

# **NOMADIC SUBJECTS IN CARMEN BOULLOSA'S NARRATIVES**

by

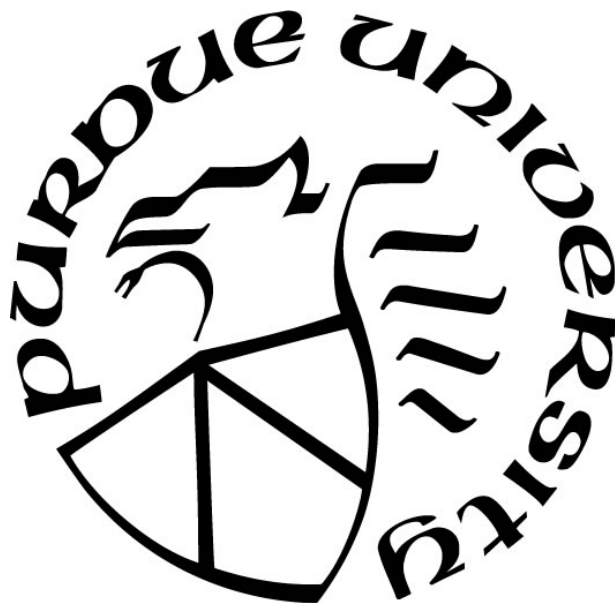
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**A Dissertation**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University*

*In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**



School of Languages and Cultures

West Lafayette, Indiana

December 2020

**THE PURDUE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL**  
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*To my mother, father, and sister*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis becomes a reality with the kind support and help of many individuals. I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my father Changmin Kim, mother Hyunok Kang, and my sister Minyoung Kim for their love, prayers, caring, and encouragement which helped me in completion of this paper. Also, I express my thanks to my beloved and supportive husband, Keunchang Oh who is always there for me. I am very grateful to have my lovable son, Yoonsung Oh. Yoonsung, thank you for making me a mother. You are my reason for living, the love of my life, and the king of my heart.

I would like to express my special gratitude and thanks to my advisor, Dr. Song No for imparting his knowledge and supporting in many ways. As my mentor, he has taught me more than I could ever give him credit for here. He has shown me, by his example, what a good advisor (and person) should be. I would also like to thank all my committee members, Dr. Hart, Dr. Stephenson, and Dr. Kim for being supportive and offering helpful comments.

I am extremely grateful to Carmen Boullosa for being in my panel in MLA 2018. It was a great honor for me to interview her in person. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Magali Lara for her generosity of allowing me to use her images in this dissertation. My special thanks go to my friends for their friendship and love: Julie Jang, Jenny Choi, Norris Dowden, Saori Houston, Michael Houston, Daniel Olson, and Shirley Olson. I would also like to express my deepest thanks to my colleagues for their support and encouragement: Minji Kang, Daniel Carillo Jara, Miluska Guzmán, Eduardo Huaytán Martínez, Débora M Borba, Lorena Pina Palacio, Megi Papiashvili, Nuur Hamad Zahonero, Ana María Carvajal, Hyeseung Jang, Felix Fandoh, Tulin Tosun, Riham Ismail, Paola Olaya, Mario Morales, Tyler Gabbard-Rocha, Niall Peach, Daleth Assad, and many more I likely missed. Lastly, I want to thank all the wonderful professors and staffs in School of Languages and Cultures at Purdue for their support and kind help.



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze how a contemporary Mexican writer, Carmen Boullosa, presents different types of nomadic subjects who upset the assumed binary opposition between traditional forms of identity. In this study, I analyze different types of nomadic subjects, who transcend and trespass rigid categorization in her five narratives: *Mejor desaparece* (1987), *Duerme* (1994), *Cielos de la tierra* (1997), *La novela perfecta* (2006), and *Las paredes hablan* (2012). In Boullosa's novels, nomadic subjects resist being defined as a fixed identity and instead cross borders and boundaries. The crossing happens in both physical/epistemological and realistic/imaginary ways through different subjects. Based on Rosi Braidotti's theory of "becoming," I argue that Boullosa's different types of "subjects-in-transition" are presented in the images of "undutiful daughters" in the late 80's, "nomadic and nonhuman characters" in the 90's, and "posthuman subjects" in the new millennium. Even though Boullosa's fictional world is enriched by the understanding Braidotti's theory, her nomadism should be understood within Mexican socio-cultural context. I would like to define the nomadic subjects as those who travel beyond the hegemonic power of structure based on western modernism by reassessing the indigenous and mestiza's spirit. In her first couple of novels, Boullosa introduces nomadic figures who break free from the Mexican patriarchal society represented the authoritative father. These nomadic figures are often presented as rebellious and grotesque to transgress the binary division of active/male and passive/female. In her later novels, nomadic subjects broaden their boundary and even challenge the binary division of human/cyborg or human/nonhuman. Technology quickly passes throughout human's life, and the borderline between human and cyborg become unclear. Finally, the nomadic subject irritates the anthropocentric world by proposing a different perspective of nature and things. By only subverting the point of view centered on human,

Boullosa's narrative is able to demonstrate the surroundings and reveal untold voices from peripheral. My reading of Boullosa offers an interdisciplinary approach, paving the way for non-hierarchical relationships, and revaluating the concept of identity as multiplicitous and gender-fluid.

## INTRODUCTION

Carmen Boullosa is a prolific Mexican writer whose transgressive works have received attention from literary critics over the last two decades. As other critics mention, Boullosa's literary world explores gender, postcolonial, and socio-cultural issues by creating a fictional space full of ambiguity. Starting from the early twentieth century, Boullosa's literary works have been studied by many academic scholars. Due to her career as a play writer and poet in her early period of writing, the secondary studies are limited and focus on her play scripts or poems.<sup>1</sup> When Boullosa started to write novels, more secondary works were published about her novels and it continues to present. Her first two novels, *Mejor desaparece* (1987) and *Antes* (1989), make Boullosa a widely known for novelist. Because of Boullosa's transition of genres from poet to novelist, *Mejor desaparece* reflects both the structure of narrative and a poem.

Her first novel, *Mejor desaparece*, is fragmentary and consists of very short chapters. Each fragmentary narration creates an image of a broken family under a patriarchal father. While the early period of Boullosa's writings depict home as an oppressive, wild, and chaotic place for a little narrator, themes of her writing have expanded to include not only some gender/sexuality concerns in Mexican society but also socio-historical issues related to colonialism in Mexico. Many critics agree that Boullosa's second period of writings, from late twentieth to twenty-first century, illustrates gender and historical problems: *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991), *Llanto*, *novelas imposibles* (1994), *La milagrosa* (1994), *Duerme* (1994), *Cielos de la tierra* (1997), and *Texas* (2014). Boullosa also revisits some female historical figures in the narrative such as *La otra*

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<sup>1</sup> There are few secondary studies on Boullosa's play and poem. Among others, there are some articles about her plays and poems: "La teorización del feminismo en la posmodernidad dentro del teatro y la ficción de Carmen Boullosa" by Roselyn Costantino (1994) and "Las camaleónicas huidizas en la poesía de Carmen Boullosa" by Jacobo Sefami (1999).

*mano de Lepanto* (2005), *La virgen y el violín* (2008), and *El libro de Ana* (2016).<sup>2</sup> Because of Boullosa's writings include intertextuality and historiographic metafiction, her writings have been considered as postmodern writing for some critics.<sup>3</sup>

The Latin American women writers who emerged in the late eighties have made constant efforts to be recognized in Latin America's patriarchal literary world.<sup>4</sup> The Latin American literary canon tends to form only with male authors and women writers have only begun to receive attention a few decades ago. The women who have constructed autonomous female voices, challenging the male literary canon, have caught the attention of both the general public and critics. While some women writers represent directly the voices of a suffering female or tell their personal experience as oppressed women, others, including Boullosa, take a certain distance to describe the story of women. Even though her position is as a female writer, Boullosa challenges this position by writing about different topics through her imagination. Gabriella de Beer interprets that Boullosa's writing goes beyond her personal experience and celebrates the moment of the art when the writing turns into a literature itself:

Unlike those writers who through their work share some autobiographical details with their readers, Boullosa does not. Even though she believes that writers make use of everything in their work, including their most personal, hidden, and private feelings, they must subject them to the order of the book. To her, a book is a work of art with its own rules and exigencies that must be met if it is to achieve an autonomous existence. (158)

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<sup>2</sup> Boullosa reexamines well-known history or figure in the past and demystify them. See "The Decodification of History and Fiction through the Role of the Outlaw in *La otra mano de Lepanto* by Carmen Boullosa" by Melvy Portocarrero for more detailed analysis about *La otra mano de Lepanto*.

<sup>3</sup> To see more about the postmodern aspects of Boullosa's novels, please see the following articles: "Las trampas del concepto 'la nueva novela histórica' y de la retórica de la historia postoficial" by Lukasz Grützmacher, "Postmodern Feminist Nomadism in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Jill Kuhnheim.

<sup>4</sup> Among them are Gabriela Mistral, Elena Garro, Elena Poniatowska, María Luisa Bombal, Sandra Cisneros, Excilia Saldana, and Cristina Peri Rossi.

For Boullosa, her personal experiences help her find subjects reentering the “most personal, hidden, and private feelings,” but she uses them to structure more complex narratives by leaving metaphors and ambiguous spaces. As such, her writing obtains its own vitality or “autonomous existence” which invites readers to participate more actively.

However, several critics have dismissed women’s writings as “feminine writing,” which ironically contributes to reinforcing the hierarchical divisions by reaffirming a “feminine space” and limiting the images of women to certain literary formulas. Under the term of “feminine writing,” writings written by women writers are generalized with a certain stereotype. Boullosa seems to be aware of the limitation of naming her novels as “feminine writing” and firmly expressed her opinion about how “feminine” could reinforce the patriarchal norms:

Lo femenino, según me parece, no es lo dulce, sentimental, doméstico, confortable y lindo; lo femenino que me interesa es el lado oculto de la feminidad, lo salvaje, o indomesticable, la oscura ley del cuerpo, lo incivilizable del hombre y la mujer o lo que la civilización ha dejado al lado de las palabras, al margen de la moral. Así sí me interesa ser una autora femenina ... Soy mujer, escribo desde mi cuerpo y desde mi memoria. Pero procuro pulir mi “feminidad” asilvajándola. (Boullosa, “Procuro” 39-40)

As we see in the passage above, Boullosa’s unwillingness to be called a “feminine” writer should be understood within the social context that tends to set binary divisions such as man/woman, public/domestic, and civil/uncivil. Boullosa resists the typical feminine side formed within the patriarchal culture and reveals the wild side of femininity which blurs the binary division of mind/body, moral/immoral, and verbal/nonverbal. While her contemporaries such as Rosario Castellanos and Laura Esquivel present women’s trauma and suffering as maladies to be cured, Boullosa escapes the trope of women as victims and instead celebrates the wounded and grotesque aspects of being a woman.

Boullosa's feminist perspective<sup>5</sup> is closer to Luce Irigaray's feminist theory than Judith Butler's.<sup>6</sup> The women characters in her novels tell us that Boullosa refuses expected gender roles by hegemonic power of structure and celebrates each uniqueness and peculiarity of different genders. Boullosa criticizes the patriarchal society and the phallogentric world, but her way of criticism is more delicate and fundamental. Instead of highlighting discrimination toward women, she redefines the concept of sexual identity so that sex and gender can be understood in a broader sense. This is because, first, there are many spectrums even inside of the category of woman, depending on their race and class. Second, Boullosa considers sex/gender as same as other factors that defines one's identity.

The characters in Boullosa's novels challenge the traditional images of certain gender, class, and race by locating them in-between spaces.<sup>7</sup> In an interview with Katherine Ibsen, Boullosa confirms again her willingness to write outside from "women writers" and her passion toward

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<sup>5</sup> The Feminist perspective in Boullosa's novels has constantly been studied in literary criticism, but it is getting harder and harder to find some feminist perspective in her later novels including *La novela perfecta*. While *Duerme* and *Las paredes hablan* present more clearly on the oppressed position of women in a patriarchal society, Boullosa's later novels keep a distance from the feminist stance. This might be her intention to reject to be classified under the category of "feminist women" writer because "the feminine literary canon has been limited in scope and oversimplified under the label of "feminist literature," which more often than not isolates women's writing in an "essentialist" pseudo-world" (Santos 7). Santos affirms that "one must set aside all such restrictive labels and exclusions" to best capture Boullosa's texts. (7) The multiplicity of voices of different gender and various layers of text could be understood as an act to avoid any kind of labeling.

<sup>6</sup> While Butler considers gender as a socially constructed and improvised performance, Irigaray points out the representation of body within culture. Butler's position is following Beauvoir's claim that we *become* differentiated as women and men, rather than being born as such. Butler rejects the view that there is a biological or natural difference on gender. Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who are engaged with the ideas of Freud and Lacan, "articulate sexual difference as integrally connected to the foundation, and disruption, of a symbolic order." As such, Butler is more radical social construction theorist compare to Irigaray who emphasizes the body.

<sup>7</sup> This is closely related to Homi Bhabha's notion of "in-between" (191-192). This term indicates "a contingent, borderline experience" that challenges "the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups" (206-207). Bhabha considers hybridity as a strategy for upsetting any polarities between the powerful/dominant/center and the powerless/dominated/periphery represented as a fixed socio-cultural model.



literature stating that “Yo no escribo novelas rosas, yo no escribo novelas en que lo importante sea el ámbito doméstico, para mí lo importante es el lenguaje, es la literatura, es el diálogo entre los libros” (Ibsen 53). Boullosa’s novels cover a broad range of literary genres including romance, mystery, and suspense, and the various range of characters in terms of gender, class, race, and time. In doing so, she overcomes the imposed gender role of woman writer by focusing on the language itself that makes the true dialogue between texts. In her novels, the binary opposition of man/woman diffuses the sexual confrontation of the two genders through writing.

For Boullosa, the discussion about writing style and writing topics due to gender difference is meaningless in literary world. If the writer freely changes the voice of the narrative, the narrative will enter the more profound and complicated world of fiction. Boullosa states that “feminine feelings are proscribed, as is the feminine view of the world and of society and of intimacy, and the dream turns into a monstrous world. [...] All of us are male and female, all of us have a male and a female part, and when writing, a writer can choose to use one of the two, or a communication of the two” (De Beer 180-181). Showing the both sides of gender in her writing, Boullosa avoids being categorized under certain characteristics that define women writers.

The in-between spaces in Boullosa’s narrative are constructed through the simultaneity of past, present, and future; different timelines starting from the colonial period of Mexico to the present create multi-dimensional structures.<sup>8</sup> Instead of presenting reality as monolithic truth of

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<sup>8</sup> Because of the repetitive background period of colonial Mexico in her novels and the reconsideration of the historical events, her novels have been considered as historical novels. Ute Seydel categorizes Boullosa’s first group of historical novel as *Son vacas, somos puercos* and *El médico de los piratas. Bucaneros y filibusteros en el Caribe*. He states that these two novels “transcurre en las comunidades de los piratas del Caribe” (*Narrar Historia(s)* 385). Then, he mentions that “Con *llanto. Novelas imposibles, Duerme, y Cielos de la tierra*, Carmen Boullosa abandonó el espacio del Caribe para centrarse en el del otro imperio azteca que se convertiría en el corazón del Virreinato novohispano. [...] En *La milagrosa*, se tematizan los crímenes políticos y la violencia en la Ciudad de México a finales del siglo XX. [...] La escritora estableció, en *Treinta años*, un diálogo erudite con textos ficcionales e historiográficos al trazar la

single dimensional structure, Boullosa complicates unilateral reality by crossing space and time. In her essay titled “La destrucción en la escritura,” she argues the importance of “destroying” reality to find more complex and multiple sides of reality:

La literatura es un espejo complejo y de tres dimensiones materiales de este instinto de destrucción. [...] Narrar no es decir con palabras inertes. [...] Cada una de sus palabras han pasado por la destrucción – química de la poesía, aunque regresen, inevitablemente, a su carácter utilitario. No sólo de palabras se hacen las novelas, aunque todo en ella sean palabras. [...] La verdad es que el novelista no construye, el novelista es un destructor. La realidad existe. [...] Las novelas no andan sueltas esperando una voz que las narre. Ellas responden a otra verdad. (216-217)

The act of destruction is not a pessimistic way of seeing reality, but to discover the complexity of reality without leaving the other side of reality. An author is not the one who gathers and narrates the history of the novel. According to Boullosa, the novel already has its vitality. As the same way that Boullosa recognizes the dark side of femininity and celebrates it, she reveals the dark side of reality through her fictional world. Many times, the colonial period of Mexico is rewritten from different perspectives. The colonial experience for Mexicans is retold by the Mexican writer through her “cuerpo, alma, espíritu y memoria” (218). For these reasons, her historical narrative has certain aspects of postcolonialism. Her postcolonial approach to the colonial period is to challenge the meta-narrative, constructed by the official history, which presupposes a linear and singular timeline. Therefore, the past is narrated with a circular structure in relation to present and even future. As Boullosa asserts in the essay above, “El pasado nos da el presente, el pasado como lo vemos hoy es lo que nos da la forma que tenemos” (“La destrucción en la escritura” 218). Ultimately, this strong connection between past, present, and future is also read as her another effort to complicate time and space and show multi-dimensional structures of our reality.

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historia de una familia, y en *Prosa rota*, presenta sus primeras ficciones de la década de los años ochenta, algunas hasta entonces inéditas” (386).

Boullosa's destructive writing could be enriched by the understanding of deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. The term deconstruction was developed by Derrida who argues that the binary oppositions signifies a hierarchical division by polarizing the two different factors such as white/black, masculine/feminine, cause/effect, conscious/unconscious, presence/absence, and speech/writing. The deconstructionists aim to remove the boundary between binary oppositions. Deleuze and Guattari apprehend re-articulation of subjectivity based on difference and transformation. In their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus*, they insist on "deterritorialize"<sup>9</sup> which lead us to see a complex subject that is free, unlimited, chaotic, and unspecified. Yet, their nomadism does not imply a physical nomadism; instead, it implies an epistemological nomadism by refusing categories or definitions (11). Similar to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical nomadism, Boullosa's destruction of writing demonstrates a novel as an open, free, and unspecified space. In Boullosa's aforementioned essay, she indicates that "la lectura muestra otra cara de los libros. Por mi parte, me reconstruyo leyendo, me vuelvo a hacer, cada vez, en la vitalidad de los autores que nos han precedido" ("La destrucción en la escritura" 219). As such, Boullosa's destructive writing is reached by the process of writing and re-writing as an author, and reading and re-reading as a reader. Her vocation as destroyer recreates and revisits her stories and memories. In this sense, both deterritorialization and destructive writing acknowledge the differences and multiplicities through the chaotic mixture of movements that denote an "open-ended series of alternatives" (Holland 55) and re-locate fixed entities.

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<sup>9</sup> In Deleuze and Guattari's discussion about Kafka, we understand that the deterritorialization leads a question of a becoming by crossing territories: "Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation. Metamorphosis is the contrary to metaphor. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the world. The thing and the other things are no longer anything but intensities overrun by deterritorialized sound or words that are following their line of escape. It is no longer a question of a resemblance. [...] Instead, it is now a question of a becoming that includes the maximum of differences as a difference of intensity, the crossing of a barrier, a raising or a falling, a bending or an erecting, an accent on the word" (*Kafka* 22).

Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism is later developed and deepened by Rosi Braidotti who focuses on feminist nomadic way of thinking and posthuman philosophy. Braidotti's nomadism is similar to the one of Deleuze and Guattari's in a sense that the nomadic subject crosses borders, associating and exchanging ideas, and emphasizing a process of metamorphosis and transposition. However, Braidotti, inspired by Donna Haraway's posthuman thinking, examines that "bodies are no more thoroughly biological, but rather a complex hybridization of living materials, technological machines, animal, and human composition where the corporeal and psychic limits are indefinite" (Setti 132). Braidotti's posthuman perspective traces the argument of sexual difference back to the place before existing traditional anthropocentric humanism.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, for Braidotti, a complete desexualization of women, sex, and body is not the solution for gender equality. Braidotti reconsiders sexual difference and female subjectivity in terms of nomadism. Käll interprets Braidotti's sexual difference as nomadic strategy:

Braidotti's account of sexual difference as nomadism captures difference in three interrelated dimensions, namely the difference between man and woman, differences between women, and differences within each woman. In all three dimensions, the central issue at stake is to bring forth an understanding of identity as a site of difference. (195)

As we see in the passage above, sexual difference is one of the elements that intersects others. Also, Braidotti's argument takes a cautious approach to seeing the differences within women.

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<sup>10</sup> Braidotti's argument on sexuality goes even beyond gender: "Post-anthropocentric feminists advocate a vision of the body as a sexually preconstituted, dynamic bundle of relations and explore the transformative potential of a different concept of the political. [...] In other words, sexuality as human and nonhuman precedes and exceeds the normative social apparatus of gender, which is a form of governance that can be disrupted through processes of becoming-minoritarian/becoming-woman/becoming-animal. This implies that sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institutions. [...] We therefore need to rediscover the notion of the sexual complexity that marks sexuality in its human and posthuman forms. A post-anthropocentric feminist approach makes it clear that bodily matter in the human as in other species is always already sexed and hence sexually differentiated along the axes of multiplicity and heterogeneity" ("Posthuman" 688-689).

What Braidotti seeks is a post-political, non-anthropocentric, and relational ontology through a dislocation of identities and institutions.

In the same vein, Boullosa's stance on gender and sexuality is similar to Braidotti's. In the same way as Braidotti, Boullosa rejects gender binary oppositions and tries to avoid the simple antagonistic confrontation between man/woman. Instead of directly presenting the experiences of suffered women, Boullosa introduces nomadic and mutable characters that also remind us of Braidotti's nomadic subjects. In Boullosa's novels, nomadic subjects resist being defined as a fixed identity and instead cross borders and boundaries. The crossing happens in both physical/epistemological and realistic/imaginary ways through different subjects. For example, in *Duerme* and *Son vacas, somos puercos*, the main protagonists cross sexual identities by changing their clothing. Their transformative actions, which also could be called metamorphosis, transposition, or becoming, challenge static conceptual structure. Also, these mutable subjects are often presented as rebellious and grotesque, as we found in Boullosa's first novel, *Mejor desaparece*. In my analysis on *Mejor desaparece*, we will see how innocent and pure little girls who follow the imposed rules by the patriarchal society finally turn into rebellious and grotesque girls who are able to take over the house by expelling their father from the house.

In *Cielos de la tierra* and *La novela perfecta*, nomadic subjects blur the boundary of human/cyborg. Both novels start the narrative by questioning human identity facing social changes related to technology. In some respects, Deleuze and Guattari's theory on nomadism provides a lens to delve into the fluid subjects in some of Boullosa's novels. However, Braidotti's nomadism is more applicable to Boullosa's narrative regarding deeper understanding on female subjectivity and broader understanding of human subjectivity that explains the relationship between

human/cyborg and human/nonhuman. In one of her interviews, Boullosa points out the dark side of humanism that Braidotti also criticizes:

El trato a las mujeres en México sigue siendo completamente desigual, en el mundo laboral, en el mundo plástico, en el mundo doméstico, en el mundo cotidiano, en todo. [...] Exageraré un poco si digo que la mujer no es precisamente un humano, que sigue siendo un semi-humano, pero sólo un poco. (Hind 54)

As Boullosa stated on the passage above, Mexican women still experience discrimination in sexist society. This is why many women writers speak about their own sexual discrimination experience through their works. The word “semi-humano” implies the criticism on humanism centered on European white male. Boullosa’s “semi-humano” is also connected to Braidotti’s following statement: “Humanism historically developed into a civilisational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalising powers of self-reflexive reason” (*The Posthuman* 13). In this sense, Braidotti’s notion of the posthuman offers a new political ontology constructing a feminist, classless, and sex-egalitarian subjects that are also found in Boullosa’s narratives.

Even though Boullosa’s fictional world is enriched by the understanding Braidotti’s theory, her narratives have their own characteristics that are better understood within the Latin American socio-cultural context. While Deleuze, Guattari, and Braidotti’s nomadism has its origins in Western post-structuralism and postmodernism, Boullosa’s writing seems to have different starting point from the western philosophers regarding the concept and the definition of postmodernism. To understand postmodernism, it is important to examine what modernism is. More specifically, modernism is named and defined in western culture which produces strong demarcation of binary oppositions of civilized/savage and considering the non-western people as irrational and uncivilized who need to be educated. Because of the danger of creating false binary oppositions between western and non-western ontologies, postcolonial critiques insist to rethink

the other side of modernity. Latin American postcolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo claim that Spanish colonization of the Americas constituted “coloniality” as its darker side of modernity. Coloniality and modernity are inseparable and they are two sides of the same coin. This is why the Latin American postcolonial thinkers insist to redefine the concept of “modernity” to liberate from the epistemic violence. If we take a look Boullosa’s descriptions of the colonial period or the Spanish conquest, her stance is not that different from the Latin American postcolonial philosophers.

Boullosa’s nomadism rejects the rigid categorization of fixed identities and binary oppositions, but at the same time, it embraces their colonial experiences and reevaluates aboriginal races of the Mexican territory before and after the conquest. Her nomadism does not refer to a wandering subject or floating subject because she expresses her affection to her racial and historical roots before being a nomadic subject. Through recognizing the importance of acknowledging their ethnic roots, her nomadism redefines the western concept of “modernity.” In her novels, the indigenous people represents the glorious moment in Mexican history before the conquest. Especially, the illusions of Moctezuma keep haunting Boullosa so that she is able to recreate the phantasmagoria within her fictional world. The representation of the indigenous people is twofold: first to admire and celebrate the indigenous culture, and secondly to denounce the discrimination toward indigenous people after the Spaniard conquest. Also, the indigenous world is often described as a mystical and magical reflecting their old beliefs. Boullosa’s attention to the indigenous culture is presented along her entire writing career.

Boullosa’s nomadism should be understood within Mexican socio-cultural context and I would like to define the nomadic subjects as those who travel beyond the hegemonic power of structure based on western modernism by reassessing the indigenous and mestiza’s spirit. The

indigenous view of the world is contrasted with the European view of the world that is based on binary oppositions. Similar to the representation of indigenous people, mestiza, who are the descendants of Spanish father and indigenous mother, has an important value in Boullosa's novels. While the indigenous group signifies the origin of Mexican people before the conquest, mestiza embraces ambivalence of Mexicans as being in both sides of ethnicity after the conquest. Putting aside an argument of the political meaning of mestiza, Boullosa believes that mestiza embodies Mexican identity. It is something that Mexicans cannot remove or escape but part of themselves. Because of the colonial experience, mestiza becomes their part of identity and Boullosa claims that their mestizanness should be considered in the center of the nomadism.

