out, not because of, but despite, her actions.

As I have already addressed in chapter 2, Garro's principal female characters are comparable to Rulfo's Susana. They are highly sexual individuals. Whereas Susana has to sink into madness to assert this sexuality, Julia has certain - albeit limited - control. Her power is passive. It is not about physical strength, but emotional strength. If she does not have the power to deny sex to Rosas, then she can deny him emotions. In that context, her relationship with Felipe Hurtado can only be understood as one in which she is a willing participant. Garro shows that 'public'

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[37] For commentary on Isabel's reasons, see Luz Elena Gutiérrez de Velasco, "Elena Garro: entre la originalidad y la persecución" http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1998/ago98/980830/sem-garro.html.
[38] Castillo, *Easy Women*, 86.
[39] Cristina Galli, "Las Formas de la violencia en 'Los recuerdos del porvenir'" *Revista Iberoamericana* LVI.150 Enero-Marzo (1990), 216.
[40] *ibid.*, 217.

women do have power. They may have had to submit to certain men in order to survive. However, they have an ability to usurp that power when given the opportunity, as is seen both in Julia's escape and the other prostitutes' rebellion. In chapter 5, I will examine how power relations between men and women, and the controls of the rule of law can extend to the body. The body, and its activities *vis à vis* sexuality, is a site of control and contestation. Through the sympathetic portrayal of transgressive behaviour, or activities which a hypocritical society would prefer to pretend do not exist, Garro is drawing attention to the human pain and anguish which lie behind the veneer of respectability in society.

Time: History, Myth or Fiction

In *Los recuerdos del porvenir,* Elena Garro explores the disruptiveness of an interrupted or altered sense of time, as well as its potential for both liberation and entrapment. In the novel form, an author's control of time is an integral part of the artifice. The author must create a sense of time and period which is separate from the real time in which the reader reads the printed word. The writer is also permitted to jump from a supposed present to the past and onward to the future, without any sense of disorientation on the part of the reader. The difference with Garro's text lies in her foregrounding of time as a thematic and stylistic feature. In the novel there is a dual concept of time: firstly the linear narrative of the love story which functions within an understood novel time and secondly the narrator's and characters' heightened awareness of time. Garro's use of time is influenced by many factors: her exposure to surrealism; indigenous Mayans' cyclical time; Western concepts of time; and finally the complex interrelation between time, the retelling of historical process and the narrative construction of the nation.[41] I shall deal individually, and in brief, with the significance of each of these different concepts of time in Garro's novel.

Throughout Garro's writing she has explored and questioned the universal givens of time and reality. While many of Garro's novels are realist in form, she has been highly experimental in her quest to explore the edges of meaning and the impossibility of a totalising representation. A case in point is her novel, *Testimonios sobre Mariana,* which appears to be semi-autobiographical. The novel is divided into

[41] See Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (London & New York, Routledge: 1990).

three sections. Each has a separate narrator, who recounts the story of Mariana, a Latin American exile, who has recently separated from a renowned academic. Mariana lives in Paris with her child. The three accounts do not provide a complete picture of Mariana and posit questions on the impossibility of representing or knowing another's life story. In *Y matarazo no llamó...* the central character, a grey bureaucrat becomes involved in an anti-government organisation.[42] Yet, he seems unable to gain any significant knowledge of others' lives and is displaced from the events in which he is a participant. These are but two examples of the recurring themes of displacement and the impossibility of representation, which run through Garro's extensive catalogue of work. In contrast, in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* by using the town as narrator it is suggested that the history and story of the town are knowable. The apparently totalising project Garro engaged in, of writing a town's story using the period of the *Cristero* rebellion as a pivotal and tangential moment in its history, shows reality is unknowable in any absolute way. Events may repeat themselves, time may be circular, yet all that happens cannot be known. There is no satisfactory closure to either Julia or Isabel's stories. The characters' displacement from reality - for example in their inability to connect with or put a fix on time – appears to be not a function of the reality of the place Ixtepec, but a result of political disturbances and terrible events which occur in individuals' lives. For example, Martin's distorted sense of time and his desire to control it, is as a result of seeing an indigenous man hanging when he was a child, and not because time *per se* is disrupted.

Garro was married to Octavio Paz when she wrote this novel. They lived in Mexico, Spain and Paris surrounded by writers and artists.[43] The couple were close acquaintances of André Breton and his coterie of Surrealists.[44] Paz is considered to

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[42] Elena Garro, *Y matarazo no llamó...* (México: Grijalbo, (1989) 1996).

[43] For an insight into this period of Garro's life her novel *Testimonios de Mariana* is a complex examination of outsiders' attitudes to the wife of an esteemed academic from three perspectives. The novel can be read as a fictionalised autobiography.

[44] Much has been written on the Surrealists as they were both polemical and prolific. Mary Ann Caws' *A Metapoetics of the Passage: Architextures in Surrealism and After.* (Hanover and London: University of New England, 1981), Anna Balakian's *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), J.H. Mathews' *Surrealism and the Novel* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), Stefan Baciu's *Antología de la poesía surrealista latinoamericana* (Valparaiso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaiso: 1981) and J.L. Gimenez-Frontin's *El surrealismo: en torno al movimiento bretoniano* (Barcelona: Montesinos, 1983) are starting points for any insight into the complexity of the movement and its influences on Latin American writers.

have been the foremost Surrealist poet in Mexico. The Surrealists were formally and stylistically experimental writers trying to explore the human psyche, and question the limitations of the conscious, in comparison to what they saw to be the limitless and rich resource of the subconscious. In their view, creativity is derived from the subconscious. The conscious mind is too beset by daily preoccupations and rules for literary or artistic creation. Anything which creates limits – and time by its nature sets limitations and boundaries, standardising, cataloguing, and controlling every moment of everyday - is restrictive, and it is the artists' aim to liberate themselves from such constraints.[45] The familiar melting clocks of Salvador Dali, a pre-eminent Surrealist, is a visual representation of how time can be literally malleable rather than rigid and purely functional. Dali's clocks serve as a fitting visual clue to Garro's complex use of time in *Los recuerdos del porvenir*. Instead of accepting everyday objects and limits as they were, Surrealists turned them on their heads, and created a sense of 'étrangement'. Whether Surrealists employed time as a central thematic element to the extent that Garro did has not been adequately studied, but the concept of breaking the boundaries of the everyday is essentially Surrealist in origin.

While Garro was influenced by Surrealism, *Los recuerdos del porvenir* can be probably best described - insofar as it is a text which resists categorisation - as Magic Realist. In Latin America, Magic Realism grew out of close contact with Surrealism. Alejo Carpentier compares and links it to the European Baroque, and his "real maravilloso" emerged from his time spent in Paris amongst the Surrealists.[46] Frida Kahlo in *Time* magazine in 1953 defended her art as a reflection of her own reality: "They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my

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[45] As Mary Ann Caws explains it: "To be surrealistically valid, an act, whether linguistic, moral or political, must throw off its past charge, adapting a position always primary. The accent falls on beginning, never on completion, on transformation rather than on stability" *Metapoetics*, 4.

[46] Carpentier was to dismiss the Surrealists as: "never more than a literary ruse, just as boring in the end as the literature that is oneiric by arrangement" in "On the Marvellous Real in America" *Magical Realism: Theory, History Community* edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham & London: Duke U.P., 1995), 86. For a discussion of a comparison between the Baroque and *lo real maravilloso*, see Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real" in Parkinson Zamora and Faris. Much has been written on Magical Realism in Latin America, Parkinson Zamora and Faris' text is a good point of departure. See also Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985). Fernando Alegría stated that "es una tentación decir que la novela de Elena Garro queda como una extraña partitura que García Márquez años después ejecutó a gran orquesta" 277. This has been interpreted as an insulting remark by some critics such as Gerald Martin *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (New York & London: Verso, 1989) suggesting that creating a great score is an inferior achievement to the interpretation of that score.

own reality."[47] She claimed that her art was intended as a representation of actual reality in Mexico, denying that she was a Surrealist. Garro's decision to use the town as narrator and to present its story is not Surrealist, but an act of political Magical Realism.[48] Magic Realism is often misunderstood and believed to be a fantastic form, showing Latin American reality to be other. Far from showing a mythical place full of monsters, giants and fantastic creatures, Magic Realist authors have written about extraordinary things, which frequently soften the horrors contained within the narrative. An example of this in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* is Isabel's conversion to stone. She is punished in a fantastic way for the betrayal of her family, and what is presented as her moral digression (becoming General Rosas' lover). Like *Los recuerdos del porvenir,* the characters in Magic Realist novels are self-consciously aware of the strangeness of their surroundings. Gabriel García Márquez was very clear in his Nobel prize acceptance speech that Magic Realism engages directly with Latin American reality. He described it as "una realidad que no es la del papel, sino que vive con nosotros y determina cada instante de nuestras incontables muertas cotidianas, y que sustenta un manantial de creación insaciable, pleno de desdicha y de belleza."[49] García Márquez describes everyday life in Latin America as absurd. He is echoing Kahlo's assertion that she is not a Surrealist. Instead, for both of them it is Latin American (or specifically Mexican in her case) reality which may appear surreal to outsiders. While influenced by her time amongst the Surrealists, Garro's Magic Realism is comparable to García Márquez and Kahlo's aesthetics and their belief that Latin American reality is surreal.

The examples of regimes controlling time in Cambodia and France show how crucial time is to the formation of a sense of political and national identity.[50] In Cambodia the dictator Pol Pot called day one of his regime year zero.[51] On the other

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[47] Frida Kahlo, "They Thought I was a Surrealist" *Time* April 27 (1953): 46.

[48] Frederic Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film" *Critical Inquiry* 12 Winter (1986) explained Carpentier's 'marvelous real': "Carpentier, however, explicitly staged his version as a more authentic Latin American realization of what in the more reified European context took the form of surrealism; his emphasis would seem to have been on a certain poetic transfiguration of the object world itself – not so much a fantastic narrative, then as a metamorphosis in perception and in things perceived", 301.

[49] Gabriel García Márquez in "La soledad de América Latina" *Conferencia Nobel*, 8 December 1982.

[50] The French didn't strictly speaking define themselves as a nation. But the French Revolution is considered to be the point of origin of modern France as a nation see Michael Ignatieff *Blood and Belonging Journeys into the New Nationalism* (Berkshire: Vintage, 1994) and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York & London: Verso, 1996).

[51] John Pilger, *Heroes* (London: Pan Books, 1989), 385-413.

side of the world two hundred years earlier, after the French Revolution, the Convention Nationale broke with the Christian calendar and brought in a "new world-era with the Year One."[52] Neither regime coincided ideologically, but both knew the force and potency of controlling time, in and after conflict. The historian Benedict Anderson considers that the creation of the concept of nationhood was made possible by what Walter Benjamin called "homogenous, empty time". Anderson explained the significance of time to national identity: "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history."[53] In the novel Ixtepec functions as an allegory for the Mexican nation. It is significant that Garro set the novel during the *Cristero* Rebellion, as it was the final conflict in the Mexican Revolution. Although it is still highly contested whether the Mexican Revolution was a genuine break with the old order, it is widely taken to be the zero hour of the modern Mexican nation state.[54] As a consequence, since the end of the Revolution, particularly from the 1930s onwards, the Revolution has been used as a backdrop for many fictional works.[55] Such texts have been created to work through the significance of the Revolution as it relates to the ever-evolving sense of Mexican national identity. Not only did the Mexican Revolution signal the start of the political status quo. But, we might say that the potent mix of mythology and historical fact surrounding the different factions in the Revolution has led to contested concepts of Mexican-ness.[56] As quoted in chapter 2, Portal considers time to be one

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[52] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, London & New York: (1983) revised 1996), 193.

[53] *ibid.*, 26.

[54] It is possible to find strong opinion on both sides of the argument. Particularly noteworthy are those who do not recognise that a debate exists. For examples of the diverse opinions, see Fuentes, Rutherford etc.

[55] Although the first novels emerged in 1927, the *novela de la Revolución* did not take off as a publishing phenomenon until the 1930s thanks to the efforts of the then Minister for Culture José Vasconcelos. See Adalbert Dessau, *La novela de la revolución mexicana* (Fondo de cultura económica, Mexico D.F.: 1972); John Rutherford, *Mexican Society During the Revolution* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1971); John S. Brushwood "Literary Periods in Twentieth-Century Mexico" in. *Contemporary Mexico* edited by James W. Wilkie et al. (University of California Press, Berkeley & London: 1976); and Elvia Montes de Oca Navas, *Protagonistas de las novelas de la revolución* (Instituto mexiquense de cultura, Toluca: 1996) for an overview of the novelas de la revolución.

[56] It is remarkable in Mexico that the victors the Partido Revolucionario Independiente (PRI) employ revolutionary language, and have institutionalised the processes of change brought about by the Revolution. Yet, the only thing that has changed in Mexico, up to the 2000 elections, has been the party figurehead, due to a constitutional rule not allowing the same person to hold the office of president for more than one term. The PRI, which considers itself to be the longest ruling democratically elected party in the world, has held onto its power largely through corruption and

of the common themes of the *novela de la Revolución*. Juan Rulfo's narrative can be seen as one such example.

Standardised Western time has governed everyday life from the industrial age onwards.[57] It dictates our waking, sleeping, working and leisure hours. Without it, there is a sense of displacement and unease, and this is what Garro explores through her characters. It is noteworthy that the name of the novel comes from the name of a bar in the Cuban jungle in the novel *Los pasos perdidos* by Alejo Carpentier.[58] Carpentier's protagonist sheds his watch, a potent symbol of Western time and culture, as he attempts to cast off European civilisation and embrace indigenous culture. He ultimately fails, due to his inability to recover the eponymous lost steps which are his efforts to deny himself and become other, rather than attempt a melding of the two cultures: European and Indigenous. *Los recuerdos del porvenir* is the narration of a portion of time, a glimpse at a period of conflict within the history of a town, in which time turns in on itself, and repeats itself in a circular motion reminiscent of the Mayan rather than Hispanic (Western) concept of time. In an interview with Roberto Páramo in 1976 Elena Garro explained that:

> ...me ha interesado sobre todo tratar el tema del tiempo, porque creo que hay una diferencia entre el tiempo occidental que trajeron los españoles y el tiempo finito que existía en el mundo antiguo mexicano. Siento que esa combinación ha dado una temporalidad especial a nuestra cultura y yo quisiera dar esa nueva dimensión."[59]

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clientalist politics. In "The modernization of the Old Order: Organization and Periodization of Twentieth-Century Mexican History", Albert L. Michaels and Mervin Bernstein describe the political aftermath of the Mexican Revolution: "The Revolution of 1910 brought much bloodshed and violence. It also enabled new men [sic] to gain control of the state. These new leaders did not change very much. But in order to stabilize the country, they had to create new institutions structured to carry out old aims," in Wilkie et al., *op. cit.*, 693.

[57] Armand F. Baker in his D. Phil. dissertation *El tiempo en la novela hispanoamericana: un estudio del concepto del tiempo en siete novelas representativas* (June 1967 University of Iowa) gives an overview of the history of Western time from ancient Greece and Rome to the 1960s.

[58] I am indebted to Adriana Mendez Rodenas for making this connection in "Tiempo femenino, tiempo ficticio: *Los recuerdos del porvenir* de Elena Garro," *Revista Iberaamericana* 51.132-133 (1985): 843-51. She describes *Los recuerdos del porvenir* as a "nombre que carga de conotaciones la transición al tiempo de atrás selvático emprendida por el protagonista de *Los pasos perdidos*", 849-850.

[59] Anita K. Stoll, "Introduction" to *A Different Reality: Studies on the work of Elena Garro*. Edited by Anita K. Stoll (London & Toronto: Bucknell U.P., 1990), 15.

Garro's emphasis on the difference of Western and Mayan time is central to the confusion surrounding the question of time in the novel.[60] I shall examine the issues in brief, and then focus on the significance of the issue of 'women's time' in relation to this novel.

Garro's characters not only have to deal with standardised Western time, but also with a native Mexican time. Her characters are not conscious of the co-existence of the two. A dual concept of time appears to be internalised. Characters move in and out of linear and circular time according to their needs. Garro explores the place and power of Mayan time on the Mexican psyche. While Western time is linear, Mayan time is circular, like the structure of the novel. It functions in a series of concentric circles. Mayan time is divided into a series of ages, which are governed by the lifetime of a sun. The end of each age is brought about by the death of the old sun, and is calculated by means of complex mathematical equations. Within each age, time is circular, man is governed by fate, and events repeat themselves until the end of the age when what can be called the history of the new age starts afresh.[61] National identity theory in Mexico, similar to that of the rest of Latin America has always had to deal with the often-uncomfortable relationship that has existed between the European settlers and the indigenous population. The Chilean poet Garbriela Mistral succinctly described this difficulty:

> ...mucho de lo español ya no sirve en este mundo de gentes, hábitos, pájaros y plantas contrastadas con lo peninsular. Todavía somos su clientela en la lengua, pero ya muchos quieren tomar posesion del sobrehaz de la Tierra Nueva.[62]

The issue of identity is central to Garro's complex use of time in the novel. Mistral is subject to her own desire for a tidy definition through a broad generalisation. Her statement echoes the desires of many post-colonial nations to search through the psychological and intellectual remnants of colonisation, and seek their own autonomous sense of self.

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[60] Robert K. Anderson, in "La realidad temporal en *Los recuerdos del porvenir*" discusses the relevance of Mayan/Aztec time in the novel.

[61] Gordon Brotherson in *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas Through their Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), gives a detailed description of Mayan time and culture.

[62] Gabriela Mistral, *Poesias completas* (Aguilar, Madrid: (1958) 1976), xx.

Even for male characters the norms of the everyday do not serve them in times of conflict, but they still exercise a degree of control over them. In the novel Martín Moncada has a peculiar relationship with time. He stops his clock daily, at a specific hour, nine o'clock:

> sin el tictac, la habitación y sus ocupantes entraron en un tiempo nuevo y melancólico donde los gestos y las voces se movían en el pasado. Doña Ana, su marido, los jóvenes y Félix se convirtieron en recuerdos de ellos mismos, sin futuro, perdidos en una luz amarilla e individual que los separaba de la realidad para volverlos sólo personajes de la memoria (12).

This is echoed in Martín Moncada's contemplation of time in relation to his own death:

> Por la noche, en su cama, recordó su propia muerte. La vio muchas veces ya cumplida en el pasado y muchas veces en el futuro antes de cumplirse. Pero era curioso que en el pasado fuese él, Martín, el que había muerto y en el futuro un personaje extraño el que moría; mientras él, acomodado en el techo de su cuarto, miraba sus dos muertes, la realidad de su cama minúscula, de su cuerpo de cinco años y de su habitación, pasaron a una dimensión sin importancia....Desde esa noche su porvenir se mezcló con un pasado no sucedido y la realidad de cada día (87).

His five-year-old self is a pivotal moment for him: it is the end of innocence and the beginning of a new and estranged sense of time. Present, past, and future are informed by one another. There is even a sense of confusion of the chronology of the events. Such temporal confusion appears illogical as it would be understood within the Western concept of time. Martín himself is confused, but it was not nature but the murder of a servant, that caused his confusion. Time and memory become confused as a result of his trauma:

> Cuando pensaba en el porvenir una avalancha de días apretujados los unos contra los otros se le venía encima y se venía encima de su casa y de sus hijos. Para él los días no contaban de la misma manera que contaban para los demás. Nunca se decía: "El lunes haré tal cosa", porque entre ese lunes y él había una multitud de recuerdos no vividos que lo separaban de la necesidad de hacer "tal cosa ese lunes". Luchaba entre varias memorias y la memoria de lo sucedido era la

> única irreal para él. De niño pasaba largas horas recordando lo que no había visto ni oído nunca (21-22).

Later Martín's sister, doña Matilde, envies his ability to live outside of time, "Tiene razón mi hermano Martín en vivir fuera del tiempo" (139), when her own "vida hecha de naderías" is threatened (139). Clearly then, it is understood by other characters that his escape from time is false and a comprehensible reaction to conflict. The barbarous acts of the soldiers (their loss of civilisation) forces the inhabitants of the town to return to mythological time. Ixtepec comments that, with the arrival of General Fransisco Rosas and his troops, "Un silencio sombrío se extendío del Norte al Sur y el tiempo se volvío otra vez de piedra" (35), and later Ixtepec comments:

> En esos días era yo tan desdichado que mis horas se acumulaban informes y mi memoria se habían convertido en sensaciones. La desdicha, como el dolor físico, iguala los minutos. Los días se convierten en el mismo día, los actos en el mismo acto y las personas en un solo personaje inútil (66).

In times of conflict, time and memory become static, silent, and are manifested in real physical pain. The circle stops when the town is faced with the horrors of the soldiers.

Time is not universally understood in the novel. As Martín creates and experiences time in his own way so do other characters and figures. The dead Indios are said to experience death in a way in which they belong to, and in, time: "obedecían a un orden perfecto y estaban ya dentro del tiempo" (16). While the Indios' relationship with time, even in death, is one of belonging, General Rosas' is outside of time: "el general incapaz de dibujar sus días, vivía fuera del tiempo, sin pasado y sin futuro" (16). Instead, we are told, that time becomes his "sombra" (34).

According to the writer and journalist Brianda Domecq, Mexican Women's writing also has its own sense of time:

> ...más que un ser o hacer en el tiempo, parece un estar en los espacios, espacios múltiple, diversos y desligados entre sí que van ensimismándose como una sucesión de escenarios teatrales, iluminándose o quedando en sombras a medida que la protagonista los ocupa o abandona. Cada espacio es un claustro cuya cerradez

> determina la ausencia de movimiento, la resistencia al cambio, la atemporalidad.[63]

Domecq suggests that women's time is akin to what Bakhtin calls mythical time. In her opinion, Mexican women are hemmed in by social constraints and are passive. How time is logged by clocks is suggested to be a form of repression which men control, Martín stops his clock daily and the family escape into another sense of time. The disruption of time is part of the disruption of the everyday brought about by conflict. Men are the actors in the war, and they have thus broken their own rules of time. The characters function in what Domecq considers to be women's time which liberates and disturbs them. Violence appears to have its own linear impetus from which everyone in the town wish to escape. There are many examples of the ways in which both men and women attempt to retreat from conventional time. While both Martín and General Rosas try to escape time with its reminders of present and past traumas, Isabel crosses into an alternative time. "Isabel suspendida podía desprenderse en cualquier instante, cruzar los espacios como un aerolito y caer en un tiempo desconocido" (32). She visits her future as if it were a physical place: "Andaba muy lejos de su cuarto caminando un porvenir que empezaba a dibujarse en su memoria" (166). She explains her escape, in conversation with Rosas: "ahora sólo vivo en la que recuerda va a suceder" (259). There are limitations to calling this specifically, women's time.