Boullosa's writing style and her authorial attitude also reflects her idea on nomadism.<sup>11</sup> As a Mexican writer who lives in the States, her fictional world is not limit to presenting one culture or one fixed identity. In many of her novels, characters often travel from one place to another and identity is one of the main questions for the characters. For example, in *Las paredes hablan*, the main character María who lives in New York goes to Mexico City to find her roots as Mexican. Even though, Boullosa writes what she captures in her daily life, in her fictional world, the voice of the narrator is not the same as the author. Boullosa tries to erase her personal voice and approach a universal literature as we see in Roberto Bolaño's novels. Her narrative serves as a third space which could be called as an in-between space. Her focus on the in-between space helps to disclose nomadic subjects who are refused to be placed in a certain social structures. She makes a ceaseless effort to be a nomadic writer and not to be categorized under certain group of writers. For these reasons, her nomadic stance as a writer even goes beyond feminism.

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<sup>11</sup> Her interest on various genres also tells how she challenges the boundary of different genres such as play, poem, short story, novel, and movie script.



Boullosa's narrative displays certain types of nomadic subjects. Along the different stage of writing process, the nomadic subjects are presented differently on a wide range of level. In her first couple of novels, Boullosa introduces relatively limitative nomadic figures who break free from the Mexican patriarchal society represented the authoritative father. In Boullosa's first period of writing, the questions of subjectivity are centered on gender and sexual identity and their oppressed position as women. These nomadic figures are often presented as rebellious and grotesque to transgress the binary division of active/male and passive/female. Later, this boundary-crossing of female subjects gets more fundamental by making them actively change their own gender identity using their clothing in. This is most notably found in *Duerme*.

Nomadic subjects broaden their boundary and even challenge the binary division of human/cyborg or human/nonhuman. Technology quickly passes throughout human's life, and the borderline between human and cyborg become unclear. As such, the invention of AI or robots sets off a debate over some ethical and existential questions in real life. While some of Boullosa's novels such as *Cielos de la tierra* and *La novela perfecta* offer a deeper reflection on what makes human a human, *Las paredes hablan* extends the boundary-crossing between human and nonhuman. The nomadic subject irritates the anthropocentric world by proposing a different perspective of nature and things. By only subverting the point of view centered on human, Boullosa's narrative is able to demonstrate the surroundings and reveal untold voices from peripheral.

In this study, I borrow Braidotti's theory of nomadism and present the argument through the images of "undutiful daughters" against the patriarchal society in her works in the late 80's, "nomadic and non-human characters" in the 90's, and finally the "posthuman subject" around the millennium. This helps us to see the complexity of women's representation and the changes in the

twentieth century feminist theories: starting from the resistance against the patriarchy in the late 80's, the understanding of gender as a social product in the 90's, and the reconsideration of sex and body in the new millennium. Through this process, this work will denote the ongoing transformation reflective of the development of feminist theories over thirty years. My reading of Boullosa offers an interdisciplinary approach, paving the way for non-hierarchical relationships, and revaluating feminine writing as multiplicitous and gender-fluid. Therefore, my reading of Boullosa illuminates the way in which she blurs binary oppositions by presenting multiple voices and multi-dimensional narratives which are not limited to one period nor one gender.

Chapter 1, "Becoming "Undutiful Daughters" in *Mejor desaparece*," examines the ways in which rebellious female characters, who have floral names such as Fuchsia, Dahlia, and Lily, turn into grotesque flowers that threaten the patriarchal father. In this chapter, I analyze *Mejor desaparece* which was written in collaboration with a Mexican artist Magali Lara. Also, I celebrate the art of grafting, an ecocritical phenomenon that centers the need for multiplicity in the hopes of discovering the new way of knowing. The narrative is based on autobiographical memories of Boullosa. Resonating with Braidotti's notion of "undutiful daughters," these images are employed to portray women resisting against a patriarchal society of the 1980's in Mexico. This chapter analyzes how the daughters betray the duty of the ideal daughter and consequently expel the father from the house.

Chapter 2, "Nomadic Mestiza in *Duerme*," explores an alternative history of colonial Mexico narrated by a nomadic subject in *Duerme*. While the first chapter focuses on the second wave of feminism, this chapter focuses on the third wave of feminism that questions binary oppositions between men vs. women. *Duerme* portrays a female nomadic subject who freely transforms into a masculine nomadic subject through crossdressing in order to resist the dominant

male discourse. In *Duerme*, Boullosa reconsiders gender and sexuality based on Judith Butler's notion of performativity within racial context that particularly reflects indigenous and mestiza women in Mexico.

Chapter 3, "Writing as Embodied Subjectivity in *Cielos de la Tierra*," brings the attention to the boundary of human and nonhuman through the figure of a cyborg in a high technology and posthuman era. Braidotti's concept of the posthuman questions anthropocentrism or humanism and how it is limited to white masculine subjects. Braidotti illustrates a non-humanistic feminism in relation to technology's redefinition of human subjectivity. Specifically, this chapter examines sexual complexity and differences between human beings and posthuman subjects. The novel presents posthuman characters who oscillate between image vs. language, biological body vs. machinelike body, and human vs posthuman. Finally, this novel addresses anthropological questions of what makes a human genuinely human through narrative discourse and writing as materiality.

Chapter 4, "Writing and posthumanism in *La novela perfecta*," reveals a perspective of a writer who lives in a highly technological era. In this chapter, I examine how using a writing machine causes simulacra, what the consequences are, and how unexpected stories with a figment of human's imagination and coincidence could make a perfect novel. Through the analysis of the tension among imagination, virtual reality, and reality, I argue that writing can protect the material world from the colonization of virtual reality. Boullosa introduces different layers of stories and discovers the gap aesthetics that only a novel written by human could provide. These gap aesthetics celebrates a spontaneous writing merged in-between space of narrative which creates different perspectives of stories that is unique and authentic.

Chapter 5, “A History Told by a Nonhuman Agent in *Las paredes hablan*,” presents a history told by a non-human subject which offers an alternative history, recovering the voices of the oppressed, minorities and victims who have been forgotten in official history. Different from official history, which is commonly told by an authoritative male voice, this narrative recovers different voices from the peripheral history. *Las paredes hablan* is one of Boullosa’s experiments with different genres expanded to include cinematography. Boullosa first wrote the film script of *Las paredes hablan* and subsequently published it in the form of a novel. By analyzing *Las paredes hablan*, my dissertation finds not only thematic and methodological connections from Boullosa’s early to later narratives but also an inter-genre connection between literature and visual art, which the previous secondary works on Boullosa have overlooked.<sup>12</sup>

My reading on Boullosa’s five narratives finds a way to transcend and trespass rigid categorization through different types of Mexican nomadic subjects. Boullosa’s writing destabilizes the European hegemonic power, patriarchal and hierarchical social structures, and binary division. While Boullosa’s narratives of the late eighties and early nineties focus on crossing the gender and sexual boundaries, her narratives from the late nineties and after the new millennium dismantle various fixed borders such as human/posthuman and human/nonhuman. Throughout the different forms of nomadic subjects, Boullosa elucidates hidden or peripheral spaces alienated from the center. Those marginal spaces make visible the untold voices and stories

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<sup>12</sup> The visual imagery in her works proposes another way to convey the traumatic experiences of oppressed women, which may be inaccessible using words. Considering the fact that Boullosa has recently returned to do another collaborative work that combines novel and installation art, it is crucial to emphasize the analysis of her collaborative works. Currently, Boullosa is working on a new collaboration between novel and installation art inspired by Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, which shows 39 elaborate place settings for the symbolic history of women. In her recent interview with Vicky Sanz, Boullosa said: “In her piece, she invites 39 prominent historical women to dinner, she sets a table with ceramic plates made for each one of them. There are no Spanish-speaking guests among them. So, I decided to make my own table.” Boullosa’s *The Dinner Party* is dedicated to Latin American women who have been systematically erased by History.

behind the official history, private and collective memories of others, and different versions of stories that invite readers to be part of the novel. As I mentioned before, Boullosa's nomadic characters have to be taken into account within Latin America's historical and social context, especially, the conquest and colonization. This analysis about nomadic subjects provide an understanding of poststructuralism and deconstruction vision in Boullosa's narratives with the addition of a posthuman perspective. Furthermore, this work will offer a framework for broader readings of a contemporary Mexican woman's writing by presenting different writing formula.

## CHAPTER 1. BECOMING “UNDUTIFUL DAUGHTERS” IN *MEJOR DESAPARECE*

*Mejor desaparece*, a collaborative work between Carmen Boullosa’s text and Magali Lara’s illustrations, offers laconic and curious stories about the Ciarrosa family in contemporary Mexico.<sup>13</sup> Through this family’s life, the novelist presents an intriguing reading of young girls’ struggle in the Mexican patriarchal society. The narrative questions the repressive systems, upheld by both the Catholic church and Mexican society during the 1950s, and renders distorted images of the family ideal, consisting of a father, a good wife, and obedient children. This novel deviates from the classic nation-building novels, which contribute to the nation formation by presenting a stable patriarchal nuclear family through the image of a good wife and obedient children in the picture-perfect “home sweet home.”<sup>14</sup> At the end of the novel, she suggests for young women to empower themselves by being “undutiful daughters” and eventually reclaim their own space in society through collective resistance against patriarchal authority. The narrative demonstrates how the daughters, suffering from double marginalization as children and as women, find their own

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<sup>13</sup> Even though the writer herself hesitated to name her first prose, *Mejor desaparece*, as a “novel” due to the lack of unity and integrity, I think that this narrative is enough to be called as a novel (Bady). On the one hand, this novel proposes a continuum of feminine writing through methodological innovation which is not explained under traditional women’s writings in the late 80’s. On the other, this narrative also serves an important foundation in her literary world which crosses or mixes between genres. Her interest in images and art can be found in her later works. Starting from this novel, *Mejor desaparece*, Boullosa wrote a movie script of *Las paredes hablan*, and currently she is working on an installation art inspired by Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*.

<sup>14</sup> The traditional image of a patriarchal nuclear family with “a good wife and good daughters” prevailed in a number of nineteenth-century novels, known as Latin American foundational novels. In such writings, it was essential to limit the female characters’ social roles within a private and domestic space in the process of nation building, while the male characters centered in the public sphere and strived for “the ideals of masculinity” (Wilkinson 1). With this dichotomist and sexist notion, education for women “is founded on emotional suffering and passive indoctrination” (1). Jean Franco states that the image of an ideal family was created with a sweet picture of husband and wife and their obedient children, and, in turn, it became an institutional model that the new generation would follow toward the nation’s civilization and progress (81-91).

way to survive and subvert the patriarchal family structure. The “undutiful daughters” are an alternative way of claiming subjectivity by deviating from the “dutiful daughters,” who are obedient to their parents by being good students, helping their parents with housework, and keeping their bodies clean.

Boullosa’s writings in the late 1980s, starting from *Mejor desaparece* and continuing to *Antes*, seem to be based on her autobiographical experience of the premature death of her mother and troubled relationship with her father. *Antes* presents the narrative through a young girl who is speaking after having died at the age of eleven. By showing two different sides of the narrator, on the one hand, as a typical child and, on the other, a girl with fear, guilt and persecution, the narration depicts a dysfunctional family where neither the mother nor the father protects their daughter. For Boullosa, *Mejor desaparece*, which took her ten years to publish, reflects her lost childhood that was full of fear, anger, and violence: “It’s so violent, and messy in its heart and its core” (Bady). The pervasive fear and violence in the novel are presented with the unsanitary and affectionless house described from the perspective of young girls.<sup>15</sup>

The first scholarly work on *Mejor desaparece* appeared in Pedro Granados’ 1994 article, “Carmen Boullosa, el árbol y el remolino,” which studies how the image of tree, a symbol of phallogocentrism defined by Jacques Derrida, challenges the phantasmagorical characters in *Mejor desaparece*. A few years later, several articles about *Mejor desaparece* appeared in *Acercamientos a Carmen Boullosa* (1999), where Barbara Dröscher, Carol Clark D’Lugo, Rilke Bolte, and Eva

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<sup>15</sup> Anna Reid interprets the haunted house as a gothic house where it is dominated by vigilance and terror. She points out that the phantasmal image of the dead mother creates a new dimension: “hay otra dimensión que se juega en estos mundos desconcertantes que no se puede describir en su totalidad y eso es lo sobrenatural. La casa es penetrada por una forma repugnante, macabra, que es introducida por el padre y a la cual se nombra ‘eso’. Transgrede los límites entre la vida y la muerte y está resuelto a la destrucción.” The gothic novel starts with the publication of *Castle of Otranto* (1764), by Horace Walpole, in response to “Siglo de las Luces donde no había cabida para lo ‘irracional’ o inexplicable y surge como manera de ilustrar lo inexplicable” (“El discurso” 206).

Gundermann offer profound literary analyses of *Mejor desaparece*.<sup>16</sup> All the critics underline the narrative ambiguity, noticeable due to unidentified narrators, and the broken family of Ciarrosa. D'Lugo reads the text as a social and ecological criticism including the necessity of comprehending the (de)formation of national identity through feminine lens. Further, Bolte and Droscher affirm the alienation and destruction of family in the modern society of Mexico (“La voz perdida” and “La muerte de las madres”), and Gundermann emphasizes how the patriarchal and traditional model of family has been destroyed by reinterpreting the feminine space (“Reinventarse en el espacio infernal de los géneros”).

Shigeko Mato (2000) also develops her argument related to the feminine sphere understanding it as a hybrid and trans-liminal space (*Locating Female Creation in a Hybrid Space: Carmen Boullosa's Trans-Liminal Narrative*). While Mato focuses on a new female creation as hybridity, Barbara Fick (2000) elaborates the female characters as “otherness or alterity that places them on the periphery of traditional representation” (“Narrative transgression and disembodies voices: The reconstruction of identity in the novels of Carmen Boullosa”). Lorena Monzón (2002) examines metafictional aspects of postmodernist context in *Mejor desaparece* and *Duerme* with regard to the enunciation of the subject (“Algunos aspectos de la metaficción en *Mejor desaparece* y *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa”). With such metafictional effects, a reader is compelled to accept an uncomfortable position of a “spoken subject,”<sup>17</sup> who wonders about the identity of the speaker;

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<sup>16</sup> The proceeding includes Barbara Dröcher's “La muerte de las madres,” Carol Clark D'Lugo's “Before They Disappear: Reassessing Cultural (De)Formation in Mexico,” Rilke Bolte's “La voz perdida- *Mejor desaparece*: exteriorización y alienación del sujeto entre la memoria imposible y la apertura textual,” and Eva Gundermann's “Reinventarse en el espacio infernal de los géneros. Una lectura feminista de *Mejor desaparece* de Carmen Boullosa.” The symposium was held in 1997 entitled “Conjugarse en infinitivo – la escritora Carmen Boullosa.”

<sup>17</sup> Monzón introduces Kaja Silverman's term of “the spoken subject,” which explains the interaction between the spectator and the reader: “*The spoken subject* es la persona a quien se dirige el sujeto que habla (*the speaking subject*). Silverman dice que ““it is the spoken subject who, by identifying with the subject of the speech, permits the signifier ‘I’ to represent a subject to another signifier (i.e. ‘you’)” (41).



in other words, which character of the novel addresses the reader as “you.” Later, in “Sí, mejor desaparece de Carmen Boullosa: ¿Una versión de ‘La loca criolla en el ático,’” María Victoria García-Serrano (2002) is specifically concerned with the representation of madness in the penultimate part of the novel, applying the feminist lens of “mad women” presented in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. While García-Serrano finds the subversive power from the image of “mad women,” Eva Gundermann has published a book on *Mejor desaparece* concentrating on the image of “lo abyecto (the heinous)” (*Desafiando lo abyecto: Una lectura feminista de “Mejor desaparece”*).

In 2003, Anna Reid complements the secondary reviews by analyzing anti-Catholic discourses and gothic elements<sup>18</sup> presented in the novel (“El discurso anticatólico en la narrativa de Carmen Boullosa”). In the same year, Shigeko Mato traces the illusion of “homely,” by examining how the novel depicts the unfulfilling role of “home” and the angelical mother (“The Illusion of the “Homely” and Consciousness of the “Unhomely”: Rethinking “Home” in Carmen Boullosa’s *Mejor desaparece*”). Lastly, Yolanda Melgar Pernías (2010) embraces three narratives of Boullosa, *Mejor desaparece*, *Antes*, and *Treinta años*, studying how the feminine Bildungsroman has been presented through the relationship between the mother and the daughter (“Madres e hijas en los Bildungsromane femeninos de Carmen Boullosa: *Mejor desaparece*, *Antes* y *Treinta años*”). Later, Melgar Pernías expands her studies on Bildungsroman to Sandra Cisneros’s narratives and shows how the Mexican identity is re-constructed in their narratives (*Los “Bildungsromane” femeninos de Carmen Boullosa y Sandra Cisneros. Mexicanidades, fronteras, puentes*).

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<sup>18</sup> Anna Reid understands the novel as the gothic genre, which “came out in England at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an answer to the Age of Enlightenment and as a way of showing the unexplainable” (“El discurso” 205).

The aforementioned essays and secondary studies effectively analyze the feminist perspective of Boullousa's novel; however, while doing so, none of them focused on interpreting illustrations and especially the relationship—in varying degrees of complementary correspondence—between the author's narrative and the illustrator's depiction. Moreover, previous critics direct much of their attention to the failure of patriarchal power, and in this sort of analysis, the figure of the father becomes the primary subject of study, rather than the daughters. Consequently, my study of this novel will focus on the process of the daughters' self-empowerment and subversion of gender hierarchy, which in the end, converts their domestic sphere from an oppressive male-chauvinistic place to a liberating feminist place.

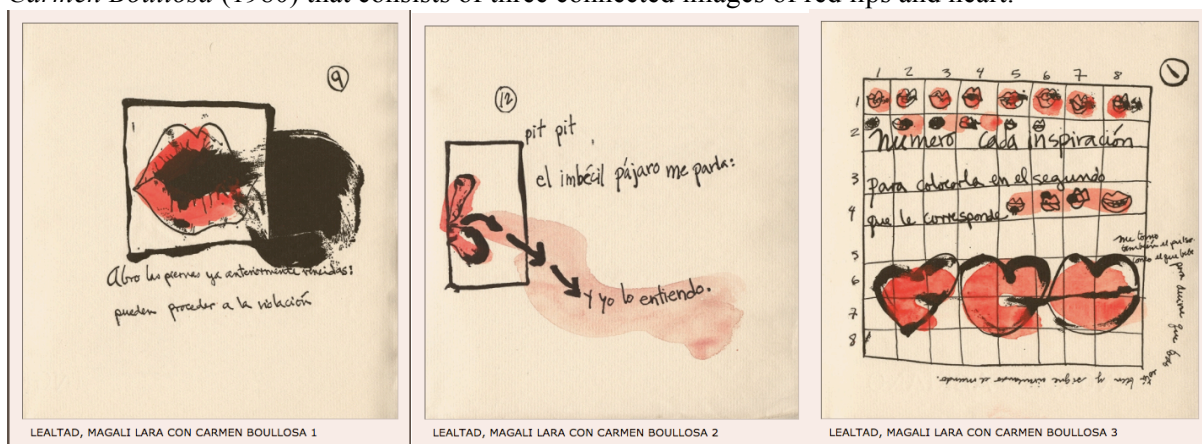
In this chapter, I will examine how the daughters do not passively remain as victims of their father's domination, but how they usurp the patriarchal authority and make the home into their own place without the father. In this way, we will approach the concept of "home" from a different perspective: "home" is not only a private and feminine place which incarcerates women by enforcing them with traditional values. By breaking down binary splits such as public/private, masculine/feminine, and reason/feeling, "home" is redefined as an alternative place, where women are self-empowered and thrive without patriarchal power. It should be noted that Boullousa's narrative suggests a new strategy of feminist resistance against the patriarchal authority: collectively taking over the house (the symbol of a father's property or place) with filthiness, odor and noises, instead of waiting passively for the collapse of patriarchal power or escaping from home. My analysis encompasses two overlooked aspects of *Mejor desaparece*: i) the novel's unique combination of visual arts (Magali Lara's illustrations) and text (Boullousa's writings) focusing on the representation of the abandoned house and the unprotected children; ii) the transformation of Ciarrosa's daughters, especially from "good daughters" to "undutiful daughters."

I borrow this term of “undutiful daughters” from Rosi Braidotti’s notions in which women need to refuse the paternal law and develop “conceptual disobedience”—I will elaborate on her theory later. Understanding Braidotti’s conceptualization will be helpful to analyze how the imagery of the obedient and tender daughters who are initially represented as flowers, finally turn into savage weeds. Through this transition, the daughters acquire collective power to subvert the paternal law and change the family hierarchy by revalidating the power of savagery. In this way, the daughters usurp the patriarchal authority instead of remaining subjugated.

## 1.1 Grafting Text and Imagery

*Mejor desaparece* is unique in its combination of Carmen Boullosa’s writing with Magali Lara’s twenty illustrations of flowers.<sup>19</sup> The novelist writes seven vignettes, five narrated by Ciarrosa’s daughters, one by their stepmother and the other by their father, while the painter inserts illustrations of flowers in between those vignettes. Each narrative piece normally does not exceed two pages, and the narrative is scattered (see fig. 1). Each narrative fragment is offered by different

<sup>19</sup> Their literary and artistic works show how the two artist influence each other and build a new form of works with text and illustrations. Boullosa’s first collaborated work with Lara is *Lealtad, Magali Lara con Carmen Boullosa* (1980) that consists of three connected images of red lips and heart.



daughters of Ciarrosa whose names are, Magnolia, Fucsia, Acacia, and Berta.<sup>20</sup> The images of flowers naturally generate connection between the images of the daughters to those of flowers. The deformed and grotesque flowers are instinctively linked to disheveled-looking girls living in the untidy house of Boullosa's text. Their appearance and behavior deviate from the ideal image of daughters and eventually help them to create an adumbral place where swampy and fecund plants inhabit in the shadows. Mato's argument also indicates that "the daughters inhabit the margin of the home" (*Locating Female Creation* 47) and has concluded that "a unilateral image of home is so strongly maintained that it does not disappear easily" (71).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Orchid symbolizes love, beauty, and fertility, Daisy symbolizes humility and modesty, Dahlia symbolizes staying graceful under pressure and challenging situations, Madonna Lily symbolizes purity, passion, and renewal, Magnolia symbolizes the feminine side of life, purity, and dignity, Fuchsia symbolizes overflowing abundance, Acacia symbolizes resurrection and immortality, and Bertha symbolizes brightness and glory (*The Language of Flowers* 94).

<sup>21</sup> Mato analyzes that "Boullosa creates a house of terror and chaos," where the image of an ideal home does not exist. "The house of Mejor, which the female characters do not inhabit, therefore, does not conform to the conventional patriarchal model kit of home and family. [...] Boullosa raises the question of the fixity and rigidity of the gendered image of home, by revealing the multilateral facets and meanings of home" (*Locating Female Creation* 37-38).



ES NECIA

¡A la escuela!  
La sirvienta no quiere darse cuenta de las nuevas costumbres y sigue haciendo los llamados a que está habituada.

— ¡Orquídea! ¡Apúrate a peinarte!

¿Cuál Orquídea? Se fue hace tanto, tanto. . .

— ¡Azucena! Pongo en tu mochila un cambio de calzones por si te llegas a hacer pipí.

¿Cuál pipí, si en dos o tres años más tendría edad para entrar a preparatoria?

Fingimos obedecer para no enfurecerla. Nos tomamos el desayuno que prepara a diario y en cuanto ordena salir rumbo a la escuela nos dispersamos como esporas en los lugares más recónditos de la casa. Pero estas esporas hace mucho que se pudrieron. Cada una de ellas trata de abrirse lugar en los húmedos rincones, en los deformes espacios que hay entre el librero y el libro, entre la pared y la cómoda, entre la silla y el escritorio.

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Figure 1 Lara's illustration and Boullousa's text in *Mejor desaparece*

Throughout the narrative, readers must guess who the narrator is and what is happening due to the gaps in the story. The space between each fragment leaves certain ambiguity and invites readers to ponder further and delve into rigorous interpretation of fragmented narratives. Some women writers take advantage of such narrative gaps and ambiguities to poignantly express themselves without words and invite readers to fill the gaps with imagination. Boullousa employs it to imply the young daughters' traumatic experience corollary to her own childhood.<sup>22</sup> As Cathy Caruth

<sup>22</sup> The sensorial descriptions such as sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste intensify the traumatic experiences of the young narrators and add to the oppressive mood in the narrative. Pedro Granados calls these different senses of language as a corporeal language (*lenguaje del cuerpo*), which is related intimately to sound, touch, smell, and taste, opposed to the abstract and the rational, and reveals the presence of "fantasmas" (224).

points out in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, literature is an intersection where traumatic experience and the language of literature merge and imply the complex relation between knowing and not knowing (3-5). This novel contains not only literary language but also visual imageries to convey the traumatic experience of the young narrators.

When I interviewed Carmen Boullosa in January of 2018, she admitted that “the violence that they [the narrators] feel interrupts the narrative flow. Therefore, all are inhibited in a big silence but it is a silence caused by violence. And under such a circumstance, readers only see that particular voices among all the characters survive” (Kim).<sup>23</sup> The fragmented structure effectively illustrates the gap between one episode and another, narrated by indeterminable multiple voices. As Boullosa states, the different voices of the young narrators are those which survive from the fearful and tyrannical house. This is why each fragment told by the survivors is assembled into a diary or a photo album, which displays one’s collections of memories. The repressed voices of the young girls are only presented in the form of a short memory. The discontinuity of the voices testifies the loss of authority as a narrator, who has power over the narrative: “There is no space for the narrator to survive. The narrator has been devoured by the violence of the story. So we only have the different voices separated” (Kim). In the surviving and scattered voices of the young girls, readers see the gaps and the silences as embodiments of their grief, pain, and suppressed feelings. The silences between each fragment are as important as the voices of the text to understand their fear and violence.

Not only Boullosa but also Lara mentions silence related to the traumatic experience in her early age. For Lara, silence is another way to transmit the violence of her infancy:

En mis sueños aparece la infancia como un lugar de silencio impuesto, de tremenda quietud para no romper algo de alarmante delicadeza, y una agobiante sensación de torpeza que me impide mover. Es un lugar violento emocionalmente y el rostro el

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<sup>23</sup> The transcript of the interview with Carmen Boullosa is in the process of publishing.

único mapa posible. Hay algo en las fotos infantiles, en algunos retratos, en los que la mirada parece contener un presagio, una promesa de algo que sólo en el futuro adquiere sentido. En cambio, el cuerpo siempre habla del momento presente, de la sexualidad y el contacto con los otros. Lenguaje corporal. (“Infancia y eso”)

According to Lara, infantile memory is not a result of accumulated remembered experiences but is retrospectively constructed. It means that the infantile memory is not a result of all the accumulated events in the past; rather is a result of finalized identity. Thus, the memory itself does not provide enough understanding of one’s identity. For Lara, the body includes more personal history than any explanation with words. Even in a moment of silence, our body can feel, speak, and nonverbally convey trauma. The bodily perception, which Lara defines as “lenguaje corporal,” tries to focus on what happens at this moment to a subject, so that it gives a better understanding of one’s state, both physically and mentally, through sensory awareness.

Lara’s illustrations of flowers, presented as abnormal, deformed, and even grotesque, fill the gaps (silences) between fragments. The rebellious images of daughters in the narrative become connected to the untypical image of flowers. The abnormal images of flowers such as flowers surrounded by beads of blood, intestine-like flowers, and parasitic flowers raise the feeling of the grotesque (see fig. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). As Peter Thomson argues, “The effect of the grotesque can best be summed up as alienation. Something which is familiar is suddenly made strange and disturbing” (59).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Freud’s notion of the “uncanny” also seems relevant here. According to Freud, the uncanny is “that class of the frightening which leads back to something which is known of old and long familiar” (219).

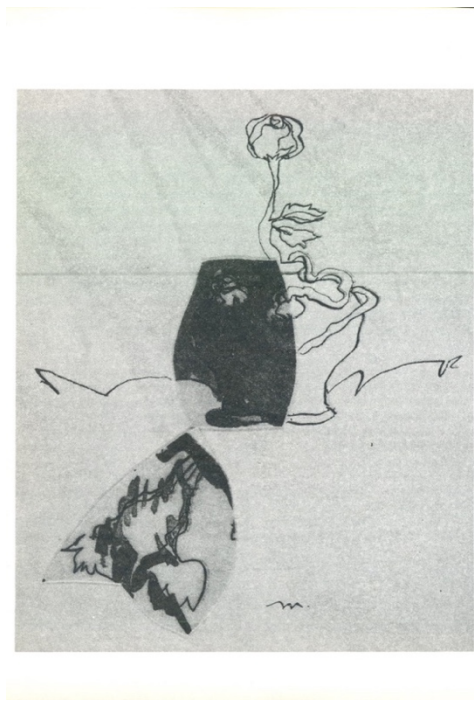


Figure 2 Flower and vase in *Mejor desaparece*



Figure 3 Vase and its reflection in *Mejor desaparece*





Figure 4 Flowers in *Mejor desaparece*

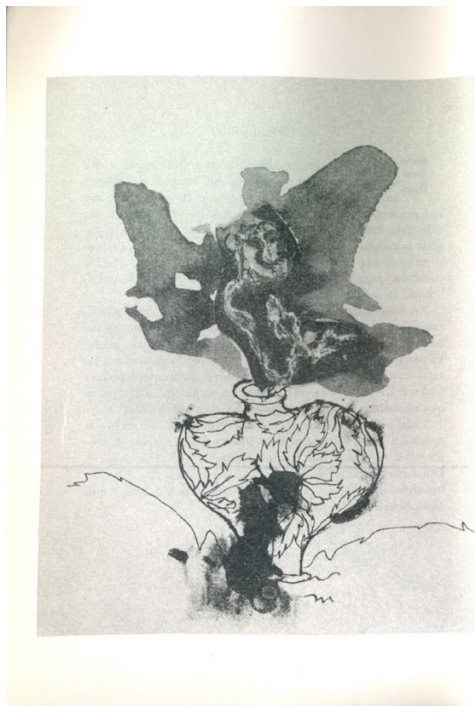


Figure 5 Flowers in the vase in *Mejor desaparece*

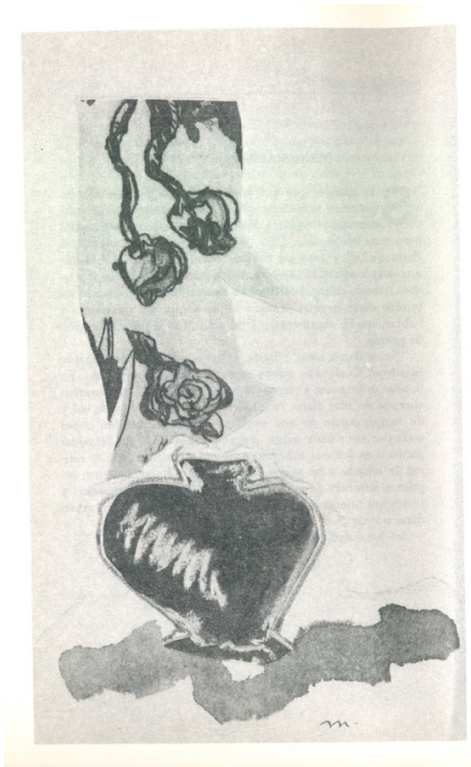


Figure 6 Flowers above the vase in *Mejor desaparece*



Figure 7 Flowers under the vase in *Mejor desaparece*

More specifically, the twenty illustrations, printed in black and white, can be divided into four categories based on the placement of the flowers and vase. The individual images do not correspond directly to the text right next to the image. For example, the half-page length text entitled “La cita” (35) offers the description of the appointment with a lawyer who delivers a card to the daughters from their father. Juxtaposed with the text, a half broken vase appears with flowers bundled at its base. These disparate images appeared unrelated, but each flower image is linked to one of the young narrators who are presented with scattered and dispersed voices in the narrative. Lara’s illustrations are interspersed in the second, third, and fourth part of the novel. As mentioned above, the flowers and vase give a clear sense of the grotesque and weirdness. First, nine of them display flowers crawling out of the vase; five of them are tangled inside of the vase; four of them are both in the vase and outside of the vase, making the flowers seem like reflections; lastly only two of them portray an ordinary image of flowers in the vase. These dispersed images of flowers and vases can be read in two ways: a single image presented from a different angle or different images of flowers and vases.<sup>25</sup> No matter how each reader interprets the images, the images presented without a particular order attest that the narrative shows a chaotic and dysfunctional family.

The flowers had been one of the main themes in Lara’s artistic creation even before working on *Mejor desaparece*. Lara’s works of flowers in 1986 prove some similarities to those in *Mejor desaparece*. As a female artist, Lara reveals a great deal about the image of flowers as corporeal representations of the human body as part of nature. In one of her interviews, Lara explains about the meaning of flowers in her works:

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<sup>25</sup> Depicting objects from a multitude of viewpoints remind us of the Cubist artwork which sketches an abstracted form of a subject by analyzing, breaking, and reassembling it. However, Lara’s two-dimensional drawing is the most distinguishing feature from the Cubism that creates the illusion of three-dimensional objects.

Tiene que ver con las formas que dotó la naturaleza a los seres vivos, y que nosotros en ellas, aunque las podemos ver de una manera más abstracta, realmente también son las de un cuerpo humano; puede ser una relación entre los motivos florales con motivos humanos. Me encontré unos dibujos líricos tibetanos, donde dibujan los órganos como si fueran flores, así los dibujan en esta medicina milenaria tibetana. Ellos sí pueden entender que hay una similitud entre un corazón y un fruto, por ejemplo, en estructura, en peso y formalmente en lo que nos concierne, así como imaginario y como sentido poético. (Gaspar Díaz )

Many times, the perception of the body has remained abstract and ideal. The idealization of the human body engenders the binary division between human/nature, mind/body, and subject/object. These binary oppositions have also been correlated with a gender opposition between male and female, considering female as less rational and logical than male: “Women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men” (Grosz 14). Throughout history, women and nature have been considered as objects to be tamed, protected, and helped by masculine subjects who justify their power over nature and women. Especially, the representation of subjugated women and nature is prevalent in the classic nation-building novels which promote the advancement of society. Such advancement manifests as dominant violent over women’s bodies and the natural world. Through her artworks, Lara connects women and nature to trouble heteropatriarchal power that insist on refining and taming the natural state of the female body and environment. She parallels the image of genital-like flowers and women’s bodies to signify how female sexuality is surveilled by male dominance. For Lara, women’s bodies and female genitalia are not something to shame or hide but to reveal and use to denounce the male domination over women.

Boullosa also interprets Lara’s flowers as savage, rebellious, and wild.<sup>26</sup> In 2005, various years after the publication of *Mejor desaparece*, Boullosa states:

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<sup>26</sup> The image of women as a “salvaja” is one of the repeated themes of Boullosa. The image of salvage starts from her famous poem, “La salvaja.” According to Mariana Libertad Suárez Velázquez, “Carmen Boullosa,

Las flores se negaban a ser fijadas en la sólida imagen. Móviles, como animales salvajes, sus rebeldes naturalezas muertas producían el efecto contrario de la intención de los bodegones tradicionales. En las de ellas, el orden doméstico no provee un resguardo contra las violencias e inclemencias del mundo. Las de Magali Lara son naturalezas vivas. El caos entra con ellas a casa. (*“Intemperie Magali Lara”*)

Both Boullosa and Lara reconsider the image of flowers and re-assesses the limited representation of home as a feminine space, where it confines the role of women regarding household and raising children.<sup>27</sup> Through the eyes of Boullosa and Lara, the concept of home turns into a primeval forest where only those competitors with strong viability can survive. They do not hesitate to present the dark side of reality through the new readings of flowers. They are not dead flowers in a still life painting to serve the visual pleasure of others, but rather are alive and vivid. The flowers that Lara depicts are not “fijadas en la sólida imagen” imposed by hegemonic view from the society, but fluid and full of potential to create a chaotic place which crosses binary oppositions. Here, the “chaos” does not mean a state of anarchy but the climax of the desire for subversion to create a new feminine space. Like a savage animal, flowers full of vitality live actively and defy the traditional system.

Not only the flower names of the daughters but also their self-descriptions make a metaphorical connection between flowers in the illustrations and the daughters in the narrative.

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in her poetic work ‘La salvaja’ (1989), establishes its own setting of the constituent texts, where a main character travels in order to carry out a process of self-representation; nevertheless the heroine, the movement, the prospection of time and the narration itself while they appear and even topicalize themselves within the work, do not comply with the traditional epic formula, but rather are elaborated from a structural, stylistic and performatively hysterical discourse” (111).

<sup>27</sup> Tracing back to the first encounter between Boullosa and Lara in their early age of twenties, it is clearly seen that their artistic connection is based on the similar experience as “being an orphan.” Boullosa states that: “I think there is a very deep, very profound connection. In sensibility but also other connection. Because we were both raised in nun schools, in very big family, mine much more catholic than hers but in that catholic world that is not, doesn’t have to do with religion but has to do with the idea, morality, the body of a girl. So we were both equally rebels. The strange thing is that we immediately became a very close friend when we met. We were very similar and we became very close friend. I was an orphan, and she lived with her parents. Nevertheless, we were equally orphan. That was a declaration of herself” (Kim).

Because the father uses “eso” to threaten them and make the home a chaotic and unstable place, the daughters strengthen their mutual solidarity to survive.<sup>28</sup> The following part describes the flower-like daughters learning their own ways to live by themselves:

Nos tomamos el desayuno que prepara a diario y en cuanto ordena salir rumbo a la escuela nos dispersamos como esporas en los lugares más recónditos de la casa. Pero estas esporas hace mucho que se pudrieron. Cada una de ellas trata de abrirse lugar en los húmedos rincones, en los deformes espacios que hay entre el librero y el libro, entre la pared y la cómoda, entre la silla y el escritorio. (Boullosa, *Mejor desaparece* 19)

The narrators as flowers, whose spores are dispersed in some hidden places of the house and grow in the shadows, show their isolation indeed, but more importantly, they also exhibit the strong vitality of the daughters who are survivors, not victims.

If the flowers in the illustrations represent the daughters in the text, the vase in Lara’s drawings is a metaphor of the patriarchal house, which controls and restrains the flowers. The fragmented and dispersed voices of the young girls demonstrate the impossibility of communication between the father and daughters. Even though they are in the same house, there is no true interaction. The father even delivers his opinion through an intermediary, his lawyer. He pretends to be a good father to the public in the interview with a newspaper journalist. The section titled, ‘Entrevista,’ which ironically displays a photo of a peaceful family with a caption of *El*

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<sup>28</sup> None of the narrators claim what the “eso” is, but it is obvious that the presence of “eso” is a strong and powerful image, especially, for the daughters: “Entró corriendo a la casa, ruidoso, alborotado, a punto de estallar, y lo oímos y sentimos antes de que empezara a dar los gritos horrendos que todos conocimos tanto y que él jamás repetiría” (*Mejor desaparece* 7). The undefined entity “eso” creates a sense of frustration over the daughters’ inability to convey their feelings. This sense of frustration and fear is symbolically represented in sensorial descriptions such as odor and sound in the narrative. De Beer mentions that the father is obsessed with “eso,” plays with it, and gives it a name, all of which frightens his daughters. With the presence of “eso,” the father becomes obsessed with cleanliness; “he washes the apples with soap, burns the used tablecloths, boils the silverware, and dips the bread into alcohol before eating it” (161). The more he becomes obsessed with the cleanliness, the dirtier do the house and the daughters become. The daughters become more disobedient and express their feeling through their corporeal senses such as odor and sound similar to “eso.”

*señor Ciarrosa con sus hermosas hijas*, illustrates his hypocrisy (65). The isolation of the daughters is clearly portrayed in the following words of a narrator: “¿Y nosotros, papá, y nosotros? Nos hemos quedado arrumbados en las páginas viejas de un olvidado álbum de familia” (66). However, the daughters as dispersed spores are not “being left behind in the old page of the forgotten family album” (66). Instead, the text represents “undutiful daughters” as grotesque flowers which threaten the patriarchal house presented as the broken vase.

## **1.2 Becoming Weeds**

The notion of “undutiful daughter” borrowed from Braidotti’s enables an effective interpretation of the novel. The process of becoming an undutiful daughter is to push the father and stepmother outside of the house by means of the daughters’ dirtiness, smell, and noise. I analyze each of these tools of chaos and resistance later in this section. At the beginning, the daughters do not want to be dirty and smelly but they later realize that dirtiness, odor, and noise work to their advantage. Collectively, they make noise which threatens their father and subsequently their stepmother. During this process, the text exposes how the stepmother victimizes the daughters while being victimized herself. The unpleasant aspects of the daughters bother their parents in different ways causing problems, thus breaking the stability of the house controlled by the father. The daughters actively use their unkempt, repugnant, and noisy conditions to resist against the parental rules and power. Eventually through such inhuman conditions, they triumph. The demise of their father’s authority is highlighted at the end of the novel presented as reduced the physical size of his body without any power over the daughters.

The “undutiful daughters” challenge disciplinary boundaries by defamiliarizing the power relations of race, sex, and gender.<sup>29</sup> The first paragraph of “Preface: The Society of Undutiful Daughters” starts by rephrasing the famous quote of Simone de Beauvoir, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”:

One is not born, [but] one becomes an undutiful daughter. Moreover, and depending on one’s theoretical disposition, one can be undutiful to one, three, or a multiplicity of structural and occasional others. Strangely enough, though, it is more difficult and slightly more problematic to be undutiful to two others simultaneously. The oedipal constellation surrounding one’s relationship to two others raises issues and contestation of an altogether different order. Let me start therefore by exploring this numerical sequence of self-others relations and the different forms of dutifulness they may engender. It mostly comes down to zeros and ones. (*Undutiful Daughters* ix)

As a post-Deleuzian theorist, Braidotti initially tracks the concept of “becoming woman,” but she also proposes a new terminology called “undutiful daughters,” which insists on the critical perspective on gender.<sup>30</sup> What Braidotti emphasizes with the images of “undutiful daughter” aims

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<sup>29</sup> Danai S. Mupotsa understands the concept of “undutiful daughters” as a “figure of defamiliarisation. [...] becoming an undutiful daughter, one becomes aware of the cartographies or relations of power that they participate in. This practice of defamiliarization is not purely a dialectical relation to power, where the politics of location such as race, sex or gender simply produces negative effects of difference. Difference here becomes a strategic site of complex, multiple and shifting consciousness” (38).

<sup>30</sup> In *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991) and *Nomadic subjects* (1994), Braidotti adopts Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy as a starting point for rhizomatic thinking, affirming differences. In an interview conducted by Kathleen O’Grady, Braidotti commented her influence from Foucault and Deleuze: “I have a great deal of problems marrying, so to speak, into any one philosophy, and the metaphor of divorce, of dissonance, of splitting, comes up strongly in the book. I do think there is an interesting intersection, or, if you will, a coming together of interests between feminism on the one hand and, on the other, the margin of critical thinkers who are attempting to redefine philosophy, radically, critically, in a 21st century perspective, making it relevant to today’s culture, and I would definitely put all the French school into that category. There is an interesting convergence between them -- their reconstruction, deconstruction of philosophy -- and some of the things that feminists aspire to, but I do not think that the connection is given. I think it has to be constructed. It has to be built up step by step. At best, we can “use” certain philosophical ideas for feminist purposes” (“Nomadic Philosopher” 35). For Braidotti, Deleuze’s thought offers a reconsideration of the power relation and of the forms of resistance through the re-articulation of subjectivity. Braidotti’s study of Deleuze’s legacy is focused on the feminist perspective which has been underestimated and criticized by Luce Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak. However, Braidotti argues that “Emphasis on the differences among women as well as on the differences internal to each woman allows for contemporary feminists to avoid the pitfall of the essentialism but also the equally threatening option of a postmodern ‘diffuse’ and fluid identity” (“Nomadism with the Difference” 311). Therefore, what Braidotti illustrates is



to deny the institutionalized definition of women (even from the stage before being “women”) and to find a way to break “the hierarchal system that defines difference as structural pejoration” (*Undutiful Daughters* ix). As such, the process of being an “undutiful daughter” mirrors “becoming-woman,” which insists on transformations, redistributions, and displacements in the phallogentric system that reduces women to gradations of inferiority. “Becoming-woman” questions the Oedipal legacy which diminishes women to the specular and complementary other of the masculine. Braidotti refuses the hierarchies of phallogentrism and celebrates the positivity of the “non-Oedipal woman,” who is for Deleuze the prototype of the nomadic vision of subjectivity (“Nomadism with the Difference” 308). The “non-Oedipal woman” expresses the strong challenge against Oedipalized sexuality under phallogentrism, which starts to stabilize the sexuality of woman as essentialized material embodiment from their young age. In this sense, Braidotti’s notion of “undutiful daughter” stresses the rejection of the social institution posed by the sexual dichotomy in the social contract of phallogentrism.

In Boullosa’s novel, being an “undutiful daughter” is metaphorically presented as *becoming plants/ becoming weeds*. The deformed flowers, the metaphor of the unpleasant daughters of Ciarrosa, are contrasted against the ideal or traditional image of flower and allude the transformative potential with subversive power. More specifically, the collective power of the daughters, who resist the culminating patriarchal power, is presented with the metaphorical

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the importance of going beyond the binary scheme that opposes the feminine to the masculine. Her theory seeks to explore a non-humanistic feminism, which marks non-equivalence between the two sexes and leads to anti-anthropocentrism: “Art, not unlike critical philosophy, is for Deleuze an intensive practice that aims at creating new ways of thinking, perceiving and sensing Life’s infinite possibilities. By transposing us beyond the confines of bound identities, art becomes necessarily inhuman in the sense of non-human in that it connects to the animal, the vegetable, earthy and planetary forces that surround us” (*The Posthuman* 107). The ontological theories of Deleuze and Braidotti present new modes of subjectivities and raise the dissymmetrical power relations between the sexes alongside the other forms of “becoming,” including the complexity of becoming-animal, becoming insect, and becoming-minority.

description of weeds. The daughter's self-description as weeds is the way how the daughters challenge against sexual objectification. The process of becoming weeds disrupts the essential image of a traditional women by revealing the other side of femininity, which is dark, grotesque, yet strong, fluid, and multilateral.

The daughters who were reborn as weeds and creepers entail collective power and plurality to subvert the patriarchal house blurring the gender binary distinction. By proposing the collectivity of weeds and creepers, the feminine sides of flowers turn into a plant with a neutral symbol, neither masculine nor feminine. The most notable transition from flowers to weeds happens when the daughters are reduced to the specular and complementary other of the masculine:

Se asomó el segundo. No venía riéndose, pero empezó a hacerlo en cuanto me vio: “linda, linda niña”. ¿Pero qué hago yo aquí? Regresó a la sala y lo oí comentar: “es muy linda la niña” y después reírse. Todos se rieron con él. Algo me había manchado el calcetín, como una gota de engrudo, como no sé qué porque olía a yerba. (Boullosa, *Mejor desaparece* 79)

The “una gota de engrudo” can be read as a sexual connotation of teenage girls who start developing their secondary sexual characteristics, but what I want to emphasize here is the use of words such as “engrudo” and “olía a yerba.” Instead of showing the ideal transition from girls to women, this part exposes how the “undutiful daughters” fail to grow as flowers but end up being weeds. From this part of the novel, they strongly refuse to be physically attractive and start to assimilate with weeds. The odor of weeds reveals their changed identity, much stronger and collective than flowers. The declaration of their being weeds later overlaps with the collective image of ivy covering the house.

More specifically, the transition from flowers to weeds occurs when the daughters disclose their own defense mechanisms against the authority of the father. One of the daughters' core mechanisms is their dirtiness. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the daughters seem to

hide and try to escape from the unorganized and chaotic house full of dirt, rats, and trash: “se desplomó, se convirtió en un basurero, en una acumulación de mierda; era ya tan diferente a lo que había sido que más de una vez llegué a perderme” (32). However, when the house turns into a labyrinth of trash, the daughters are forced to transformed to different being. Despite their efforts to avoid the dirtiness, saying: “Llegamos puntuales, limpios hasta donde era posible, acicalados como animales valiéndonos de lo que podíamos para evitar la mugre que nos rodeaba en la casa,” it attaches more strongly to the daughters (35). Finally, the dirtiness becomes part of their existence. The daughters realize that the dirtiness is an effective tool to distance themselves from the institution of traditional femininity and to defend themselves against the male gaze. Eventually, the daughters turn into wild poisonous plants that contain strong power to survive in the wilderness of the house. They embrace their own wilderness to adapt to their surroundings and at the same time to challenge the threat posed by their father. Embodying poisonous plants, the daughters wield the powerful and sometimes dangerous force of the natural world.

The other defense of the daughters is the repugnant smell of their bodies. The repugnant smell totally rejects the expectation of sweetly scented flowers and maximizes the grotesque image of the daughters. The following segment “Yo” illustrates that the strong presence of their repugnant smell differentiates them from the ideal image of “beautiful daughters”:

Estoy ocupada en una actividad que me retrae y me quita todas las energías. He llegado a perfeccionarla a un punto que muchos no creerían posible. ¿Qué hago mañana, tarde y –sobre todo- noche? Me huelo. Huelo a qué huelo. Por eso la cama, la mugre, las carreras que doy por el parque o los reposos prolongados. ¿Ustedes creen que no es nada? He detectado una gama insospechadamente extensa de matices en el olor de mi piel. Sé olerme. (63)

The narrator’s self-awareness when she smells herself suggests her presence in the world. The odor notes the daughter’s invisible territory against the father, and at the same time, protects the daughters themselves from the patriarchal entities. As such, the odor presents itself even more

strongly when the daughters encounter an uncomfortable situation: “Y los señores me miraron como si se hubieran encontrado a un espectro y no dijeron una sola palabra. [...] De pronto empecé a despedir un olor fortísimo, un olor inocultable y Bati me miró fijamente pero no se atrevió a decir nada y los otros me miraban también fijamente y evidentemente asustados” (71). The daughter’s repugnant smell results in them no longer being presented as “linda” and “hermosa” but as weird, dirty,<sup>31</sup> and even monster-like: “Papá, ¿no te das cuenta de que soy un monstruo?” (69) Their smell thus becomes a subversive way to challenge patriarchal power.

Lastly, with their noise, the daughters fortify the house against their stepmother and father. The overwhelming powerful sound pushes the stepmother into her room and blocks out the father’s pleas to enter the house. “Sí, mejor desaparece,” which is narrated by the stepmother, indicates that what bothers her is the severe noise caused by them. In the daughters’ narration, they declare themselves as enunciators, and they do not acknowledge the noise.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the majority of the novel, the daughters assert their voices via monologues or short conversations. However, when the stepmother narrates the text, she explains that the daughters are disruptive by making noise and breaking the silence in order to bother her stability. It is notable to see how the noise becomes

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<sup>31</sup> In the secondary studies which analyze from the feminist perspective, the dirtiness of the daughters and the careless home are used as a supporting symbol to show how the daughters are abandoned by the father and oppressed in a patriarchal home which alludes to Mexican society. These studies agree to conclude that the father is punished and lost his authority by diminishing his size until trapped in the grass surrounded his house. Through the ending part, many critics focus on how the ideal image of modern family ends in failure as total broken family. Furthermore, they try to show how the image of home has been oppressed women keeping them inside of the house.

<sup>32</sup> The collective power of the daughters is clearly presented in the last two parts of the novel, told by the stepmother and the father, showing the daughters as threatening entities. The change of narrators from daughters to the father and stepmother gives a completely different point of view for the readers. It is not surprising as it might seem that each daughter’s voice is weak to challenge the patriarchal figure, however, the last two parts reveal their subversive power by presenting them as a collective group which is threatening. And finally, this collectivity obtains enough power to escape from the father’s control and subvert the patriarchal home by becoming weeds.

an important instrument for the daughters to challenge the stepmother who is finally incarcerated in her room:

¡Vaya! Esos sí que son mugrosos... Nadie puede probarme lo contrario... Mugrosos, ruidosos, estúpidamente locos. A mí me gusta tomar el café a solas y durante mucho tiempo, encerrarme en el cuarto, mirar hacia la terraza [...] A mi cuarto no entran. No puedo detener sus ruidos, llegan como el espejo donde se reflejan sus ojos y sus actos y puede que sea yo quien lo invite a entrar. A mi cuarto no entran, pero alrededor de él han creado una valla espesa con su loca e indomable locura. (89-93)

Throughout the stepmother's narration, the children have been defined as "mugrosos, ruidos y locos" (89) which are threatening and disturbing to her. The "indomable locura" easily matches the undutiful and rebellious daughters along the narrative.