The concept of women's time has been explored in an article by Adriana Mendez Rodenas's: "Tiempo femenino, tiempo ficticio: *Los recuerdos* del porvenir de Elena Garro."[64] She has taken her cue from Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time".[65] In her article, Kristeva examines the interstices between woman and the following areas: the nation (which she renames 'sociocultural ensembles'[66]), space, motherhood, and time. For her, womanhood is determined by her biology. Motherhood ties her to

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[63] Brianda Domecq, *Mujer que publica...mujer pública* (Mexico: Editorial Diana, 1994), 56.

[64] Adriana Mendez Rodenas, "Tiempo femenino, tiempo ficticio" *Revista Iberoamericana*. 51 (1985): 843-51. Garro's writing lends itself to critical readings using French feminist discourse. For examples of such readings, see Monique J. LeMaître, "El deseo de la muerte y la muerte del deseo en la obra de Elena Garro: hacia una definición de la escritura femenina en su obra" *Revista Iberoamericana* 148-149 julio-diciembre (1989): 1005-1017; and "M/Otherhood and Multivocality in Novels by Four Mexican Women Writers" (PhD thesis University of Limerick, 2000) by Teresa M. Hurley.

[65] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake in *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 13-35.

space because woman is the locus for the primary, originatory womb or matrix. Further, woman as embodiment of womb experiences time subjectively which "essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity*".[67] Woman, aligned with the body and intuition "becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival - in other words, the time of history."[68] For Kristeva, linear time is associated with 'male' pursuits of history, development, progress and, even, language; and woman's time is circular. Therefore, for her, Western feminism has engaged with this temporal order in evolving ways. In her opinion, there have been two phases in feminism: the first was concerned with finding a place in linear time; and the second, enthralled to psychoanalysis, rejected linear time.[69] She concludes with a call for a third phase in feminism. This third phase will break down the "dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities [which] may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*".[70] I shall be investigating breakdowns in this gender dichotomy in chapter 4. In the event of the collapse of the dichotomy, women's time will therefore - I presume - need to be renamed to become a non-gender specific term. Women's time is, in her opinion, the basis through which power will be recast in a new and radical way. Kristeva, therefore, celebrates 'women's time', by building positive associations with aspects of womanhood which have been maligned or suppressed. Maternity, reproduction, Freudian hysteria, intuition are all set up as positive features of womanhood.

The chink in her armour starts from the very name of the article, "Women's Time". In a sleight of hand, she is configuring 'women' as a monolithic entity, which she purports later to reduce to metaphysical contemplation in her future, utopian theoretical model. There is also a worrying essentialism in aligning women with biology. It begets several assumptions: that there is a standardised aspirational model which will benefit women; that there is an ideal world order which would facilitate women, in what is dubiously placed as their primary function, as reproducers; that identity is constructed in a known and knowable fashion; and finally, that experience

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[66] *ibid.*, 14.
[67] *ibid.*, 16, italics in original.
[68] *ibid.*, 17.
[69] *ibid.*, 18-19.
[70] *ibid.*, 33.

can be constituted universally. By way of an example of the inherent difficulties that are in this alternative model, I would like to cite a novel by the Canadian novelist, Margaret Atwood. She imagined a dystopian world, in *The Handmaid's Tale,* where woman's reproduction is controlled on an official level.[71] Linear time, in the body of the diary-style narrative, is stalled: history is completed, progress is impossible, life is governed by a patriarchal, conservative religious sect. Events in the novel are circular and the repetition proves deadening. In Atwood's novel, as is the case with many of the writers of *novelas de la Revolución*, time can be circular and not necessarily belong to women's time.[72] It represents an absence of change. In such novels, politically conservative and/or reactionary regimes govern over a stasis, and are primarily concerned with maintaining the status quo. In Kaminsky's words, "Unlike ...Kristeva, who sees the return to the semiotic by means of nonsytactic use of language a liberating move by women and men alike, Garro unmasks the semiotic as a prison and monumental time as a form of hell."[73]

Mendez Rodenas employs Kristeva's theory to suggest that there is something essentially female in Garro's use of time in the novel. This is not the case for two reasons: firstly, Garro has stated, as quoted earlier, that her temporal experimentation is part of a distinctly individual sense of the world and a way of writing that is specifically tied to a Mayan concept of time; and secondly, Garro is employing time in her novel - albeit in an original way - following what is an essential thematic feature of the *novelas de la Revolución,* as written by both men and by women. I believe that by suggesting there is a universal women's time is rather limited, just as it would be to suggest that there is a universal male time, given the many other variants on individual experiences that gender alone cannot govern, such as class and race.

There is also a doubling of time on a narrative level in *Los recuerdos del porvenir.* Firstly, there is the time which follows the linear forward-moving imperative of the fates of the two principal female characters: Julia and Isabel. Secondly, there is the narrator's time. The first novel-time is simple to grasp. It is impelled by the narrative thrust of Ixtepec's account of Isabel and Julia's relationship

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[71] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Vintage, 1996).

[72] Doris Sommers in *Foundational Fictions* has also read the 'vicious circles' into which writers descended as an essential feature of Garro's contemporaries, Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez, due to a disillusionment with Latin American (lack of) economic development, 2.

[73] Amy K. Kaminsky, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers* (Minneapolis & London; University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 89.

with the General. The two love stories follow the imperatives of the traditional Nineteenth Century novel. They have a beginning, middle and end, although the conclusions are somewhat ambiguous. This linearity is common to Western time. Novel time and Western time can be looked at simultaneously as they are influenced and were born of similar circumstances: the enlightenment and the coming of the machine age.[74] Western time became widespread in Europe from the Thirteenth Century on, and, it has been suggested, signalled the start of industrialisation. It provided the general population with a sense of belonging in a present against the backdrop of the past, which, in turn, is constantly moving onward to the future.[75] Previous to this, Europeans understood time as what Bakhtin described as mythic time.[76] Past and future were understood to belong to an eternal present. Patricia Dreschel Tobin explains the role of time in the realist novel: "the novel offers, then, not a mimesis of undeliberated, organic life-in-time, but a homologue that exacts a privileged conceptualization of human life as purposeful and therefore imbued with meaning."[77] She continues: "The realistic novel convinces us, not because the contents of its fictional world resemble those of our own, but because it structures experience in the same way we do; what is essential to the illusion of reality is not what happens but how it happens."[78] The role of time in the novel according to Drechsel Tobin is not to recreate a sense of real time but of what can be called felt time. Garro has shown that this felt time is bound up with individual experience, as time itself, as it is measured, is a conceptual invention and not a thing in itself. She has broken away from the conventions of time as they are generally employed in the

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[74] Mumford explains that the widespread use of the mechanical clock from the thirteenth century on was the start of the machine age, "Time took on the character of an enclosed space; it could be divided, it could be filled up, it could even be expanded by the invention of labor-saving instruments", 17.

[75] Again, Mumford: "A generalized time-consciousness accompanied the wider use of clocks: dissociating time from organic sequences, it became easier for the men of the Renaissance to indulge the fantasy of reviving the classic past or reliving the splendors of antique Roman civilization: the cult of history, appearing first in daily ritual, finally abstracted itself as a special discipline" 17. For a further discussion of the relationship of history and storytelling to time see also Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (Hutchinson of London, London, 1965).

[76] For a full discussion of mythic time and the chronotope of the modern novel, see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). See also, G.J. Whitrow, *Time and History: Views from Prehistory to the Present Day.* (Oxford & New York: Oxford U.P., 1989) and James Phelan, "Present Tense Narration, Mimesis, the Narrative Norm, and the Positioning of the Reader in *Waiting for the Barbarians*," in *Understanding Narrative* edited by James Phelan & Peter J. Rabinowitz (Ohio State U.P., Colombus: 1994) who discuss the significance of time in the modern novel.

[77] Patricia Drechsel Tobin, *Time and the Novel* (New Jersey & Surrey, Princeton U.P.: 1978), 5.

[78] Drechsel Tobin, *op. cit.,* 6.

realist tradition. But that does not mean that her novel is a complete break with that tradition.

Conclusion

Garro succeeds in creating a greater ambiguity in her characters than limited comparisons to national figures would allow, and deals with individuals, not gender types or female mythical figures. In her essay (essentially a defence of her divorce from Octavio Paz) "A mí me ha ocurrido todo al revés" she recounts how, as a child, she liked "el revés de las cosas"[79], and she believed that "Tal vez la realidad no era lo que yo veía."[80] In her opinion, her own personal perspective is different from others, even, she suggests, inside out. This is the effect her work often produces: a world portrayed from a different perspective. In *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, Garro unsettles comfortable static notions of what women's roles are in conflict situations. She plays with givens such as time and historical truth to show that reality, even when told fantastically, is more complex than traditional realism allow.

Through her use and slippage from 'we' to 'I' as the narrative voice of Ixtepec, Garro takes the physical landscape, and questions its validity in the language of national identity. Ixtepec's inability to use language consistently undermines its role as spokesperson. Ixtepec is a dubious narrator which expresses itself alternatively with collective and personal pronouns. As Bhabha says, "The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression."[81] Bhabha's explanation suggests that descriptions of physical space are but the external manifestation of internal nationalist sentiment, implicitly questioning the possibility of consistent and questionable collective experience. Garro problematises this by forefronting the physical space, a trope significant to nationalist writing, while at the same time making that space the narrator, who, in turn, is inconsistent and employs self-conscious story telling devices.

The disruptions of traditional novel and Western conventions of time in *Los recuerdos del porvenir* play an integral part in Garro's attempt to change the limited

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[79] Garro, "A mí me ha ocurrido todo al revés" *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 374 abril (1979), 38.
[80] Garro, "A mí me ha ocurrido todo al revés", *op. cit.,* 39.

and male-centred representation of conflict in Mexican fiction. She wrote about conflict from a very individual perspective. She believed that "All revolutions suffer the same process: they devour themselves."[82] *Los recuerdos del porvenir* tells the story of this carnivorous animal from a very pessimistic perspective. In the novel, history repeats itself and time is circular, with the true story hidden behind others' agendas. As it is for the other female authors I shall study in this thesis, it is also a recognition by her of the need to explore Mexican national identity from an alternative, and less male-centred point of view.

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[81] Bhabha, *op. cit.*, 294-5.
[82] Muncy, *op. cit.*, 24.

Chapter 4

Fighting Invisibility: Women Revolutionaries in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesus mío*

Time, history and the place of women in national identity are all themes dealt with by Elena Garro in her novel. Her text is clearly fiction and was a radical break with previous forms of representing women's role in conflict. Elena Poniatowska addresses similar absences in Mexican letters in a very different way. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* by Elena Poniatowska has attracted considerable critical attention, due, in no small part, to the contested form and disputed authorship of the text.[1] Throughout her career, Poniatowska has written about the disenfranchised and those who have been left out of national and historical narratives. In *Hasta no verte Jesús mío,* she recorded the story of a *soldadera*, a female soldier in the Mexican Revolution. While the text lies in the interstices between fact and fiction, the central narrator (Jesusa) is highly ambiguous. She is not the "abnegada mujercita mexicana" Poniatowska claims are commonplace in Mexican texts.[2] Instead, Jesusa is complex, belligerent and, more significantly, resists categorization. In this chapter, I shall explore how Jesusa defies conventional representations of gendered behaviour in times of conflict, and discuss the techniques Poniatowska employs to disrupt fixed meanings in relation to the representation of women and violence.

A considerable body of work has been written about the Revolution, particularly the bellicose years.[3] Poniatowska's text can be compared to those novels generally included under the label of *novela de la revolución* because it deals with the Revolution as a central theme. But this inclusion is contested, as the text was not written within the timeframe suggested by some critics in the field: from 1915 when Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* was first published, up to the publication of Agustín

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[1] Elena Poniatowska, *Hasta no verte, Jesus mío.* (Mexico D.F.: Ediciones era, 1983). Hereinafter numbers in parenthesis refer to this edition.

[2] Elena Poniatowska, "Testimonios de una escritora: Elena Poniatowska en microfono" in *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas* edited by Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega (Río Piedras, P.R.: Ediciones Huracán, 1984), 159.

[3] Some writers such as Shirlene Ann Soto *The Mexican Woman: A Study of Her Participation in the Revolution, 1910-1940* (Palo Alto: R and E. Pubs, 1979) differentiate between the period of violent struggle and the 20 year period of reform up to the 1940s. For the sake of this study, when I use the term the Mexican Revolution, I refer to the time of conflict that was the period 1910-1920.

Yañez's *Al filo del agua* in 1947.[4] It was written after 1968, a date Rosario Castellanos claimed was a turning point for Mexican literature.[5] It is, however, useful to view the text in the context of the earlier *novelas de la revolución,* because these had ignored women's roles in the Revolution; other than as asides, sub-plots, and as a backdrop to the central male characters in the narrative, as I have discussed in chapter 2. Considering the dramatic effect the Revolution had on women of all classes, it is surprising that few texts have been written from the point of view of Mexican women.[6]

Elena Poniatowska was born in Paris in 1932 of French father of Polish noble origin and Mexican mother.[7] On arrival in Mexico in 1942, at the age of ten, she spoke no Spanish.[8] She was educated in a British school in Philadelphia and claims she received her Spanish education from the servants in her parent's house. Thus, when she was later to write about the disenfranchised and poor, she already felt that she had a considerable knowledge of their lexicon and manners.[9] She is aware of how privileged her position is, and how removed her lived experiences are from those she often writes about.[10]

She is a prolific writer, yet she is difficult to categorise. She can appear at once to be working inside and outside of the centre. She has written a flirtatious text

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[4] John Rutherford, *Mexican Society During the Revolution: A Literary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Joseph Sommers in *After the Storm: Landmarks of the Modern Mexican Novel.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968) agrees with this date, setting the period during which the *novela de la revolución* was written as between 1915-1947, 5-7. Portal in *Proceso op. cit.,* is one of the few writers to include *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* within this category, 19. Portal sees the Revolution as having had an all-encompassing influence: "La Revolución mexicana ha dado lugar a la narrativa mexicana contemporanea", 15.

[5] Rosario Castellanos, "Literatura latinoamericana y su valor testimonial" *Hispania.* 2:XLVII (1964): 223-230.

[6] Frederick C. Turner wrote: "Al proveer a la mujer mexicana de un nuevo papel en la sociedad y de un nuevo sentido de participación nacional, la Revolución de 1910 alteró de una manera significativa la naturaleza del nacionalismo y de la sociedad," in "Los efectos de la participación femenina en la revolución de 1910" *Historia mexicana.* V:LXIV:4 (1967), 603. See also, Lillian Estelle Fisher, "The Influence of the Present Mexican Revolution Upon the Status of Women" *Hispanic American Historical Review.* V:XXIII:1 (1942): 211-228 for commentary on the social and legal changes brought about by the Revolution.

[7] Interview with Magdalena García Pinto, "Entrevista con Elena Poniatowska, octubre de 1983, en su casa de Coyoacán", *Historias intimas: conversaciones con diez escritoras latinoamericanas* (Hanover: Ediciones del norte, 1988), 175-180.

[8] In the interview with García Pinto she explains that she learnt Spanish from the servants and thus understood Jesusa: "Es el español que conozco. Si me hablas del español de *Platero y Yo* o de Cervantes, es para mí un español desconocido", 184.

[9] Beth Jörgenson, *The Writing of Elena Poniatowska: Engaging Dialogues* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), xi-xv.

about the late Octavio Paz,[11] snide articles about fellow Mexican Guadalupe Loaeza,[12] and yet never fails to engage in serious political debates, such as her writings on the present situation in Chiapas.[13] She writes texts which have chronicled events such as the harsh government response to the student protests in the Olympic year 1968[14] and the chaos and disorganization after the Earthquake in 1985, as they were witnessed by those involved.[15] Poniatowska is author of novels, biographies, short stories, screen plays and a considerable body of journalistic writing. Much of her writing is concerned with issues of personal identity, and with the way events of national significance intersect with individuals' lives.[16] This concern with the local and personal effects of national policies and upheavals has led her to write about individuals as disparate as Gaby Brimmer, an artist and writer brain damaged at birth,[17] and Tina Modotti, the Italian-born photographer, actress, and revolutionary.[18] I believe that the quality and range of her writing, as well as her sometimes ludic style and always defiant politics, explain her popularity both inside and outside of Mexico.[19]

Hasta no verte Jesús mío is the account of Jesusa Palancares' life. It is a picaresque tale of an illiterate girl whose mother dies. Her father is a brutal man who has multiple relationships and leads an itinerant life staying only for short periods in any one place, quickly moving off in search of new work. When he joins the revolutionary forces, she accompanies him. She is forced to marry an abusive man, and is later left orphaned and widowed by the Revolution. The remainder of the text deals with the many different jobs she had: bar work in a brothel, maid, factory

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[10] Interview with Beth Miller, *Latin American Literary Review* 4 Fall-Winter (1975): 74 and "Testimonios de una escritora: Elena Poniatowska en microfono", 159-160.
[11] Elena Poniatowska, *Octavio Paz: las palabras del árbol* (Barcelona: Editorial lumen, 1998)
[12] Elena Poniatowska, "'Tú tienes la culpa por traer ese minifalda' o la prosa de Guadalupe Loaeza" *La Jornada* viernes 15 December 1989, 31.
[13] Poniatowska as a journalist and as someone who has always written about the poor and disenfranchised in Mexico has, like many writers throughout Latin America, written about or engaged in direct dialogue with the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas.
[14] Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (México D.F.: Biblioteca Era, (1971) 1997).
[15] Elena Poniatowska, *Nada Nadie* (México: Ediciones era, 1988).
[16] Elena Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el silencio* (México D.f.: Ediciones Era, (1980) 1999).
[17] Gaby Brimmer and Elena Poniatowska, *Gaby Brimmer* (México D.F.: Grijalbo, 1979).
[18] Elena Poniatowska, *Tinísima* (México D.F.: Ediciones Era, (1992) 1998).
[19] Bell Gale Chevigny summarised her reasoning for Poniatowska's popularity as follows: "her mixture of modes of knowing - investigative and empathetic - and ways of telling - novelistic, testimonial, journalistic and confessional - engage the feelings and curiosity of the reader: the reader is implicated in pursuit of the story beyond its formal ending" in "The Transformation of Privilege in the Works of Elena Poniatowska", *Latin American Literary Review* 13:2 (1985), 61.

worker, union organiser, among others, and her conversion to a protestant sect, the *Obra Espiritual*. In the text she gives a succinct precis of her working and personal life after the Revolution:

> Y desde entonces todo fueron fábricas y fábricas y talleres y changarros y piqueras y pulquerías y cantinas y salones de baile y más fábricas y talleres y lavaderos y señoras fregonas y tortillas duras y dale y dale con la bebedera del pulque, tequila y hojas en la madrugada para las crudas. Y amigas y amigos que no servían para nada, y perros que me dejaban sola por andar siguiendo a sus perras. Y hombres peores que perros del mal y policías ladrones y pelados abusivos. Y yo que siempre sola, y del muchacho que recogí de chiquito y que se fue y me dejó más sola y me saludas a nunca vuelvas y no es por ai (147-8).

The run-on-lines, repetition, and the directness of the information provided all give an insight into Jesusa's personality as it is conveyed throughout the text. Here she also gives a stark summary of what her life was like: work, heavy drinking, abuse and loneliness. The portion of the text of primary interest here focuses on Jesusa's role as *soldadera* during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).

Poniatowska principally writes about those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to tell their stories. She makes the invisible visible. In the conclusion to her essay "Literature and Women in Latin America", Poniatowska offers an explanation as to why women write:

> This is why we write. We write in order to understand the incomprehensible, in order to bear testimony to things, so that our children's children will know. We write in order to be. We write so as not to be wiped off from the map. In Latin America, we write because this is the only way we know not to disappear, and in order to bear testimony [to] (about [sic]) those who disappear because of politics or hunger. We write so that they will know that for a span of time and light – scientists would call it a 'lapse' – we lived here on earth; we were a point in space, a point of reference, a sign, a particle that moved and generated energy and heat, and then rejoined other particles. This is why we write.[20]

The first person plural 'we' suggests greater homogeneity amongst women writers than is the case in reality. But it is an assessment which is resonant in writing by both

Elena Garro and Ángeles Mastretta. It is probable to suggest that Poniatowska is speaking at least of her own motivations for writing. She repeats the words "to bear testimony". Bearing testimony is a central conceit (if you will) in her writing: she writes about the marginalised, and particularly marginalised women. To write is to exist and survive. To be written about is another way of gaining visibility, even immortality. In *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* Poniatowska draws attention to the existence of *soldaderas* in the Revolution, a much neglected group in Mexican history and fiction.

Las soldaderas: History and Jesusa's Story

While women had been both victims and active participants in conflicts in Mexico since the early colonial times, their roles have been largely ignored by anyone other than a handful of feminist historians and writers.[21] There are historical records which show that women were leaders, activists and journalists in the Independence movement (1810-1820), the North American invasion (1846-1848), and the Reform War and the French Intervention (1857-1867).[22] Women's involvement in conflict in Mexico is nothing new; what is still in its nascent stage is the study of that involvement. The *soldaderas*' roles in the Revolution lies largely ignored in official histories.[23] Jesusa's story adds an extra dimension to our understanding of the realities of the Revolution. The first records of the appearance of the *soldadera* was in the independence movement. The troops "depended on women to forage for and prepare the soldiers' food, wash their clothes, and tend their wounds."[24] They were cooks, nurses and laundry women. In *Las soldaderas* Poniatowska describes the role of the *soldadera* in the Mexican Revolution:

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[20] Elena Poniatowska, "Literature and Women in Latin America." *Women's Writing in Latin America*, eds. Sara Castro-Klarén and Beatriz Sarlo (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991, 86-87.