The stepmother's self-imposed incarceration denotes the subtle ways in which the rules of the patriarchal father seeks to harm all the women in the house.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, the horizontal hostility against the daughters only harms and isolates her. The entire house seems like it is conquered by the daughters, and the only space that she can stay in peace is her room. Repeating "a mi cuarto no entran" implies, on the one hand, the certainty of maintaining her own space and on the other, the fear of losing her own space. Her fear not only comes from the fact that she might lose her space because of the daughter's invasion but also she might be alone locked in her room. The following part shows her complex and confused state of mind:

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<sup>33</sup> The stepmother's monologue describes her loneliness due to the emotional distance between her and her husband. The lack of communication is not only found between the father and daughters, but also between the father and the stepmother. The incarcerated image of the stepmother reminds us of *The Mad Woman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. García Serrano understands the stepmother's monologue, "Sí, mejor desaparece," as "representación de la locura femenina en una de las obras latinoamericanas" (153). In a similar vein, Dröscher proposes a Kafkian lens to see the alienation and Gundermann analyzes how a patriarchal family model ends in failure. The kafkian perspective could be found more precisely in *Violenta pureza* which is another collaborative work of Boullosa and Lara. While *Mejor desaparece* illuminates different character of alienation which is the daughters', the stepmother, and the father, *Violenta pureza* only focus on a single alienated narrator who is trapped in her own room. Whether the characters in the narrative are presented alone or as a group, all the characters in both narratives face their true identity through the internalization.

Me asomo por la ventana del cuarto. Trato de contar en voz alta para dejar de oírlos, pero también quiero oírlos. No comprendo qué hacen en esta ocasión. Los he oído llevando cosas, comiendo, peleando, odiando, siendo crueles, ensuciándose más, pero no entiendo qué hacen hoy. (95)

It is worth observing that the stepmother shows a small possibility to reconcile with them, or at least, she seems to express her willingness to approach them. Even though she suffers from the noises, she keeps trying to communicate with the daughters. The stepmother's slight hope to reach the daughters appears as a symbol of the window in her room. The passage above displays the double-mindedness of the stepmother who, on the one hand, does not mind the daughters, and on the other, wants to know what they are doing. The stepmother is another victim of this patriarchal house where there is no communication nor any affection to her. The stepmother fails to be close to the daughters and begins to withdraw into herself:

Hay días, como hoy, en que pienso que soy una flama devastando, comiendo, devorando lo que la rodea. [...] Pero no sé si pensar que también yo desapareceré en el aire, que podré voltear a verme en el espejo y que ya no estaré más. Lo pienso a menudo; cuando necesito tranquilizarme asomo mi cara indefensa a la devastadora noria de fuego. Entonces, me calmo, me siento serena, pero adentro de mí sigo oyendo la voz que me dice: "mejor desaparece, mejor desaparece." (98)

As the subjectivity of the stepmother becomes weak, she transforms into an abstract and floating entity that seems to disappear into thin air. In this sense, the book title, *Mejor desaparece*, reflects the stepmother's lowered position in the family hierarchy and her sense of alienation. The more the daughters dominate the house, the more the identity of the stepmother shrinks. The monologue above demonstrates her struggle not to be withdrawn from people.

In the following part narrated by the father, entitled "No desaparece," the daughters finally retake the patriarchal house by using their collective power and exile him. Mirroring the previous monologue of the stepmother, this part consists of the father's monologue:

No había visto que la hiedra se asoma, que ya trepó toda la cara interior del muro y que ahora va a bajar por la de afuera, lo malo es que dicen que destruye los ladrillos,

será mejor podarla. Además, está a punto de tapar el timbre, y el número de la casa se ve a duras penas. (101)

This part begins when the father returns to his home. The father struggles to locate the doorbell and the house number because of the overwhelming amount of ivy covering the house. At the beginning of the novel, he could not anticipate that the ivy would destroy the bricks of the house, so he is surprised how quickly the ivy encased it. One single stem of ivy cannot affect the whole house, but multiple vines have enough power to make the house invisible. The house is not familiar to him anymore and the exterior of the house engenders an uncanny moment. Similar to this change, the grotesque image of the daughters also generates the sense of the uncanny in the house.

The narrative inverts the patriarchal rule over the house through the image of ivy, which illustrates a subtle way to upheave power imbalances between the daughters and the father. The father tries everything he can but struggles to enter his home:

Qué barbaridad. Qué grosería... Cuánto se tardan en abrir. No tengo ninguna prisa, pero cómo van a saber que soy yo, ¿qué tal que fuera el hombre de la tintorería o el lechero? (el lechero no ha de venir a estas horas), ¿o un vendedor ambulante? [...] Debo decirles que se quiten esa mala costumbre, ¿será costumbre o será que no sirve el timbre? entonces debo decirles que lo manden arreglar cuanto antes. La reja no es muy alta, puedo saltármela, pero si yo fuera uno de nuestros vecinos y viera a alguien saltándose la reja pensaría que es un ladrón, llamaría a la policía, ¿cómo voy a saltar la reja de mi casa? (102)

Despite the father's effort to maintain his authority, he cannot deny the unexpected situation that leads him to be lost. First, he blames his daughters, but later, he starts thinking about other explanations. It is meaningful that this is the first time for readers to listen to his internal voice and to see how he feels about his daughters. While the father struggles outside of the house, the readers realize that the daughters are inside. Whether the daughters intentionally keep their father outside of the house or not, the fact is that the father loses control to access to his own home.

The last two parts are the first and the last time that the parents recognize their daughters by listening to their voices so that the daughters become independent subjects. In my interview with Carmen Boullosa, she mentioned how the father's position toward his daughters changes by the end of the narrative:

Between all of them, they are all flowers, not human beings. Then she (the stepmother) doesn't call them by name and then the third voice which is the father, he tries to see the daughters but he can't. He is the only one that really tries to see the daughters. To catch the girls through the window but he couldn't. He wanted to really see them but he lost the power to see them. But it is specular because at the beginning of the narrative we don't have a mother, we only have dirt that comes to the house and then dirt speaks and dirt hates them and then the father disappears. (Kim)

This is the only moment that he tries to approach his children through the door and the window, but he fails both. He realizes that he cannot even reach the window. He mentions that "Si estiro el brazo, con los dedos puedo tamborilear la ventana, tal vez me oigan, pero ya para qué..." (Boullosa, *Mejor desaparece* 104). The metaphor of the window is found in both the stepmother's narrative and the father's, and in both instances represents the failure of communication between parents and children. The metaphor of the window illustrates not only a desire to reach a real conversation but also the visibility of the daughter's presence.

The father, who never refers to his daughters by their names until the last part, calls out to them. He forces himself to recognize their personhood and subjectivity. Despite his efforts, the father remains outside of the house waiting for the daughters' response. The names which spelled out from the father are not the flowers names presented along with the narrative, but different names such as Lucía, Isabel, Rosario, Inés, Sara, and Alfonso (103-104).<sup>34</sup> These names raise a

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<sup>34</sup> At the end of the novel, readers encounter that Ciarrosa has a son named Alfonso. However, Alfonso has neither voice nor flower name. The narrators of this novel exclude Alfonso by not allowing him to participate in the narrative.



new question on the veracity of the daughters' names. Are these names the real names of his children, or does this moment in the text suggest that the father has different children that have not been mentioned before?

Either of these two questions is valid to understand the metaphor of the daughters. If the daughters' real names are what the father called out, it suggests that the daughters renamed themselves after flowers. Self-naming is a meaningful way to recognize their selfhood as independent and autonomous women. The daughters showed the way how they retake the image of flower to reveal the other side of femininity which is presented as dirty and grotesque figures. The second possible interpretation leads another picture of the relationship between the patriarchal figure and his daughters. It is interesting to consider that the father calls out to children who did not appeared in the previous stories. If this discovery is accurate, the text further posits that the father makes the daughters invisible.

As a result, the house dominated by the daughters permanently turns into a comfortable and liberal place for them. The father is expelled by his daughters and realizes that the daughters and the house are not the same as before. He confesses that “Mis hijos dejaron de ser mis hijos... Mi casa no era más que muros” (105). This is the moment when he truly admits his daughter's new existential condition as “undutiful daughters.” He realizes that the house is nothing more than a wall, which impedes him to dominate and possess it. Finally, the alienation from his daughters reduces his physical size: “*Primero vi disminuir mi tamaño, como si mi piel, mi carne, mis huesos, mi ropa, mi pelo, fueran jalando por un torrente rebelde de agua despeñada*” (104-105, emphasis hers). Notably, the description of the downsizing of the father written in italics establishes the deep inside of his internal voice. He starts to recall his past with the daughters and himself. After a half

page narration with his internal voice, the narrative displays the father's complete diminution as he loses his voice:

Ya no alcanzo la ventana con los dedos. Ya no puedo tocarla. Desde acá abajo la veo, si me apoyo en la pared ya no la veo... Siento como que me resbalo, algo me hace caerme pero no me caigo, veo llegar a mis ojos los pétalos de la petunia, yo debí embarrarla contra el lodo en la loca carrera que emprendí para escapar de esto, la lengua se me escoge, quiero hablar, sólo salen palabras mochas, pienso: me estoy haciendo pequeño, me hago diminuto .... (105)

The diminished body, which impedes him to speak, changes the position between the father and the daughters. It is the moment of inversion that the silence now passes to the father. The lost voice of the father refers to the subverted authority of the patriarchal figure. His voice, his hand, and his presence do not reach to his daughters. He is trapped in grass leaves: "¡Ay! ¡Sería mejor desaparecer que quedarme corriendo atrapado entre las hojas del pasto!" (105) Eventually, the solidarity of the daughters overthrows the patriarchal house through the collective power which makes it possible to turn the flowers into weeds.

In short, the process of becoming weeds dislocates the ideal image of a sweet picture of a modern family. The grotesque images related to the daughters such as a chaotic home full of dirt, rats, and trash, help to change the daughters' existential condition from flowers to wild poisonous plants. Through this process of transition, the little girls survive the violence and, finally, obtain their true voices. Instead of serving their bodies as visual pleasure, they revive as a body that naturally belongs to nature. The image of nature which includes flowers, plants, and weeds is connected to women's bodies and understands them as part of nature to demonstrate how the masculine power exploits both women and the wilderness. Confronting the sexualized body of women constructed on the masculine social norm, the daughters' bodies are reborn as plants, escaping from any sexual connotation that incarcerates the daughters under the gender binary division.

*Mejor desaparece* offers a collaborative work between imagery and text that creates an alternative feminine space where the patriarchal power is decentered and challenged by little girls, the Ciarrosa's daughters. Both the images and texts suggest how the ideal image of daughters in the modern family turns into a wild and grotesque image presented as weeds /plants. While Lara's images of flowers illustrate the escaping flowers from the vase that symbolizes the patriarchal house, Boullosa's narrative demonstrates how fragmented voices of isolated daughters dominate the house and expel the father from the domestic sphere.

*Mejor desaparece* discloses the dark side of the home which is established in nineteenth-century novels to contribute to the nation formation. Rosi Braidotti's concept of "undutiful daughters" allows readers to perceive that daughters can no longer be defined in totality as obedient and docile possession of parents. The deformed images of flowers separate ideal daughters from "undutiful daughters," and a broken vase of each image illustrates how the patriarchal house is challenged by the "undutiful daughters." The vase, an object meant to lock in and contain flowers, symbolizes the restrictive power that degrades the daughters as the complementary of Man. Therefore, the abnormal images of flowers and vase allow for the consideration of the daughters' struggle against the father.

The process of becoming weeds shows not only the desire to escape from to-be-look-at-ness but also reaffirms the solidarity between the daughters. Ironically, the young daughters take the visualized image of flowers represented as their names and are reborn as another category of flower: weeds. The image of ivy at the end of the narrative emphasizes the solidarity between minorities which topples the oppressive systems. In this way, an idealized picture of home and daughters become an illusion. Finally, the father is abandoned by his own daughters who are abused and abandoned by him. Being "undutiful daughters"/being weeds is a way to resist the

patriarchal norm and seek to destabilize the conservative definition of home and daughterhood by presenting grotesque and rebellious images of women.

## CHAPTER 2. NOMADIC MESTIZA IN *DUERME*

*Duerme* is based on the Mexican colonial period together with *Llanto: Novelas imposibles* and *Cielos de la tierra*, where colonial history is rewritten from the Latin American perspective in a postmodern setting. The main character, Claire Fleury,<sup>35</sup> shows the transformation of identity through her cross-dressing which implicates the social-cultural difference along with the narrative. As a nomadic figure, Claire embodies multiple forms: a French pirate and a soldier, a Mexican nobleman, an Indian woman, a Mexican woman, and finally, a male cadaver. Claire's nomadism allows her to transcend not only geographic and physical boundaries but also essential and monistic identities. Through the hybrid and nomadic character, who experiences different social norms, the narrative blurs the distinction of gender, race, and the social hierarchy.

Due to the unessential, unfixed, and mutable identities of Claire, the novel has been studied focused on the problem of subjectivity and identity construction in the Mexican socio-historical context, especially, that of the colonial period. The secondary studies of this novel have been widely divided into three different thematic approaches understanding the figure of Claire. Among the first group, some articles address how Claire's transformative body through her cross-dressing overcomes the gender and racial binary division.<sup>36</sup> Other articles focus on a mystic-religious figure

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<sup>35</sup> Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco finds the intertextuality related to the main character, Claire Fleury or Clara Flor, in Carmen Boullosa's narratives as Ana Rosa Domenella indicates in her earlier article. Gutiérrez de Velasco argues that "Claire-Clara es un personaje que de suyo dio un salto desde otra novela de Carmen Boullosa, como lo advierte Ana Rosa Domenella, es decir, desde *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991): "Y prefiero pasar por hombre, aunque los hombres sean seres que desprecio, que seguir siendo una puta. Se acabó" (*Son vacas, somos puercos* 20) (150).

<sup>36</sup> "La herida siempre abierta en un cuerpo" by Vanessa Vilches, "'Distruto Disfrutar': Corporeality, Cross-Dressing, and Jouissance in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Sara A. Potter, "La escritura con el cuerpo en *Son vacas, somos puercos* y *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by Elizabeth Montes Garcés, "Renegotiating Colonial Bodies in Historiographic Metafiction: Carmen Boullosa's *Son vacas, somos puercos*, *Llanto: novelas imposibles*, and *Duerme*" by Jessica Burke, "Geographical and Corporeal Transformations in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Claire Taylor, "The Sor Juana Archetype in Recent Works by Mexican Women Writers" by Emily Hind, "¿Armas del débil? Mujeres de armas tomar en la narrativa de Carmen

of Claire, who shares the indigenous cosmovision recognizing the *mestiza*,<sup>37</sup> historically descendants of a Spanish white father and indigenous mother. Finally, the other articles take postcolonial approaches and situate Claire's identity in the Mexican colonial time to understand the dark sides of official history which cover the marginalized voices.<sup>38</sup> Each of the secondary studies presents different methodologies and theoretical approaches to analyze the novel; however, the mutable and nomadic images of Claire, who keeps changing her identity, is the axis of the majority of textual analyses. These studies understand Claire's cross-dressing through different terminologies such as corporeal transformations, hybridity, "travestismo,"<sup>39</sup> "hermafroditismo and

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Boullosa" by Prats Fons Nuria, "Hacia el tercer sexo: Travestismo y transgresión en *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by Oscar Robles, "Construcción y desestabilización de identidades en la narrativa de Carmen Boullosa y Cristina Rivera Garza" by Ute Seydel, "Cross-Dressing and the Birth of a Nation: *Duerme* by Carmen Boullosa" by Salvador Oropesa, "Nuevas configuraciones de identidad: *Duerme* y dos novelas más de Carmen Boullosa" by Andrea Byrum, "El cuerpo en la narrativa de Carmen Boullosa" by Laura Pirott-Quintero, and "Postmodern Feminist Nomadism in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Jill Kuhnheim, "Desentilización del sujeto en la narrativa mexicana contemporánea: un acercamiento centrífugo – centripeta" by Ramón Trejo Téllez.

<sup>37</sup> "Carmen Boullosa: Re-Writing the Surrealist and Latin American Quest" by Inés Ferrero Cándenas, "El culto del agua y su magia en *Duerme*, de Carmen Boullosa" by Sylvia Carullo, "Redes textuales: Los epígrafes en *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by Justo Ulloa and Leonor Álvarez Ulloa, "Simbología del agua en el espacio textual en la novela *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by Abelina Landín Vargas, "Cybermestizaje: Virtual Variations on the Theme of the Feminine Subject" by Jerry Hoeg, "*Duerme*: La mascarada, ¿pérdida o conquista de una identidad?" by Giovanna Minardi, and "Strategic Hybridity in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Laura Pirott-Quintero.

<sup>38</sup> "Historia, ficción: La construcción alternativa de la subjetividad-mujer en *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by María Dolores Bolívar, "Metamorfosis del lenguaje novelístico en *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" by Oswaldo Estrada, "(Re)opening the Veins on the Historiography Visionary: Clothing, Mapping, and Tonguing Subjectivities in Carmen Boullosa's *Duerme*" by Juli Kroll, "Vertiente histórica y procesos intertextuales en *Duerme*" by Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco, "De lo invisible a lo innombrable: Lo irrepresentable en la obra de Kahlo y Boullosa" by Yolanda Martínez San Miguel, "Revisiones a las narraciones históricas mexicanas en *Duerme* (1994) e 'Isabel' (2000) de Carmen Boullosa" by Rosana Blanco Cano, "Colonizando la colonia: versiones postcoloniales de las crónicas" by Verónica Salles-Reese, "Las narraciones históricas de Carmen Boullosa: el retorno de Moctezuma, un sueño virreinal y la utopía de futuro" by Paola Madrid Moctezuma, and *Narrar Historia(s): La ficcionalización de temas históricos por las escritoras mexicanas Elena Garro, Rosa Beltrán y Carmen Boullosa* by Ute Seydel.

<sup>39</sup> Oscar Robles states that "el travestismo de Claire puede leerse como una desacralización del rol masculino. [...] el travestismo de Claire va más allá de la violación del orden patriarcal y se relaciona con lo que Marjorie Garber llama "category crisis." De acuerdo a este concepto, un personaje real o ficticio asume el travestismo y cruza las fronteras, los márgenes y las categorías sociales para poner en crisis estas "clasificaciones" impuestas por las ideologías dominantes" (33-34).

la transexualidad,”<sup>40</sup> and “cybermestiza,”<sup>41</sup> “postmodern feminist nomadism,”<sup>42</sup> all of which imply a new subjectivity of Claire that is transitional and transcultural.

I propose a new terminology, “nomadic mestiza,” to stress not only Claire’s fluid and transformative identity but also her mestiza and indigenous identities that represent the oppressed others in the Mexican colonial period. The word “nomadic” (or nomadism) includes the meaning of physical mobility of cross-dressing, the fluidity of identity, and historical circularity. This word “nomadic” seems to be contradictory to the word “mestiza” which underlines the essential and fixed identity of Mexican society. However, both “nomadic” and “mestiza” are not contradictory but complementary. To understand the complex figure of Claire, it is crucial to see her identities through the two different lenses which intersect multiple divisions and embrace the histories from peripheries, both pre-Columbian and colonial histories. Even though Claire’s nomadism is strong and important in the narrative, the nomadism should be understood within the Mexican socio-historical context. This is because Claire differs from a European nomadic subject. The novel presents a nomadic subject but also a mestiza. The mestiza incarnates the figure of La Malinche, who is considered both the betrayer and the victim, and who embodies a symbol of a national formation of Mexico.<sup>43</sup> Similar to a painful and sorrowful figure of Malinche, Claire also symbolizes woman as inferiority of others during the colonial society. However, the nomadic

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<sup>40</sup> Ute Seydel explains that the gender identity of Claire deal with the two myth, hermaphroditism and transsexuality: “El primero se refiere al nacimiento de Hermafrodito de la relación amorosa entre Hermes y Afrodita, y el segundo relata la transexualidad de Isis que nace niña, pero es vestida durante su niñez y adolescencia con ropa varonil para que el padre no la asesine” (“Construcción y desestabilización” 162).

<sup>41</sup> Jerry Hoeg’s term “cybermestiza” highlights the hybrid fusion of the posthuman and the mestiza to understand the “performativity and material body are in constant flux, and therefore immune to rigid categorization” (69).

<sup>42</sup> Jill Kuhnheim has read Claire as a postmodern nomadic identity which is “an amalgam of multiple, changing constructions” (9).

<sup>43</sup> Octavio Paz first argues that the Mexican nation as “Hijos de la Malinche” in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). Doña Marina becomes a symbol of a violated mother who betrays the Mexican people. According to Paz, she embodies the open, the *chingada*, the passive, and defenseless.

mestiza goes even beyond the symbol of Malinche. Different from Malinche, Claire does not remain passively as a betrayer or victim but transforms herself into a nomadic subjectivity who resists fixed identities and transgresses the binary oppositions.

This work takes the three following steps to understand the nomadic mestiza. First, I will focus on the nomadism presented through Claire, who crosses the gender and racial boundaries. This first part will take Judith Butler's performative theory and Rosi Braidotti's notion of "becoming" and "nomadism" as a theoretical framework. Butler's theory of gender as constructed through performative acts is helpful to reflect how Claire breaks the social hierarchy through her repetitive nature of performative and bodily acts. Furthermore, Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject who "refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" will offer an understanding of fluid identity that also blurs the binary divisions (*Nomadic Subjects* 5). Each step of Claire's transformation shows different experiences and suffering presented through multiple forms of discrimination. It is worth noting that her nomadic body transgresses gendered and racial binary oppositions, re-writing the official history written from the European perspective.

Second, I will discuss the *mestiza* value of Claire, which triggers her to obtain vitality and mobility to become a nomadic subject. Borrowing Braidotti's notion of nomadic subject, I will further develop this Mexican nomadic subject later related to a mestiza in the colonial context. Because the idea of mestiza as inferior is traced back to the colonization, Claire's nomadism should be considered in the colonial historical context to recover her mestiza identity. To overcome the binary oppositions and the double marginalization of Mexican women, the narrative reevaluates the mestiza spirit and reinterprets it as the principal mechanism to recognize the value of Mexican culture and history. The indigenous woman, who appears always with Claire and helps to resurrect



her, is the allegory of the primordial Mexico before the colonization. Boullosa's narrative proposes a strong figure of the indigenous woman as the mother of the nation and grants her a vital role to reveal the double marginalization of women of color throughout the patriarchal history. Claire's nomadism is only possible and meaningful with the recognition of mestiza identity. While the nomadism refers to open, fluid, and non-hierarchical relationships, a mestiza reminds readers of the violence of the Colonial Mexico and reveals her pain.

Third, I will demonstrate how the coexistence of the nomadism and the mestiza embodies circularity to understand different histories from the periphery told by different voices. The circularity is the movement of nomadic mestiza that broadens the boundaries. In the novel, the circularity has the power to challenge the official history written from imperialist perspectives and to recover the forgotten voices and subjugated people victimized by the hegemonic power of discourse. Voices and perspectives from the periphery threaten the concept of a singular official history. The center of this history privileges white Anglo males as the only subject of the past and other perspectives remain outside of this discourse. The peripheral histories confront the center as follows: on the one hand, the narrative is described by multiple senses such as a sense of hearing, smell, and touch rather than just visual. Confronting the role of vision as a privileged sense which has been related to European epistemology, Boullosa's novel evokes different senses as alternative ways of understanding the world.<sup>44</sup> Through the blurry and cloudy lens, the ambiguity and vagueness of the narrative decenters the mono-narrative. On the other hand, the peripheral histories use circularity of the novel's structure to confront the official history by connecting the first and

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<sup>44</sup> Yolanda Martínez San Miguel studies the parallel structure between *Duerme* and Frida Kahlo's paintings. She focuses on the limited representation in their works questioning as following: "¿Qué sucede cuando el silencio es un síntoma de resistencia no ya contra un interlocutor poderoso o contra una sociedad opresiva sino contra un sistema de comunicación imperfecto, opaco, ineficaz?" (42).

the last part of the novel. The circular time,<sup>45</sup> creating an in-between space for a nomadic mestiza, obscures the linear time which intensifies the binary division between reality/fantasy, male/female, and European/indigenous.

## 2.1 Nomadic Subject<sup>46</sup>

The novel starts with the arrival of a French woman pirate disguised in men's clothes<sup>47</sup> whose name is Claire Fluercy<sup>48</sup> in the city of Temixtitán,<sup>49</sup> an indigenous city in the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the novel, an indigenous woman called "las manos tibias," who takes care of Claire in a coma and discovers Claire's female identity. Claire's disguise starts with her

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<sup>45</sup> The three dimensional structure are a leitmotif of her novel which shows a circularity of time and space. Instead of the plain setting of time and space, a number of her novels demonstrate the connection between one story and another, so that it presents how history has been repeated through the time. And it is important that the way treat history as a continuing process rather than a finished event help us having a critical perspective to the past to prevent having the same error in the future. Also, the three dimensional setting which can be seen with a different aspect is the way that how reality is presented. Esther Sanchez-Couto also understands the tridimensional with regard to "la realidad, la historia y la literatura como factores determinantes en la discusión sobre la identidad" (165). Through Claire who "dialoga consigo misma mientras recorre la ciudad colonial", the reality, the history, and the literature join together in an interactive space (165). The most important thing to maintain this three-dimensional relation is having certain tensions between one and another. It seems valid that ambiguity is an important element to maintain the three-dimensional relation (165).

<sup>46</sup> The first critique who used the term "nomadism" to analyze the female character of the novel is Jill Kuhnheim who connects Gloria Anzaldúa's moveable subject in "borderlands" and Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subject. Kuhnheim states that "Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti employs an inverse strategy that complements that of Anzaldúa and departs from the idea of mobility to postulate different, feminist subjectivities through her construction of the nomadic subject" (8).

<sup>47</sup> The female character dressed as a male is related to the literature of the time, la monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso, who was a woman military dressed as a man. Carmen Boullosa has been received lots of influence from the characters that change their clothes and perform different roles.