[21] Angeles Mendieta Alatorre in *La mujer en la Revolución mexicana*, (México: Biblioteca del instituto nacional de estudios historicos de la revolución mexicana, 1961) cites the rape of the indigenous women as an early incident of women's involuntary involvement in conflict. In her discussion she erroneously omits any allusion to indigenous internecine war, thereby suggesting that civil unrest was only a consequence of the colonization of Mexico.

[22] Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982), 25 and Mendieta Alatorre, *op. cit.*, 22-26.

[23] In *Las soldaderas* (Mexico: Ediciones era, 2000) Elena Poniatowska explains the etymology of the word soldadera: "Durante todas las guerras e invasiones, los soldados utilizaban su "soldad" (palabra de origen aragonés) para emplear a una mujer como sirvienta. La mujer iba al cuartel a cobrar su sueldo o soldada. De ahí el nombre de soldadera", 20.

[24] Mendieta Alatorre, *Op. cit.*., 40.

> La soldadera se encargaba de hacer las previsiones necesarias. Trabajar para un soldado se convirtió, rápidamente, en una manera de ganarse la vida y mantener a sus hijos. Como las sirvientas, las soldaderas eran libres; podían irse a la hora que se les antojara, acompañar a los soldados por todo el país o cambiar de hombre a voluntad. Algunas incluso seguían a la tropa para venderle carne seca, hacer sus tortillas y cocer sus frijoles y, como no tenía a ningún hombre en especial, prostituirse si se daba el caso. Sin embargo, la mayoría tenía a su hombre y era fiel a carta cabal.[25]

Writing in 1967, in an essay entitled "Los efectos de la participación femenina en la revolución de 1910", the historian Frederick C. Turner claims that the right to bear arms and fight alongside the men in combat brought about a significant change in the role of women in Mexico. Jean Franco would describe it, many years later, as the move from being private citizens to becoming public actors.[26] Jesusa describes this change in society: "En aquella época [in the period immediately after the Revolution] las mujeres no trabajaban más que en su casa o de criadas. Ahora la mujer le gana al hombre en lo salidera. Ya no calienta casa" (255). Up to the present day, the *soldadera* (as this new public citizen warrior is called) is one of the hidden characters in the war. The Revolution may have brought women out of their homes, but they remain invisible. They are represented as shadows, foils to the glory of the male fighters and leaders.[27] Like men, women's roles during the conflict were complex and multiple. Turner describes their work: "trabajaron como empleadas y secretarias, como espías y contrabandistas de municiones." He continues: "innumerable cantidad de mujeres viajó con las tropas para prepararles los alimentos y mantuvo la moral por medio del aliento y [what he very coyly calls] la compañía.[28]

Due to this perception of the *soldaderas* as unpaid prostitutes, rather than what they eventually were, namely women who were active participants in the armed conflict, Jesusa denies she was a *soldadera.* She succinctly declares that she was not

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[25] Poniatowska, *Las soldaderas op. cit.,* 21.

[26] Jean Franco, "Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private" in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture* edited by George Yúdice, Jean Franco & Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) and "Killing Priests, Nuns, Women, Children" and "Self-Destructing Heroines" *Minnesota Review* 22 Spring (1984): 105-115 has applied Hannah Arendt's theories of the connection between gender and the public and private to Latin America.

[27] Elvia Montes de Oca Navas in *Protagonistas de las novelas de la revolución* (Instituto mexiquense de cultura: Toluca, 1996) "en la narrativa este personaje [la mujer en la novela de la revolución] como deslucido, atrás del hombre, perdido en su sombra", 136.

a *soldadera* because "no crea que ando de soldadera. Una cosa es andar en campaña y otra en compaña" (220). By this, I believe she means that she was a soldier not a prostitute. The word *soldadera* has come to mean more than is implied in Jesusa's usage. As outlined by Turner, and as also detailed by Shirlene Ann Soto in her study *The Mexican Woman: A Study of Her Participation in the Revolution,* women held many different posts and played many roles in the Revolution.[29] They were foot soldiers, cooks, smugglers, journalists, officers in the army, companions to the men and prostitutes. After the war, and as a result of this involvement, women's rights changed, yet very little has been written either in fact or fiction on the role of women in the Revolution. The women who have gained most notoriety in the Revolution were the middle-and upper-class women who were the journalists and activists, whereas the ranks of the *soldaderas* were filled by the rural and urban lower-class who, as a consequence of having little or no access to recording their own story or having it recorded by others, are often the forgotten participants in history.[30] Just as accounts of male participation in the Revolution are many and varied, there are many accounts of women's experiences yet to be told. Considering the significance of the Revolution to Mexican national mythology the omission of women from myth making, fictional accounts and historical records clearly diminishes women's roles in the Revolution and consequently their place as part of the "imagined community".

In stark contrast to Turner's and Jesusa's contentions that women gained improved status from the Revolution, Jean Franco has stated that "the revolution is a parenthesis of freedom" between an old and new patriarchy, rather than a radical liberating force. Women were given the freedom to move into public spheres of work and conflict. Yet, she claims, that they then had to return to the domestic, and the limitations they had experienced before the Revolution. This may be largely true, insofar as women have had, and continue to have, a long struggle towards equal rights in Mexico. For example women were only granted equal civil rights in 1927 and it took up to 1953 to obtain suffrage state wide.[31] It is also quite significant that many women were very strong supporters of Porfirio Díaz, and his wife mobilised groups of

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[28]Turner, *op. cit.,* 603.

[29] Shirlene Ann Soto *The Mexican Woman: A Study of Her Participation in the Revolution, 1910-1940.* (Palo Alto: R and E. Pubs., 1979).

[30] Macías *op. cit.,* 40. Exceptions are women like 'La Coronela' who has had her life story recorded on tape. She was directly engaged in armed combat during the Revolution, see Macías *op. cit.,* 42-43.

[31] See Macías for an analysis of how women in Mexico obtained basic civil rights and suffrage.

reactionary women.[32] There was no more homogeneity of political beliefs among women than is ever the case amongst men. As could be seen in the novels studied in chapter 2, the Revolution had many factions and sides. It was a ten-year struggle on many fronts, at first united against the long-serving dictator Díaz (1876-1911) and later divided by political interests and radically different ideologies. But, the changes the Revolution brought about in women's roles in Mexican society can be compared to the nascent stages of feminism in Europe and North America, as I have examined in chapter 1. World War I and the need for more women to work outside the home; their involvement in the territorial armies and, what in England, was called the 'war effort'; made them aware of their role as public citizens.[33] These changed roles led women to demand rights within the nation state. Mexican women, having had a greater involvement in the struggle than women in the United States of America or Britain, had their lives even more radically changed by the Revolution.

Jesusa's involvement in the Revolution was not exemplary. Her account bears resemblances to Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo,* the Revolution as told from 'below', as experienced by the soldiers. Jesusa's participation in the Revolution was involuntary, at first. She was merely following her father, as she had done earlier when he changed employment (63-66). Jesusa was neither interested in, nor involved in, the politics of the war. She does concede that there were other politically engaged females. She recognises that there were other women who were directly engaged in the machinations of war, in both planning and fighting. In this way Poniatowska shows that war was experienced differently by other women, rather than limiting the readers' focus to Jesusa's own story. For example, General Genovevo Blanco's daughter, Lucía, was in a position of authority. Jesusa describes Lucía less than favorably, considering her to be 'machorra', but concedes that she is respected, feared and obeyed by the men (80-82). Jesusa says of Lucía: "Todos la obedecían. Revisaba

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[32] Women often supported the Catholic Church and were traditionally seen to be allied to it. Thus conservatives sometimes supported women's causes e.g. suffrage to garner their support see Soto *op. cit.,* 37. This perceived alliance with the Church is considered by some as reason for many Revolutionary politicians' lack of support for women's suffrage. They believed that women, if given the vote, would vote conservatively. See for example Macías *op. cit.,* xiii-xv and 49.

[33] See Introduction to *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation* edited by Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich and Susan Merrill Squier (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987): "with World War I the boundaries between battlefront and home front and public and private gendered spheres began to dissolve", xviii and James Longenbach "The Women and Men of 1914" on how the discourse of the British suffragette movement often paralleled that of World War I Cooper, Auslander Munich and Merrill Squier *op. cit.,* 97-123.

la puntería de los hombres. Entrenaba la caballería. Conocía el calibre de las balas y con su papá planeaba ataques y defensas" (80-81). Jesusa herself admits to enjoying "la balacera": "La balacera es todo mi amor porque se oye muy bonita" (206). With such descriptions Poniatowska gives a flavour of, not only the roles women played in the conflict, but also another insight into the attraction of the Revolution. There is a sense from Jesusa that she returns to the front looking for adventure, a relief from the routine of hard labour (See for example 179, 213, and 237).

In the narrative she provides insights into the relationships between the women in the field. In an incident with one of her father's companions, 'la Guayabita', she shows the degree of solidarity that existed between the *soldaderas*:

> La Guayabita me maltrataba en las calles, me mentaba a mi madre, me decía insolencia y media, que era yo una puta quién sabe qué, una puta quién sabe cuanto, y yo pues no sabía contestar nada nomás me ponía a llorar al oír todas las insolencias que me decía (68).

As a result the *soldaderas* encourage her to fight back offering their assistance. This she does with great brutality, first by throwing a rock at 'la Guayabita', then pummeling her with her fists and finally hitting her with the heel of her shoe in her face (69). This incident also shows her pride in her physical strength, a strength she evidently was not afraid to use.

As many writers of *novelas de la revolución* portrayed in their novels, Jesusa conveys the disillusionment felt by the soldiers with the Revolution. Showing too that allegiances were not as pure and ideologically based as they may have been perceived to be: "Así fue la revolución, que ahora soy de éstos, pero mañana seré de los otros, a chaquetazo limpio, el caso es estar con el más fuerte, el que tiene más parque..." (71) and later:

> ...allí en la revolucíon todos se hacían ver su suerte, al parejo, que tú eres traidor, no, que tú, que vamos a remontarnos al cerro, oye, éste ya se volteó, no, si es carrancista, pues ¿no que era zapatista?, los de guerrero eran todos zapatistas pero se volvieron carrancistas todos entre dos fogonazos, todos en la misma olla, todos desoyendo las consignas bajaba por el laderío cuando les decían que rodearon las lomas, se iban por el despeñadero cuando había que escampar, olvidaban los mensajes, las municiones se les hacían perdedizas, se entretenían mucho en la cava de trincheras, se tomaban rivalidad y se mataban generales contra generales y casi todos caminábamos sin saber ni por dónde... (73).

This is a vivid description of the chaos of the war, of how little the soldiers were influenced by ideology, but moved by a need to survive, changing sides as a matter of necessity, rather than having any particular camp loyalties. It is also gives a flavour of the orality of the language. This passage contains a rich vocabulary, a long sustained monologue, repetition, active verbs, little concern for written grammatical rules and an enactment of imagined or remembered dialogue. She is also patently engaged in a dialogue with the silent Poniatowska.

The wealth of language employed, and the relationship between Poniatowska as editor and the original real-life individual Josefina who narrated her story, are central to the representation of the fictional *soldadera,* Jesusa, in the text.[34] Poniatowska's editorial techniques, and the difficulties of recording a story, such as Josefina's, centres around their different relationships with language. Poniatowska is a literate educated woman and Josefina is illiterate. I shall first explain Poniatowska's technique. She met with Josefina Borquez several times a week over a year. Josefina did not allow her to use a tape recorder.[35] Josefina did not pace her speech, which meant that Poniatowska had limited recourse to note-taking, and had to recall the conversations once she got home to where she lived on the other side of Mexico City. Thus, while Poniatowska is a seasoned interviewer - having worked with the anthropologist Oscar Lewis and as a journalist interviewing many authors, politicians and artists - many techniques she would have ordinarily employed were redundant when recording Josefina's stories.[36] Poniatowska has written a text which combines the restructuring of an 'as told by' text and her own deliberate fictionalization of

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[34] I shall refer to the character in the text as Jesusa and the informer as Josefina, to avoid any confusion. See Beth E. Jörgenson, 'Creative Confusions - Readings of "Hasta no verte Jesús mío"' in *The Writing of Elena Poniatowska* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 28, for further elaboration on this matter.

[35] See Poniatowska's description of the encounter and method in "Testimonio de una escritora: Elena Poniatowska en microfono", 157. See also, García Pinto *op. cit.,* 181-182 and *Luz y luna, las lunitas* (México D.F: Ediciones era, 1994).

[36] Oscar Lewis wrote *The Children of Sánchez* Harmondsworth, (Penguin: (1961) 1964) a text which blurs the line between anthropological text and fiction. It was written after extensive interviews with real-life individuals but, as the blurb at the back of the 1964 edition announces, it "stands at the point where literature meets life." In an interview with García Pinto, Poniatowska explains the importance of the experience of working with Lewis: "Ahora yo creo que dentro de mí debe haber una influencia por haber trabajado un mes y medio con Oscar Lewis. Lo conocí antes de que él fuera famoso por *Los hijos de Sánchez.* Le ayudé con otro libro que se llama *Pedro Martínez.* Lo vi trabajar. Vi cómo él se daba a la gente," in "Entrevista con Elena Poniatowska, octubre de 1983, en su casa de Coyoacán", 181. In the same interview, she also describes her journalistic career, 185-186.

Josefina's story. I shall first explore, in brief, the issues at stake when recording an oral life story. Later, I shall examine how *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* can be described as fiction.

Walter J. Ong studied the transformations of thought processes and the psychological impact of literacy on individuals and cultures. He explains that "writing restructures consciousness."[37] Poniatowska was conscious of the restructuring of Josefina's oral language into Jesusa's written words. In a colloquium Poniatowska explained the necessary practical changes which took place in the transition from oral to written language: "...porque realmente ella no me dictó el libro así en la oreja y yo no más escribí sino que traté de darle capítulos, darle una secuencia, hacer un libro."[38] She did not merely transcribe; she re-wrote. She is aware that oral language has different rules to written language.

There is a necessary process in converting the speech of a primarily oral narrator into text. Poniatowska explained her approach:

> Utilicé las anécdotas, las ideas y muchos de los modismos de Jesusa Palancares pero no podría afirmar que el relato es una transcripción directa de su vida porque ella misma lo rechazaría. Maté a los personajes que me sobraban, eliminé cuanta sesión espiritualista pude, elaboré donde me pareció necesario, podé, cocí, remendé, inventé.[39]

Cynthia Steele describes Poniatowska's methods of converting Josefina's life story into a written account as an "aggressive editorial stance."[40] Instead, I believe that these are the techniques which are central to the conversion of Josefina's oral account "from another world" into a text for the literate world.[41] What exactly Poniatowska edited out or, in her own words "Utilicé....Maté...eliminé...elaboré...podé, cocí, remendé, inventé", can be subject to speculation and controversy. Whether she edited fairly or wisely is an impossible and hypothetical debate. Of interest are the

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[37] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* (London: Routledge, (1982) 1999). This is the title of chapter 4 of the text, 78-116.
[38] Poniatowska, "Testimonios de una escritora", *op. cit.,* 160.
[39] In "Gender, Genre and Authority: Hasta no verte Jesús mío (1969) by Elena Poniatowska" by Cynthia Steele, 33.
[40] *ibid.*, 33.
[41] Poniatowska in an interview with Beth Miller *Latin American Literary Review*, *op. cit.,* 74.

differences between Josefina's mindset as a narrator, who is principally steeped in "primary orality" and Poniatowska who is a highly literate editor and writer. [42]

Josefina is involved in a form of fictionalising of her self and her own life story. Oral speech acts and storytelling have their own specific techniques which are often incompatible with the techniques of the written word. This is true even in a literate culture, but more so among individuals or communities who are barely literate, such as Josefina. The speaker is not conscious of how it will appear on the page; she (in this case) has different concerns. Personal story telling skills, memories and desires to impress (or not) her listener are of much greater importance to an oral narrator.

Ong studied this difference between oral and chirographic cultures. While he is chiefly concerned with the historical development of thought from 'primary orality' to literate or chirographic cultures, he also explicates the complexities and differences between an oral and literate mind. In analysing the role Poniatowska had as literate editor, it is easy to succumb to the thinking that Jesusa's oral language is inferior to the final written text. They are simply different modes of narration. In both instances the narrator is aware of their different audiences: Josefina is giving an oral account of her story to Poniatowska, while Poniatowska must convert Josefina's story into written form for her potential reader. Ong is careful to distance his study from any emphasis on the primacy of the written word. He does not believe that literate cultures have more progressive and advanced story telling techniques than oral cultures. They are different:

> Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations.[43]

Jesusa is not part of a world totally isolated from the written word. But, she knows enough to recognise help wanted signs in order to gain employment (138-9). Her husband, Pedro reads to her (114-115). She goes to films and is an ardent listener to

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[42] Ong defines 'primary orality' as "the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print", *op. cit.,* 11, and 'chirographic cultures' as writing literate cultures, 35.
[43] *ibid.*, 14.

radio soaps both of which have originated in texts by literate writers (140). But, she cannot be described as literate. Words do not define her thoughts. When she speaks, the shape of the word does not determine her use of it. Ong contends that whether a person is literate or not affects story telling. Repetition, use of mnemonics (for example in the form of sayings), situational thought i.e. that thought that is influenced by lived experience rather than abstract thought, and the influence of homeostatic (shedding redundant memories which would detract from living in the present) and agonistically toned world views, and discursiveness, are but some of the techniques he describes.[44]

Poniatowska plays with the reader's assumptions on approaching the text: regarding both its form and narrator. She gives no indication in the text that it is not a novel. Without knowledge from outside the text, it appears to be a picaresque tale with an anarchic first-person narrator. The jacket notes suggest as much: "relata la vida azarosa y errante de Jesusa Palancares."[45] Yet, almost by way of a disruption of this assumption, she begins and ends the text with statements by Jesusa directly to her. In an epigraph to the text, Poniatowska quotes Jesusa:

> Algún día que vengan ya no me va a encontrar; se topará con el puro viento. Llegará ese día y cuando llegue, no habrá ni quien le dé razon. Y pensará que todo ha sido mentira. Es verdad, estamos aquí de a mentiras; lo que cuentan en el radio son mentiras, mentiras las que dicen los vecinos y mentira que me va a sentir. Si ya no le sirvo para nada, ¿qué carajos va a extrañar? Y en el taller tampoco ¿Quién quiere usted que me extrañe si ni adioses voy a mandar? (8).

By quoting an apparently fictional character, she is disrupting convention and signaling to any reader who may not be aware of the mode of production of the text that all may not be what it seems. The repetition of the word 'mentira' (lie) no less than five times acts as a warning to the reader. Also, her declaration that "estamos aquí de mentiras" is not just a metaphysical statement about humanity's existence and transience here on earth, but a post-modern warning by Poniatowska that we should be wary of what we are reading. The epigraph also establishes their relationship. Jesusa highlights the fact that Poniatowska has used her to tell a story, and when she

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[44] *ibid.*, 14. Oscar Lewis makes similar observations about the Sánchez's language, *op. cit.,* xii-xxix.
[45] I refer here to the Biblioteca era edition, 1994.

is gone she will not be of any use to her: "Si ya no le sirvo para nada, ¿qué carajos va a extrañar?" Implicit in this is an address to the reader who is also just using Jesusa, reading her as a story without really caring about who she is outside of the text. Having warned us in the epilogue, Jesusa dismisses both Poniatowska and, in turn, the reader with the abrupt statement "Ahora ya no chingue. Váyase. Dejeme dormir" (316). Contrary to any perception that Jesusa may want her story told, or that her life has been validated by the writing and our later reading of it, Poniatowska and reader are nuisances, a distraction, robbing her of her sleep.[46]

Jesusa: Transgendered, Transvestite or Transsexual?

Jesusa disrupts conventional representations of women through her behaviour and her attitudes to fixed gender roles. She believes herself to be, what could be termed, transgendered i.e. acting out roles of the other gender - a type of psychological, and oftentimes literal, cross-dressing. Jesusa's attitude to gendered behaviour is an example of her ambivalence towards women, like herself, who assume male conduct. Anna Macías explains that her attitude is typical of the combative *soldaderas*. "To achieve equality in the eyes of man, a Mexican woman must act like a man,"[47] because "in general, Mexican men view women as 'others', not as equals. To be female is to be reticent, subordinate, and self-sacrificing. To be male is to be decisive, dominant, and courageous."[48] This statement reflects some of Jesusa's attitudes in the text. As with all aspects of Jesusa's personality and worldview, she confounds more than conforms and she refuses to project a consistent view point. She considers such transgendered behaviour to be unnatural or 'mala' but respects it as a mode of survival and a way of getting access to greater personal freedom.

Jesusa is contradictory in both her trangendered games and also within her own gender identity. In her examination of essentialism, its origins, usefulness and how it has been contested by philosophers and critics, Diana Fuss declares that subjectivity - including gender - cannot be asserted to be experienced universally. She examines

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[46] Lucille Kerr in "Gestures of Authorship: Lying to Tell the Truth in Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío.*" 106 *MLN* (1999) says that the epigraph "highlights the text's status as a *novela testimonial*, which its narrative body might otherwise seems to conceal", 376.
[47] Macías, *op. cit.*, 158.
[48] *ibid.*, 158.

the sex/gender debate, i.e. whether a person's experiences are governed or determined by their body (sex), or whether their gender can ever be separated from the material. This is a thorny issue and one which I do not have space to detail fully. But, what is key to the present argument is that, although the material may determine experience, it is neither everything, nor can it be considered necessarily to be experienced consistently by all people. In Fuss's words:

> [b]odily experiences may seem self-evident and immediately perceptible but they are always socially mediated. Even if we were to agree that experience is not merely constructed but also constructing, we would still have to acknowledge that there is little agreement amongst women on exactly what constitutes 'a woman's experience'[49]

Geography, society, culture, family, history, and beliefs construct and determine experience. But no two women (or men for that matter) have the same experiences. This is why it is worthwhile writing, reading and studying fiction. Differences govern lives more that similarities. Whilst patterns can be observed and linkages meditated upon, no two lives are the same. Herein lies the crux of studying Jesusa as a character. She recounts experiences which can be plotted in fiction and (in Hayden White's term) have been emplotted in history, thereby producing comparisons with others. Her own assertions of difference and of uniqueness draw attention to the dangers of sketching grids in which other comparable characters could be placed. She simultaneously sketches herself into specific formulae, and talks herself out of them. This is most evident in her projection of herself as at once female and transgendered.

Jesusa carries a mixed attitude to gendered behaviour. She accepts that there are such things as normative female and male behaviour. In the text she compares the troops of the Revolution with the present day army. While she claims the old army were paragons of masculinity, able to march all day and endure extreme hardships, she derides the present day army, saying "ahora ya ni mujeres tienen" (237-8). Having women accompany the troops, for her, was obviously a symbol of masculine prowess and the armies' ability to fight. Yet this assertion that men, by right, should have women by their side to prove their 'hombría', stands against an earlier statement

she has made criticising men, who assume they have a right to have any woman they like. "Esa es la enfermedad de los mexicanos: creer que son muy charros porque se nos montan encima. Y se equivocan porque no todas somos sus yeguas mansas" (178). Again, she proves contradictory: she is generally critical of male behaviour towards women, but believes that they should have a woman by their side to prove their manliness.

The issue of gender is very complex in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. Jesusa explains her involvement in the Revolution as part of what she perceives to be dysfunctional gender behaviour. She has a contradictory attitude towards other women, and how her behaviour as a woman might be judged by others. This attitude is largely informed by the chauvinistic society she lives in. She does not identify with those whom she perceives to be 'ordinary' women. She has a very strict sense of what 'ordinary' men and women are like and she is strongly influenced by societal expectations of both genders. Since childhood she claims to be "muy hombrada" and that:

> ...siempre me gustó jugar a la guerra, a las pedradas, a la rayuela, al trompo, a las canicas, a la lucha, a las patadas, a puras cosas de hombre, puro matar lagartijas a piedrazos, puro reventar iguanas contra las rocas (19-20).

This is what is usually described as tomboy behaviour in a girl, because little girls are not supposed to act like this. She identifies herself as 'muy hombrada' because such behaviour is defined as inherently masculine, and in her childhood games she equates masculinity with freedom. She does not wish to accept the limitations of her gender and, as a child sought this freedom: "Yo más bien quería hacerle de hombre, alazarme las greñas, ir con los muchachos a correr gallo, a cantar con guitarra cuando a ellos les daban su libertad" (70). For Jesusa there is a rigid polarity to male and female behaviour, which to her would preclude women from warlike behaviour. Men are aggressive, violent and assertive while women are passive, gentle and compliant.

It would be easy to assume that, for Jesusa, where femininity is positive, masculinity is negative. This is not her consistent view throughout the text, as is evidenced in her description of her sister's passive acceptance of the violence directed

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[49] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (Routledge: New York, (1989) 1990), 25.

against her by men. Jesusa declares her sister's behaviour to be typical and derisory "female behaviour". She does not wish to emulate her sister's passivity, and prefers to assume the role of aggressor rather than victim (30-31). Yet, she observes her father's behaviour towards many women who pass through his life and approves of it, blaming the women, colluding with his violence and praising him for his 'manliness'. She sees her father's behaviour as correct and even conspires against the women in his life: "era hombre [her father], a fuerza tenía que ser enamorado. Siempre tuvo sus mujeres y eso sí, yo siempre les pegué porque eran abusivas" (67). Jesusa's attitude to gendered roles was formed by the society she lives in, and helps explain why in Mexico the role of the *soldaderas* has been largely ignored. It is not deemed 'natural' for women to fight. Thus any involvement is assumed to be sporadic and exceptional. This is echoed by the critics, Ana Lau and Carmen Ramos. In their introduction to *Mujeres y Revolución 1900-1917,* they claim that the soldadera was 'la subversión del género':

> la soldadera es la mujer en la guerra, con un rol de hombre: se viste y adopta una actitud masculina porque en la confusion social, sexual y genérica de la guerra, sólo como hombre puede sobrevivir. Al adoptar las ropas del hombre, las mujeres soldaderas brincaban las barreras, los límites que el ordenamiento genérico les imponía. Se volvían hombres, así sea momentáneamente.[50]

They stress both the temporality and the expediency of the change. Jesusa, in contrast repeatedly states that she had been male-identified since childhood, continued to act violently, independently and had exercised freedom during and after the Revolution. All are actions considered by her to be masculine; at times they are associated with war, but generally they are related to her need to survive.

She justifies her violent actions through a thought out personal stance, assuming it to be unnatural yet personally necessary.[51] She came to a decision that she needed to learn to defend herself having endured her husband's abuse. He was extremely violent and regularly beat her. She colluded in maintaining his image as a good husband, eventhough he locked her up, and didn't let her wash until "me

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[50] Ana Lau and Carmen Ramos, *Mujeres y Revolución 1900-1917* (México: Instituto nacional de estudios históricos de la Revolución mexicana, 1993), 37-38.

[51] Earlier in the text she declares "No me rajaba, nunca me le rajé a nadie. Y conmigo, le cae de madre al que se raje. Con mi papá también me ponía", *Hasta no verte,* 53.

agusanó la cabeza" (95-97). The turning point came when, in a fit of jealousy, he brought her away from the encampment, started to beat her with a machete and she pulled a gun on him. Yet, she feels that this necessary defensive act was 'mala' and, as a good wife, she should have let him kill her. There is probably more than a hint of irony in Jesusa's statement. While she also believed that he was justified in his jealousy, she couldn't be jealous of him: "cumplía como hombre porque las mujeres lo perseguían a propósito" (98-99 and 102-103). From that point on, she learns to "dar antes de que me den" (102). Crucially, despite her repeated protestations of her independence prior to this moment, she declares that "ya se volvió el mundo al revés" (100). She realises that her assertion of strength and power over her husband was a subversion of the status quo. As with her personal attitude to all things, she has a sense of a world outside of herself and a social structure which is rigid and unbending. Her own views are at variance with these. She describes her behaviour as necessary and often bad. Her actions, she reminds us, are those of a survivor. The inherent message carries with it a mixed dualism: on the one hand it suggests that she would be good if it were not for a society gone wrong; on the other, she is a rebellious individual who neither seeks out structures to which she can conform, nor fits well into any mould.

By way of talking about another, Jesusa expounds her variable theory on gender and of being transgendered. She describes a transvestite friend's proclivity for female attire: "[Don Lucho] era muy amante de los trapos como nosotras" (186). She fuses transvestism (the desire to dress in drag) with transexuality (the belief that one was born into the wrong body), and takes this opportunity to launch into a defence of her own, sometime, transvestism and her transexual aspirations:

> ¿Y qué? Si ése era su [Don Lucho] gusto. Yo me visto a veces de hombre y me encanta....me gusta más ser hombre que mujer. Para todas las mujeres sería mejor ser hombre, seguro, porque es más divertido, es uno más libre y nadie se burla de uno. En cambio de mujer, a ninguna edad la pueden respetar...En cambio, el hombre vestido de hombre va y viene: se va y no viene y como es hombre ni quien le pare el alto. ¡Mil veces mejor ser hombre que mujer! Aunque yo hice todo lo que quise de joven, sé que todo es mejor en el hombre que en la mujer. ¡Bendita la mujer que quiere ser hombre! (186).

For Jesusa, rigid gender rules and boundaries exist. There are ways of being male and female, and, at times, she identifies more with the former than the latter. Her rigid

boundaries implicitly suggest that she herself is transgendered. She is neither fully male nor female. Her sex may be female, but her 'performance' is often male. Her behaviour is part of her own attempts at survival, rather than any desire to sign up for corrective gender re-assignment. She sees men as having more freedom, fun, independence, and respect. She is very clear that it is the posturing and clothing which makes a 'real' man ("el hombre vestido de hombre"). She is conscious of the power of masculine clothing, as worn by men and women. When she is in drag, she has access to that power. Though the power of drag is not unique to Mexican culture, it is symptomatic of all patriarchal cultures with polarised male/female bahaviour and clothing. According to critic Debra Silverman: "The woman in man's clothing can be read as trying to usurp the phallus and its power by taking on the external signifiers of masculinity. Her drag may participate in the dichotomy that aligns power with men and weakness with women. So if women want power they have to look like men."[52] Jesusa can gain masculine freedoms through drag, as well as through her actions and behaviour.

The queer theorist, Judith Butler, has drawn attention to drag as a highly stylised performance of gender. She argues that all gender is performance, and in her 1990 Preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, she asks: "[i]s drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which itself is established? Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?"[53] In the following text she explores these questions and provides her own answers. For her, "[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[54] She reads gender as the performance of sex. This sex may not be that of the performer, but may be, in the form of drag, a dramatization of gender which, in Silverman's words, "seems to have the power to disrupt gender categories and even to determine the outcome of that disruption."[55]

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[52] Debra Silverman, "Making a Spectacle, or is There a Female Drag?" *Critical Matrix* 7.2 (1993), 80.
[53] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999), xxviii.
[54] Butler, *op. cit.*, 43.
[55] Silverman, *op. cit.*, 80.

Butler, through a critique of gender as a complex psycho-social construct, draws attention to it as artifice. Her chief concern in her inquiry is not to negate the existence of gender divisions, but to examine "the very structure of the political domain which seems to necessitate a stable subject"[56]

Jesusa, by asserting both the right of herself and of the other to dress in drag, is drawing attention to gender roles and to the way she can, through drag, simultaneously disrupt and reinforce these roles. She appropriates the external signs of masculinity when it suits her. Clothes are just a part of what makes her masculine. We are told that her behaviour from her early childhood has marked her as not only masculine identified, but also "mala": "en esta última reencarnación he sido muy perra, pegalona, y borracha. Muy de todo. No puedo decir que he sido buena" (13).[57] She describes herself as bad, but does not appear to be ashamed of this. Her badness is generally associated with her violation of strict gendered roles. A key example of this is standing up to Pedro's abuse.

As ever, Jesusa is contradictory. There are slippages in her gender identification and cross-dressing. She provides an explanation for not wearing men's clothing at the time of speaking, saying that "[n]omás que yo no puedo traer pantalones; en primer lugar porque estoy vieja y en segundo lugar, no tengo ya por qué andar haciendo visiones" (186). This statement is key to the blurred distinctions between male and female in Jesusa's mindset. She is not strictly male identified, insofar as her own vanity and personal image cannot countenance that it is appropriate for her to wear male clothing at her age. Therefore, female clothing is how she projects her older, less violent and less hot-headed self. Secondly, the phrase 'haciendo visiones' acts as a clue to her reasons for transvestism. The phrase suggests posturing, fantasy and, to employ Butler's word, performance. Straddling gender roles is performance for Jesusa. She frequently boasts of all of the men who have wooed her and asked her to marry them, thereby asserting her heterosexuality (see for example 54-55, 81, 172 and passim). Yet, she repeatedly calls attention to her male performances. We are never to understand that she is anything other than a straight woman who sometimes disguises herself as a man. Mixed in with her gender play, she also repeatedly delineates the practicalities of wanting to be male. She reiterates

[56] Fiona Webster, "The Politics of Sex and Gender: Benhabib and Butler Debate Subjectivity" *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 15.1 Winter (2000), 7.

her assertions that men have greater respect and freedoms. For example, she explains that for a time women are arrested for being out after 9pm "mujer que anduviera por la calle, mujer que se llevarían a la cárcel" (189). Although, in this matter she and her friends frequently break this law through collaboration and guile, not transvestism. On another occasion, she tells us that she is accepted as an honorary man when she wants. Her transgendered behaviour works through dress and posturing:

> Me alzaba yo las greñas para arriba, me ponía mi sombrero y mi uniforme y me iba a correr gallo con ellos: a canta con guitarra. Yo le hacía de hombre y les llevábamos gallo a toda la tendalada de viejas calientes. Anduve con muchos soldados paséandome con ellos en el puerto de Acapulco por las calles, cargando guitarra y botellas y nunca me metieron mano (154).

Their acceptance of her as an honorary man renders her sex invisible. She is one of the men, and they, of course, are straight men with their accompanying 'viejas calientes', and obviously not (as she sees them) emasculated gay men. She is accepted as part of the male homosocial world.[58] Therefore, her performance keeps her safe. Again, through language ('hacía de hombre') she emphasises that this is a performance. In continuation, she shows, through dialogue, just how accepted she is as a man:

> -¿No vienes con nosotros, Jesusa?
> -Sí, ahorita, los alcanzo.
> -Yo también voy - decía una mesera Rosita muy modosita.
> -¡No, tú no!
> -¡Ay! ¿Por qué?
> -Entre menos burros, más olotes.
> -¡Cómo serán! ¡Cómo serán!
> -¡Carajo! Esto es cosa de hombres. No queremos jirimiquiadas (154).

Using few words and sparse dialogue, she conjures up the scene succinctly. She also contrasts her acceptance and Rosita's rejection. The men's different reactions to both women are acceptable in the context of Jesusa's asserted masculinity and Rosita's femininity. Thus, it is rendered natural that one would be invited and the other would

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[57] She repeatedly refers to herself as 'mala', see for example 101, 142, passim.

[58] For further discussion of the homosocia,l see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1985).

be rebuffed. Rosita is demure (modosita) and whimpering (jirimiquiadas), while Jesusa is a man. There is further subversion of gender divisions through the detail of Rosita as a mesera. We have been repeatedly told by Jesusa that, as part of her job as a mesera, she too must assume the trappings of femininity and get her hair done in styles which imitated the film stars of the day. She expends much space describing the curls and styles they must wear in order to appeal to the male clientele of the bar (144). At the mention of Rosita's job, she is reminding us that both may have feminine attire and appearance, but Jesusa is accepted as male through the performance of an active, violent, heavy-drinking, male role.

Jesusa does not claim to be unique in her cross-dressing and transgender performances. She provides the example of other women such as Sara Camacho, who, like her "todo lo hacía como hombre" (261). It is important to her that Sara is not a 'manflora' (lesbian), as she finds lesbianism abhorrent: "pues eso es una pura desgracia" (261). This is probably her own need to assert her heterosexuality in the face of the transgendered games she plays. In contrast, she finds gay men sympathetic. For her a gay man is one who behaves like a woman: "los afeminados son más buenos que los machos. Como que su desgracia de ser mitad hombre y mitad mujer los hace mejores" (186). She identifies more with gay men than with lesbians. She does follow through her logic and asserts that lesbians are also half-woman and half-man: "[c]uentan - yo no los he visto - que viven alternado, un mes de hombre y un mes de mujer porque tienen cosa de hombre y cosa de mujer" (261). Both of her definitions of homosexuality are more akin to some complex transexuality or intersexuality.[59] However, what remains clear is that she is threatened, not by women who act like men, but women who are attracted to other women. She makes sure that she cannot be erroneously identified as lesbian by ensuring that her male attire does not coincide with any that they might wear: "[d]e joven, me gustaban las blusas de manga larga con cuello de hombre y corbata, pero como eso se ponían ellas, las aborrecí" (261). By not identifying with lesbians, she is making it clear that she is not attracted to women. Deborah A. Shaw has explained Jesusa's 'defensiveness' in her

[59] For a discussion of intersexuals i.e. individuals born with both sexual organs, see Anne Fausto-Sterling *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

'tirade'.[60] In Shaw's words, Jesusa is "keen to distance herself from the stigma of [female] homosexuality."[61] Again, it must be remembered that she is reflecting a skewed view of what constitutes homosexuality. What is crucial to her is that the (listener) reader knows that she is not a lesbian. Instead, she is implicitly stating that she craves the freedoms men have, and that she can only have if she acts like a man.

Jesusa believes in the dialectic: man is violent / woman is passive, because stories such as hers are not told. Women who commit violent acts reside outside of the traditional accounts of war. Thus they are the invisible warriors. The historian Jean Bethke Elshtain examined how gender has been represented in historical accounts of war in the West. She considers that societies are "the sum total of their 'war stories'.[62] In other words, history is told as a narrative of battles won and lost, an activity ascribed to men. She argues that women in times of war become what she calls 'Beautiful Souls' "offering succor and compassion", and men are 'Just Warriors' who either willingly or unwillingly go out and do battle.[63] She contends that: "wars are not men's property. Rather, wars destroy and bring into being men and women as particular identities by canalizing energy and giving permission to narrate."[64] She contends that during times of conflict men and women have gender specific roles. They become "locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have complementary needs and exemplify gender-specific virtues."[65] This is not to say that men and women conform to these roles. Instead they are represented in both official narrative and textual representations as behaving in fixed ways. Jesusa has internalized this fixed, perception of gendered behaviour, and feels she needs to justify her own involvement in the Revolution.

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[60] Deborah A. Shaw "Fragmented Identities: Contemporary Mexican Women's Writing" King's College University of London, 1997, 54.
[61] Shaw, 55. Shaw is careful in differentiating Jesusa's attitude to male and female homosexuality. Jesusa's attitude to the latter is "a fine example of how Jesusa is not simply a passive subject, but challenges the dominant ideological script", 55. Arturo Pérez Pisonero ignores Jesusa's prejudice against lesbians. But, he echoes Shaw's opinion with regard to Jesusa's attitude to gay men: "En el esquema general de la novela la homosexualidad aparece como símbolo de un compromiso cultural de un posible cambio de valores en una sociedad estrictamente masculina y patriarcal. En el homosexual Manuel el robachicos ve Jesusa Palacares la enunciación de la fórmula para la armonía que ella, inconscientemente, ha buscado" "La mujer en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea" *Cuadernos Hispanomericanos* 498 (1991), 133. This is perhaps somewhat idealistic on both their parts, as her assessment of Manuel's behaviour is as a "defecto" (184).
[62] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), 166.
[63] *ibid.*, 4.
[64] *ibid.*, 166.
[65] *ibid.*, 4.

Jesusa describes how she went to war in drag:

> Casi no iban mujeres en campaña; a mí me llevaba Pedro sin orden del general Espinosa y Córdoba; por eso me vestía de hombre para que se hicieran de la vista gorda. Me tapaba la cabeza con el paliacate y el sombrero. Por lo regular, unas iban como yo, porque sus maridos las obligaban, otras porque le hacían al hombre, pero la mayoría de las mujeres se quedaban atrás con la impedimenta. Doy razón de varias partes porque si me hubiera quedado en la estación, allí no veo nada ni oigo nada. Es bonito. La verdad, es bonito porque siquiera no es cuento. Uno vio. Después le agarré el modo y me gustaba ir a peliar, pero me duró poco el gusto (109-110).

At first she cross-dresses out of necessity, and not out of desire, as she claims to do later in life. She goes to the frontline of war because of her husband's jealousy. Yet, she finds herself enjoying the experience. Her honest admission of her feelings is unusual. To have a character describe war as beautiful is at best controversial and at worst damning. In the context of the *novelas de la Revolución*, war is described as messy, bloody, chaotic and horrific. Characters are dehumanised by the experience, and left scarred for life. In Azuela's *Los de abajo,* Demetrio returns home damaged and deeply unsettled with the reality that he meets. Comala, in *Pedro Páramo*, is a dead town unable to function after the war. With this literary precedent, Jesusa's conviction that her experiences of war actually gave her confidence and new found freedoms prove the uniqueness of this text within the canon of the *novelas de la Revolución.*

Although Jesusa was active in combat, and proved her abilities sufficiently to be offered command of a troop, she refused and left the army after her husband was killed in battle (128). She relishes the memory of having killed some of Pancho Villa's army, whom she considered to be brutal murderers and thieves. She tells of how she loaded up her husband's rifle, and describes how she was "tumbando ladrones como si nada" (129). After the war she realises that, while her male counterparts received recompense for their involvement in the war, as a woman she will receive nothing. She explains "No tenía más rango que el de ser galleta de capitán" (132). A 'galleta' was a derogatory term for those who were the soldiers's lovers.

In Jesusa's opinion, men can be evaluated on their treatment of women. She assesses two major figures in the Revolution - Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata - on

this basis. She criticises Villa's guerilla warfare, saying that using tactics, such as blowing up a train, meant that he was a 'bandido porque no peleaba como los hombres' (95). She says, "Yo si a alguno odio más, es a Villa" (95). Although she never met him, she has fixed ideas based on stories she heard and encounters she had with his army while on the battlefield. She sums up his behaviour, using his mistreatment of women as indicative of his character:

> Él se agarraba a la que más muchacha, se la llevaba, la traía y ya que se aburría de ella la aventaba y agarraba otra...¡Fue un bandido sin alma que les ordená a sus hombres que cada quien se agarra a su mujer y se la arrastrara! Yo de los guerilleros al que más aborezco es a Villa. Ése no tuvo mamá (96).

He uses women, encourages his soldiers to do the same, and she insults him saying "Ése no tuvo mamá". Her attitude contrasts with Nellie Campobello's celebration of Villa as a folk hero. Jesusa's harsh judgement of him on this basis may appear peculiar in the light of her mistreatment by her husband. But Pedro's behaviour was within a socially acceptable context. She was his wife and therefore his property. In contrast, she says, Villa only pretended that the women who accompanied him were his wives. He is acting in an arbitrary manner, outside of the societal rules which would normally govern his actions. He takes random women, uses them and abandons them. Pedro took Jesusa as his wife, was unfaithful, and violently abused her. But Jesusa does not see this as a reflection on her troop; she sees it merely as an unfortunate part of her personal living arrangements.

Her meeting with Zapata is cast in a very different light. The women in Jesusa's troop travelled in an advance party. They entered territory controlled by Zapata, and he saved them from cross fire. After rudimentary security checks, he invited them to join him until they could be safely returned to their own troop. In returning them he is careful to "demostrarles a los carrancistas que él peleaba por la revolución y no apoderándose de las mujeres" (75). It is a point of honour for Zapata to treat the women well, according to Jesusa. What is implicit in this is that he did not see them as warriors but as possessions. The women belonged to another, and respect for them was in accordance with fair warfare. If they had been taken seriously as soldiers, the women would have been killed or imprisoned. Through these accounts, it is evident that there are different rules governing men and women in war. When

Jesusa is acting a female role and is part of the advance party whose primary job is to set up camp and forage for food, she must be treated as a woman. But when she dresses in male attire and carries a gun, she expects to be treated as a man.