<sup>48</sup> Vanessa Vilches Norat compares the main character between *Duerme* and *Son vacas, somos puercos*. The woman dressed in man also appeared in *Son vacas, somos puercos* called Smeeks. Even though there is no explanation of the direct relationship between them, both have lots in common: for example, the both Claire and Smeeks are hybrid figures presented by "transvestite (travestida)."

<sup>49</sup> Temixtitán was a capital of the Mexican empire known as Tenochtitlán. Cortés called it as Temixtitán but also it was called by Tenuchtitlán, Tenustitlán, and Theonustitlán. Talking on Mexican history, Temixtitán represents a high Mexican culture before the Spanish invasion. In this context, the city where lives Claire symbolizes the indigenous spirit which was brilliant before they concur. Mentioning the nahual language such as "nite, uica" (15), "Cecmiquiliztli" (16), "Nite nauatia" (18), "Xeluihqui" (29), and "tlamarizpololiznezcayotilli" (43), the novel shows pride and dignity of Temixtitán.

substitution of Count Enrique de Urquiza, a Spanish nobleman who confronts against the viceroy in favor of indigenous people. The indigenous woman with “las manos tibias” gives Claire the magic water from lake Valle de Mexico and saves Claire from her death sentence. From this moment, Claire wears indigenous clothes and lives with other indigenous people of Count Urquiza until she transforms herself into Clara Flor who serves the viceroy as a war counselor. During the stay in the palace, she encounters with a poet, Pedro de Ocejó, and they fall in love. When the viceroy begins to detest Claire, the poet takes her to a place far away from Mexico City to protect her. However, Claire falls asleep due to the magical water that induces her to dream eternally if she strays more than twenty leagues away from the city.

Through cross-dressing, Claire experiences different social status based on gender and race. When Claire changes her clothes: “visto ropa de Castilla y tengo cuatro indias a mi cuidado y tres españoles [...] visto como me comporto, como un varón, llegado el caso” (93). Claire mentions that the clothes determine how she acts. Claire’s transsexual figure mirrors Judith Butler’s theory of “performativity” which explains sexual identity as a politically imposed act.<sup>50</sup> The cross-dressing shows a gender as an “act” which creates an open space without the binary division between man and woman:

Consider the further consequence that if gender is something that one becomes—but can never be—then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort. If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 143)

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<sup>50</sup> According to Laura Pirott-Quintero, the performativity of Claire which could be understood in the postmodern context of travesty turns into an agent “desorden (disorder)” colonial and esthetic (“Strategic Hybridity”).

Gender is a state of “becoming” which can be changed at any time depending on the cultural, social, and political context. In this sense, what Butler proposes here is an indefinite identity that freely crosses the division between different genders and blurs the biologically imposed sexual binary. In this novel, Claire is the figure of “becoming” that resists against the sexual and racial discrimination and injustice by showing how the society treats her differently based on the dressing: “Pero no he de quejarme de ella, me trata de varón blanco, que si me viera vestida así, volvería a hablarme con respeto, volvería a salvarme la vida aún a riesgo de perder la propia y después volvería a vestirme de mujer para volver a tutearme y perderme todo aprecio” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 81). What Claire experiences during the act of cross-dressing is not only her different perspective toward society but also the different treatment of the others toward her. Vanessa Vilches Norat suggests a reading of “los cuerpos *investidos*, en tanto que aquí la vestidura se convierte en *investidura* porque confiere poder dentro de la economía social” (62).

Cross-dressing could be seen as a simple change of her appearance, but it affects how others view Claire. Claire finally obtains the exact feeling of indigenous people by wearing their clothes:

Para indicar a los indios que han de hacerse a un lado, azotan su látigo de un lado al otro, sin cuidarse de golpearlos como a reses. Ni a sus caballos golpean así. Consigo esquivar un latigazo, tropiezo por hacerlo con otra india, una mujer ya vieja, que camina con dificultad, y a la que detengo para que no caiga por mi peso. La mantilla de sus hombros se cae. Miro en su brazo marcado un nombre con hierro ardiendo. Como reses. (Boullosa, *Duerme* 56)

Claire with Indian clothes sees a totally different world exploited by el conde. The comparison with “reses” shows the exploitation toward indigenous people who were treated even worse than animals. Also, she expresses the nostalgia before the arrival of the Spaniards: “Pero cuando ellos no habían llegado a arruinarnos, nuestras calles estaban trazadas en orden perfecto” (58). Entering the world of indigenous people, Claire starts to understand not only the gender binary division but also the racial binary division of the world where we live.

Claire's dream presented as similar but different repetitive scenes signify the complex and multifaceted identity, a nomadic subject, who resists a single, fixed, and pure presence. The repetition of the dream creates a new context where each repeated image has a different function as Jaque Derrida's concept of "iterability." Niall Lucy explains the iterability as the following way: "*Iterability* refers to this structure of repetition-as-difference, which both enables and limits the idealization of every single thing's singularity, purity, presence. This is true of *iterability* itself" (59). Each episode of Claire's dreams affects her body to be comprised of different subjects. This alter embodiment exposes her nomadic body as a symbol of the intersection between her Mexican ancestry and identity.

Claire takes the role as a representative of the collective voices of indigenous people in the colonial period. All of Claire's three repetitive dreams reflect traumatic experiences. In the first two dreams, the victims are indigenous women raped by the Spanish Count, and in the last dream, the victim is presented as an indigenous city conquered by Spaniards called Temixtitan.<sup>51</sup> The connection between Claire and the indigenous people has been made by the medium of the clothes. In the first dream, Claire realizes that she is dressed in indigenous clothes saying: "infelicidad de verme vestida así, descubierta mujer, no me da fuerzas para articular pensamientos" (52). Even though Claire comes from outside of Mexico, she is able to share the same pain as the other indigenous people by getting dressed like them. Vanessa Vilches Norat indicates that the moment when Claire dressed in huipil "implica apropiarse del imaginario indígena" (64).

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<sup>51</sup> Ramón Trejo Téllez understands the novel as a similar movement of the oscillation of centrifugal-centripetal and explains the come and go movement of Claire related to the clothing and her unstable consciousness. He interprets the description of the simultaneity in accordance with the historic time of García de León in which "el lenguaje es lo que sujeta al tiempo y su simultaneidad de ocurrencia a un desarrollo lineal" (49).

While the first dream deals with a racial problem, the second dream addresses sexual and gender issues. Claire encounters with a man dressed in her clothes: “Sobre mi montura, viene un hombre vestido con mis ropas, y no se detiene hasta estar a nuestro lado” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 52). It should be noted that this is a moment that creates ambivalence when Claire sees an illusion of another Claire through the clothes. However, in this part, the sexual violation by Conde invokes the prostitution of Claire’s mother.<sup>52</sup> The tragedy of being a daughter of a prostitute is inscribed in her body since she was born. Michel Foucault indicates that a body is the “inscribed surface of events” (Foucault 83) and the body is not pure anatomy but presupposes symbolic orders. The corporal analysis shows not only the personal identity inscribed based on her own experience but also the encounter with the history and writing that is codified.

The third dream deals with a broader historical context between conqueror and conquered: “Lo tercero simultáneo que me acontece es que nos detenemos frente a las barcas que el Capitán General hizo construir para tomar Temixtitan por asalto, varadas en tierra seca” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 54). The invasion of the indigenous city by Spaniards is connected to the humble indigenous woman and the raped woman. All three images of each fragment tie them together not only as victims but also as a hybrid identity that trespasses time and space.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, Claire is the only one who can overcome all types of binarism through her nomadic identity.

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<sup>52</sup> Claire recalls her mother when she starts to feel the magical water running in her veins: “Recuerdo a mamá. La veo haciéndome usar ropa de varón desde muy niña para que yo pueda acompañarla de un lado al otro, en su largo peregrinar de prostituta, viajando al lado de ejércitos; veo a los soldados entrenándose en el uso de las armas, pero aunque mucho veo, no puedo recordar el nombre de mamá ni los míos (el de varón, el de niña) [...]” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 34). This is one of the few parts that Claire tells about her old memories. From this passage, we assume the reason why she ended up changing her clothes. Even though it does not indicate the direct reason of changing clothes but we can see that it happened when the mother of the little narrator tried to protect her from soldiers who want to treat her as a sexual object. This little thread in her childhood leads her to use clothes as her shield to protect her from dangerous situations.

<sup>53</sup> Paola Madrid Moctezuma also states that the number three represents the hybrid identity of Claire, “al mestizaje, al hibridismo cultural” (“Las narraciones históricas”).

Thinking the body related to a non-unitary vision of subjectivity offers an understanding beyond Butler's performative theory. While Butler sees the sexual difference as the limit of the discourse of embodiment, Braidotti understands it as "a negotiable, transversal, affective space" ("Affirming the Affirmative"). What the nomadic subject manifests is not an "actual traveling" but "nomadic state" that "[resists] settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" (*Nomadic Subjects* 5) as explains Braidotti. The figure of Claire portrays the problems she faces in the (re)construction of a sense of identity as the ways of intersecting and interacting "with each other in the constitution of subjectivity" (4). Claire's nomadic figure conceptualizes identity as an amalgam of different races, classes, and genders which change according to a variety of circumstances and reveals in-between spaces where different identities are intersected. The mobility of Claire is similar to the rhizomatic thought which Braidotti defines as "non-deterministic, non-linear and non-teleological" (Braidotti, "Affirming the Affirmative"). Claire's journey of cross-dressing moves atypically and aimlessly showing different constitutions of subjectivity not only between cultures but also even within the same culture. Jill Kuhnheim indicates that the "variations within the idea of the self, within one culture – demonstrating that multiculturalism is not only a 'difference between cultures,' but also 'difference within the same culture'" (9).

## **2.2 Nomadic Mestiza**

Claire's nomadism clearly offers a different way to cross boundaries. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the mestiza heritage is centered on her identity formation. It might seem contradictory that the nomadic subject, who refuses any fixed or unitary identity, recognizes its mestiza origin. Yet, the mestiza is already a nomadic subject who situates in-between space of pre-colonial times and the Spanish invasion. Mestiza, who has been conceptualized as an inferior subject within the social hierarchy due to the double alienation of gender and race, ironically

obtains the access of being on both sides. By doing so, they recover the indigenous cosmovision and rewrite the Mexican history. In this sense, the reconsideration of mestiza is important for readers to recognize the beginning of the binary formation in Mexican history, which later results in different layers of alienation.<sup>54</sup>

The novel traces back to the beginning of Mexican identity, mestiza, started with the Spanish conquest. The following passage shows the moment when the racial binary dichotomy has started. The narrator describes the Mexican world after the conquest founded on binary oppositions clearly divided into two parts that lead to physical violence and the conceptualization of inferior others:

El mundo se divide en dos: el viejo y las tierras nuevas. La luz y la oscuridad. El bien y el mal. Los hombres y las mujeres. Los europeos y los de las otras razas. Esto último no lo sabe quien no deja su tierra, ahí creará que la diversidad es amplia, que hay ingleses, franceses, flamencos, chinos, portugueses, catalanes. Reto a cualquiera que vista como yo ropa de india y luego me dirá en cuánto se dividen los seres. “En dos”, me contestará, “los blancos y los indios.” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 57)

The world here refers to Mexico where the arrival of Spaniards changed all the aspects of pre-Columbian time and after. The word that defines “el Viejo mundo” and “el Nuevo mundo” presents the clear demarcation between the old and new worlds. This clear demarcation constructed by Eurocentric vision also emphasizes the racial hierarchy between white and indigenous people and excludes other races from Latin American history. The European perspective adds superiority into the notion such as civilization/barbarity, white/black, male/female, and order/disorder. During the

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<sup>54</sup> In her first article (“El cuerpo en la narrativa de Carmen Boullosa”), Pirott-Quintero states that the physical transformation is a challenge against the sexual binary between masculine and feminine in our patriarchal and normative society. According to Laura Pirott-Quintero, the image of Claire leads us to think about mestizo discourse that recalls not only the definition of barbarian that was put over indigenous people to conquest them but also alienation of women in Mexican history (“Strategic Hybridity”) through sexual violence toward indigenous women. Claire as a “mujer vestida de hombre” makes her free to play between articulation and disarticulation.



process of acculturation, the alienation of women was even out of the picture so that women of color, especially mestiza, have been doubly marginalized. The following narration of Claire indicates her mestiza as an invisible and defeated subject that is not involved in any part of the world:

La ciudad misma donde estoy estancada se divide en dos: los magníficos palacios de los españoles, ordenados, alineados a los lados de las amplias calzadas, y las casuchas en desorden de los indios escondidas tras ellos. [...] Digo que el mundo está dividido en riguroso dos, y aunque es verdad, la verdad me hace mentir. Si acaso mi atuendo de india es verosímil, lo es por un solo motivo, por el tres. Ven mi porte de blanca, mi cuerpo de blanca, mi ropa de india, y dicen “es mestiza”. No miento, respondo a las cuentas que han aprendido a hacer en esta tierra los españoles. Para ellos tres es dos, no les cabe duda. Por este error, yo digo “nuestras calles”, digo “nosotros”, atrapada en un tres que no debiera existir. El mundo se divide en dos.... (58)

The strong division of the two worlds determines mestiza, a race between white and indigenous people, to be considered as another type of indigenous people opposite to white people. Therefore, mestiza, indigenous, and white are not three different races but two, white or non-white. This is why the narrator mentions that the three are the same as two, so the mestiza consequentially falls into the binary oppositions.<sup>55</sup> Regarding Claire’s worldview, Juli Kroll explains Claire’s consciousness implies a “transcultural, serves as a portal for conflicting identities, with the soil of Mexico her only ‘home’ conversant with a native community she cannot fully understand and which cannot be fully recovered in discourse” (116). Claire’s self-awareness and affirmation of mestiza show how she bears the colonial conflict through her own self.

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<sup>55</sup> In *Bending the Rules*, Cristina Santos finds a literary similarity between Clarice Lispector and Carmen Boullosa through their use of ambiguity and indeterminacy, which require the active participation of the reader in their texts.

The mestiza origin running in Claire's blood is presented through the metaphor of water in the novel.<sup>56</sup> First, the water symbolizes the pre-Columbian spirit in which there is no binary division. The representation of pre-Columbian sacred water can be found in numerous chronicles in the Colonial period. For example, the water is described as a vital and fundamental element to construct the cities in Mexico in *Historia verdadera de la conquista de México* by Bernal Díaz del Castillo: "Luego Moctezuma le tomó por la mano y le dijo que mirase su gran ciudad y todas las demás ciudades que había dentro en el agua, y otros muchos pueblos alrededor de la misma laguna entierra" (Díaz del Castillo 45). So the value of water is significant in the Aztec culture and history. The second epigraph of Cervantes de Salazar tells about the mythic water in the pre-Colombian world:

*Si como parecen pensarlo Avicena e Hipócrates, la mejor agua es la que más se asemeja al aire; la que más presto se calienta y se enfría; la que cuece en menos tiempo las legumbres, y en fin, la más ligera, entonces no hay ninguna preferible a la nuestra. (Boullosa, Duerme 7)*

According to Cervantes de Salazar, the purest water symbolizes the core of pre-Colombians which passes in the spirit of Mexicans.<sup>57</sup> The fluidity of water represents the continuity of oral history and the advanced culture of Mexicans. Furthermore, the name Claire recalls the image of "clear (*clara* in Spanish)" water. Second, water is a symbol of purity and resurrection. Similar to the meaning of the baptism, the water poured into Claire's body makes her revive. The pure and clean water from the lake serves as a cure for Claire and creates a new subject based on colonial Mexico,

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<sup>56</sup> Abelina Landín Vargas's article "Simbología del agua en el espacio textual en la novela *Duerme* de Carmen Boullosa" analyzes the image of water based on the theory of Gastón Bachelard that interprets water as a symbol of sacrifice, recovery, and rebirth. The pure water running in Claire's veins not only give her a vitality but also change her in an immortal hybrid.

<sup>57</sup> According to Ulloa, "el epígrafe es un fragmento extraído del "Diálogo Tercero" el ultimo de tres diálogos dedicados a la descripción de la ciudad de México y sus alrededores y comprendidos entre los siete publicados bajo el título *Méjico en 1554 y túmulo imperial*" (106).

a nomadic mestiza. Third, the water represents harmony and integration of the divided world. Claire mentions the sea as an ideal place where all the divisions have been blurred: “el mar es donde el mundo se mira completo. [...] fuera de él, en tierra firme, todo se mira dividido. [...] en tierra firme todo viene roto, partido, fragmentado, dividido... Nunca hay nada completo...” (46). The sea counterposes the earth: while the sea has no division, the earth is cracked, fragmented, and divided. Therefore, the binary division is only presented on the earth, not in the sea.

The indigenous woman with tepid hands (“las manos tibias”), who saves Claire’s life from the gallows and gives her eternal life through the water, represents a prototype of the nomadic mestiza. The indigenous woman denies an established and fixed identity and validates a fluid identity through her different names. While Claire transgresses the boundaries through cross-dressing, the indigenous woman creates an ambiguous identity by having multiple names like Juana, Cosme, and Inés.<sup>58</sup> The text describes how the two women resemble a mother and a daughter: “Inés (de algún modo la madre de lo que soy) por su edad ya habrá muerto” (129). The way Claire calls the indigenous woman suggests Claire’s self-reflection on her own in-between identity. Claire even uses the same expression of “tibia vida (tepid life)” (76) – not hot or cold,

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<sup>58</sup> At the beginning of the novel, the name of the indigenous woman was introduced by Claire (“la india de las manos tibias”), but later, Claire encounters the indigenous woman with another name in her dream (or some unconsciousness state) and started to call her as “Juana” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 51): “Un emisario blanco llega a pie y entrega algo a la de las manos tibias, sin dirigirnos la palabra. Juana, si se llama así, nos da la orden de ir hacia casa y hacia allá vamos, cada uno absorto en sus pensamientos, y yo en ninguno, que la infelicidad de verme vestida así, descubierta mujer, no me da fuerzas para articular pensamientos” (51-52). The narrator gives her name as “Juana” but she takes a certain distance by stating “si se llama así” which presents uncertainty of her real name. What Claire knows about the indigenous woman with tepid hands is extremely limited because she doesn’t even know her real name. It seems like the indigenous woman with tepid hands is not willing to give her real name or maybe it is not important to her. However, Claire obsesses over the indigenous woman’s real name by expressing her curiosity through the following parenthesis: “[...] baja la de las manos tibias (¿sabré algún día cómo se llama la que me salvó la vida?), pasa el poeta [...]” (71). Al final, Claire finds out that her real name is Inés: “Y tú, te llamas Inés, ¿verdad? ¿Por qué nunca quisiste decírmelo? [...] - Porque usted [...] usted no se va a morir nunca, y yo no quiero que usted conozca mi nombre para que me deje a mí estar muerta en paz” (127).

merely like warm – to illustrate her life and her being as an in-between subject. Claire is located in the middle of the two poles, in terms of race and gender (white/indigenous and man/woman) and as we see the description of her life above, she has never been in an extreme situation. Her life itself is tepid and this tepidness shows the indigenous vision inherited by the indigenous woman and serves as an instrument to dismantle any dichotomy oppositions.

### **2.3 The Circularity of Nomadic Mestiza**

The nomadic mestiza crosses the boundary between men/women and Spanish/indigenous and blurs distinctions of linear time and space. The way the nomadic mestiza broaden boundaries generates certain circularity to challenge the lineal time and limited space. Claire's circular movement offers the most effective way to expand the boundaries without excluding any species, voices, and histories. Starting her deep connection with the mestiza, her movement creates certain circularity without limit. Claire establishes spaces that engender the subjugated others from the periphery to obtain their voices, identities, and histories. In this way, the official history with Eurocentric vision is threatened by the multiple voices from the peripheral histories presented through the following mechanism along with the narrative: ambiguous descriptions by multiple senses (i.e. hearing, smell, and touch) that blurs the clear demarcation of any categorization and the circularity of history and narrative.

Claire's position as nomadic mestiza makes the periphery visible. She decentralizes and destabilizes the gender and racial hierarchy presenting marginal stories as a counterpart of the center of the official history. This narrative (turn structure, mode) reflects both postmodern and postcolonial readings of Claire's character. While the postmodern decenters the viability of linear monolithic history, the postcolonial theory questions a hierarchical and Eurocentric vision of history. Considering Claire's position as a postmodern and postcolonial figure, the novel reveals

those marginal spaces where the inferior others such as slaves, natives, and women are given their voices to speak. While the word “center” already has a connotation of an absolute and singular figure in the hegemonic discourse, the periphery embraces all different elements which are not able to be fit in the center. In the novel, Claire eventually dismantles this distinction and, especially, the conceptualization of the center, which is the dominant discourse of homogenizing categories. Claire’s circular movement embodies this postmodern disruption when the periphery is a “space of the marginalized or peripheral subject faced with a crisis of centrality. It is adorned with the ciphers of plurality, heterogeneity, and dissidence, confirming Lyotard’s observation that postmodernism refines our awareness of difference” (Richard 11). In addition to representing a postcolonial disruption of linearity, this center/periphery discusses also closely related to the Latin American post-colonialism that is a critique of the periphery.<sup>59</sup> Latin American post-colonial

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<sup>59</sup> As some Latin American post-colonial critics such as Enrique Dussel and Walter Dignolo have noted, the universal History constructed on the myth of western modernity hide their darker side of coloniality that the indigenous people suffer from European conquest and violence. Dignolo explains the relation between modernity and coloniality based on the study of Arturo Escobar: 1. There is no modernity without coloniality because coloniality is constitutive of modernity. 2. The modern/colonial world originates in the sixteenth century, and the discovery/invention of America is the colonial component of modernity whose visible face is the European Renaissance. 3. The Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution are derivative historical moments consisting of the transformation of the colonial matrix of power. 4. Modernity is the name for the historical process in which Europe began its progress toward world hegemony. It carries a darker side, coloniality. 5. Capitalism, as we know it today, is of the essence for both the conception of modernity and its darker side, coloniality. 6. Capitalism and modernity/coloniality had a second historical moment of transformation after World War II when the US took the imperial leadership previously enjoyed at different times by both Spain and England (Idea of Latin America xiii). Dussel recognizes epistemological postcolonialism by criticizing the Eurocentric modernity which began with the conquest of Latin American in 1492 when the world-system, capitalism, and colonialism began as well. He proposed a new perspective on self-awareness that corresponds to the Cartesian “Cogito ergo sum.” In *The Invention of the Americas*, Dussel states that “the ‘I-conquistador’ forms the protohistory of Cartesian ego cogito and constitutes its own subjectivity as will-to-power” (43). The modern ego was born in its self-constitution over against regions it dominated and immediately covered the “Others.” While European modernity is based on the claim that the foundation of knowledge is a universal reason, Dignolo laments that the conceptual narrative of world history never paid any attention to the perspective of coloniality. From the sixteenth century Spanish missionary Bartolomé de Las Casas to the nineteenth century’s Hegel, and from Marx to Toynbee, European thinkers have asserted their interpretation of world history to be universal. The non-European countries are presented as part of these thinkers’ “objects,” as a marginal part of their history (xiii).

thinkers apply the center/periphery dichotomy to the modern/colonial world-system to show how the dependency of the Third World included in the First is still valid in the current stage of globalization. Mignolo defines “border thinking as an epistemology from a subaltern perspective” (“The Geopolitics of Knowledge” 71), which makes visible the colonial difference and the variety of local histories.<sup>60</sup>

In the novel, the border-crossing between the center and the periphery is performed by the following literary aesthetics; ambiguous narrative and the plurality of voices. First, the ambiguity works as a strong instrument to blur the demarcation of reality/fantasy. The narrative proclaims a detailed description through each of the five senses to show the different layers of reality/fantasy. While the visual description takes an important role to build the general setting, the description with the other four senses captures the in-between space of reality/fantasy and extends the boundary of reality. As such, the narrative prevents the mono-interpretation of an incident. From the first sentence of the novel, the narrator spells a simple but affirmative sentence to stimulate the reader’s imagination using a sense of sound: “Ya oigo” (Boullosa, *Duerme* 15). Even though the narrator, Claire, cannot open her mouth nor her eyes to express what happened to her, she narrates as if she sees everything:

Nuestro alrededor sigue totalmente oscuro. Me sorprendo vociferando. Mis palabras (mudas, no puedo abrir la boca) son un torrente gritando “¡suéltanme!”, “¡déjenme ir, déjenme!”. Gritan desesperadas e inútiles, no se escuchan. A pesar de su revuelo, alcanzo a oír atrás de ellas “nite, uica”. Ya oigo, pero no puedo moverme. Ni los párpados puedo abrir. [...] ¿Dónde vamos? Yo bebí una copa que llevó a mi

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<sup>60</sup> Mignolo’s “border thinking” is a deconstructive way of thinking by inverting the Eurocentric perspective: “The limit of Western philosophy is the border where the colonial difference emerges, making visible the variety of local histories that Western thought, from the right and the left, hid and suppressed. Thus there are historical experiences of marginalization no longer equivalent to the situation that engendered Greek philosophy and allowed its revamping in the Europe of nations, emerging together with the industrial revolution and the consolidation of capitalism. These new philosophies have been initiated by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Rigoberta Menchú, Gloria Anzaldúa, Subramani, Abdelkhebir Khatibi, and Edouard Glissant, among others” (“The Geopolitics of Knowledge” 66).

habitación solicito un criado, caí en la inconsciencia, y ahora voy aquí, trotando a cuestas de un hombre. (15)

Claire's efforts to see, speak, and move are interrupted by different settings: darkness, muteness, and powerlessness. The incompatibility of two different senses intensifies the contrast of the different perceptions of the two worlds: words-mute, shout-deaf, movement-paralysis, and consciousness-unconsciousness. From the perspective of senses, the world falls again into binary oppositions.

However, Claire's unstable state reveals the confrontation between one sense or another and helps readers see from different perspectives and induce open interpretations. Claire's monologue invites readers to the ambiguous narrative through her position as an unreliable narrator. For example, the readers start to doubt the veracity of the narrator who raises us some questions on her consciousness: Is she awake or in a comma? Later, the ambiguity of the consciousness of Claire becomes intensified with her self-narration in the following part:

Como me sienta para ponerme la camisa, los veo, algunos son indios, por lo menos uno español; veo con dificultad, borrosamente, todo se me desdibuja. Ya no sé si tengo los ojos abiertos o cerrados, sólo alcanzo a percibir una luz móvil, como arena cayendo, como cataratas de arena, y tengo náuseas. Casi no siento las cuatro manos que me vistes, ni los ojos que me ven mujer, humillándome. Y no consigo dejar este gesto de poner en palabras cuanto me va sucediendo. ¿Para qué lo hago? ¿Para qué narrarme a mí lo que va sucediendo? (21)

This moment shows Claire's own confusion about whether or not she is awake. This part makes readers identify with Claire and leads them to be confused about whether or not she is awake when she wonders if her own eyes are open or closed. This statement also makes readers question her consciousness and her reliability. The expressions such as "borrosamente" (blurry) and "se me desdibuja" (blur) heighten the moment of ambiguity and vagueness. The phrases such as "desdibujándome" (34), "un poco desdibujadas" (36), and "Creo que me quedé dormido. Creo que estoy despierto" (42), appear throughout the novel and intensify the blurry mood. In this way,

instead of clarifying a situation with the narrator's eyes, the novel opens all possibilities to interpret from different perspectives from the periphery.

Second, the plurality of voices presented by the nomadic subject Claire recovers the forgotten past stories left at the margin of the official history. The marginal stories threaten official history, which is authorized and endorsed by the social structure of power. In the same vein, the Spanish poet Pedro de Ocejo who develops an erotic relationship with Claire expresses the dark side of the official history and states "Escribir historias sí sirve ... pero sirve demasiado, es una manera de conquistar y vencer" (77). The different voices spoken by Claire's multiple genders and classes reevaluate the potential of the periphery. While other historical novels normally center around male voices, this novel told by the nomadic mestiza shows the marginal histories based on Claire's personal experience.<sup>61</sup> Different from the other historical writing focused on the historical incident, the narrative is grounded on a pre-Columbian legend or myth to recuperate marginal others. María Dolores Bolívar states that:

En *Duerme* Boullosa quiere recrear para nosotros un mundo narrativo especialmente conocedor del mundo referencial de la historia. La historia, para Boullosa, acaso podamos decir, se trata de una historia con minúscula que se nutre y enriquece, sobre todo, de la leyenda. [...] la trama de *Duerme* se basa en el mito de la mujer dormida que permanece fija en el valle del Anahuac .... (49-50)

The stories of collective memory recognize the multicity and plurality of individual stories. As María Dolores Bolívar mentions, this story of Claire is "una representación *transhistórica* de la feminidad" (50) which allows the story to float through and around history.<sup>62</sup> The Myth of

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<sup>61</sup> Verónica Salles-Reese argues that "A diferencia de la Historia que se narra en el imperfecto, *Duerme* se narra en primera persona y en un presente inmediato, no-histórico, que corresponde al momento de la experiencia que también es el momento de la lectura" (146).

<sup>62</sup> The following myth of Iztaccihuatl is written in Los calendarios de Helguera: "Cuenta la leyenda que en la infancia de los tiempos, cuando llegaron los Aztecas al Valle de Anáhuac y las montañas aún no tomaban su forma eterna, nació en la gran Tenochtitlán una hermosa princesa llamada Mixtli, hija de Tizoc 'Tlatoanic' (Emperador o Gran Señor) de los mexicas. Mixtli era asediada por innumerables nobles entre ellos Axoocxo, hombre cruel y sanguinario, el cual reclamaba la mano de Mixtli, pero el corazón de la



Iztaccihuatl is reborn through the collective memory of pre-colonial times when the discourse of *mestizaje* was born in Mexico. Claire, as a nomadic mestiza, takes an important role to convert the axis of official history from a center to periphery, and as such she fosters a space to excavate hidden stories about the past. In a similar context, Rosana Blanco-Cano states that the narrative breaks the historic conciliation through the main character dislocated from the social norm. For Blanco-Cano, Claire represents “bien distinta de la propuesta por el discurso oficial como la esencia de lo mexicano” and makes possible the crossing between cultural differences. Rather, Claire’s plurality of voices, words, and memories creates a new realm of history that destabilizes the defining limits of gender and the cultural divisions of Self and Other.

Claire’s life itself shows the circular structure of eternal life, rejecting the linear form of life and death. Her life is presented as a journey of a lineal structure but atypical, unpredictable, unstable, and circular. Oswaldo Estrada indicates that the mythical language of the novel refuses the linear structure of the history, referring to Carlos Fuentes’ *Valiente mundo nuevo*: “la historia no es enteramente lineal sino más bien cíclica y compuesta de espirales que se suceden, a través de constantes *corsi e recorsi* (cursos y recursos)” (“Metamorfosis del lenguaje” 154). The myth of Claire, based on their own language, captures the pre-Columbian cosmovision, and marks different layers of history. As Carrie Chorba explains, Boullosa’s historical narratives “rewrite and revive the past in remarkably different ways” (311). Boullosa rewrites and revives the past by rejecting the linear structure of history and expanding discourse on history. The narrative invades the realm

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doncella pertenecía a un guerrero llamado “Popoca”, que había salido a combatir para conquistar el título de Caballero Aquila y así disputar la mano de Mixtli a Axooco. Mixtli al saber a su amado en peligro y pensando en la imposibilidad de su amor, se quita la vida sin imaginar que Popoca regresaba triunfante; al ver a su amada muerta, Popoca tomó el yerto cuerpo entre sus brazos, se dirigió a la montaña y ahí permaneció agachado a sus pies pensando que la nieve la despertaría del sueño y así poder unirse en vida. Con el paso del tiempo Mixtli se cubre de nieve convirtiéndose en el volcán Iztaccihuatl (Mujer Dormida) y permanece dominante sobre el valle del Anáhuac” (*Popocatepetl* 183).

of official history through the use of an unstable and mutable narrator who specializes in characterizing the minority's perspective and dismantles the linear structure of the historical events.

Boullosa calls attention to the vitality of the circulation and rejects converting Claire's version of history into a type of fairy tale. The final chapter of the novel titled "El desenlace de Claire que duerme bella en el bosque cercano al Potosí," is narrated by Pedro de Ocejo, who projects his vision to finish Claire's story with a fairy tale ending. Not as the typical romantic ending, the romance between Claire and Pedro fails when Claire sees the aged Pedro after she awakes. Immersed in Claire's perspective, the readers tend to reject Pedro's fantasy. Boullosa notes how Pedro awakes from his own fantasy when he sees a Mexican peasant woman: "¡Ay, perdón! Se me ha colado una historia que no va a aquí, porque los que trabajan las tierras no son robustos sino muertos de hambre que andan como delgados hilos que vuela el aire, ni son blancos, que sólo los indios tocan la tierra y las minas que enriquecen a los españoles y a los criollos" (Boullosa, *Duerme* 141). Despite Pedro's awareness of colonial reality, he portrays his interpretation of representing Claire as a "sleeping beauty." Jessica Burke claims that "It is Pedro who puts an end to Claire's (hi)story (which is really *his* story) by giving a fairy-tale ending to the 'sleeping beauty' that is quite unsatisfactory for a reader accustomed to a different Claire" ("Renegotiating Colonial Bodies" 55). The narrative lead by Claire has changed with the intervention of Pedro's voice over the narrative. Despite all the effort to present multiple historical layers seems to fail due to Pedro's unrealistic world.

Boullosa's rejection of a fairy-tale ending compliments the circular ending of the novel by further highlighting Claire's perspective as a nomadic mestiza. In particular, the ending offers space for Claire's story to be able to survive through the circular time which overlaps with the structure of the novel itself. The text bookends the beginning and the end of the narrative with

attention to the senses; while the first line of the novel starts with the description with a sense of hearing, the last line of the novel ends with the act of closing her eyes, which implies Claire's eternal sleep: "Cierro los ojos. Aquí acaba todo" (Boullosa, *Duerme* 146). However, according to the recorded events in the narrative, it makes readers think that this isn't the end of the story. Based on the circularity that we have seen, the novel throws us an expectation of open and circular ending. Even though Claire closes her eyes, the novel seems far from done as it could go back again to the first line, the moment when she just awakes from deep sleep (or coma), "Ya oigo: por aquí, por aquí" (15). Claire's story might continue again a new story that will never finish. This is the way in which the narrative rescues all the forgotten voices from the indigenous myth and histories deviating from Pedro's version of (hi)story. Andrea Byrum mentions that the open ending challenges against a monolithic narrative: "queda dormida y no sabemos qué pasará con ella o con México. Así se la da a la novela un final abierto que viene a ser un tipo de reto" (150). The open-ended narrative prevents a single interpretation of history from any point of view and invites readers to participate and contribute to making their own histories. In this way, not only the boundaries of identity, nation, and gender could be extended but also the narrative is rewritten and recreated beyond the boundaries.

The narrative focuses on the fluid and multi-identity of Claire who rejects cultural binarism, especially sexual and racial binarism. To understand the mutable image of Claire presented along with the colonial history of Mexico, she should be understood as a nomadic mestiza, which recognizes and values her constant change as a nomadic subject and her mestizaje to returning before establishing the Eurocentric vision that presents a binary opposition of white and nonwhite. The uniqueness of Claire's complex and fluid identity questions the traditional definition of one's

identity and history. The new terminology, nomadic mestiza, offers an understanding of alternative histories like the one told by Claire which has been considered outside of the hegemonic discourse.

The circularity of Claire's nomadism helps to broaden the boundaries and to reconsider the official history that generates subjugated others. Claire's numerous historical experiences depend on her cross-dressing and ironically reveal repetitive binary oppositions with certain patterns of discrimination. Through the story of Claire, readers experience Claire's nomadic life and understand the mestizaje as the central axis which embraces the pain of Mexican people. Therefore, the nomadic mestiza aims for an unfixed and mutable subject to overcome certain boundaries and to broaden its boundaries to revisit the voices of subjugated others. The mobility of nomadic mestiza does not imply physical but epistemological and ontological questions of oneself. This movement examines the ways in which the nomadic mestiza embodies multiple races and histories. Because of this, the nomadic mestiza remains in a continuous state of becoming and expresses the collective histories from the Mexican colonial period.

### CHAPTER 3. WRITING AS EMBODIED SUBJECTIVITY IN *CIELOS DE LA TIERRA*

Boullosa's eighth novel *Cielos de la tierra* shows more explicitly our posthuman future as the "end" of Man. The author establishes a parallel timeline of the past, present, and finally the future where humans turn into cyborgs. While *Duerme* blurs gender and sexuality through Claire's hybridity,<sup>63</sup> this novel complicates the boundary of human and nonhuman through the figure of cyborg. The narrative offers three different timelines presented by three different characters, and the stories are loosely connected and intersected with one another. The three narrators, Hernando de Rivas, Estela, and Lear, are tied together by their thematic concerns about history, memory, and the value of writing.<sup>64</sup> Hernando de Rivas<sup>65</sup> is an indigenous student of the Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, which educates Catholic priests in the colonial period. In this institute, he writes his own stories in Latin. These stories later turn into an official history, mainly focused on the racism toward indigenous people. His writing regarding social discrimination exposes the failure of cultural assimilation through which religion and racism play important parts. Hernando's sixteenth-century manuscript falls into Estela's hand, who lives in a corrupted society of Mexico City in the 1990s, and she translates the manuscript into Spanish. Ultimately, it reaches to Lear, a

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<sup>63</sup> The term hybridity is often used in racial and multicultural theories in the nineteenth century. Néstor García Canclini, who theorizes the concept of hybridity in Latin American context focused on race and identity, understands the hybridity within a process of transculturation situated between tradition and modernity. However, the term that I use when analyzing this novel is more applicable to the era after postmodernism in which the hybridization celebrates its position between human and technology. Hybridity in the twenty-first century implies "the shared physicality not only of human and animals, but also of animate creatures and inanimate matter" (Desblache 245). Hybridity also signifies the new understanding of extended body which celebrates our "cyborgian convergence culture" (247).

<sup>64</sup> Even though the three fragmented stories are set in different timelines, all three stories happened somewhere in Mexico. It is obvious that Hernando and Estela live in Mexico, but the novel does not mention Lear's location.

<sup>65</sup> Hernando de Rivas is the most realistic and historical character among the three. See John Skirius' article, "La historicidad, la verosimilitud y los conflictos interiores en *Cielos de la tierra* de Carmen Boullosa" for more historical information regarding Hernando.

woman in a future community called L'Atlantide. The novel does not provide specific information about Lear's time, but her narration explains that she is the last human being who is interested in archiving history and texts. She works to preserve the manuscript by translating it into new codes that dominate the new age.

My reading on this novel focuses on an understanding of writing as materiality. In this way, writing recovers the voices inside of Mexican history from its colonization to its futuristic world where the presence of a language or writing become obsolete. The novel illustrates how the problem of alienation becomes more nuanced and subtle due to technologies or digital information. Borrowing from Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti explains the shifted paradigm of the dominant discourse when she writes "white capitalist patriarchy has turned into the 'informatics of domination'" and "the bodies of women and other minorities have been cannibalized by the new technologies" (*Nomadic Theory* 67).<sup>66</sup> The technologies also assign a different symbolic meaning to *others* including women and minorities. Braidotti states that "the symbolic division of labor between the sexes, the races, and the species have been transformed in the spectral economy of dematerialization of difference" (52). She also asserts that Foucault's political economy of the Panopticon is no longer adequate and has been replaced by the molecular informatics of domination" (52). As such, the understanding of power and knowledge become more complicated involving another power structure related to technology and digital information.

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<sup>66</sup> This is why Lear's story does not seem to answer the questions on the sexual difference in cyber times. Katherine Hayles raises some questions related to gender difference in the posthuman society. For instance, Braidotti asks "What do gendered bodies have to do with the erasure of embodiment and the subsequent merging of machine and human intelligence in the figure of the cyborg" (*Nomadic Theory* 63). Braidotti proposes two possible results to her questions but she does not further expand upon ideas of futuristic sexual difference or the gendered bodies. Instead, she calls attention to the new "hybrid body" (65) of women whose body is cannibalized and "have undergone a significant mutation" (67). Boullosa's story about Lear relates to Haraway and Braidotti's understanding of cyborgs. Therefore, this is presented through the meaning of writing (narrative).

*Cielos de la tierra* posits the value of the human subject through writing as a form of narrative discourse, a system of thoughts, and sociocultural conventions. Boullosa evaluates the writing as a tangible material beyond her concerns on sexual discrimination in the previous human history, which she continuously foregrounds in her previous novels. Related to virtual communities where knowledge can be codified and transmitted, this novel proposes writing as a symbol of human value through the main character, Lear, who struggles to preserve the manuscript of Mexican history starting from its colonial period. The writing in this novel serves as a bridge between past and present and it poses narrative discourse that culturally shares human understanding and sense-making.<sup>67</sup> Even though the artificial intelligence and virtual reality create a new, convincing reality that replaces ours, the novel reclaims the materiality of writing as “physical properties of an embodied text” (Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America* 25). The writing/manuscript carries the nineteenth century into the futuristic society. It reconsiders the meaning of text throughout history, starting from the very first moment of its creation. This novel affirms a rich and vagarious imagination of the future world and raises profound questions on the materiality of texts and narrative discourse to embrace human history and identity.

The critical attention to this particular novel gained momentum in the early 2000s when various scholars developed an apocalyptic discourse at the birth of the new millennium.<sup>68</sup> Especially, between 1999 and 2000, three critics importantly explored this apocalyptic narrative: “The Operation of Orality and Memory in Carmen Boullosa’s Fiction” (1999) by Anna Reid,<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The relation between narrative discourse and identity started from a personal level as Michael Bamberg states. He mentions that “narratives, irrespective of whether they deal with one’s life or an episode or event in the life of someone else, always reveal the speaker’s identity” (223).

<sup>68</sup> To see more about Mexican apocalyptic novels, please see *Envisioning the End of the World: Mexican Apocalyptic Novels in the Era of Globalization* by Kristina Puotkalyte-Gurgel.

<sup>69</sup> In 1999, the symposium on Boullosa was held in Berlin, Germany, and the proceedings of the symposium were later published as a book. This article was included in that book.

“Utopia, Heterotopia, and Memory in Carmen Boullosa’s *Cielos de la tierra*” (2000) by Javier Durán; and “A Spiritual Proposal for the New Millennium in *Cielos de la tierra*, *Earthly Heavens*, by Carmen Boullosa” (2000) by Juanita Garciagodoy. In “*Cielos de la tierra* por Carmen Boullosa – Escribiendo la utopía Mexicana a través del eterno apocalipsis mexicano,” (1999) Alejandro Morales refers to the apocalyptic vision of Carlos Fuentes in *Terra Nostra* to demonstrate how the Mexican utopian dream turns into an eternal apocalyptic vision.

Claire Taylor’s “Cities, Codes and Cyborgs in Carmen Boullosa’s *Cielos de la tierra*” (2003) examines the cyborg figure in the postmodern context. Taylor explains this concept “through the formulation of the city, of the codes, and of the body, in its specific manifestation as cyborg” (478). By analyzing the concept of memory and the process of writing, critics of the early twenty-first century focused on the apocalyptic world in the narrative around the new millennium. Shifting away from these apocalyptic readings, recent critics overcome the fear of dystopia of the new millennium and instead contemplate a new vision of the posthuman that leads us to coexist with machines and cyborgs. The shift in scholarship celebrates a co-mingling of human and nonhuman entities. Instead of fearing the amalgamation of these bodies in the way that apocalyptic narrative might, posthumanism insists that we are and were always already posthuman even before the new millennium.

The first part of this chapter analyzes how the posthuman elements are presented through the inhabitants of L’Atlàntide. More specifically, I will focus on the demateriality of the posthuman world through the articulated bodies of the inhabitants, the code, and the abolition of languages. As Bill Brown mentions, modern media and new technologies are digitalized so the meaning of the object is not the same as before. Brown argues how the new media dematerializes and changes the perception of the material world. The posthuman era in the novel, the code, which



is explained in further detail later in this chapter, replaces the traditional languages. The dematerialization challenges not only the boundary between material and nonmaterial but also the demarcation between human and nonhuman. For a deeper theoretical approach, this argument is based on Braidotti, Haraway, and Hayles's posthuman theories. The novel presents the tension between human and nonhuman through Lear's confrontation with the social changes that transform her friend into a cyborg. Analyzing Lear's internal struggle, I will show how the intimate relation of human-machine has changed the symbolic meaning of the biological origin of humans and how the bodies of the cyborg in *L'Atlantide* are demonstrated differently. In the second part, I will highlight the transformation of the writing process how is considered differently over time. Under the impact of the technological evolution, the written language represents text as a material object. This materiality of text resists the immateriality of computer code. The novel proposes new in-depth structures of human subjectivity and writing considering it as a textual re-materialism. Hernando, Estela, and Lear offer writings that each serve different functions. For example, Hernando's writing provides the text's first narrative discourse, Estela's writing signifies collective memory and peripheral history, and Lear's writing studies the materialization of embodied differences. By observing the intersection between three writings, Boullosa's work exposes racial and gender differences in each narrative. Starting with the manuscript of Hernando, who first initiates the materiality of writing through his authorship, the manuscript passes on to Estela, who plays a crucial role in adding the voices of subjugated others. Finally, Lear inherits the document and works on codifying it before the abolition of languages. In the last part, I will examine how the text makes it possible to decenter masculine narrative discourse through Estela and Lear's feminine discourse located at the margin. Due to the presence of both female narrators, Estela and Lear, their writing seems to create feminine discourse more clearly than Hernando's.

However, Hernando's writing ironically includes more notable female voices through his consideration of women. Through Hernando's representation of his mother and dancers ("gitana"),<sup>70</sup> his manuscript criticizes colonial male-dominated discourse that limited the image of women as angelic or monstrous. The modification of writing by these three characters illustrates how narrative discourse is constructed and how it often marginalizes subjugated voices.

### 3.1 Posthuman and Cyborg Hybridity

Lear's story in the novel displays a new phenomenon of the futuristic society that "physical, palpable material reality is disappearing" (Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America* 20). Lear, who is the last human-like character, encounters different types of dematerialization in which the meaning of the object is no longer tangible because of media digitalization. In this futuristic society, a machine replaces human reproduction, languages are changed to literal code in the form of numbers and letters, and the identification is encoded based on their origin and name. The new technologies not only change the ways of living but also ways of thinking. The dematerialization of L'Atlàntide depicts how the traditional concept of human identity is challenged. Through Lear's struggle and isolation within the posthuman world and obsession with language, the novel promotes some fundamental questions that might be raised about the hybridity of human/posthuman and human/machine.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> In this chapter, I will use the term "gitana" as Hernando mentioned in the text to avoid the connotation of the word that gypsies imply.

<sup>71</sup> In "Intrahistoria y memoria del presente: una lectura de *Cielos de la tierra*, de Carmen Boullosa," Holanda Castro explains that meta-narrative in the posthuman era has fallen and the mediation of images is growing: "Para la redacción de *Cielos de la tierra*, ya se ha vivido en la época *posthumana*: los metarrelatos han caídos, la mediación de las imágenes es cada vez mayor y la tecnología es absolutamente indispensable para nuestra supervivencia. Necesitábamos casas, luego ciudades y seguidamente cables para vivir y recordarnos, como señalan tanto Flusser como Mc Luhan. Nuestra manera de disfrutar, de leer, de escuchar, de mirar, cambió época tras época: del escándalo de la imprenta al de la inteligencia artificial no tuvieron que pasar muchos años. [...] Entramos, así, a la época de la *posthistoria*, y Juan Nepomuceno es quien está viendo el fin del último metarrelato" (170).

Lear stands in a post-apocalyptic community with uncertain timescale from the reference to “este año sin nombre o número, más de cien años después de la desaparición de la vida natural terrestre” (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 32). This futuristic place refers to somewhere suspended in the air after apocalypse on Earth: “Vivimos suspendidos en la atmósfera de la Tierra, alejados de la superficie, evitando las radiaciones, las ruinas, la destrucción, las tolvaneras y nubes tóxicas de las tormentas” (16). From the beginning of the novel, Lear’s eyes capture a new type of society and human being, the posthuman, whose identity is changed along with the technological revolution.<sup>72</sup>

Boullosa locates Lear in a space caught between the memory of the past when people used names to identify themselves and the present when they replace their name with numbers:

Ahora mi nombre es Lear. Una casualidad me despojó del anterior. Los miembros de mi comunidad se llaman el uno al otro echando mano de una cifra. [...] Porque no sé quién fue mi padre ni quién mi madre, porque fui gestada en un engendrador y pasé los años de crecimiento en La Conformación (la primera etapa en La Cuna, la segunda en El Receptor de Imágenes), porque aunque *polvo eres, Lear, en polvo no te convertirás*, no puedo echar mano de gran parte de las interpretaciones que en el tiempo de la Historia usaron los hombres para desentrañar lo que soy. (15)

Numbers and codes minimize the communication between the inhabitants in L’Atlàntide and biological parents become obsolete due to technology’s intervention in the process of insemination. This new society in the future seems to reflect Fukuyama’s vision and concerns on the world coming after postmodernism. In Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), he urges us to define our new upcoming world by replacing the word “postmodernism” because the advance of high technology has changed both our way of living and thinking. In this context, the

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<sup>72</sup> The posthuman should be distinguished from transhuman. If technology is mostly related to the enhancement of human beings, it should be considered as transhuman rather than posthuman. For example, a person who lives with a mechanical heart, who has a prosthetic arm or also, who attempts to vary their genes through technological intervention is often broadly considered as posthuman, but it is more proper to define these examples as transhuman.

new machine of human growth called “La Conformación” highlights how digital media constituted with visual imagery takes over the material. By digitizing them, the object and media are dematerialized. The physical and materialistic body of a human, which passes down its biological traits to the next generation, is ceded by artificial insemination machines that generate non-tangible visual images. Haraway considers the artificial way of human reproduction as follows: “holistic politics depend on metaphors of rebirth and invariably call on the resources of reproductive sex. I would suggest that cyborgs have to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing” (181).<sup>73</sup>

This new digitalized society with numbers, images, and electronic codes differs from “el tiempo de la Historia” that privileges both individual and collective identities. Instead, as Boullosa depicts, each character in *L’Atlàntide* is posthuman and “has no father, no mother, they have artificial parents, they are another kind of human” (Reid, “Interview” 151). Although Lear embodies some posthuman traits such as having indefinite lineage, she remains separate from the rest of the inhabitants of *L’Atlàntide* who are presented as cyborgs. While the rest of the inhabitants including her closest friend, Ramón, have machine-like bodies with electronic brains, Lear questions her identity and human history. Taking the dialogue between Lear and Ramón into account, it is easy to recognize that she has a different attitude and thinking than the other residents.

While she is sensitive using her name, Ramón thinks that naming has become meaningless:

No, ahora me llamo Lear.  
Se rió, a mandíbula batiente.

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<sup>73</sup> Lear’s story also reminds us of the social shift from print culture to a digital culture defined by Marshall McLuhan who is well known for his phrase, “the medium is the message.” The image of Lear who has none of the characteristics of being Mexican links to McLuhan’s idea of electronic media that has rendered the world into a “global village.” According to McLuhan, this new digital media extends our consciousness across the globe and challenges nationalism.