Joel Hancock claimed that Jesusa has attracted considerable attention from feminist critics because she is exceptional and androgynous:

> [i]ntimately involved with the social realities of Mexico, the protagonist deviates radically from the commonly protrayed stereotypes of women. Her personality and conduct embody a blend of so-called feminine and masculine traits, thus approximating the androgynous figure which some feminist critics regard as essential.[66]

While Hancock backs his assertion with reference to one such critic, his claim is erroneous. He ascribes androgyny to what is in fact transgendered behaviour. Jesusa's crossing of gender lines leave her in a much more ambiguous position than androgyny, as she identifies strongly at times and to varying degrees with both men and women. His is a mistaken belief that, if an individual is to go outside of the boundaries of their sex and accepted social norms for their gender, it makes them other. They cease to be either male or female but an 'it'. Hancock is judging Jesusa's analysis of her own behaviour as dysfunctional, when, in fact she appears proud of her actions, and of the fact that being 'muy hombrada' has helped her to survive. Jesusa does fall outside of typical images and stereotypes of women in Mexican literature. But so do all of the characters I deal with by the three women writers. Garro challenges the now clichéd *Malinche* figure through Isabel, Julia and the prostitutes, and Mastretta, as I shall examine in chapter 5, plays with, and subverts, representations of motherhood and the public / private divide. It is not then the critics who are most at odds with the stereotypes and tropes surrounding women in literature. It is the writers who are most active in challenging them.

Talking and Telling Fictions

Choosing to represent an individual such as Jesusa who is at the margins of society is a political and controversial act. By writing down the life-story of Jesusa, Poniatowska is traversing physical, emotional, economic, and psychological

difference and entering strange (and perhaps even alien) geographical space, everyday realities, and opportunities from her own direct lived experience. But, other than autobiography, every author writes about lives outside of his or her experience. Gender, psychological, experiential, behavioural differences notwithstanding, class and racial differences appear to give critics the greatest source of discomfit.

Poniatowska wrote *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* after a chance meeting with Josefina Borquez (1900-1987) a poor Mexican who identifies herself as *mestiza*. Poniatowska interviewed her and documented her story. Subsequently, Poniatowska amended and edited the text, creating a coherent narrative. So far this reads as the conventional story behind the writing of a *testimonio*. An intellectual interlocutor meets an illiterate informant and writes the story. This is where Poniatowska diverged from convention; she created a fictional character called Jesusa Palancares and filtered Josefina's testimony through the character Jesusa. Consequently, Poniatowska's text cannot be unproblematically described as either *testimonio* or fiction. It is a fictionalised account of a real individual's life story. Through the narrative, and as a direct result of Poniatowska's claims outside the text that the source material is authentic, she draws attention to significant absences in Mexican writing, namely, the accounts of the *soldadera*s's experiences during the Mexican Revolution, the experience of the migrant worker in Mexico City, and life for the urban underclass.[67]

Poniatowska was active in creating a piece of fiction. She has admitted to invention, omissions and even cooking the text. Jean Franco has said that: "Poniatowska has consistently amplified the testimonial genre by converting it into fiction and by incorporating many testimonials into a chronicle of a single event."[68] In this comment, Franco is clearly referring to other texts such as *La noche del Tlatelolco* and *Nada nadie*, but she recognises the fictional elements in Poniatowska's re-working of the *testimonio* and her willingness to push out the boundaries of a

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[66] Joel Hancock in "Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*: The Remaking of the Image of Woman." *Hispania.* 86:3 (1983), 353.

[67] For an examination of Mexico City in Poniatowska's work, see Laura Navarrete Maya "La ciudad de México en la obra de Elena Poniatowska (una visión de compromiso social)" in *Actas del XIII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas* Florencio Sevilla and Carlos Alvar eds. (Madrid: Castalia, 2000).

[68] Jean Franco, in "Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private." *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, eds. George Yúdice, Jean Franco & Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992).

problematic and contested genre. Franco's discussion of *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* continues in *Plotting Women, Gender and Representation in Mexico*. Franco is a weighty voice in this field, merging post-colonial theories with contemporary international feminism, combined with a considerable knowledge of Mexican letters. For her, Jesusa "illustrates nothing."[69] This is a simple yet radical statement. She represents herself, she does not, pace John Beverley, evoke other voices.[70]

In an interview in 1983, Magdalena García Pinto asked Poniatowska if *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is a *testimonio*, to which she gave a rather ambiguous reply:

> Ella [Josefina] me dice que no lo es porque a ella yo se lo di a leer[71] después y se enojó. Me dijo "eso usted no entiende nada. De qué le sirve haber estudiado tanto. Ud. Todo lo cambió. Ud. no lo entendió." Ahora es verdad que está basado en muchas conversaciones con ella pero es una novela ¿no? No es lo que ella me dictó ni en el idioma, pero el fondo siempre es ella. Eso ella no lo reconoce porque ella quisiera que yo hablara sobre ciertas cosas.[72]

This comment encapsulates the contradictions and complexities involved in the relationship between Poniatowska, Josefina and the reader/critic, and the difficulties in disentangling fact from fiction. Poniatowska tells García Pinto that Josefina disapproved of the text. Josefina complained that Poniatowska just does not understand her. Poniatowska contends that they had different aims, but that she was faithful to Josefina's character. In this comment, Poniatowska is speaking for Josefina. How are we to know she is not again mis-representing her as Poniatowska says that Josefina claims? It is a *mise en abîme* of possible mis-representations and contestable facts, since no one but Poniatowska has had direct access to the original subject, Josefina Borquez. The reader only has access to Jesusa, the character. Poniatowska is ambiguous in her statement that *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is a work of fiction. The "es una novela ¿no?" suggests that she is deliberately avoiding any absolute certainties, a refusal to categorise the text within any specific genre.

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[69] Franco, *Plotting Women, op. cit.*, 178.

[70] John Beverley, "The Margin at the Center. On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)" in Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[71] Poniatowska explains that, although she refers to Jesusa reading the text, she in fact read it to Jesusa.

[72] Interview with García Pinto "Entrevista con Elena Poniatowska, octubre de 1983, en su casa de Coyoacán", 180. In the same interview she explains that the things she omitted were: "la Obra Espiritual, su casa de Mesmer, Roque Rojas, Luz de Oriente y todo ese tipo de cosas", 180.

Poniatowska is ambivalent about her role writing Jeusa's life story. In an essay on the writers of the literary movement known as "La Onda", she asks a crucial question: "¿Qué hubiera sucedido si Jesusa Palancares escribe ELLA su propia historia y no soy yo la autora de *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*?"[73] She compares Jesusa to the writers of "La Onda" who wrote about poverty and the underclasses from direct lived experience, whereas Josefina's story was only told because Poniatowska wrote it down for her. Yet to further cloud the issue, Poniatowska continues to refer to the real-life individual, Josefina Borquez, by the name of the character Jesusa she replaced her with.[74] She is aware of the incongruity of speaking for another, and there appears to be a degree of anger against a social order which results in Jesusa not having the educational opportunities which would enable her to write her own story, saying "nadie más debe hablar por su boca."[75]

Hasta no verte Jesús mío is not a novel as texts such as Elena Garro or Ángeles Mastretta's writing can only be described. In my opinion this text is a piece of documentary fiction. Documentary fiction is a style of writing which resists closure, and is best described by the author's intent rather than in the result. The author, in order to write a documentary fiction, possesses a distrust of absolute truths, of the 'grand récit' and of the absolute differentiation between fact and fiction. It lies in the interstices: "it locates itself between factual discourse and fictive discourse"[76] and:

> ...is distinguished by its insistence that it contains some kind of specific and verifiable link to the historical world....It implicitly claims to replicate certain features of actuality in a relatively direct and unmediated fashion; it invokes familiar novelistic conventions, but it requires the reader to accept certain textual elements – characters,

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[73] Elena Poniatowska, *¡Ay vida, no me mereces! Carlos Fuentes, Rosario Castellanos, Juan Rulfo y la literatura de la onda* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, (1985) 1987), 193 capitalisation hers.

[74] Thornea Beckford in "Elena Poniatowska and the Anxiety of Authorship" (PhD thesis University of Birmingham, 1998) has carried out an indepth study of authorship in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*. She made a very salient point with respect to the authority of this text: "Although Bórquez narrates her life-story to the writer, the irony is that the textual version is attributed to Elena Poniatowska whose signature graces the cover of the work. Therefore, the illiterate woman's self-authorizing signature as 'originator' of the story becomes invisible because of Poniatowska's signature on the cover of the work", 91.

[75] Poniatowska, *¡Ay vida, no me mereces!*, op cit, 193.

[76] Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca & London: Cornell U.P., 1986), 25.

> incidents, or actual documents – as possessing referents in the world of the reader.[77]

Documentary fiction is a style which developed in the United States of America in the nineteen sixties. John Hollowell described the sixties in the United States of America as an "apocalyptic"[78] time when:

> Everyday events continually blurred the comfortable distinctions between reality and unreality, between fantasy and fact. In a society so fluid and so elusive, the creation of social realism seemed continually to be upstaged by current events.[79]

As a result, in order to find a new way of writing about North America, writers created a hybrid form that claimed to be neither purely fact nor fiction, a form which comes under the rubric of "New Journalism". John Hollowell, in his study on this form has drawn parallels between Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, a nonfiction novel and possibly the most famous of this type of writing, and Oscar Lewis' *The Children of Sánchez*. Hollowell describes the latter as more novel than "work of social science."[80] As I have mentioned earlier, Poniatowska worked for a short period with Lewis and has had a long career as a journalist. Most of her writing is marked by the documentary fiction style of writing: combining facts with personal commentary and fictional narrative, setting the context of the events, and engaging with the issues in the story. The confusion, created by Poniatowska's constant slippage between sometimes describing *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* as a novel and other times as a *testimonio*, is erased when it is described as documentary fiction. The assumption in documentary fiction is that the facts of the story are real and the narrative includes the stories of real-life individuals. It differs from *testimonio* in that the author of documentary fiction uses artifice and imagination to create a literary work. In Hollowell's words: "the best new journalists use a variety of writing techniques to place the reader 'inside' a world he [sic] may find quite different from his [sic]

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[77] *ibid.*, 26.
[78] John Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 3.
[79] *ibid.*, 5.
[80] *ibid.*, 10.

own."[81] Poniatowska has succeeded in drawing the reader inside Jesusa's world by fictionalising her subject.

Poniatowska collated the text and sequenced the events in such a fashion that it resembles a picaresque novel. In Edward H. Friedman's words, she "encodes the material according to the techniques of narrative fiction.[82] The difficulty in employing the picaresque form is that "the picaresque favors the rules of society over civil disobedience of the individual"[83] and the female protagonist, or antiheroine as Friedman calls her, "fuels the myth of male superiority while contributing to its destruction, or deconstruction."[84] In other words, although the protagonist of the picaresque offers a social critique of the society he or she lives in, ultimately he or she is an outsider, and thus exceptional. A key flaw in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* is that Poniatowska fails to get inside the character. We enter her world but not her mind. What we know of Jesusa are the stories she tells, up until the moment when she pushes us out the door so that she can get back to her life. In comparison with later works by Poniatowska, such as *Tinísima,* where by using primary sources, interviews and historical resources, she enters into Tina Modotti's world and creates an imagined inner world into which the reader can enter. By creating such psychological depth in the character 'Tina', Poniatowska brings the reader closer to the photographer, revolutionary and actress, Tina. *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* was Poniatowska's first attempt at this style of writing. Previously, she had written either journalism or purely fictional narrative, and *Tinísima* was written in 1989, a sign of how her technique has developed over the years. As a consequence of her prolific output and constant development of this form, she has become one of the major exponents of such New Journalism in Mexico.

Hasta no verte Jesús mío still stands as an exemplary text. She not only brings the reader into Jesusa's world, but has also shown a hitherto seldom seen version of the Mexican Revolution. Jesusa's behaviour throughout the text is governed by her

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[81] *ibid.*, 24. For more detailed examination and a summary of Tom Wolfe's analysis of the core components of New Journalism, see Hollowell, *op. cit.,* 25-30.
[82] Edward H. Friedman, *The Antiheroine's Voice: Narrative Discourse and Transformations of the Picaresque* (Colombia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 186. See also Charles M. Tatum, "Elena Poniatowska's *Hasta no verte Jesus mío* [Until I See You, Dear Jesus]" *Latin American Women Writers: Yesterday and Today* edited by Yvette E. Miller & Charles M. Tatum (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review, 1975).
[83] *ibid.*, xi.
[84] *ibid.*, xiv.

lived experiences. She has had to work hard to survive, in poor conditions, dogged by ill-health, with no protection from family or friends. Her life is difficult. She faces a simple expediency: she either fights or dies, even after the war. There is a danger that, with too few accounts written of women's experience of war outside of their role as 'Beautiful Souls', women like Jesusa will continue to appear exceptional and feel marginalised. Jesusa explains how she feels like an outsider because of her class:

> Al fin de cuentas no tengo patria. Soy como los húngaros: de ninguna parte. No me siento mexicana ni reconozco a los mexicanos....Si yo tuviera dinero y bienes, sería mexicana, pero como soy peor que la basura, pues no soy nada (218).[85]

Individual lives are often told as unique and therefore do not unsettle the status quo. Gayatri Spivak has said: "the putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order to better exclude the margin."[86] Those allowed into the centre are lauded as different and exceptional, thus explaining their inclusion. Jesusa is a cantankerous, contradictory and mercurial character who defies easy definitions. Discussions of her characterisation has caused much dissension among the critics and has attracted considerable attention. By using a character who disrupts cosy definitions of the marginal, and of what constituted female involvement in the Revolution, Poniatowska has opened up the area to much needed debate.

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[85] Catherine Caulfield, in "God and Satan: The Ephemeral Other and the Self-consciousness of Jesusa Palancares in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*" *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos* XXIV.2 Invierno (2000): 275-294, suggests that this statement is reflective of Jesusa's sense of otherness. She is both firmly "rooted in a particular historical context" which is "rooted in a specific ideology" and "a character that in itself is other to those Mexicans who do not share her particular language", 281.

[86] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. (New York & London: Methuen, 1987), 107.

Chapter 5

Bolero's and Escapism: Revolution and Popular Culture in *Arráncame la vida* by Ángeles Mastretta

Arráncame la vida was Ángeles Mastretta's first novel, and established her reputation as a novelist in Mexico.[1] The milieu Mastretta writes about has more in common with the world Garro represents than Jesusa's world. Like the world represented in Fuentes' novel, her characters are on the whole privileged. Mastretta writes the story of Catalina Ascencio from her adolescence, when she met her husband Andrés Ascencio, through her marriage, and up to her attainment of freedom on his death. It can be described as a *novela de la revolución*. Catalina tells the history of the Revolution from her husband's point of view. She is in the curious position of privileged witness to the top hierarchy of the Revolution, although she is not an active participant. Violence has a central role and is an underlying current in the novel, despite the fact that it represents post-bellum Mexico. *Arráncame la vida* has been criticised because it was a best seller, and thus is assumed to have no literary merit.[2] This is a limited perspective, but one which deserves some consideration. In my study I shall examine the reverberations the label of best seller has on any serious study of the novel. Catalina writes colloquially, and although her husband is cruel, she does not fulfil the stereotypical role of passive victim. Conflict and brutality rage inside and outside her home and both merit examination.

Ángeles Mastretta was born in Puebla, Mexico in 1949. She began her career – just as many novelists in Mexico have - as a journalist.[3] She studied journalism at the Universidad Autonoma de México in Mexico City. Her first published book was a collection of poetry entitled *La pájara pinta* in 1975. *Arráncame la vida* was published

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[1] Ángeles Mastretta, *Arráncame la vida* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1996). Hereinafter the numbers in parenthesis will refer to this edition.

[2] Nuala Finnegan, in "'Light' Women / 'Light' Literature: Women and Popular Fiction in Mexico Since 1980" *Donaire* 15 November (2000) has illuminated the backdrop to much of the negative press directed against Mastretta in the context of the politics of the publishing industry in Mexico, 18-19. See also Jean Franco's discussion of Mexican popular fiction in "Afterword: From Romance to Refractory Aesthetic" in Brooksbank Jones and Davies, *op. cit.*.

in 1985 and has been followed by a collection of short stories *Mujeres de ojos grandes* (1990); and two novels *Mal de amores* (1996) [4] and *Ninguna eternidad como la mía* (1999); as well as the publication of two collections of essays *Puerto libre* (1993)[5] and *El mundo iluminado* (1998). She consistently creates strong female characters in her fiction. But, she is careful to point out that neither she nor her characters are feminist: "my characters are women in search of their liberation, but they are not proponents of feminism....The behaviour of my characters is contradictory and does not conform to any thesis."[6] She suggests that her characters, because they are 'contradictory' are exceptional. With reference to Poniatowska's text, I have already examined the issue of exceptionality, but it is a topic worth revisiting in this chapter in relation to Mastretta's text. In almost conversational style, she approaches serious topics with irony and humour.[7]

Writing the Revolution: Duplicity, Complicity and Transformations

Arráncame la vida is a self-consciously populist novel which deals with the power struggle in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. This period is often called Revolutionary by those who believed that after the violent conflict the real Revolution began, whereby Mexico would become an egalitarian state.[8] That this was not achieved is clearly charted in the novel. The level of corruption, deceit, and criminal behaviour carried out in the quest for power is personified in the character Andrés Ascencio, husband to the protagonist Catalina. The sub-text of the novel appears to be that not only

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[3] Aníbal González *Journalism and the Development of Spanish American Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[4] Ángeles Mastretta *Mal de amores* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1996 (1998)).

[5] Ángeles Mastretta *Puerto libre* (Madrid: El País/Aguilar, (1993) 1994).

[6] Gabriella de Beer *Contemporary Mexican Women Writers: Five Voices* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 233.

[7] In another interview she says: "creo que lo más importante es hacer respetable su profesión. En el caso de una escritora si las mujeres preponderan en tu historia no es siempre lo importante, una no puede volverse mujeróloga o escribir solamente para nosotras" Elvira Hernández Carballido "Entrevista Ángeles Mastretta: Cuando el primer deber es contar la historia" *Fem* junio 1996, 19. For a in-depth examination of how humour is employed in the novel see Yolanda Monatalvo Apante "Arráncame la vida, del humor tierno al negro", *Actas del XIII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas* Florencio Sevilla y Carlos Alvar eds. (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 2000).

[8] For this reason, for example, the critic Lillian Estelle Fisher, writing in 1942, could entitle her article (an overview of the feminist movement in Mexico from 1910-1942) "The Influence of the *Present* Mexican Revolution Upon the Status of Women" *Hispanic American Historical Review* V:XXIII:1 (1942): 211-228.

did the Revolution not rid Mexico of the old-guard Porfiriato, but it also provided a whole new band of opportunistic, self-serving individuals the chance to gain power.

Many of the novels studied in this thesis expressed deep disillusionment with the Revolution, but none is quite so pessimistic as *Arráncame la vida.* The main body of the novel deals with what some refer to as the non-violent Revolutionary period 1930-1940s. Mastretta created a character who was too young to be directly involved in the conflict. Instead, we are given a second-hand and untrustworthy account of Andrés's involvement in the Revolution. This filtered story reflects an image of a reinvented official version which Andrés uses to justify his position of power. *Arráncame la vida* can be placed alongside other *novelas de la revolución,* because it coincides with two points of Adalbert Dessau's three-part definition. Firstly, "la reproducción e interpretación literaria de la revolución", and, secondly, "la reproducción literaria del carácter nacional mexicano captado antológicamente...[que] no intenta ya representar la realidad sino su reflejo en la conciencia."[9] Mastretta is re-imagining the Revolution from a new perspective, that is, of a woman who accompanied her husband in his quest for power and through Catalina's account of his experiences of war.

Slippages in meaning, an unreliable narrator, dubious characters with untrustworthy accounts of themselves, all demand an alert reader. The story of the Revolution is told by Catalina. The mediated account is a reminder that many of the *novelas de la revolución* and accounts of the Revolution are told by individuals who did not participate in the Revolution. The implicit suggestion is that the *novelas de la revolución*, and other accounts of the Revolution, are stories whose authors may have varying agendas or have sourced their information from individuals with a vested interest in transmitting very particular or biased versions of their stories. From the first chapter we are warned that Andrés cannot be trusted. When he meets Catalina's family, she says that he relates exaggerated stories of his involvement in the Revolution:

> Andrés les contaba historias en las que siempre resultaba triunfante. No hubo batalla que él no ganara, ni muerto que no

[9] Adalbert Dessau, *La novela de la Revolución mexicana* trans Juan José Utrilla (México D.F.: Fondo de cultura económica, (1967) 1972), 405-406.

> matara por haber traicionado a la Revolución o al Jefe Máximo o a quien se ofreciera (10).

At first, it may appear that he was merely attempting to entertain his future in-laws with stories of wartime glory, but later it becomes clear that Andrés is pure façade. He has reinvented himself. This small, early detail functions as a warning of his general character, and in metafictional fashion, the reader should be alert to the slippages in all of the stories within this text: both the large body of the text and the stories told by the characters to one another. Janet N. Gold, in an essay on *Arráncame la vida,* declared that:

> One of the pleasures of reading this text is the necessary activity of sorting out the strands or levels of duplicity and complicity, which are by no means stable or clearly defined, but rather transmit their own contradictory or double messages.[10]

It is Mastretta's skill in creating what Gold calls "strands or levels of duplicity and complicity" which make this a highly complex novel. As readers, our attention is being drawn towards the duplicitous nature of the narrator, the stories she tells us and the lies told to her by others. Our complicity lies in the sympathetic portrayal of a character who has compromised for her own and her husband's self-advancement. She is frequently selfish in her choices – such as her various love affairs – and it appears probable by the end of the novel that the function of the text was to justify Andrés's murder.

Andrés's involvement in the Revolution is a significant example of the slippages in meaning in the narrative. Andrés's story signals a key turning point in their relationship. In his account of the Revolution, as told by Catalina, she tells us that he was first employed by a General loyal to Porfirio Díaz, who later changed sides and joined up with Huerta when offered governership of Puebla. When the General died, Andrés took up with Eulalia, a woman who accompanied Madero's troops and he went to live with her and her father, Refugio Núñez. Through Eulalia Andrés became politicised: "Andrés seguía entendiendo bastante poco, pero frente a la niña se volvió maderista"

(44). Andrés is shown to be somebody with no ideals, just ambition. His politics, in as much as he can be said to have any, is assimilated from others, changing sides according to necessity. In this chapter Mastretta gives a brief account of the principal events of the Revolution and of the way they influenced Andrés, Refugio and Eulalia's lives, alongside their contrasting political views. Included in this is a tragi-comic retelling of Eulalia giving birth while watching the Convencionista army, with Villa and Zapata at its head, marching into Mexico City:

> Una columna de más de cincuenta mil hombres entró tras ellos [Villa and Zapata]. El desfile empezó a las diez de la mañana y terminó a las cuatro y media de la tarde. Eulalia parió una niña a media calle. Su padre la recibió, la limpió y la envolvió en el rebozo de Eulalia mientras Andrés los miraba hecho un pendejo (46).

The narrator's ironic tone can be garnered from this extract. Also, this story could be read as either too bizarre to be believable, or alternatively, an ironic take on Magic Realism, but it fits with the internal narrative of the story and the characterisation of Eulalia. She is represented as a highly politicised woman for whom seeing Zapata in the flesh is an honour worthy of the extreme discomfort and danger of giving birth in a crowded street. We are told that Eulalia is happy: "Tenía una hija, un hombre y había visto pasar a Emiliano Zapata. Con eso le bastaba" (47). What is most significant in the previous extract is the phrase "Andrés los miraba hecho un pendejo". The reader is implicitly reminded of who is telling the story (Catalina) and of her attitude to Andrés. In Catalina's retelling, Andrés is not a hero, but someone who can only stand idly by while his wife gives birth. This is a clever device used by Mastretta to add extra layers to the story. Not only is this Andrés's invented self, it is also Catalina's ironic recreation of Andrés's fiction. Thereby Mastretta draws attention to the novel as a fiction whose narrator is highly subjective and unreliable.

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[10] Janet N. Gold, "*Arráncame la vida*, Textural Complicity and the Boundaries of Rebellion" *Chasqui: Revista de literatura latino-americana*. 17:2 (1988), 36.

This chapter is also significant for the contrast between Eulalia and Refugio, as common working people who believed the ideals of the Revolution, and the power hungry Andrés. Eulalia and Refugio are described as people with simple ideals:

> El padre de Eulalia trabajaba también en el establo [tending to the cattle, their livelihood], odiaba y tenía esperanza, le había pasado a su hija la sonrisa sombría de la derrota y la certidumbre de que pronto la Revolución volvería para sacarlos de pobres (43).

They are poor people with aspirations for a better life, willing to make sacrifices for the greater good. "En cambio Andrés estaba harto de pobreza y rutina. Quería ser rico, quería ser jefe, quería desfilar, no ir a mirar desfiles" (47). He wants personal gain not political change. He then makes his move towards self-advancement by aligning himself with an old friend, Rodolfo, who has similar ambitions. Eulalia dies of typhoid and he is left free to follow his ambitions.

The reader is not left long with the illusion of truth created in the story, Catalina's ironic touches notwithstanding. The next chapter undermines any claims to veracity. It opens:

> Toda esta dramática y enternecedora historia yo la creí completa durante varios años. Veneré la memoria de Eulalia, quise hacerme de una risa como la suya, y cien tardes le envidié con todas mis ganas al amante simplón y apegado que mi general fue con ella (55).

Catalina's rude awakening comes when the opposition send documents suggesting that Andrés had invented his involvement with Madero, and they claim that he had fought under Victoriano Huerta. When she asks him "Así que no es cierto lo de la leche" (55), he replies: "Si les vas a creer antes a mis enemigos que a mí no tenemos nada que hablar" (55). His inability to give a direct reply obviously leads her to the conclusion that he has lied to her. Disillusioned, she sits in the garden and:

> piensa y piensa hasta que él se paró frente a mi sillón con sus piernas a la altura de mis ojos, sus ojos arriba de mi cabeza, y dijo:
> -¿Entonces qué? ¿No quieres ser gobernadora?

> Lo miré, nos reímos, dije que sí y olvidé el intento de crearle un pasado honroso (55).

This moment is crucial to an understanding of both Catalina and her relationship with her husband. She is not an innocent witness. She too must bear responsibility as someone who is happy to facilitate his corruption and deceit for her own personal gain, "Me gustaría ser gobernadora. Llevaba casi cinco años entre la cocina, la chichi y los pañales. Me aburría" (55). Catalina's acceptance of the status quo is part of the core power-play in the novel between husband and wife. Danny J. Anderson sees this as part of what he calls:

> the transformational displacement of the historical record, of the story of a traditional marriage, and of the dominant social codes for proper language use, disturbs the represented field of values and produces for readers the interstices where the lines of power relations become palpable.[11]

Andrés consistently tries to impose his will on Catalina and she repeatedly and variously resists his attempts to control her. The power struggle is part of the 'tretas del débil' which I discussed in relation to *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. The 'tretas del débil' are the limited tools available to the weak to usurp the powerful. These are various and complex in *Arráncame la vida*. The telling of the story merely with the unreliable Catalina as narrator is one level of these 'tretas'. She obtains ultimate revenge by being given the textual space to vindicate her actions in her first-person narrative. Then these are the continuous acts of rebellion: her love affairs; her collusion with the illicit love affairs of his children and hers (some of his children from previous relationships live with them); her decisions whether or not to accompany him on his campaigns; the use of sex as a weapon (99) and so on. All these are part of what Anderson calls the "interstices where the lines of power relations become palpable". Anderson is eager to clarify that by creating a subversive, illusive text Mastretta is not creating an historically inaccurate text, but is exploring power relations in a new way. Traditionally, in Mexican letters women have been represented as passive victims and men as active agents. Instead, Mastretta

implicitly queries this given through the ambiguous narration of Catalina. Evoking Michel Foucault's theoretical approach to genealogies of power, Anderson explains Mastretta's technique:

> *Arráncame la vida* does not escape history; rather, within this displacement and disturbance the novel produces a space where readers can perceive the genealogy of the power relations that continue to affect Mexico in the 1980s, and thus imaginatively understand the agenda for the future.[12]

The novel is grounded in a specific historical moment of national formation. The power relations established in the aftermath of the conflict would be continued over the following decades. Mastretta deals with a loaded topic behind an apparently light-weight narrative employing an untrustworthy narrator.

'Genealogies of the self' and 'technologies of the self' are ideas propounded by Foucault in an attempt "to sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves."[13] Foucault propounded the thesis that the ways in which different cultures developed their methods of disciplining their peoples were directly related to the changing attitudes to the way the body is perceived. Examining the history of French disciplinary practices, he reads the move from torture and public executions in the eighteenth century as a result of the realisation that the government could not be seen to carry out acts of revenge on its people, and instead must effect power on its citizens.[14] The influence of Foucault's theories of power on critical praxis has been to invest the public/private debate with further meaning. According to Foucault, there is no private in which the public is not all-pervasive. In previous systems the body was "the king's property, on which the sovereign left his work and brought

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[11] Danny J. Anderson, "Displacement Strategies of Transformation in *Arráncame la vida*, by Ángeles Mastretta" in *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. 21 (1988), 24.
[12] *ibid.*, 24.
[13] "Technologies of the Self" by Michel Foucault in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick H. Hulton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), 17-18. See also *Foucault: A Critical Reader* edited by David Couzens (Oxford: Blackwell, (1986) 1998).
[14] *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Person* Michel Foucault translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage Books, 1979), 74-92.

down the effects of his power. Now he [sic] will be rather the property of society, the object of a collective and useful appropriation."[15] The enlightenment brought with it new understandings of humanity and with it new forms of punishment. To punish by using pain was losing currency. In its place the body of the individual could be deprived of its newly defined rights and duties. The body became invested with meaning: "power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs."[16] The body and its activities became bureaucratized. Laws were drawn up ascribing to it rights, duties and meaning. Sexuality, as an extension of the body's performative functions, was also made subject to external controls. In Lois McNay's words, Foucault's theories suggest that "sexuality is not an innate or natural quality of the body, but rather the effect of historically specific power relations."[17] Anderson is suggesting that (in the Foucauldian sense) Mastretta is laying bare the power relations which are exercised over women such as Catalina in Mexico. Consequently, he is implying that she is giving the reader her own historical reading of the processes which led to the present condition of the Mexican woman.

Catalina: Story-teller or Telling Stories?

Catalina's honesty is not irreproachable. She is an unreliable narrator who often attempts to shock and scandalise in order to entertain the reader, rather than have any need to tell the truth. Frequently, her light, ironic tone is tinged with an awareness of the seriousness of her husband's behaviour. This is particularly the case when she realises that her children are also conscious of his murders. Her young son asks how people become stars when they die, as she has said they do, when he has heard his father say "A ése búsquenle un hoyo" (87). She is upset that she cannot protect her children's innocence and takes full responsibility for their loss. "No podían vivir en las nubes nuestros hijos. Estaban demasiado cerca. Cuando decidí quedarme decidí también por ellos y ni modo de guardarlos en una bola de cristal" (88). Consequently, she decides to distance the children from her (and most importantly from Andrés) and leave them in the

[15] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, op. cit.,* 109.
[16] *ibid.,* 25.
[17] *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 3.

care of their nanny, in order the better to protect their innocence. Catalina's acquiescence and silence implicate her in Andrés's activities.

The novel is the account of an insider, that is someone who had direct access to the machinations of the oligarchy who ran the country after the conflict. In an interview in *Fem* Mastretta explained her choice of narrator:

> en *Arráncame la vida* yo quería contar la historia del cacique y del medio en que vivía y entendí que como no soy historiadora ni quería hacer historia sino ficción, me dije: Necesito una voz que sepa y no sepa, así decidí que esa voz sería la de la mujer del cacique, de esa manera inventé la voz de Catalina.[18]

According to Mastretta, Catalina's function is as a spy or witness. She is an observer in Andrés's power games. Mastretta emphasizes that, as an author of fiction, in this text she does not aspire to writing history. In her act of not writing history she uses the woman and not the man as narrator because she is "una voz que sepa y no sepa". This is an ambiguous answer with many nuances, and begs the question: why is it not history when a woman speaks? The answer lies in both history and tradition, and both are rooted, ultimately, in power. Woman has not had a place in history, as history primarily documents war, and, as I have discussed in this thesis, women's roles in wars have been largely omitted. Also, women have had few roles in the decision-making processes within the political arena which are another aspect of historical record. Therefore, when a woman speaks, it is anecdote and story, in sum private, not public - the latter being the stuff of history and the space belonging to man. Mastretta is emphasising the place and location of power of women in Mexico: they belong to the private where they can use all their skills to their own ends, but they do not have any power in public spaces, either intellectually or physically. Catalina is a feisty, honest, vulgar and well-developed character who is aware of, and accepts, her husband's criminal behaviour. Thus Mastretta has created a character who is subversive in a way that fits with traditional representations of women, while simultaneously questioning it. Catalina rebels, not to

[18] Elvira Hernández Carballido, "Entrevista Ángeles Mastretta: Cuando el primer deber es contar la historia", in *Fem* junio 1996, 20.

change society substantially, but to improve her own situation.[19] When she finds life with her husband too oppressive, she appears to slowly poison him with a herbal infusion she gives him, claiming it to be medicinal. Catalina can be criticised as a privileged woman who is inculcated in her husband's actions because she does not act against him, and who does not use her position of privilege to create any significant change.

Catalina's privilege fits with the conventions of the genre. The novel is highly conventional stylistically. It is, on some level, an historical romance insofar as it relates Catalina's love stories set in the past. It opens with the marriage of Andrés and Catalina "Ese año pasaron muchas cosas en este país. Entre otras Andrés y yo nos casamos" (9), and ends with his death, when Catalina declares in an internal monologue: "Cuántas cosas ya no tendría que hacer. Estaba sola, nadie me mandaba. Cuántas cosas haría, pensé bajo la lluvia a carcajadas" (305). His death is her liberation. Catalina marries Andrés at fifteen when he is "más de treinta" (9). The opening page sets the jocular, ribald tone of the novel. Catalina presents herself as a sexual being who unselfconsciously lusts after this man. We are invited by her description to join her gaze, and understand her attraction for this murderous, treacherous, adulterous man:

> Me gustó. Tenía las manos grandes y unos labios que apretados daban miedo y, riéndose, confianza. Como si tuviera dos bocas. El pelo después de un rato de hablar se le albortaba y le caía sobre la frente con la misma insistencia con que él lo empujaba hacia atrás en un hábito de toda la vida. No era lo que se dice un hombre guapo. Tenía los ojos demasiado chicos y la nariz demasiado grande, pero yo nunca había visto unos ojos tan vivos y no conocía a nadie con su expresión de certidumbre (9).

Through these synecdochic images of Andrés's hair, lips, eyes, gestures and so on, Mastretta provides a sensual portrait of a man from the point of view of his wife, Catalina. The description of Catalina's gaze is more usual in fiction in a man than a woman. Her representation of him as an attractive man is an open invitation to the readers to join in her gaze, and perhaps to fill in the gaps according to their own personal

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[19] In Myriam Yvonne Jehenson's words, Catalina's "quest for self-identity is not integration into, but repudiation of, that society whose restrictive norms have curtailed her freedom" in *Latin American Women Writers: Class, Race, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 115.

fantasies. It is an attempt to have us understand their relationship. Her aggressiveness and honest declaration of her attraction for him belies the myth of the passive woman waiting to be saved by a man. Later, she ironically mocks conventional fairytale imagery when she declares "Y de veras me atrapó un sapo. Tenía quince años y muchas ganas de que me pasaron cosas" (11). Her 'sapo' did not turn into a prince, nor did she expect him to. Instead he facilitated her escape from home, and gave her a chance to obtain freedom from her parents. Unfortunately for her, she had not planned for the limitations on that freedom which were imposed by being his wife. Later, in the opening chapter, she compares her naïveté to Andrés's relative sophistication. She describes her and her sisters as "hijas de un campesino que dejó de ordeñar vacas porque aprendió a hacer quesos", while he is "convertido en general gracias a todas las casualidades y todas las astucias menos la de haber heredado un apellido con escudo" (10).[20] It is very possible that she is being playful. She creates a dialectic between the person she was when she got married and Andrés. She establishes herself as a young innocent, tied to a corrupt man, thereby appealing to the reader's sympathies. But we soon learn to be wary of her version of the truth. Because we only have her story to go on, she is not always a reliable narrator.

As well as the attention drawn to Catalina as a narrator, intertextual references are made to other story-telling devices. In particular, popular culture is frequently alluded to in the novel. Reference is made to cinema, both Hollywood and Mexican, and to acting. She mentions being treated like the actress Dolores del Río while out at night (115); and later she describes feeling like an "artista de Hollywood", when wearing her fox skin coat (155). In an amusing juxtaposition of politics and popular culture she declares: "Nunca se me va a olvidar el día que se convirtió en candidata a la presidencia porque fue el mismo que llegó Tyrone Power al país" (112). His arrival provides her with an opportunity to portray the frustrations and limitations experienced by women of her class,

[20] Monique J. Lemaître León reads the juxtaposition of these two contrasting representations, of themselves by Catalina and Andrés, as an example of the differences between their discourse: hers is her subjective reality, and his is to comply with official discourse, in "La historia oficial frente al discurso de la 'ficción' femenina en *Arráncame la vida* de Ángeles Mastretta" *Explicación de textos literarios* 23.2 (1994/1995): 39-53. This suggests that hers is somehow more honest than his, when she clearly proves herself to be a dubious narrator.

and the role of popular culture in their lives. The women are not interested in the presidential election, but in escapism. She accompanies a friend, Mónica, to the airport to meet the famous Hollywood actor. She says that, due to her husband's prolonged ill-health, Mónica "llevaba años guardándose las ganas de coger...En cuanto vio a Tyrone Power le salieron todos los deseos y se puso como una fiera" (112). That Mastretta sets Mónica's behaviour up as the act of a sexually frustrated woman, takes on a darkly comic turn when she says that Power is accosted by so many woman that he is left "sin saco y sin un solo botón en la camisa" (113). Films are presented as a popular form of escapism, a release from the frustrations and tedium of everyday life. She also considers novels to have the same function. When Catalina meets Alonso Quijano, with whom she later has an affair, she compares his looks to those of Clark Gable and tells him that the novel *La dama de las camelias,* which he made into a film, was a significant text in her mother's opinion (248). She tells him, "era la biblia" (249). Popular culture is important to Catalina. Her taste in popular culture is not just local. It is international, reflecting the influence of the cultural production of other countries on Mexican cultural consumption. Hollywood had long had an influence on both the films that were made in Mexico and on what was seen by audiences. Charles Ramírez Berg explains:

> Hollywood's overwhelming dominance devastated Mexico's film production. Only two Mexican films were made in 1923, none at all in 1924. By the late 1920s, Mexican film production had virtually disappeared....Though the Mexican film industry had made its phoenixlike rebirth in the early 1930s and matured and solidified into a considerable national cinema by the end of that decade, it had grown accustomed to the Hollywood way of telling stories.[21]

Catalina's tastes are reflective of those of the general public. Imported popular culture, whether sentimental French novels or Hollywood film, had wide diffusion in Mexico.

Acting recurs as a theme: women must act out roles. During the time this novel is set (1930-1940s), "in general, women still fell into one of three archetypes according to rigid class divisions: the doll-like beauty, the subjugated wife and mother, and the

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[21] Charles Ramírez Berg, *Cinema of Solitude: A Critical Study of Mexican Film, 1967-1983* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 13.

prostitute."[22] Catalina acts out each of these roles; at times playfully and, at others, expediently. She knows that she must adopt a public persona to assist her husband's political career on the election trail "Yo empecé a sentir que llevaba siglos soñando niños y abrazando viejitos con cara de enternecida madre del pueblo poblano", while "en la ciudad todo el mundo hablaba de los ochocientos crímenes y las cincuenta amantes del gobernador" (71). There are two realities in her life: the projected official version and the real version, which rarely transcends rumour and suspicion. She is aware that she is compromised by her collusion, and the fact that she is his "cómplice oficial" (72) and "parte de la decoración, alguien a quien se le corren las atenciones que habría que tener con un mueble si de repente se sentara a la mesa y sonriera....La cosa era ser bonita, dulce, impecable" (74). In public, she is denied agency and has no right to express personal opinions, becoming merely a function, decoration or tool for Andrés's political ambitions. Yet, she has also consciously decided to take part in these ambitions. The critic, Anderson, refers to Catalina's behaviour as that of acting out a 'script'.[23] She must be seen to be the perfect wife, an image, he claims, she recounts as a "displacement", because the reader is constantly being reminded that it is both an act and a constant power-play between husband and wife.[24]

When going to vote for the first time, she accompanies Andrés "a presumir de mi condición de su mujer oficial" (137). There she is also acting out a role "fui hasta la urna de la mano de mi general como si no le supiera nada, como si fuera la tonta que parecía" (137). In this she reminds us of the difference between appearance and reality, and, in a private act of rebellion, she votes for the opposition, although she knows that the voting system is rigged in favour of the candidate Andrés is supporting. Her rebellion appears fruitless. She has long since made a decision to stay with Andrés. She has made concessions. As he constantly reminds her, she is his and must act that role perfectly. On one occasion, having caught her flirting he accuses her of showing him up:

-Qué obvia eres, Catalina, dan ganas de pegarte.

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[22] Claudia Schaefer, *Textured Lives: Women, Art, and Representation in Modern Mexico* (Tucson & London: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 7.
[23] Anderson, *op. cit.*, 15.
[24] *ibid.*, 16.

> -Y tú eres muy disimulado, ¿no?
> -Yo no tengo por qué disimular, yo soy un señor, tú eres una mujer y las mujeres cuando andan de cabras locas queriéndose coger a todo el que les pone a temblar el ombligo se llaman putas (102).

Her gender requires her to act out a role, and his allows him every freedom, even letting him go so far as to abuse this power with his threat of domestic violence. Here Mastretta brings to the fore the significance of the public/private divide. They are spaces in which different freedoms are allowed to men and women, as Andrés has succinctly explained. It is clear that, unlike Jesusa in Poniatowska's text, "Catalina does not set out to subvert gender norms. Neither does she seek to uphold them: she simply follows whichever course of behaviour is most suitable for self-protection, according to the circumstances."[25] She ventures into spaces that would normally be seen to be inappropriate for someone of her class and sex: when she wants to meet her lover, if she wants to make a point to Andrés or if she is merely accompanying a friend to see a movie star. This makes her exceptional. At other times her behaviour within given spaces is highly conventional. There is a constant tension in the novel between the boundaries of the acceptable and the unacceptable. Although she never radically subverts gender norms, she does play with these norms as it suits her.

Catalina often flies in the face of conventional romantic narrative which represents marriage as the apotheosis of a woman's self-fulfillment. This is perhaps because her narrative begins where other fairytale romances end: at marriage. Catalina describes her 'happy ever after' in typically ascerbic brevity: "Sé que tanta faramalla (of the wedding ceremony) acabará en el cansancio de todos los días durmiendo y amaneciendo con la misma barriga junto" (13). As if to confirm her suspicions, Andrés's wedding vow is: "prometo las deferencias que el fuerte debe al débil" (14). In this way, from the opening pages of the novel, Catalina establishes that this is a story without the typical happy ending. Simultaneously, through humour, Mastretta ensures that this is not an entirely downbeat narrative. In critic Yolanda Montalvo Apante's words: "Catalina es lúcida y al no tomarse en serio y reír del ridículo que hace con su voz consigne la

[25] Deborah A. Shaw, "Fragmented Identities: Contemporary Mexican Women's Writing" (PhD thesis King's College, University of London, 1997), 107.

complicidad del lector que también ríe de la escena".[26] Her ludic tone acts as a verbal wink to the reader. We are complicit in the events of the novel, as we have access to her darkly humorous tone in a way that is not available to those within the narrative. An example of the conflict between appearance and her appraisal of the situation is her statement that: "Andrés me tenía guardada como un juguete con el que platicaba de tonterías, al que se cogía tres veces a la semana y hacía feliz con rascarle la espalda y llevar al zócalo los domingos" (28). Implicit in this remark is that, through her assessment that she is being used as a toy, her very awareness of it suggests dissatisfaction. If she had described the physical aspect of her married life in terms of romantic moments of lovemaking, rather than the cruder use of the verb 'coger', or written with pride at accompanying her husband around the local square, as opposed to the implication of being treated as a family pet ('llevar al zócalo los domingos'), this would be an entirely different narrative. Catalina's playfulness, and her perspective creates what Montalvo Apante describes as a "pastiche del género" (i.e. novela rosa).[27]

At times, Catalina dislikes her role as gobernadora and claims that:

> Me hubiera gustado ser amante de Andrés. Esperarlo metida en batas de seda y zapatillas brillantes, usar el dinero justo para lo que se me antojara, dormir hasta tardísimo en las mañanas, librarme de la Beneficiencia Pública y el gesto de primera dama. Además, a las amantes todo el mundo les tiene lástima o cariño, nadie las considera cómplices (71-72).