¿Ya *no* te llamas Cordelia? ¿Ahora Lear? – se rió más –. No se puede estar brincando de nombre, ésa no es manera. Nombrar deja de tener sentido. (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 113)

In general, names imply one's identity and as such, Lear tells her friend about her "current" name. In doing so, she desires to connect with her lost lineage and asserts her authority over her identity. Here, she navigates occupying both human and posthuman forms of being. The inhabitants of the new community no longer question either personal history nor collective history. In this new futuristic society, everything can be changed and nothing is essential. The status of human subjectivity and ethical values also may be changed due to the complexity of our time. The novel invites readers to reevaluate the meaning of language, ethics, and human subjectivity through the narrative.<sup>74</sup>

The extinction of human languages and names underscore the loss of materiality in L'Atlàntide. This is because human languages and their words are related to the material world, thus human history and archives are center-pieces of the past's materialization. The archive preserves a material view of history long gone. The novel reveals how the archive fails to be preserved for the next generation. According to Lear, languages are banned due to the "Reforma del lenguaje" and are replaced by new codes such as "N41, N42, N43, 087 and Y1":

Las traduzco a la lengua castellana: N41 quiere decir "estás contaminando el aire con necios ruidos". Ésta se aplica a quien haga ruidos de cualquier índole. N42, "la proximidad verbal engendra sensaciones desagradables y malos sentimientos." (92)

The new way of communication in the posthuman era is simple and economic. As many posthuman theorists highlight, the advance of technology produces new social coding that makes limitless

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<sup>74</sup> The posthuman theory is related to Deleuze's theory, especially, the concept of Rhizome that allows the free formation of multiple, non-hierarchical, and acentric knowledges. The posthuman theory borrows the image of rhizome which indicates the capacity to change through the undefinable and unstructured organizational epistemology.

communication possible between people without any language barrier. As we see in the text, there are, of course, no distinctions of race, because all entities such as Lear are created by a deliberate selection of sperm-egg binding. The story of Lear's birth portrays the scientific way to penetrate into the uncontrollable fact of human nature. Now humans themselves actively participate in their form of being:

Cuando nos escogieron, o mejor dicho, cuando escogieron el óvulo y el espermatozoide (examinados sus genes) que iban a tornarse en nosotros, optaron por la más amplia diversidad de fisonomías. Nuestra comunidad es un muestrario de lo que Natura dio a la apariencia humana. Aquí no cuenta la 'raza', porque todos somos de una distinta, y porque, auxiliados del Receptor de Imágenes, los hombres que hicieron a los sobrevivientes crearon en cada uno de nosotros un protagonista igualmente meritorio de belleza y respeto. [...] Estas imágenes fueron fijas y móviles, planas y de tres dimensiones. (108)

The genetic technology or biotechnology that appears in this passage is a scientific way of "breeding improved species through hybridization and artificial selection" (Best 13). The free selection of genes to improve the human condition sounds like an innovation to eliminate a racial problem or discrimination based on color, but it is worth noting that Lear does not implicate a positive outcome. For Lear, the unpredictability of nature is what makes a human a human: "Sin la prodigiosa Naturaleza el hombre ya no es humano. Ha perdido incluso su lengua. Quedamos nosotros, pero no somos ya humanos. Somos otro género, uno que no tiene nombre y que no quiere tenerlo, porque repudia al lenguaje" (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 171). In this context, what makes a new type of human distinct is the way we treat language. Lear's nostalgia of language continues to distance herself from the other type of human.

Although Lear acknowledges the presence of other posthuman figures, she is the one who still raises questions about preserving languages and archival texts of the past. Andrew Brown, who published a book about Latin American science fiction, *Cyborgs in Latin America* (2010), interprets Lear as a character who is situated at the margin of the posthuman society. He proclaims

that the description of the new community, where Lear lives, seems to fulfill all the characteristics of posthuman identity. However, Brown notes that similar to posthuman theory, the novel reflects ethical concerns about morality in a posthuman world. By describing Lear's resistance against the abolition of language, the novel raises fundamental questions on what differentiates humans from cyborgs. Brown also states that Lear's internal conflicts deviate from a typical image of a cyborg model<sup>75</sup>:

While Lear is clearly post-human, her subsequent experiences and comments tend toward a dismantling of the cyborg model. Indeed, Lear's interest in the uncovering of History suggests a cyborg uneasy with its theoretical definition. [...] If Lear belongs to a community that embodies the cyborg utopias to which theorist such a Donna Haraway aspire, Lear herself appears at the margin of such a society – nostalgic for precisely what her community forbids and what cyborg theorists have rejected. (*Cyborgs in Latin America* 51-52)

In this passage, Brown argues how nostalgia blurs Lear's boundary between human/posthuman. The existence of nostalgia in the posthuman space questions the possibility of cyborg utopias. By "dismantling of the cyborg model" Lear's identity rejects perfect binary oppositions. Through Lear's character, Boullosa troubles cyborg theory that overlooks the complex ethical implications of the cyborg. On the one hand, she refuses to glamorize the utopic fantasy of cyborg free from

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<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that Brown leads these posthuman aspects to announce what Boullosa proposes is "the cyborg utopia as yet another dystopia" (55) that "apparently embrace Haraway's rejection of the Garden of Eden" (Brown, *Cyborgs in Latin America* 53), which is the symbol of the organic family model. It seems proper, in this context, to apply Haraway's concept of cyborg that "is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (Haraway 151). For these reasons, Brown addresses that "Boullosa's rather straightforward condemnation of the dehumanizing effects of technological society situates it among much of traditional science fiction" (54). However, I problematize the understanding of the novel within the traditional science fiction genre due to its characters' obsession with writing. Brown analyzes how nuclear family gender roles are eliminated and how cyborg utopia turns into a dystopia through posthuman perspectives. Furthermore, Brown's argument fails to consider Lear's story in relation to the other stories of Hernando and Estela. As the narrative indicates in the "nota del autor," the novel emphasizes the connection of the three different parts considering "la novela es diálogo y unidad" (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 13).

conflict (e.g. stemming from race, class, and gender) while on the other hand, she celebrates the potential of the cyborg to examine these categories of difference.

True to Brown's observation, Lear defines herself as the only "human" distinguished from the other "posthuman": "Soy el último ser humano que resta sobre la Tierra. Los atlántidos no son ya hijos del hombre y de la mujer" (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 306).<sup>76</sup> Lear confesses that she is the only one who is dedicated to finding her origin and human history. To maintain her difference, Lear reaffirms history and language which is reminiscent of human nostalgia:

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

As we see in the passage above, Lear's obsession with languages, text, and history recognizes her identity and human subjectivity. Her consistent questions regarding her origin indicate Lear's willingness to find her own identity by conveying what the human being has preserved. As such, her efforts to translate and preserve the manuscript serve both herself and her future community.

While the materiality of language and text is replaced by digitized images and codes, material bodies of posthuman are maximized with characters' extreme hybridism and artificial bodies. Their bodies lose the concept of materiality in a different way by being too far from the natural human body. The artificial body appears to be segmented, grotesque, and disjointed that causes a strong disgust for Lear. The posthuman bodies reveal humankind's deconstructive political moves and challenge the boundaries of humans, animals, and technology.<sup>77</sup> Carson,

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<sup>76</sup> The "Atlanteans" recalls an ancient fantasy of Atlantis which is first mentioned in Plato's work. Considering the allegorical aspect of Atlantis that was taken up in utopian works of several writers, the "Atlanteans" locate somewhere between utopia and dystopia.

<sup>77</sup> Jessica Burke explains that the disappearance of language, memory, and time "dissolves the line between man and beast" ("Consuming the Other" 181); however, she focuses more on the cannibalistic aspects of



another inhabitant of L'Atlàntide, is the one who most clearly represents a disarticulated and grotesque body:

Carson se desarticuló a sí misma un brazo, lo separó del resto de su cuerpo. [...] De pronto, vi uno de sus dedos saliendo por su oreja, y la punta de otro saliéndose por la nariz. Carson abrió la boca: atrás de la lengua estaba el resto de la mano. (352)

Carson's body embodies a transformation and amalgamation of human and machine. Claire Taylor mentions that Carson "reveals herself to be a cyborg, a cybernetic organism, a noun whose very etymology, in its uneasy neologism, reveals the grafting together of two opposing terms" ("Cities, Codes and Cyborgs" 488). The term "cybernetic organism" is rooted to the concept of "becoming machine" that "understood in this specific sense indicates and actualizes the relational powers of a subject that is no longer cast in a dualist frame, but bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one's technologically mediated planetary environment" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 92).<sup>78</sup> The figure of Carson, then, celebrates the hybrid amalgamation and revisits the concept of the human body as non-sexualized and non-gendered.<sup>79</sup>

Although Carson returns as a cyborg, Lear reaffirms her body as a materialized and natural object with flesh and organs: "¿Tengo también el cuerpo lleno de cosas? Estoy convencida de que no. Yo no estoy rellena de cosas. Respiro. Estoy viva. Mi cuerpo es de carne y no de tiesa materia artificial" (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 359). The perception of the body as a medium of experience is also related to the phenomenological world of Merleau-Ponty who states that: "I am

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bodies. Burke interprets cannibalism in this novel stating that "the members of L'Atlàntide only begin to consume cadavers after beginning their decline into a more primitive existence" (181).

<sup>78</sup> Braidotti takes Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs," or "becoming machine" to propose an alternative body that non-normalized and non-Oedipalized sexuality. This cybernetic body becomes a place of transgression in terms of sexual and gendered identity.

<sup>79</sup> Despite the non-gendered description of Carson, the narrator calls Carson as her. This feature also could be found in the setting of Lear's voice. There is an unconscious identification of the writer with women throughout the novel. This implicit intention of the writer naturally creates a space for marginalized beings which I will later elaborate.

all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and though them, all the rest” (525).<sup>80</sup> For Lear, the body constitutes the most fundamental substance of human identity. Lear’s nostalgia for corporeal humanness is expressed by her desire for true communications and emotional interactions with others. She states that “Deseo. Me llena de horror el corazón saber que no podré jamás cruzar palabra alguna con nadie, que nunca más podré conversar, pero más todavía saber que nunca más podré practicar con nadie las artes amatorias. [...] Ellos no pueden hacer nunca más el amor” (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 359). The fear of losing real communications and human interactions is later revealed through her obsession with translating the manuscript.

I take Lear’s story further to consider the relationship between posthuman and the idea of writing as a discourse. This connection plays an important role to make all three narrators connected in some way. Here, the narrative as discourse refers to ways of constituting knowledge, forms of subjectivity, and power relations. Even though all three different narrators live at different times and are marginalized in their society, they share a unique status dedicated to writing in order to maintain their memory and history against dematerialization.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the posthuman bodies are often known as “a technology, a screen, a projected image; it is a body under the sign of AIDS, a contaminated body, a deadly body, a techno-body; it is, as we shall see, a queer body” (Halberstam and Livingston 3).

<sup>81</sup> The important function of words as a connector of different periods is also notable inside of the novel. The phrase in Esperanto, which starts and closes each fragment, could be understood as a demarcation to divide each story narrated by different narrators. At the same time, the Esperanto phrase serves as a key to access each different fragment. For example, if the fragment is about Lear, it starts with the following phrase, “Ekfloros keston de Learo”, and ends with “Slosos keston de Learo.” The first fragment about Lear indicates the reason of using Esperanto at the beginning and the end of each fragment: “Cada cesto llevará una frase en esperanto para abrirlo y la equivalente para cerrarlo, como acostumbro; mi: ábrete Sésamo” de la Central de Estudios” (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 32). The “Central de Estudios” is a place for the past where all human texts and memories of the human history have been archived. Diana Sofía Sánchez Hernández interprets the use of Esperanto as “una solución a los problemas de las desigualdades humanas causadas por las diferencias idiomáticas” (“Al margen”). The interpretation of Esperanto by Torres supports Diana Sofía’s idea of the common language free from “el ‘estigma’ de un imperialismo político, económico o religiosa, permitiera dejarse escuchar en un plano de perfecta igualdad, no hablando en la lengua de ningún conquistador, vale decir, de ninguna nación dominante” (Torres 25). As we can see through the

### 3.2 Textual Re-materialism

The obsession of text and the act of writing of all narrators addresses their effort to accomplish what I call textual re-materialism. The manuscript represents textual materiality that proposes a critical strategy of “analytic objectification that focuses on the physical properties of an embodied text—only makes sense if you’re willing to grant that, for instance, a book is a ‘material object’ whereas a text is a ‘sequence of words’” (Price 10). In this novel, the manuscript is the material object that has survived decades. The text obtains its value as an archive including the important information of historical events and one’s identity. While various types of digital reproduction threaten the authorship of a manuscript, text as a material object still recognizes its voice and the role of the author as a human subject.<sup>82</sup> For these reasons, the textual materialism provides a chance to reconsider the author’s view based on their socio-cultural context. In the novel, the manuscript evokes nostalgia for human history and identity. The text presents various perspectives of the authors, Hernando, Estela, and Lear, who possess different gender and class

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reference, the ideology of Esperanto is a utopia of languages, but what we can see in the narrative is not utopic but dystopic. In my opinion, Esperanto not only symbolizes the resistance or the rejection of cultural differences based on the hegemonic discourse but also emphasizes the equal importance to each period within the continuum of understanding. Also, the use of Esperanto from the beginning and the end of each fragment could be interpreted as a magic language that leads readers to time travel and emerges into different times and memories with one universal language which has survived throughout history. Thus, Esperanto shows how the global language could be adjusted in the local context and vice versa.

<sup>82</sup> The novel itself indicates the authority of writer along the structure of the novel. Before starting the novel, “nota del autor” introduces its presence and power over the narrative. According to “nota del autor,” this novel written by Juan Nepomuceno Rodríguez Álvarez is not about three but “dos sobrepuestas”, one that occurs in the future and the other in the past: “El relato de Estela la condenó a un papel lateral, el de traductora al español del texto del indio que en Tlatelolco, en el siglo XVI, redactara en latín sus memorias” (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 13). This is the only place where the author’s name appears. However, this fictional space is extended further by including a letter written by Boullosa that comes before the “nota del autor.”<sup>82</sup> The letter starting “Querido lector” states that this novel is written by various authors: “Esta novela no es una novela de autor, sino de autores. En sus páginas hay tres personajes que confiesan confesar, y habemos dos que confesamos haberla escrito.” These two comments regarding the novel lead us to take certain distance from the writer’s authority. As Boullosa’s letter functions as a part of the novel, it allows both the author and the reader breathe new life into the novel: “dele la calidez que no supe encontrarle en el camino. Que nazca en ti, y que sea tuya” (11).

positions.<sup>83</sup> During this process, readers see how the writing works as a narrative discourse and how each narrator constitutes differently the narrative.

Even though all three narrators are dedicated to writing, the authorial process is not uniform. While Hernando initiates the manuscript writing about his own experience, Estela and Lear translate his written text. As the original author, Hernando is confident that his manuscript will be preserved for a long time in the future. In his attitude toward the writing, his passion and affection for non-code languages are strongly presented:

Yo voy a contarles una historia, lo más detallado que mi vieja memoria me permita, y evitaré hasta donde pueda las preguntas. No temo ofender a nadie con mis recuentos, no podrán. Pasarán varias veces cien años antes de que cualquiera ponga los ojos donde escribo, en latín porque es la lengua en que sé hacerlo con menor torpeza y porque sé es lengua que, como ha resistido el paso del tiempo, vivirá en el futuro. Ocultaré mis escritos, los llegaré a otros tiempos. (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 70)

For Hernando, Latin signifies resistance because it has endured time and has survived from the Spaniard influence. This Colegio creates a new social hierarchy originated in colonial period of Mexico, “a class of native nobles capable of evangelizing to their fellow natives” by choosing the “best and brightest” indigenous students (Zimmer 223). In this context, Hernando is the medium of this acculturation through Catholicism that “had every intention of converting the adolescents into priests” (223). Because of this unique historical background in Mexico, Latin implies elitism as well as cultural and educational colonization of Spaniards, while Latin in Europe symbolizes elitism. Hernando portrays how Spaniards use a group of indigenous elite, including Hernando himself, to control Mexico during the colonial time. Here, Hernando provides an account of the

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<sup>83</sup> From among the three different stories, Hernando’s and Lear’s stories occupy the majority of the novel. For example, Estela’s story appears as only four fragments, Lear’s part takes the form of nineteen, and Hernando’s stories are shown through eighteen fragments out of forty-one. It indicates that the story of Estela works as a medium that links Hernando and Lear.

complex and subtle processes of acculturation in which Latin serves as a medium for new indigenous elites as a unified social group. Hernando's Latin illuminates the two different mechanisms of language. On the one hand, Hernando's Latin conveys an important and strong tool that strengthens the new social discourse. On the other, Hernando's Latin represents an authority as a writer (teller) who has a power to narrate what happens in the colonial time. Particularly, Hernando's writing participates in the formation of history from a unique perspective of an indigenous elite. His writing elevates the voice of aborigine to the same level as any European subject who writes a history.

However, Hernando's writing marks a limitation of assimilation into the European way of history. Even though Hernando is educated in "Colegio de Santa Cruz" learning Latin which is an elite language for some selected people, his indigenous nature keeps alienating him from the white European Christian community: "Entre todos los muchachos del Colegio, siempre creí ser el único llegado ahí por un error" (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 138). The writing process is one way for Hernando to record what happened to him, and he remains cognizant of the writing process throughout the novel. Hernando constructs his authorship and shares his feelings by inviting readers to participate in his narrative:

[...] lector, si lo llegara a haber, no sería el maestro que mis lecciones tomase en pasados tiempos, ni sería el alumno a quien yo enseñase lo que los franciscos regalaron, para que después nosotros lo regaláramos a nuestros alumnos, blancos que no indios, porque los indios han sido condenados ya a la ignorancia y a un eterno sometimiento. (177)

The direct mentioning of the readers is one of the 'quijotic' rhetorical devices<sup>84</sup> but the narrative trespasses the metatextual boundary of the classic Spanish literature and plays on words. In this

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<sup>84</sup> The "quijotic" metaphor is often found in this novel. First, Boullosa begins the text with her "Nota del autor" and recalls the metafiction of *Don Quijote*. Same as *Don Quijote* which is written by numerous fictional writers, this novel also presents different authors including Boullosa, Juan Nepomuceno Rodríguez

context, Hernando is aware of the future readers. The readers could be two different subjects: one is the future readers and translators such as Estela and Lear while the other could be the real readers who are reading this novel. Since Hernando is the one who starts writing history, he is more conscious of his act of writing by acknowledging readers when he writes: “Si usted, lector (si acaso usted algún día existe), prestó atención a lo que anoté aquí sobre la fiesta de inauguración, verá que la cuento con todo detalle” (187-188). Furthermore, this awareness of authority distinguishes Hernando from both Estela and Lear who are working from his manuscript.

Hernando’s writing process corresponds to the construction of both individual and collective memories. Hernando’s memories, constructed retrospectively, contains uncertainty. He recognizes this uncertainty and even plays with it because he knows that he has the power to write whatever he wants. Seemingly, he claims to write a historical text; however, his writing and memories fill the space of his limited perspective:

Quiero contar de principio a fin la historia, y para ella debo decir dónde, cuándo y cómo nací, añadiendo una pizca de mis primeros años, para explicar de qué manera fui llevado a formar parte de la historia que quiero contar. Avanzaré desde mi nacimiento, lo más rápidamente que me sea dado hacerlo, y no me detendré hasta llegar al fin. Es verdad de a ratos se me nubla la vista y no veo sino negro, como si yo fuera huésped ya del De Profundis. Pero si nublada queda mi vista, no así mi imaginación ni mi entendimiento. Por ejemplo, cuando saco a cuanto el De Profundis, son varias las cosas que comprendo e imagino. (79-80)

As Hernando admits, the writing process includes a modification based on an understanding and an imagination which also happens for readers when they read a text. The reference of *De*

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Álvarez, and the three narrators, Hernando, Estela, and Lear. Second, abundance of literary elements inserted in the narrative also reminds us of *Don Quijote*. Highly educated and talented in literature, all three narrators are dedicated to writing and reading. They introduce various classic literature to readers. Third, their revisited and modified texts mirror *Don Quijote*’s pastiche. Hernando emphasizes that the original text belongs to him stating that: “Es mi lectura, exageradamente personal, de un manuscrito que me pertenece, que me habla a mí desde el siglo XVI, que me explica mi presente. Nadie más que yo le hincará el diente, por el momento, a menos que, o un error que no calculo, o el paso del tiempo, lleven a su descubrimiento en el entierro de la mesa” (67).

*Profundis*, a letter written by Oscar Wilde, which was edited by a journalist Robert Ross, indicates the meaninglessness of the original text passing through the various editions. Starting with the first published letter in 1905, more editions were released until 1962. During the nearly 6 decades, the text has changed significantly by passing through the hands of different editors. Similarly, Hernando's work finds itself in multiple versions.

Hernando's individual memory juxtaposes with the colonial period history in Mexico. After expressing his desire for writing, he narrates the story that he was born on the 14th of October in 526 in Texcoco, seventy-one years ago. This was the time when Columbus came to "la tierra" of indigenous people. Hernando mentions this arrival when he expresses his concerns about the exploitation by Spaniards: "Qué trato le darán? ¿Será para ellos como para mí y para sus padres una princesa? ¿Le darán trato de esclava? Y nosotros, ¿vamos donde hay cielo sobre la tierra? ¿Cómo será la villa de estos hombres terribles?" (84). The title of this novel, "cielos de la tierra," is also mentioned in the epigraph. The phrase comes from *Grandeza Mexicana* by Bernardo de Balbuena, a Spanish poet who praises the beauties of the New World including the architecture, the vegetation, the animals, and the surroundings in general. Diana Sofía Sánchez Hernández calls the attention to the plurality of the title: "el sentido original unívoco y discriminador del verso de Balbuena. Del aspecto evidentemente excluyente del poema, el título *Cielos de la tierra* habla de un espacio mayor, en el que se incluye no solo las Indias sino a toda la tierra; asimismo se incorpora no solo la visión cristiana sino también la perspectiva indígena" ("Al margen"). Boullosa's title highlights different perspectives of plurality including the vision of indigenous people which had been excluded in the Eurocentric world. To quote Sánchez Hernández, "El manuscrito de Hernando, por tanto, no solo consigna los acontecimientos más importantes de su vida, sino que al momento de problematizar la constitución de una identidad híbrida aborda de manera paralela

el devenir de una nueva identidad colectiva y la degradación y marginación a la que fueron condenados los pueblos indígenas” (“El sujeto”). The hybrid identity implies that acculturation causes serious racial power relations and defines mestizo or indigenous as an inferior race. Racial variation produces a racial hierarchy that further alienates indigenous people from the Eurocentric society.

The social problem of racial discrimination in Hernando’s history continues in Estela’s story.<sup>85</sup> Besides the description of the corrupted government of Mexico, Lear describes deep-rooted racism against indigenous people in her own house by telling her grandmother’s racism and how the older woman highlights the whiteness of the family. Despite the obsession of the whiteness of her own family, Estela’s mestiza mother transmits her indigenous gene to Estela:

Mi padre se había casado ciego de amor con una vulgar tabasqueña, un pésimo partido. Yo no tenía los ojos claros, y por más que hacía mi mamá (no cantaba mal las rancheras), lavándome con manzanilla el cabello para que no perdiera su tono rubio, antes de los nueve años ya lo tenía yo castaño. (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 49)

As such, while Hernando focuses on illustrating the discrimination against indigenous people in the monk school, Estela extends the scope of race in Mexico after the Spaniard conquest by Hernán Cortes. Estela’s race as mestiza demonstrates the complexity of ethnicity born between white and indigenous people. Estela dedicates numerous paragraphs to explain her family, gene, and racial features. The passage above describes the physical growth of Estela and emphasizes the

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<sup>85</sup> The way in which Estela’s manuscript reaches Lear explains the necessity of her dedication to writing: “Practico las artes arqueológicas para recuperar libros y manuscritos. No me interesa ya rescatar otros objetos. Las obras del arte que merecían un espacio sobre la Tierra permanecen intactas bajo una burbuja que sí toca la superficie, a la que nombramos Das Menschen Museum, el Museo del Hombre. Creo que nadie la visita” (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 21). In this place beyond the inhabitants of L’Atlántide, Lear finds the manuscript in “la Biblioteca de El Colegio de México.” She does not inform readers why she highlights this particular manuscript, nor does she provide any connection between Mexico and the text. Lear says “No es que me interese especialmente México” (22) and then she lists all the different places of the library in all over the world.



importance of genetic power and the intimate relationship with the past, history, and genealogy. The novel traces this feature from Hernando to Estela. The indigenous identity is still or even more important in the twentieth century in Mexico in which Estela lives. Estela questions that: “Pero el ‘asunto indio’ no era una verdadera preocupación, o no lo era tanto como el ‘asunto negro’, *Black is beautiful*, pero no ‘Lo indio es lo bello’” (198). Even though some racial problems are discussed in greater detail, the world continues to devalue indigenous people under white supremacy.

Although all three stories seem connected through their attention to corrupted and problematic societies — including the futuristic and apocalyptic society — the ending suggests a type of human essentiality that might survive through time. In the penultimate paragraph, Lear uses the first person plural form, “nosotros,” for the first and the last time to express the unity of all three narrators:

Salvaremos al lenguaje y a la memoria de hombre, y un día conformaremos al puño que nos relate, y nos preguntaremos por el misterio de la muerte, por el necio sinsentido del hombre y de la mujer. Sentiremos horror, aunque nuestros cuerpos no conozcan más ni el frío ni el dolor. Un abismo estará abierto a nuestros pies. Ésos serán los cielos de la Tierra. (369)

Writing unifies all three in the same voice and the same body. As Lear notes, all three dedicate their life to human “language and memory” through text. However, not all three narrators share the same role as a writer because Hernando is the one who starts writing history, and Estela and Lear are those who translate his manuscript.

The title, *Cielos de la tierra*, denotes this strong connection between three narrators over a long period of time. By mentioning the novel’s three different timelines of Hernando, Estela, and Lear, Boullosa concludes “Los tres se llamará *Los cielos de la Tierra*. L’Atlàntide pertenecerá al pasado, como la vieja Tenochtitlan, como el México de Hernando y el país de Estela” (369). Each narrative shows the individual part of the multiple “cielos,” as such, they form part of the Mexican

history. The phrasing of the title, *Cielos de la tierra*, criticizes the Eurocentric perspective and questions the concept of the linear history that envisions progress as a goal by replacing it with the cyclical history. Anna Reid interprets the narrative as “cyclical nature of destruction” by indicating the repeated apocalyptic images over the stories (“The Operation of Orality” 190). According to the last part of the novel, “cielo de la tierra” does not exist, but “cielos de la tierra” in plural form does as part of history. Lear stresses that each fragmented story from a different narrator connected to one another, and Lear finally declares the union of the three different temporal contexts of the novel:

Me uniré a Estela y a Hernando hasta el fin de los tiempos. Desdeñaré la muerte anunciada de Hernando, quitaré el párrafo en que se la menciona, no le permitiré llegar a su fin. A Estela tampoco la dejaré alcanzar su muerte propia, la que tendría con el gran estallido. A los dos traeré a mí, compartiremos un kesto común que nadie sabrá cerrar. Los tres viviremos en un mismo territorio. Los tres perteneceremos a tres distintos tiempos, nuestras memorias serán de tres distintas épocas, pero yo conoceré la de Hernando, y Hernando conocerá la mía, y ganaremos un espacio común en el que nos miraremos a los ojos y formaremos una nueva comunidad. (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 369)

The three different narrators transcend space and time through the written text. Lear believes that history and memory are the only ways to create a new community that is able to “vencer el cotidiano uso del tiempo y de la muerte” — as Álvaro Mutis said in the second epigraph of the novel. To preserve our history and memory in the future, text is the main key for Boullosa. Emphasizing the material text seems like an outdated view in this posthuman era; however, text means more than words. As we see in their writing, text first and foremost presents how one’s cultural, racial, and gender identity is formed and challenged. Second, it exposes how different genres of writing could be generated and inherited in the future. As Lear indicates at the end of the novel adding some lines of the poem “Shall earth no more inspire thee” by Emily Brontë, her translation demonstrates how she appreciates the language and literature: “Vuelvo a mi Hernando.