Her statement is made subversive in the context of Mexican literary production. Debra A. Castillo explains that in Latin American fiction "unproductive eroticism is not only immoral; it is unpatriotic and often related to the barbarous prehistory of the American mission, and can be represented by 'unnatural' women for whom sensuality is power."[28] An example of one such woman is the often-maligned *Malinche*, already discussed in chapter 1. Another is the eponymous Doña Bárbara, whose sexuality is represented as

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[26] Montalvo Apante, *op. cit.*, 262.
[27] *ibid.*., 268.
[28] Debra A. Castillo, *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 16.

dangerous, and literally, barbarous.[29] She is seductive and powerful, and has to be defeated. In the face of Catalina's sometime frustrations, the life of a lover is represented in this quotation as quite idyllic. In contrast, throughout the text, she shows how different the reality is, not only in the difficulties she encounters as Carlos's lover, but also as shown in the relationship between Bibi and General Odilón Gómez Soto. In the novel, Catalina recounts an incident, at a party, which demonstrates the powerlessness of women - particularly lovers - and the attitude that they are playthings with which the men can do what they like. General Gómez Soto was pandered to because he owned a large number of newspapers and, in the novel, control of the press is directly linked to control of national power (127). One night Catalina, Andrés and supporters of Fito, their desired candidate for president, attend a party at Gómez Soto's residence. Gómez Soto, drunk and belligerent, climbs onto a table and Bibi attempts to convince him to get down. In response he calls her a "vieja puta" and attempts to strangle the pregnant Bibi (134). Meanwhile "nadie intervenía", until, on Catalina's insistence, Andrés steps in and stops Gómez Soto. Shortly afterwards "todo el mundo había olvidado el incidente y otra vez Bibi y Odi eran una pareja perfecta", and Bibi acts as if nothing happened (135). This demonstrates that, while women's behaviour is carefully policed, male transgressions can be dismissed as rough play.[30] Although many witnessed the event, they will all willingly pretend that it did not happen. Gómez Soto's power is sufficient to exonerate and hide, even in public, his character flaws. Appearances must be maintained.

Catalina is aware of the importance ascribed to appearance by other women. In many ways she represents herself as being exceptional in her honesty. In response to listening to a speech by the president at the "Monumento de la Madre" on the "inmenso regocijo de ser madre y cosas por el estilo" (273), she gives her real opinion of motherhood to his wife, Chofi:

> En lugar de responder que muy acertado y callarme la boca, tuve la nefasta ocurrencia de disertar sobre las incomodidades, lastres y obligaciones

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[29] Gloria Durán provides an overview of the representation of women such as Doña Bárbara in "From Victim to Witch: The Evolution of Woman's Role in Spanish American Fiction as a Clue to Negative Social Change", in *Discurso: revista de estudios iberoamericanas* 10:2 (1993): 85-95.

[30] After the incident Gómez Soto says "A veces jugamos un poco brusco, pero todo es juego" (134).

> espeluznantes de la maternidad. Quedé como una arpía. Resultaba entonces que mi amor por los hijos de Andrés era un invento, que cómo podría decirse que los quería si ni siquiera me daba orgullo ser madre de los que parí. No me disculpé, ni alegué a mi favor ni me importó parecerles una bruja. Había detestado alguna vez ser madre de mis hijos y de los ajenos, y estaba en mi derecho a decirlo (274).

Evidently convention would suggest that she should "responder que muy acertado y callarme la boca." Instead, she speaks directly and honestly. In her reporting of the story, she uses exaggerated language such as 'nefasta', 'arpía', and 'bruja', implicitly mocking the other woman.[31] In a brief paragraph she conveys the dialogue succinctly and with considerable irony. She is objecting to the appearance of always being satisfied rather than giving a generalised complaint of motherhood, which is what Chofi is suggesting. In this way she can expect support from others who despise the hypocrisy of having to be proud and uncomplaining, irrespective of their troubles. The emphasis on her own exceptionality implicitly suggests that other woman are happy with their lot, that they willingly put up fronts and are incapable of rebellion. The contention by the narrator of her uniqueness diffuses any threat she may pose. In Shaw's words:

> While she [Catalina] may search for individual freedom within a Mexican brand of capitalist patriarchy, she never seeks to undermine that system. On the contrary, she helps to preserve it as the identity she has constructed for herself is born of that system, and so she depends upon it for her survival.[32]

Through Mastretta's narrative, Catalina is a product of the creeping neoliberal ideology of 1980s politics in Mexico. She is exceptional in that way that self-fulfilment is an individualistic enterprise spawned of market economic thinking. Value is not placed on collective action. Instead, Catalina acts out of a desire for personal survival and individual self-realisation. If she lays claim to the fact that other individuals shared her feelings, then there is scope for demanding social change. Why change if most women were happy with their lot? Change only occurs through collective actions, and throughout the novel Mastretta represents one such action (the Revolution) as having

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[31] For an in-depth study of the significance of motherhood in Mexican narrative, see Hurley *op. cit.*.
[32] Shaw *op. cit.*, 108.

been inherently flawed. Catalina's claim to uniqueness de-politicises the novel while simultaneously having an evident conservative political undercurrent.

Playing Roles in Public and Private

The projection of perfection, acting roles, pretence of contentment are all significant to the way private lives are presented in public. Mastretta invests the public/private duality with new meaning. In other texts Jean Franco's reading of this duality has been pertinent. As I have previously examined, Franco uses architectural structure to examine privileged women's lives. Mexican houses are built to be inward looking, with thick outer walls and a central patio.[33] Therefore women are trapped in houses where they are shielded from the outside and subject to close internal supervision. In contrast, Catalina's house is open to public scrutiny, and by extension so too is her life. She describes herself as a prisoner in what she sees as Andrés's house:

> Otra quería yo ser, viviendo en una casa que no fuera aquella fortaleza a la que le sobraban cuartos, por la que no podía caminar sin tropiezos, porque hasta en los prados Andrés inventó sembrar rosales (73).

She inhabits the private, which is also strictly controlled by him. The children are her responsibility, but are not considered hers: "siete hijos apellidos como él, salidos de él, suyos mucho antes que míos" (73). When she refers to periods during which she becomes a 'perfect' wife, she describes them as if they were times of illness, i.e. when the house is completely ordered, the children well-behaved etc. She says "fui adquiriendo obsesiones" (73). What is also significant is that it is clearly a performance. Her home is open to public view. Therefore she must act out a role, within a house which functions as a stage. Her performance must include all three aforementioned archetypes:

> Establecí un orden enfermo, era como si siempre estuviera a punto de abrirse el telón. En la casa ni una pizca de polvo, ni un cuadro medio chueco, ni un cenicero en la mesa indebida, ni un zapato en el vestidor

[33] Jean Franco, "Going Public: Reinhabiting the Private." *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture* edited by George Yúdice, Jean Franco & Juan Flores. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992).

> fuera de su horma y su funda. Todos los días me echinaba las pestañas y les ponía rímel, estrenaba vestidos, hacía ejercicio, esperando que él llegara de repente y le diera a todo su razón de ser. Pero tardaba tanto que daban ganas de meterse en la piyama desde las cinco, comer galletas con helado o cacahuetes con limón y chile, o todo junto hasta sentir la panza hinchada y una mínima quietud entre las piernas (144).

Here, she declares herself tired of being the perfect wife, mother, and lover. The strain of living up to these societal and marital expectations proves difficult. Yet, she is a privileged woman who has chosen to live with this man and comply with his orders because it has led to a luxurious lifestyle. Her other life choices are not considerable, and given that her story is related to us in a biased fashion it is very easy to sympathise with her. Knowing that, can we condone her behaviour as someone who facilitated her husband's brutality and corruption? This is the central dilemma of the text. Catalina asks us to understand her and condone her husband, yet she does little to stop him, and by being his 'perfect' wife, by nurturing his children and sharing his bed, she enables him to attain a position of power and wealth. In response to this consideration, in an interview with Kay S. García, Mastretta said that: "It would go against the logic of the story if Catalina had tried to convince Andrés to stop being a murderer, to start being a responsible politician and respecting the will of the majority."[34] Thus, Catalina's inaction appears to be in the interest of narrative logic, rather than any attempt to create an ideal scenario. Mastretta does not aspire to write a political agenda into her text, as she says in the same interview: "I don't have messages for anybody. I believe that messages are made for politicians and priests. Writers are only obliged to invent and to tell stories."[35] It can also be suggested that Mastretta encourages a certain level of discomfort in the reader. Catalina is honest about her husband's wrongdoings, and is aware of her role as facilitator. Consequently, as readers, we may be moved to share in her ambivalence. Mastretta addresses the problem of political collusion through Catalina without appearing to have a political agenda in her writing.

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[34] Kay S. García, *Broken Bars: New Perspectives from Mexican Women Writers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 80.
[35] García, *op. cit.*, 79.

Public and private spheres are shown to be problematic in the novel. They are less a dialectic and more a continuation of the one public domain ruled over by Andrés. Hannah Arendt sees this less rigid separation as a modern condition, whereby the private sphere is becoming a matter of "collective concern". She continues: "the two realms indeed constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-ending stream of the life process itself."[36] If, as Arendt suggests, the private has now been pushed into the public, it is necessary to examine how she defines the public:

> It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves – constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses – lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. The most current of such transformations occurred in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences.[37]

Arendt brings to the fore two points in relation to the public that are of relevance to *Arráncame la vida*: appearance and the significance of storytelling. Catalina achieves external validation through the telling of her story. She tells her story in order to bring to a public sphere events, thoughts, feelings and aspirations which are hidden behind appearance. To use Arendt's terms she takes her 'intimate life' out of the shadows and, using the backdrop of the political events of the time, in the telling they become public. She has appeared to be the perfect mother and wife while being constantly disaffected with her lot. She has variously played with appearance, and has been trapped behind it. Her private life has been subject to public scrutiny because of the very public role her husband has played and her involvement in that world. Yet, when she is telling the story of that life, she is teasing the reader with half-truths and displacements. Her strategies suggest that, however public a person can be, either through circumstance or out of

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[36] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 33.
[37] *ibid.*, 50.

volition, we cannot fully see into his or her private world. According to Arendt, the term public also "signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it."[38] This "privately owned place" is not merely the locus of inhabited living space, but the personal internal world or consciousness. Therefore we know as much about Catalina as she wants us to know, despite her very public place in the world.

Arráncame la vida brought to the fore themes of the public/private duality which Mastretta later developed in *Mal de amores*. It is evident from both novels that she sees space as highly gendered and political. I shall briefly examine how the private is represented as a disrupted space during the violent period of the Revolution in this novel. *Mal de amores* is a romantic novel set in the period preceding and during the Revolution. It is ostensibly the story of Emilia Sauri and her love affair with two men: the adventurous, boy-next-door turned Revolutionary, Daniel and the staid, sensible doctor Antonio. Her love for Daniel is that of young friendship turned passionate love. In contrast, her attraction to Antonio appears to be a mixture of their shared interest in medicine and of a socially acceptable match. Her love stories are set against the background, first of her liberal upbringing, where politics is a staple part of her everyday existence:

> En casa de los Sauri se discutía el futuro de la patria como en otras se discuten los deberes del día siguiente, y la botica parecía una cantina desordenada donde los parroquianos dirimían sus apegos y ambiciones antes de subir a seguir discutiéndolos tras el caldo de frijoles que Josefa tenía para todo aquel que pasara por su comedor (*Mal de amores*, 228).

Later, the narrator tells us: "La política fue siempre una de las yerbas importantes de los guisos servidos en casa de los Sauri" (*Mal de amores*, 249). Secondly, her relationships are intercalated with accounts of the Revolution and Daniel's involvement in it. Mastretta engages with the invasion of the Revolution into the private domestic space of Emilia's home life. Not only is her relationship with Daniel altered because of his involvement with the Revolution, it is also clear that her home is a space where

[38] *ibid.*, 52.

Revolutionary politics is part of everyday life. Mastretta directly declares the invasion of the private by the public act of war: "Nada era tan cambiante como la rutina por esos tiempos" (*Mal de amores*, 228). War changes routine and affects the private.

Emilia's relationships with Antonio and Daniel can be read as metaphors for the Mexican peoples' relationship with the Revolution. Daniel is the Revolution. He is risky, complex, attractive, and elusive.[39] In contrast, Antonio is the security and reliability of a liberal new democratic order. The debates surrounding the Revolution are largely played out in discussions between Emilia's parents and their friends. They want an end to Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, yet are troubled by the damage caused by war (*Mal de amores*, 213 and 219). Emilia is torn between wanting Revolution or wanting democracy. Daniel tells her that the Revolution is not for her. She belongs to domestic, secure spaces:

> - Esta guerra no es tuya, Emilia - le dijo apretándose contra ella la última noche que durmieron bajo el techo de los Morales.
> - ¿Qué es mío? - le preguntó Emilia.
> La Casa de la Estrella, la medicina, la botica, mis ojos - le dijo Daniel (*Mal de amores*, 264).

The possibility of Emilia fighting in the Revolution is never really engaged with. She spends a period as a medic, principally attached to the Red Cross. Thus her skills are used in a neutral, non-political manner. Emilia is the private spaces pushed forcibly into the public due to circumstances. Yet, at one point when she gets the opportunity she takes flight to Chicago "en busca de la universidad y de un futuro que no pensará en la guerra" (*Mal de amores*, 285). Later she realises that she cannot continue to evade the Revolution: "sabía de cierto que de esa guerra no podría irse nunca, aunque nunca la viera más que de lejos aunque sólo le tocara rehacer su debacle y sus ruinas como mejor pudiera" (*Mal de amores*, 309). Having left him to go to university, she accompanies Daniel in his pursuit of war. She is resigned to the fact that he will fight, and she will pick up the pieces, frequently separated from him.

Mastretta presents Daniel/Revolution fatalistically. Emilia/the people are bound to him/it. But they are also the ones who suffer and must recoup the damages. The Revolution, just as with Daniel and Emilia's relationship, is an impossibility. It cannot exist within routine. The ordinariness of everyday life is incompatible with its continuance. Emilia continues their relationship throughout the rest of their lives, all the while having a conventional relationship with Antonio.[40] The relationship with Antonio is solid and reliable, while her life-long affair with Daniel is just that: brief and passionate liaisons.

The representation of the Revolution is, ultimately, negative. Beginning a Revolution is described variously as "rasgar una almohada de plumas" (*Mal de amores*, 190) and freeing a tiger (*Mal de amores*, 220). Its results are understood by Emilia's liberal father to be bleak and counter-productive:

> ... de la guerra contra la dictadura no había salido más que guerra, y la lucha contra los desmanes de un general no había hecho sino multiplicar a los generales y a sus desmanes.
> - En lugar de democracia conseguimos caos y en lugar de justicia, ajusticiadores - dijo Diego Sauri irónico y entristecido (*Mal de amores*, 364).

He had hope for democracy and change. Instead, he contends that one general is replaced by others, and in place of democracy is chaos. Attention is also drawn to the psychic damage experienced by Emilia: "La experiencia del horror vuelto costumbre no se olvida jamás. Y tanto horror vieron sus ojos esos días que mucho tiempo después temía cerrarlos y encontrarse de nuevo con la guerra y sus designios" (*Mal de amores*, 317). The very fact of war becoming normalised inflicts its own damage on those who live through it.

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[39] In an interview with Gabriela de Beer in Nexos Abril 1993, no 184, Mastretta describes Daniel as "un aventurero y que va y viene y que vuelve a ella como a su casa", http://www.nexos.com.mx/archivo_nexos/detalle.asp?id=2826 26/04/02.

[40] In the same interview with de Beer, Mastretta explains that the Revolution was a period which figured as a disruption of conventional mores: "la época de la Revolución de 1910-1940 fue una época bastante permisiva, transformadora, enriquecida, muy vital, en la que se aceptaba con naturalidad a la gente distinta y extraña, sin considerar sus desacatos como algo punible." For similar commentary by Mastretta, see

Mastretta takes a significant anti-war stance, and in turn, implicitly questions the validity of the conflict, when nothing appeared to change after the Revolution. As with many other writers of the *novela de la Revolución* studied in this thesis, Mastretta criticises the Revolution, and ascribes to it negative characteristics. In *Mal de amores* she makes it explicit that the Revolution was but a symptom of the overarching chaos of Mexican politics and society: "en México pasaban tantas cosas al mismo tiempo que si uno no atendía varias a la vez, terminaba por ir siempre atrás de los hechos fundamentales. Ahí estaba como ejemplo la revolución que seguía cuatrapeándolo todo" (*Mal de amores*, 291). In part, this assessment echoes other writers' sentiments and judgements regarding the Revolution. Through her narrative, Mastretta goes even further: the Revolution was a typical (as opposed to being atypical), albeit extreme and traumatic, period of Mexican political and social reality. She is more pessimistic than many of her predecessors. As with all of the writers studied here, the time she wrote in, as opposed to the time she was writing about, influenced her reading (and writing) of the Revolution. Thereby we come full circle: the Revolution is a thematic link for all of these writers because of its significance, throughout the last century, to the imagined community 'Mexico'. It had to be re-negotiated, re-defined, and re-imagined for each generation. This is the 90's version, just as other writers were firmly positioned in their decade and generation. In *Mal de amores,* Mastretta explores how public private spaces can become during war, and furthermore, how they are dramatically altered by war. She also skilfully plays with Emilia's relationships as metaphors of the Mexican political process of the early part of the twentieth century. In Carmen M. Rivera Villegas's words, "la autora invierte los esquemas discursivos del nacionalismo patriarcal, conjugándolos con la experiencia anecdótica de una mujer que experimenta su crecimiento psicológico y emocional por medio de los golpes sociales que le atesta la cultura dominante."[41] Emilia's private relationships are reflective of her personal struggle to find her public place during a time of conflict.

"Ángeles Mastretta: Women of Will in Love and War" by Barbara Mujica in www.lasmujeres.com/angelesmastretta/women.shtml 26/04/02 originally published in Americas, 1997.

[41] Carmen M. Rivera Villegas, "Las mujeres y la Revolución Mexicana en *Mal de amores* de Ángeles Mastretta" *Letras femeninas* 24:1-2 (1998), 45.

The public play of private sentiment is evident in the use of the bolero in *Arráncame la vida*. The use of the bolero in the title and text of the novel is significant. For Claudia Schaefer it can be read as a metaphor for the political system in Mexico:

> Curiously similar to the codified postrevolutionary political system and its personalization of power, the Mexican romantic bolero refuses innovation and adaptation in favor of solidifying (institutionalizing) its success with trite sentimentalism over and against changing economic and social conditions. An entire system of popular mythology has been built around both the writers and the performers of this musical genre, which attempts to offer the public stability and tradition in the midst of 'chaos'.[42]

Schaefer's quest for a fluid analogy brings her to overstate the potential role of the bolero in Mexico. What she does emphasise in this statement is the significance of culture (in particular, here, popular culture) in the production of meaning and in imagining the nation. If, through song, change can be imagined, then the possibility of that change is made more possible. The conceptualisation of a new way of being enters the national psyche, so to speak. It is not culture by itself which actually bring about transformation, but a complex combination of different elements such as: politics, governance, external and internal conditions, economics, popular revolution, and so on. Culture can help create the conditions for change.

Schaefer's analogy is a useful one, because she draws attention to the bolero as a central conceit in the novel. The title of the novel is the name of a bolero. This is made apparent to us in chapter sixteen. An interplay of characters and songs reveals Catalina's strong attraction to Carlos and is a significant exploration of the power relations between Catalina, Carlos and Andrés. In this chapter, the three are among the last few guests left at a party held to celebrate the opening night of a performance by the newly formed National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Carlos Vives. Andrés decides he wants to hear some boleros. A singer, Toña, is found and requests are made. Four boleros are sung: *Temor*, *La noche de anoche*, *Cenizas*, and the eponymous *Arráncame la vida*. Apart from the significant marker of the presence of the title of the novel among the songs sung, the circumstances and lyrics of all of the boleros are imbued with meaning.

First, Toña is asked to sing *Temor*. She laments not having a pianist and, in reply, Carlos sits down and plays the opening of the song. Toña, surprised, says: "¿No me diga que usted sabe de estas músicas?" (189). For her, popular and classical music are very distinct. Her saying "estas músicas" suggests that she thinks that bolero is inferior. This is a reflection of an attitude held by others in the novel. Previously in the text, Andrés declares that he considers the classical music played in the concert to be élitist and difficult. Catalina says "Es bueno este Vives". To which he replies: ¿Cómo sabes que es bueno? Yo no tengo la menor idea. Es la primera vez que venimos a esto. A mí se me hace demasiado teatral. Las bandas de los pueblos son más frescas y dan menos sueño" (174). Andrés does not understand classical music. It is new and therefore unknown and out of context. Classical music is sophistry and theatricality whereas popular music is lively and appeals to his emotions. He merely attends the concert in support of the president who helped establish the orchestra.

At the party the lyrics of the boleros act as an extra layer of dialogue, at others like stage directions. When Toña sings a bolero about love against all odds "no habrá una barrera en el mundo / que mi amor profundo no rompa por ti" (189), Catalina moves closer to the piano, on Carlos's invitation, and joins in, singing "Yo estoy obsesionada contigo y el mundo es testigo de mi frenesí" (190). The tension builds. While singing *La noche de anoche* Carlos touches Catalina's leg. Meanwhile, we are reminded of Andrés's presence and the potential danger that he poses. The singing of *Cenizas* is intercalated with insults and taunts between Catalina and Andrés. It is a song which describes the end of one love and the chance of love with someone new (191). By the end of *Cenizas,* Andrés is asleep and *Arráncame la vida* begins, on Catalina's request. The song opens "Arráncala, toma mi corazón", an obvious invitation to Carlos, sung by Toña who acts as Catalina's intermediary. At the end of the song, having sung it together – despite Catalina's admission that she is a poor singer – Toña, aware of the sexual tension between Catalina and Carlos, asks "¿Y ustedes qué? – Preguntó ella -. ¿Se quieren o se van a querer?" (192). This episode marks the beginning of their affair, and leads to the events that signal a significant turning point in Catalina's attitude to Andrés.

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[42] Schaefer, *op. cit.,* 93-94.

Just as contrast was made between the way Catalina enjoyed watching Carlos perform as a conductor at the concert as opposed to the way she was moved by the orchestra's rendition of a popular song, popular music is shown to have an emotional tie for Catalina. Seeing her cry after the performance, Andrés teases her "Ya m'ija – dijo Andrés -. En mala hora le conté a Vives que tú no sabías de música nada más que eso que tu padre cantaba todo el tiempo" (178). The boleros seduce her, and she uses them to tell Carlos her feelings, all the while flirting with him. Despite the obvious lyrics, they function as a code. Andrés is not aware of the exchange between Carlos and Catalina, and for him the songs are pure entertainment: catharsis at listening to tales of others' losses and celebratory of love's triumph. The use of this is both playful and serious on Mastretta's part.[43] She is using terms of reference familiar to her Mexican readership. These are popular songs, and she is also setting up the drama of a romantic affair, which according to conventions of the genre is doomed to fail.

Popular culture is central to *Arráncame la vida*, not only through the bolero form, but also in the style in which this text is written. The use of popular culture is not a marketing ploy on Mastretta's behalf to guarantee financial success of the novel.[44] Instead, it can be seen to be an important element of her desire to write an authentic text. Women are the principal consumers of historical romances, and by writing a subversive version of such a text, Mastretta is indirectly deconstructing the genre. She addresses women who are generally marginalised by writing about the problematics encountered by a woman compromised by her role in life. She is not a literary author eager to display her skills to dazzle the reader with her innovative technique. Instead, she takes a well-used formula and disrupts its conventions. This is a radical act and one which reaches a wide audience.

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[43] Speaking with Ron Teichman in Nexos Abril 1987, no 112 Mastretta explained the significance of the title: "Tiene que ver con el modo en que esta mujer primero se deja arrancar la vida y después se la arranca a los demás. Si tú piensas esta novela sin sentido del humor, puede ser un gran tango. Se mueren algunos de los principales personajes, el país es terrible, esta lleno de traidores y asesinos. Pero es también un bolero porque está lleno de sentido del humor, de pasiones y de fantasías" http://www.nexos.com.mx/archivo_nexos/detalle.asp?id=768 26/04/02.

[44] She says as much in an interview with de Beer, "I didn't write the book thinking it was going to be a success. I wrote it because I wanted to, but not deliberately so that it would be a best-seller", 230.

The writer and critic, Marta Traba, in reply to the question "¿Cuál es el público lector de los textos escritos por mujeres?", said:

> Me parece que se dirige a una audiencia mayor y más iletrada; carece de las audiencias cerradas traductoras de jeroglíficos, que han ido desarrollándose es las últimas décadas. Es una *literatura marginal* para marginados, más que una *literatura fetiche* para iniciados.[45]

Traba's statement is not all-inclusive.[46] For example, Elena Garro wrote novels which are highly stylised and literary. However, Traba's contention is accurate in relation to Mastretta's novel. *Arráncame la vida* is written in a genre generally marginalised by literary criticism because of a supposition that, if it is popular and has general currency, it must be inferior. Traba refers to 'una literatura marginal', a statement which is of relevance to this text because the narrator is someone who, in other texts is merely a function, someone who usually accompanies the actual protagonist.[47] A direct comparison can be made with Artemio Cruz's wife, also named Catalina, in Carlos Fuentes's novel examined earlier.[48] She is a cypher, someone whom we only get to know through Artemio's eyes and who is ascribed roles according to the needs of Artemio's monologues. In *Arráncame la vida,* in an inversion of traditional representations, the male character (Andrés) becomes secondary to Catalina's story.[49] Mastretta is writing in

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[45] Magdalena García Pinto, *Historias íntimas: conversaciones con diez escritoras latinoamericanas* (Hanover: Ediciones del norte, 1988) 208, italics in the original.

[46] Andreas Huyssen in "Mass Culture as Women: Modernism's Other" in Tania Modleski ed. *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) echoes this claim: "mass culture is somehow associated with woman while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men", 191. As a consequence, early theorists of the modern novel were eager to distance themselves from romance novels as female fodder, 193-194.

[47] Rosario Castellanos described how history is gendered: "la historia es el archivo de los hechos cumplidos por el hombre, y todo lo que queda fuera de él pertenece al reino de la conjetura, de la fábula, de la leyenda, de la mentira" "La mujer y su imagen" in *Mujer que sabe latín...* (Mexico: Fondo de cultura económica, 1995), 9.

[48] It has been suggested that *Arráncame la vida* is a reworking of *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*. See Salvador A. Oropesa, "Popular Culture and Gender/Genre Construction in Mexican Bolero by Ángeles Mastretta" edited by David William Foster and Robert Reis in *Bodies and Biases: Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and Literature* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 138. Aída Apter-Cragnolino also examines this comparison in "Jugando con el melodrama: género literario y mirada femenina en *Arráncame la vida* de Ángeles Mastretta" in *Confluencia* 11:1 Fall (1995), 128-129.

[49] According to Mastretta, the character, Andrés, is based on the real-life politician from Puebla, Maximino Avila Camacho, and Catalina is based on Margarita Richardi, his wife. Although, she claims that the novel is "90 per cent fiction" García, *op. cit.,* 73-74.

a populist genre in a subversive way: Catalina tells her story in an ambiguous fashion. The reader is implicitly challenged to reveal the truth behind the elisions, tricks, duplicities and subterfuge of the text, all the while presented with a conventional linear narrative. The innovation in this novel lies in its duplicitous narrator and not in the narrative itself. Mastretta uses a form, which has wide appeal, in a new way. This innovative use of the narrator in a conventional genre fits with Jean Franco's theory of mass culture in Mexico:

> ...with respect to women, it can be said that this pluralism [the many forms of mass culture consumed by women], together with the internationalization of mass culture, has constituted new kinds of feminine subjects that conflict with older national 'femininities.'[50]

According to Franco, popular forms provide opportunities for new representations of women. Popular fiction is influenced by international images of womanhood which is not confined to national types. There is also a potential for subversion within popular culture, as it is considered lightweight, and therefore is not believed to have any influence on the status quo. An author writing a self-consciously literary novel may be harshly criticised for broaching topics which are the general currency of soap operas. The feminine subjects in *Arráncame la vida* are, in many ways, atypical, and represent a fresh approach to the old stereotypes. The critic Aída Apter-Cragnolino considers the use of popular forms in the novel to be a radical act:

> En *Arráncame la vida,* la utilización de los géneros populares, el melodrama, la novela rosa y el bolero, como textos de la cultura que esquematizan, reducen y terminan por disolver la complejidad de los conflictos poder/subordinación, masculino/femenino son "citados" para ser problematizados y subvertidos. La relectura de las premisas de todo un sistema literario de carecterísticas mitopoéticas se opone por otra parte a una visión esencialista de la historia, que termina siendo circular y sin salida posible. El humor y el desparpajo en el comportamiento lingüístico

[50] Jean Franco, "The Incorporation of Women : A Comparison of North American and Mexican Popular Narrative" in Modleski, *op. cit.,* 119.

> desafían, además, las formas rígidamente codificadas de los papeles que cada grupo humano supone jugar.[51]

Mastretta's use of popular forms, which have given rules and have "formas rígidamente codificadas" is subversive. She simultaneously conforms to a convention which appeals directly to the emotions, yet subverts these same conventions. At the centre of the novel is Catalina's love story; while it is told in a ludic manner which disrupts a standard reading of the text. Mastretta is aware of having created characters who do not conform to expectations. In an interview with Gabriella de Beer, she said of the female characters in the novel: "I believe that in a certain way many of the women in *Arráncame la vida* are anachronistic. By anachronistic I mean they are ahead of their time."[52] Mastretta has created characters who are novel in Mexican literature, because, in them she has created an alternative vision of the past in a significant period of national formation in Mexico.

Mastretta's innovation can also be criticised, in so far as she self-consciously creates what she has described as anachronistic characters. She uses the word 'anachronistic' to mean that the female characters in the novel are supposed to be more liberated than women of the 30s and 40s would have been. Yet they are shown to have little more ambition than to maintain the general status quo. This suggests that Catalina's lack of sexual inhibition, her transgressive behaviour, and her rebelliousness were not features of women during this period. Mastretta in this statement ignores women who were non-conformist or had opportunities for equal or even greater freedoms to Catalina. Catalina does not seek changes for others or on a grand social level. Her ambitions do not go beyond a quest for personal freedom. I would not like to diminish that personal need, but she readily accepts that the political arena is not a place to which she belongs. Her freedom can only be achieved through acceptable ends, within the constraints of the genre: marriage or by arranging for an apparently blameless death for her husband. In this she is following conventional characterisation in popular novels. As the critic Judith Williamson explains: "one of the most important aspects of images of 'femininity' in mass culture is not what they reveal, but what they conceal. If 'woman' means home,

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[51] Apter-Cragnolino, *op. cit.,* 131.
[52] de Beer, *op. cit.,* 233.

love, and sex, what 'woman' doesn't mean, in general currency, is work, class, and politics."[53] Catalina is a subversive, elusive narrator whose primary ambition is to return to the private. At the end of the novel she expels both her husband (and his entourage) and the reading public from her life. In contrast to Williamson's attitude, Aralia López González suggests that Catalina's body stands for the public space, and can be read as a metaphor for Mexico:

> ...su cuerpo [Catalina's] es expropriado por Andrés, su marido, de la misma manera que este supermacho feudal cuya referencia es un general y un gobernador reales de la política mexicana, emanado de la Revolución y después aliado a los intereses extranjeros norteamericanos, se apropia de un Estado y ejerece el poder con fines personales y arbitrarios. Consume a México como consume a Catalina.[54]

López González interprets their relationship as coloniser and colonised. To present Catalina's body as a site for dominance has echoes in colonial language.[55] She is anopen and empty space ready to be controlled by man. López González, while attempting to supply a political interpretation of the novel, is glossing over Catalina's agency. Catalina clearly states that she chose Andrés, willingly becoming his wife, while constantly resisting his total control over her. By creating the link, Mexico-Catalina López González negates any possibility that Mastretta could have made Catalina political. Mastretta deliberately created a character who chose to play within her roles, occasionally transgressing social mores, but, who never radically moves outside of what is expected of her.

Power and politics are at the core of *Arráncame la vida*. In an interview Mastretta explained the reason for writing *Arráncame la vida* and using real characters:

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[53] Judith Williamson, "Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization" in Modleski, *op. cit.,* 103.

[54] Aralia López González, "Nuevas formas de ser mujer en la narrative contemporánea de escritoras mexicanas", *Casa de las Americas* 183 abril (1991), 7.

[55] Annie McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995) states that "The feminizing of the land represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy", and that "the feminizing of the land is both a poetics of ambivalence and a politics of violence", 24-26.

> in *Arráncame la vida* I resorted to real characters and situations that would help me weave the fiction that my novel became. It appealed to me to tell about power, to imagine the emotions and the thoughts of people who decided the fate of others. During the thirties and forties of this century, Mexico as we know it today was taking shape. Many of the ways of conducting politics, of sensing and creating problems, as well as the authoritarianism and the lack of justice that govern our country today originated at that time. I was attracted to the idea of looking inside of those who initiated the bad political habits from which we still suffer.[56]

Mastretta wrote out of a desire to represent a significant period in Mexican history. It was a time of considerable power struggles. The country was trying to re-build its economic, social, cultural and political structures after a long period of conflict. In *Arráncame la vida* Mastretta has created a sense of the time from which modern Mexico was born. Her representation is negative. The reader is given an image of a birth which was not only difficult, but much compromised, despite the images and rhetoric to the contrary. The message in this novel is that the Revolution strayed far from its ideals, and that power was attained through dubious, corrupt, and sometimes, criminal means. That Mastretta presents this in a novel with a female central character who appears primarily concerned with telling her private story, is a radical departure in Mexican literature. *Arráncame la vida* is the private made public, all the while imbuing both of these spaces with new meaning and revealing the surfaces of deceit within the power structures.

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[56] de Beer, *op. cit.*, 231-232.

Conclusion: From the Past to the Future

But surely to tell these tall tales and others like them would be to speed the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect.[1]

In the midst of the propaganda of war the rhetoric from both sides has similar traits. Women and children - women are invariably represented as the primary carers, nurturers and are the last line of defence of the future stakeholders in the nation - must be protected, at all costs. They can be shown as the pitiful victims of battle, the defenceless guardians of domesticity, but they are not represented as able and fit warriors. When battles occur on the home front, women cannot but be implicit in the violence, either through direct combat, or through the provision of practical supports for those in the theatre of war. Women's role in combat was largely ignored until the Franco-Algerian war (1954-1962) spurred many academics to focus on its significance.[2] It is a role that many critics I employed in this thesis have investigated in detail.[3] Since then the study of gender and conflict has grown in significance and stature. With the recent second Gulf War, the topic has yet again become the subject of debate, where the focus has changed to women combatants who have entered as subalterns into the field of battle.[4] Still, in the twenty-first century, if the propaganda is to be believed, the war is fought either to protect women and children or to save them. It appears that there are still highly gendered readings of women's role in conflicts. This is possibly why so little has been written on the places women occupied during the Mexican Revolution.

Women have been absent from accounts of the Revolution. It is difficult to speak of absences, other than to look at the historical accounts which verify where women should have been. These too can be difficult to locate. All too often

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[1] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2000), 541.

[2] *La Battaglia di Algieri* (1965) dir Gillo Pontecorvo B&W 117 mins is a film made shortly after the event, and shows the role women played in the conflict.

[3] See Cooke and Woolacott for an example of such discussions, *op. cit.*.

[4] In the media event which took place in March-April 2003 which presented Gulf War 2 to an international audience, such rhetoric was evident and repeated in various contexts. For a discussion of the debate on whether women and homosexuals should be allowed into the U.S. army, see, for example, Holly Allen "Gender, Sexuality and the Military Model of U.S. National Community" in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* Tamar Mayer ed. (London: Routledge, 2000) and on the recent debate surrounding women in the U.S. army during the second Gulf War: "The Final Frontier" Conor O'Clery *The Irish Times* Saturday, March 29th 2003 and Anne Applebaum "When Women Go to War" ibid (originally printed in *The Washington Post*),.

historians have assumed that women's roles were subsidiary to those of the men - just as they have also often counted the foot soldiers as mere numbers and given detailed accounts of only the leaders' lives. There is a class issue as well as a gender issue. But that is for another to investigate. Here, I have looked at how women were represented by other women who recognised an absence, and chose to redress the balance in a variety of styles. Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska and Ángeles Mastretta are very different writers. They employ a difference in style, characterisation, methodology, approach and genre. They belie the suggestion that there is a way of writing particular to women. Instead, they are testament to the fact that all that many women novelists may have in common is a desire to write about significant historical moments with complex female characters.

The textual retelling of the past is determined by the present of the writer. Thus the texts I have studied in this thesis have addressed a seminal moment in Mexican history, according to the time each author was living. The Revolution cannot be known through one canonical text. Nor can 'Mexico' be found in specific texts. Mexican writing is vibrant and ever evolving. This study of texts based on a significant historical period reveals the diversity of Mexican Literature. Through writing about the Revolution, authors have explored different aspects of Mexico's dramatic charge into modernity through violence in a complex and challenging way.

Violent acts have been at the root of European-influenced literature in Latin America. The earliest forms of creativity began with the chronicles by the conquistadors. They wrote texts describing their conquests and the wondrous sights they had seen. These accounts were filled with tales of battles won and lost. They were not strictly works of fiction. They were written by adventurers who had to justify the expense of their travels to their patrons in Europe, as well as to encourage future expeditions. The writers were also avid readers of chivalrous tales: the popular fiction of its day. Thus they were often keen to elaborate when necessary. Fiction in Latin America, as a discrete activity, began in the nineteenth century. The incipient texts coincided with the birth of new nations and nationalism. These nations were formed out of conflict. Thus conflict and nationhood have long been interrelated in fictional texts. In addition to this long-established tradition, and born of the difficult period of conflict that was the Mexican Revolution, the *novela de la revolución* emerged. They were texts which have attempted to explain, describe, explore, unpick, and even deconstruct, the complexities of the Revolution as a moment of

national formation. The writers of the *novela de la revolución* have taken many different approaches to the representation of the Revolution. There are those such as Mariano Azuela who wrote in the immediate aftermath; others such as Juan Rulfo and Elena Garro wrote highly stylised poetic texts; Elena Poniatowska sought out first hand accounts by a subaltern in order to give a new version of the events; and then writers such as Carlos Fuentes and Ángeles Mastretta were concerned with the political leaders who emerged as a consequence of the Revolution.

A Revolution is a time when old power structures are overturned to be replaced by the new. The Mexican Revolution was a violent play for power. Traditionally - textually - violence and power have belonged to men. Women have been the facilitators, nurses, nurturers, symbols, and backdrop whose role was to enable men to fight for their power. These roles are incompatible with violence. So, any women who engaged in violent acts were represented as unnatural and dangerous. An example of such a dangerous woman is la Pintada in *Los de abajo*. Also, Jesusa in *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* has assimilated this attitude and recounts her tale claiming that she is an exceptional, violent (male?) woman.

The three primary works of fiction studied in this thesis bear comparison. They are a reflection of the heterogeneity of writing by women. Garro, Poniatowska and Mastretta are very different authors whose works inspire very diverse critical responses. Within the texts, radically different lived experiences are represented. Each can be read as very individual responses to Octavio Paz's narrow definition of Mexicanness. Mexico is not definable in a single sentence, nor even in a series of essays. It is constructed, like all nations, in a steady polyphonous dialogue. Mexico is expressed in its constant, negotiated, multi-layered texts. Negotiated, because each writer is aware of what has gone before, and aware too that there exist ideas of self and nationhood which must be explored, deconstructed or engaged with. The nation as a physical being also has a presence in Mexican fiction. Juan Rulfo created Comala, Garro, Ixtepec. Jesusa travelled throughout the country and searched for her actual place in the projected nation, whether as a *soldadera*, wife, worker or woman. Mastretta's Catalina followed her husband's travails and found herself both inside and outside of the centre.

Mexican writing is constantly questing for a sense of the many selves which inhabit the nation-space. Authors are not searching for an elusive, authentic Mexican. Instead, they seek to represent the many, and varied, Mexicans, and the diversity of

their experiences. The exciting part of this project is that it is both ever-evolving and ongoing, and has resulted in the production of divergent and richly-layered texts. Through modes of cultural production, such as fiction, the nation is projected, and so too is the self. The self is represented either through an exploration of the writer's psyche or a representation of another's life. Culture is also fed by sources outside of the nation. Mexican writers go beyond the frontiers of a nation where the border looms large. The novel would not have existed in Mexico without external influences. Proustian sustained explorations of subjective memory made possible Garro's later expansion of this theme in her text. An unlikely combination of the influences of the Cuban Miguel Barnet and the North American novelist Truman Capote laid the way for Poniatowska's unique style. Hollywood cinema and French romantic novels provided intertextual references, form and context for Mastretta's novel. This is not to privilege the external sources over any other form of cultural production. Indigenous culture plays a significant role in the culture of the nation and in the novels examined. The problematic place of the indigenous in Mexico is represented differently in each of the texts: from the apparently superficial reference to the Tehuana dress Catalina and her family wear in order to garner votes for her husband in Mastretta's novel, to Jesusa's racialist judgement of her self as ugly because of her dark skin, or to Garro's complex use of Mayan time in her novel. The writers are conscious of Mexico's *mestizo* culture, and also make reference to the indigenous in very different ways. That the concept of a *mestizo* culture is problematic is another live subject in Mexican letters and cultural production.

The cultural representation of the nation, at its best, is not isolationist. It should be the result of the intelligent engagement with the outside, in order to expand upon and invest the unique experiences of individuals and collectives alike with powerful modes of self-expression. To this end, boundaries both within the individual, collective and nation must be tested and explored. The critic Nira Yuval-Davis recently wrote: "'culture' is never an essentialist and homogenous body of traditions and customs, but a rich resource, usually full of internal contradictions, and a resource which is always used selectively in various ethnic, cultural and religious projects within specific power relations and political discourse".[5] Complex power relations determine cultural expression. An example of this can be seen in the debate

regarding what is 'high' or 'low' culture which is often determined by gender, class or race associations. But it can be also be judged in relation to specific stylistic categories. Texts such as Garro's highly stylised novel is placed at the top of the hierarchy qualitatively, with Mastretta's at the bottom and Poniatowska's text ambivalently in the middle. Such categorisation must be considered carefully.

Writing is not just about formal concerns. Other issues must also be taken into account. Mexico as a nation-space is a construct born of colonialism. Textual representation has been a way for the inhabitants of that nation to negotiate what it means to be Mexican. Many responses have come forward to this query, with many more constantly being produced. This does not mean that all writing is about the geopolitics of Mexico in the broadsweep. Instead, many authors have shown an underlying need to understand and represent the problematics of inhabiting a country with such diversity, inequities and multiple cultures.

The fictions I have examined in this thesis are questing fictions. That is, they are fictions which break down the boundaries of form and character hitherto employed. They have taken traditional modes of representation, and implicitly challenged them. Thus, any single reading of the novels cannot achieve closure, as they are complex texts by authors dissatisfied with the way women have been represented. This dissatisfaction has led to new ways of writing about a seminal moment in Mexican history and letters.

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[5] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 38.

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