Pero debo dejar anotados aquí antes de hacerlo unos versos de la Brontë: ‘Few hearts to mortals given/ On earth so wildly pine/ Yet none would ask a Heaven/ More like the Earth than thine’” (355). Also, Brontë’s verses add literary sensibility to Lear’s writing by throwing an image of the beauty of the earth which links to the title of the novel, “Cielos de la tierra.”

The current problem should be considered in relation to the past and influential power of the future. Regarding the ending, Javier Durán notes that the ending “posits the emergence of a new apocalypse, and the failed utopia disintegrates in another heterotopian moment of destruction” (62). The ending of the narrative deviates successfully from an extreme conclusion of constructing either utopia or dystopia. What we encounter at the end of the narrative is one piece of the future that allows us to encounter the past.

### **3.3 Marginalized Writing**

The marginalized writing recognizes the voices of subjugated others in history. By exposing different categories of narrators depending on class, gender, and race, Boullosa illuminates how narrative discourse is constructed from different level and how narrative discourse transgresses boundaries. While Hernando’s writing about colonial period provides a different historical view from an indigenous people who decenter the official history, Estela’s and Lear’s touch on Hernando’s writing infuses feminine voices into history. Hernando’s manuscript highlights the authority of a male writer who has the power to narrate his-story.<sup>86</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously argue that women or women writers are often presented as either angels or monsters by patriarchal perspectives on women. This false duality limits female representation

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<sup>86</sup> I connect these words, his and story, with the hyphen to emphasize how the male voice represented as Hernando later become the official history.

in literature. Considering the fact that Hernando writes from a male perspective emphasizing on his authority as the writer, he seems to follow the patriarchal representation of women.

Ironically, Hernando's manuscript reveals the limitation of his writing regarding women representation and proposes a subversive effect of these two images of women. In doing so, he indicates the failure of male authorship. First, I would like to demonstrate how Hernando's manuscript is used to pinpoint these two extreme prototypes of women, and second, how these two women do not remain as victims of Hernando's writing but rather subvert the narrative by demonstrating Hernando's failure to become a priest. Furthermore, I consider his manuscript in relation to Estela and Lear. I will focus on how these two images can be revisited from a feminine perspective.

Most notably, Hernando's mother represents the figure of angel in his manuscript. The maternal love is often described as unconditional and boundless. Notwithstanding the intimate relationship between Hernando and his mother, the male centered Catholic society of the colonial period separates the woman from her son. Hernando recalls his mother's visit to his school with a cynical tone:

Yo me quedaba afuera para hablar con ella, porque las mujeres tenían prohibida la entrada a los patios del Colegio. Los franciscanos no hablaban con mujeres. "Parece que los franciscanos les tienen miedo a las mujeres", yo pensaba, cuando no sabía que no hablaban con ellas por considerarlas aliadas del mal. (Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 212)

The discrimination against women is presented implicitly through the maternal figure. Despite this discrimination and marginalization, Hernando attempts to cultivate an intimate relationship with his mother, stating that: "Yo era su joya, y ella era mi tesoro" (192). Their bond refers to the book by Damián de Vegas describing women as a "bellísima doncella,Cuál será el cuerpo, cuál el alma

della, [...] Si los ángeles puros siempre han sido, Y por Reina la adoran con profundo” (213-214).

Then, Hernando elevates his mother’s status to a Virgen (angel):

Y mujer era la Virgen, y no por ello tendríamos prohibido hablar de ella o con ella.  
Aunque mi madre no fuese virgen, era pura, era hermosa, no usaba *axí*, ese  
ungüento amarillo de la tierra que se untan las bajas mujeres para tener buen rostro  
y luciente, ni usaba colores o afeites en el rostro, porque no era perdida ni mundanal.  
(214)

Hernando dedicates a major part of his-story to express his love for his mother which become more like an obsession. He praises both her positive inner side and her attractive appearance: “La belleza de mi mamá era tanta que no dudo dieran esta orden para no verla” (215).<sup>87</sup> Hernando’s description of his mother exemplifies the angelic and pure side of female characters in Gilbert and Gubar’s critique. Through his manuscript, he tries to replicate the patriarchal dichotomy of angel/monster when he describes his mother as a holy figure.

While Hernando’s mother is described as a holy angel, the sensual dancer juxtaposes the angelic image with a monster-like women and completes the other half of this problematic binary. From the beginning of the encounter with the dancers (or “gitana”), Hernando describes them as sensual and tempting characters. When a group of women called Hernando and his friend Martín Jacoba to give a message to them, both Franciscans realize their instinctive feeling toward women that is not acceptable for a true Franciscan:

[...] justo cuando una de ellas, sin duda la más hermosa, hacíanos unas danzas para  
alborotarnos, chanceándonos porque quisimos persuadirla, mientras a Martín  
Jacobita y a mí se nos subían los colores y se nos desperezaban los malos  
pensamientos, [...]. (318)

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<sup>87</sup> This also reminds us of the Sigmund Freud’s theory of the Oedipal complex which describe a developmental stage of a child that desire for his or her opposite sex parent and jealousy toward his or her same sex parent. However, Hernando’s description about his mother

The attractive women who provoked “malos pensamientos” impeded their practice to be Franciscan. This means that during the colonial period, the group of women, especially, those who are in the lowest social hierarchy, hinder men from being part of the male dominated Spanish culture. Before meeting with these women, Hernando had a dream about women who had pressed down on his body: “La piedra se volvía entonces una enorme mujer que, apretando mi pecho con su peso, traía calor a mi cuerpo, pero no las llamas que yo continuaba esperando para reunirme con ellos, no las llamas ni las mujeres: la mujer era una piedra que me sujetaba al cuerpo” (174). The dream alludes perfectly to Hernando’s future when he fails to become a priest because of his illicit relationship with the dancer:

Yo nunca había visto un cuerpo así tendido y casi sin ropas, y aunque lo hubiera visto antes jamás habría sido de la misma bárbara belleza. Pasaron los minutos y mis ojos se acostumbraron más a la oscuridad. La encontré a cada momento más hermosa, más completa, más desnuda. [...] Sabía que debía irme, pero no podía moverme. Su belleza me había fijado al piso de tierra, como si yo fuera de dura piedra. (341)

The perfect absorption of “bárbara belleza” of woman presented with her body results in the complete inversion of his being. The “darkness (oscuridad)” can be understood as a metaphor for, without contradicting, the “light.” The contrast between darkness and lightness continues to appear in the following sentence: “[...] la extendí, mis ojos se habían acostumbrado a la oscuridad, ya no me hacía falta para ver bien la luz del día” (343). After this moment, Hernando realizes that the woman is not “mi ángel” but an “ángel egoísta y cruel” that makes Hernando “envenenado por completo” (347-348). Juxtaposed with the angelic image of his mother, Hernando underscores the opposite half of Gilbert and Gubar’s binary when he characterizes the dancer as monstrous.

The sexual desire of Hernando has been presented with a certain odor translocated by his contact with the woman: “Este olor no tenía por fuente al agua y la yerba con su poder celeste, sino la llama de la concupiscencia. Era el olor de mujer mezclado con el de mi cuerpo inflamado

por ella” (345). Hernando tries to locate and eliminate the odor from the woman; however, the more he tries, the stronger it smells. When he jumps into the river, which signifies baptism and cleansing, to get rid of the repugnant smell, again, a second inversion occurs when he frees himself from his religion. Even if the purification of water signifies a spiritual rebirth in baptism, here, Hernando experiences the opposite effect when he disengages from the Catholic church. Instead of feeling more committed to his religion, he feels closer to his bodily desires:

Caminé sobre el cauce del río, sintiendo el agua correr sobre mi piel, acariciándola. Qué felicidad sentí. Vivir en el mundo de los frailes me había engañado con una vejez que no era la mía. El toque del agua me purificaba de ellos. Hernando podría correr, gritar, bailar y volar de vez en vez. Acosté mi cuerpo en las aguas y volví a nadar como cuando era niño. [...] Ángel, angelito, me doy la media vuelta y vuelvo a enfundar mi pija en tu cuerpecito. Ahora yo seré el niño que mamará de tus pezones. (348)

Hernando realizes his separation from the Catholic church, and as such, he no longer wishes to be a priest. Water symbolizes more than just religious baptism and, ironically, frees him from the religious world made by Spaniards. It is worth noting that, however, Hernando affirms that he will be a boy who could breastfeed from the angel presented as the woman dancer at the end of this passage. Therefore, the “ángel egoísta y cruel,” again, turns into an angel (347). Hernando’s story seems like it is following the two reductive representations of women, either angel or monster, but it actually complicates the dichotomy of women representation appeared in history. Hernando himself elevates the gypsy to the same level as his mother, and in doing so, he disrupts the clear distinctions between angel/monster and mother/dancer.

For these reasons, Hernando’s represents women in a way that transcends the dichotomy of angel vs monster. His-story subverts this implicit opposition and reconsiders women as those who have power over the patriarchal society. This subversive structure is highlighted by demonstrating the image of the dancer who leads to his failure to be a priest. Considering the fact

that Hernando represents both an outcome of acculturation and the male writer with an authoritative figure, the intervention of the dancer serves as more than a seduction between man and woman. Her act confronts and challenges against the conservative male-dominated society. On one level, the woman dancer serves as an important momentum to free Hernando from the acculturation. Moreover, it offers us an alternative and marginal discourse that embraces his-story and the others.

Estela and Lear's stories expose their voices as women actively adding and revising the manuscript of Hernando. Hernando is the "seed (semilla)" by initiating the history as he admits: "Yo soy la semilla que invoca a los recuerdos" (119). However, Estela rewrites the manuscript with her own voice: "El manuscrito está en bastante mal estado. Algunos pasajes son ilegibles por las manchas en el papel, [...] Era mío, lo decidí desde que pensé trabajar con él, y a mi modo remedíé las ausencias" (53). Due to the illegibility of the original manuscript, the manuscript turns into her own writing through her retouch and rewriting process. Also, Estela mentions that: "Ay, no: creo que sí lo he borrado a fuerza de escribirlo en mi propia versión, añadiendo esto y quitando aquello, dándole fuerza donde me pareció encontrarlo débil o empañado" (145). Her words serve to clarify her voice same as Hernando and confront the oppression toward women: "Yo callo. No soy escritora, y no gané con mi generación el lugar para hablar. Sigo con mi traducción de Hernando, y a lo que más me atrevo es a reparar lo que es ilegible en el original, y a mentir un poco aquí y otro poco allá, para hacer más posible su historia" (205).

However, different from Hernando, Estela does not claim authorship of the manuscript. She frees herself from defining her power over the writing and focuses on the writing to make it more legible than his-story. Estela's revision links Lear's desire to pass down the manuscript to future generations. The modification and revision by Estela and Lear could be interpreted as a



challenge to Hernando's male authorship. Estela and Lear approach from different perspectives, but they both are revising and offering critical insight. While Estela expresses her sense of duty to preserve the collective voice, Lear expresses her willingness of modifying the original manuscript to make herself feel better: "[...] Voy a hacer dos cosas para quitarme el malestar. Una es saltarme el párrafo dicho, y la otra es anotar aquí cómo fue esto enojoso que digo, para quitarme el mal sabor de la boca" (89). Through the act of writing, her self-exploration maintains her authorial voice on a personal level.

The inevitability of reaching the manuscript to Estela and Lear indicates their important role as women narrators and their power to change the manuscript, the official history, written by a male writer. Instead of finding the manuscript in the library where she works, Estela receives it directly from indigenous people during the missionary trip with her parents:

Lo otro que quiero contar es cómo llegó a mis manos. Siendo, como lo es, un manuscrito del siglo XVI, sería lógico que lo hubiera encontrado en los Archivos del Fondo Franciscano que custodia en el Museo el Instituto de Antropología (para el que yo trabajo, soy investigadora en él hace diecisiete años, ahora mi tema es la mujer india e hispana en el siglo XVI), pero no fue así. (53)

It is noteworthy that this passage above exposes the supposed fortuity as being inevitable fate. Estela was always meant to study the indigenous and Hispanic women in the sixteenth century. This sense of inevitability shows the important roles of women in history and the impossibility of singular male history.

This direct contact between Estela and the Indigenous world leads her also serve as a mediator to deliver Hernando's manuscript and the indispensability for her to be the only "survivor" and "the mediator" which is a woman, not a man:

Resulta que mis papás (esto es lo segundo y último que tengo que contar de mí misma), me llevaron a vivir un año a un pueblo indio, asumiendo el papel de una "familia misionera". Nos fuimos los tres, mi mamá embarazada por segunda vez de

un niño que, otra vez, no nació vivo (fui la única sobreviviente), a catequizar a un pueblo indio. (53)

It is meaningful that the only survivor is Estela, a mestiza woman, after enduring all the patriarchal social structure in the colonial period.<sup>88</sup> While Hernando represents the mediator between two different worlds, Estela performs exactly the same role as he did in the past. Their similar positions portray an interesting result of changing roles due to circumstances beyond control. This change determines how the female voices have been recovered through Estela and Lear's writing process.

Boullosa's posthuman society depicts a place where language and writing as material are confronting a dematerialization due to the omnipresence of technology. As Andy Clark notes, Boullosa takes a similar stance that being cyborgs is "not in the merely superficial sense of combining flesh and wires but in the more profound sense of being human-technology symbionts" (3). For these reasons, becoming a posthuman poses some ontological questions on our way of being human. In this novel, Boullosa informs how the human body becomes a cyborg and how the physical transformation is internalized. This transformation changes the way both the characters and the readers see the material world, especially, the meaning of historical text. From her perspective as a writer, she recognizes the importance of text as a material object that embodies subjectivity and different narrative discourses and distinguishes humans from cyborg. In addition to exposing these points of difference, Boullosa plays with the overlapped aspects between human and cyborg.

The posthuman figure in this novel shows the way of transition and "of its roots in some of the most basic and characteristic facts about human nature" (Clark 3). The most basic fact of human nature is presented with the obsession of writing through the lens and voice of different

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<sup>88</sup> In *Duerme*, mestiza is presented with an in-between and complex identity that rejects specific gender norm, this novel shows the image of mestiza as a female subject who survived from a patriarchal society.

characters' classes and genders. For all three narrators, writing is an important way that proves their history either individual or collective. The written texts are the medium that helps humans to feel that they hold past, present, and future. Especially, in the futuristic and apocalyptic world where the concept of history, race, and gender differs from the past, the written text in general still determines Lear's voice as the only survivor who wants to preserve writing as material. Lear ends the narrative in order to return to the power of textual territory:

No puedo permanecer ya con mi comunidad. Voy a intentar brincar al territorio que puedo compartir con Estela y Hernando, volverme de palabras. Creo que puedo hacerlo. Es cierto que aquello que habita un libro es un territorio verdadero.  
(Boullosa, *Cielos de la tierra* 368)

The text mediates the way that all three narrators meet and communicate with each other. This fictional space decenters masculine narrative discourse through Estela and Lear who revisit Hernando's version of his-story. By adding and removing contents, the two women disrupt the male-dominated history and reinterpret women representation in the traditional text. As such, the three narratives reach to establish an alternative history of human that recovers the voices of subjugated others and offer the readers to reexamine the value of writing as a medium that connects our past, present, and future.

## CHAPTER 4. WRITING AND POSTHUMANISM IN *LA NOVELA PERFECTA*

Boullosa's nomadic stance as a writer by being both in the U.S and Mexico deepens her perspectives as a nomad. For Boullosa, both Mexico and the U.S turn out to be the symbolical place where she creates her imaginary world based on her real experience. In one of her interviews, she confessed that *La novela perfecta* is a memory of Brooklyn, which represents a distinctive place by different ethnic groups: "La casa (una *brownstone* de cuatro pisos más el sótano, como la nuestra) carecía de toda división interior, no había una sola pared tampoco pisos entre los niveles, ni siquiera separando el sótano. Era un inmenso cascarón vacío, pura piel o solo el esqueleto del XIX" (Prieto 75). Like the gothic style setting as we see in her first novel, *Mejor desaparece*, the novel projects a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere with the labyrinthine house of Paul Lederer. Since the novel is dedicated to Adolfo Bio Casares, it is full of fantastic and surreal elements that show "lo bioyborgesbianco" (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 54).<sup>89</sup> Especially, this novel recalls *La invención de Morel* (1940) by Bio Casares; Like Morel's machine invention, which is capable of reproducing reality, Lederer's creation, with its sensor underneath its tongue, externally projects the fiction of the imagination on to real life.

*La novela perfecta* invites readers to be part of the imaginary world where reality and virtual reality intersect each other and create a chaotic world. The novel discloses an imaginary world presented by a first person narrator, Vértiz, who is a writer living in Brooklyn. The readers

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<sup>89</sup> When Mateos-Vega interviewed Boullosa about *La novela perfecta*, Boullosa stated that: "Esta novela también es un homenaje a Jorge Luis Borges y Adolfo Bioy Casares. Cuando éramos jóvenes escritores, a los de mi generación no nos atraía la literatura realista ni costumbrista. A dorábamos a Borges y a Bioy, era nuestro signo de rebeldía y de pertenencia. Queríamos entrar en sus mundos imaginarios, ricos en posibilidades narrativas, pero también de reflexión. Entonces, este libro es mi novela escrita a los 50 años de edad, acerca de mis pasiones adolescente" ("*La novela perfecta* refleja mis pasiones de adolescente").

encounter a main plot about the perfect novel project; The perfect novel project starts by putting a sensor underneath Vértiz's tongue. The sensor connects to his cerebral nerves to project and represent his complete narrative including his personal emotion, color, light, odor, and sense of touch.<sup>90</sup> According to Lederer, the "perfect novel" is a novel that "tal como tú la ves en tu cabeza, tal como la cargas íntegra en tu imaginación, sin robarle una frase, un parlamento, una imagen, un sentimiento, una sensación, una idea, sin quitarle un pelo a su atmósfera...Idéntica a sí misma" (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 25). This seems like a perfect representation of an imagination. All the senses transmit what Vértiz imagines, sees, and feels, so that he, as a writer, can be liberated from the confine of verbalizing his imagination into only words. This revolutionary way of writing invites readers to perceive the exact world as the writer envisions.

This novel demonstrates the perspective of a writer who lives in a high technology era. Traditionally, writing is considered a job that only humans can do, but nowadays we see a machine writing a novel in real life. The main plot of the novel is based on the post-human context in which everyone believes that "un futuro próximo podremos comunicarnos con señales que harán innecesaria el habla. Tendremos medios más adecuados para expresar nuestros pensamientos y sentimientos" (120). While *Cielos de la tierra* reconsiders the value of writing as a narrative discourse in the posthuman era, this novel focuses on the writing process related to technology and the meaning of literary novel in the posthuman era.<sup>91</sup> Boullosa poses some questions on the

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<sup>90</sup> The machine-writer in this novel reminds us of a news article about a Japanese A.I program that co-authored a short-form novel and passed the first round of screening for a national literary prize in 2006. The novel titled "The Day a Computer Writes a Novel" was written by A.I program's development team at Future University Hakodate in Japan and they selected words and sentences and set parameters for A.I write a novel autonomously (Olewitz).

<sup>91</sup> Oswaldo Estrada indicates the difference between *Cielos de la tierra* and *La novela perfecta* regarding the act of construction and deconstruction of Mexican history: "Si en *Cielos de la tierra* el personaje de Lear viaja desde el futuro de un mundo conocido como L'Atlántide, en una burbuja de aire, hasta las puertas de un México colonial para salvar a su comunidad del olvido, para volver a sus orígenes y 'reconstruir lo que los hombres de la Historia se empeñaron en destruir' (16), en *La novela perfecta* el escritor vuelve al

possibility of a complete representation of others' thoughts, which we may have thought about once in our lifetime: wouldn't a novel be perfect if we could share the complete imagination of the writer? Would the advancement of technology in the post-human era help us to share the exact feelings or thoughts of the author? Because of this background setting of the virtual effect created by Lederer, some critics already have analyzed the relation between technology and literature in the post-human context. For instance, Laura R. Loustau borrows the new term "tecno-escritura" used in "Tecno-escritura: literatura y tecnología en América Latina" by Andrew Brown which indicates the importance of the interconnection between literature and technology that will provide a better perspective: "ofrece una perspectiva única... de cómo la modernidad, y la postmodernidad, se está[n] articulando y rearticulando en América Latina" (737). However, Loustau pays attention to the tension between the real and virtual writer and questions the impossibility of translating one's consciousness (and identity) in her article, "Tecnología y literatura en *La novela perfecta* de Carmen Boullosa." She argues the role of Vértiz as a writer who demonstrates the essence of writing by comparing it with the other extreme presented by Lederer's virtual reality. As Loustau pinpoints, this novel does not conclude with the failure of the perfect novel but the discovery of Vértiz's own novel.

In this novel, there are multiple layers of stories. As we see in the title, the first story is about Lederer and Vértiz's perfect novel project. Even though this perfect novel brings a lot of attention as the main plot, readers find different layers of stories inside and around of it. For example, while reading the perfect novel story, readers meet the second story, which is Vértiz's diamond story, created by himself without any interruption by Lederer. The third layer of the story

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momento inicial del encuentro entre Europa y la América indígena para recalcar su novedad, su fantasía, incluso su potencial literario, precisamente por presentarse como espejo 'feroz y devorante de la realidad' ("La destrucción" 217) en un punto simultáneo de destrucción y creación" ("Memorias futuristas" 56).

could be found from readers' perspective since it is about the relations between Vértiz and other characters. The last story is the entire novel that Vértiz (or Boullosa) is writing. Considering the fact that this novel is about a novel, all these multiple layers of stories encourage us to think about how a novel becomes a novel and what a novel truly means. The title catches readers' attention to anticipate a perfect machine-writing aided by technology, however, multiple layers of stories inside of the novel rather illustrate the impossibility of the single perfect novel.<sup>92</sup> By showing various types of stories, Boullosa demands readers to be part of the formation of a novel.<sup>93</sup> Not a single machine makes a perfect novel, but unexpected stories become the perfect novel.

At first glance, this novel appears to illustrate how a perfect novel is born via technology, however, it examines how unexpected stories with a figment of human imagination and coincidence could make a perfect novel in the posthuman era. For Boullosa, there is no need to worry about robots or machines taking over the human writer's job in the future. To analyze the value of a novel written by a human, first, I will focus on the reason why the perfect novel ends in failure. In this first part, we will see how a tiny sensor projects one's imagination like a movie projection and creates a hyperreality that engenders complete chaos with lots of simulacres. In the second part, I will point out how Vértiz successfully creates his own diamond novel despite the failure of the perfect novel project. By seeing Vértiz's novel more closely, we will understand what could be an authentic (and almost perfect) novel. In the last part, I will introduce the aesthetics of cracks that make an *un-perfect* novel a perfect novel. The aesthetics of cracks celebrate beauty of

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<sup>92</sup> The multiple layers of stories that are found in this novel are similar to the literary technique of metafiction, especially, a framed story which is a literary technique of telling a story within a story. However, *La novela perfecta* does not exactly fit in the character of the framed story. While a framed story is used to connect one story to another to be able to offer readers a better understanding of the narrative, each story in this novel totally has its own space and never crosses with another. This novel even seems to play and twist with the postmodern metafiction and goes beyond its uniqueness.

<sup>93</sup> Casanova denominates this novel, which is full of interactions between the author and readers, as "la novela leída-escrita" (134).

contingency, marginal space, in-between space of the narrative. These cracks in the novel display different perspectives of stories that are unique, authentic, and open space to readers to be part of the novel.

#### 4.1 The Failure of the Perfect Novel – “A Machine is not Perfect”

The perfect novel project proposed by Lederer cannot but fail. The technic was successfully worked out but there are other side effects that they have not expected. So what are the reasons to make his ambitious project of writing a perfect novel to fail? What kind of problem would occur if we reach to translate the exact internal experiences of a writer without any writing process but projecting a visual? What makes novel a novel? To answer all these questions, I would like to address, first, how Vértiz’s authorship has weakened throughout the project with Lederer, second, what the consequence of the project is.

The sensor connected to Vértiz’s brain transmits exactly what he thinks at that moment. As Vértiz admits that “los personajes hechos, la tensión ... ¡Era perfecto, perfecto, era lo que yo querría que fuera mi novela!” (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 42) The sensor even delivers five senses, thoughts, and memories. However, during the process of writing the perfect novel, he feels that he also turns into a part of the novel directed by Lederer and, finally, he feels a huge sense of loss of the authority as the writer:

En mi novela, cuando mi novela era mía, yo había pensado dejarlos aquí y pasar a la siguiente escena sin regodearme en el coito, pero en casa del vecino, la cogada ocurriendo con tal lujo de detalles y sensaciones (porque todo lo sentíamos, era como que, al tiempo que los veía, yo también *actuaba* sus partes), lo dejé seguir.  
(44)

As we see in the passage above, Vértiz realizes that the narrative full of vivid details and sensual descriptions started to escape from him. When he writes a novel, he used to control the scene, but now he turns into a part of the narrative without any control because it is taken by Lederer. Vértiz



becomes the one who possesses the power over the narrative and Vértiz turns into one of his own creative works.

The novel is presented like a movie. Instead of “writing” a novel with a pen, Vértiz “open his eyes” to write with a sensor. The “el ojo de la novela” presents the narrative like we see through a camera lens: “El Ojo de la novela deja la ambulancia, corre de vuelta las seis cuadras, sobe por la pared del Hotel Génova, cruza la terraza con árboles, entra por la ventana al cuarto de Ana y la encuentra con el teléfono al oído, esperando todavía alguna respuesta de la recepción” (103-104). Laura Mulvey argues that the one who sees, which is the eye of the camera in movies, has a male gaze that is active and oppressive. On the other hand, the one who is seen called *to-be-looked-at-ness* and is passive and submissive (62). We can see here how the power relation between Vértiz and Lederer changes through the process of writing. And this is the reason why Vértiz feels uncomfortable working with Lederer. Finally, Vértiz loses all his interest in the writing:

Pero extrañamente, cuando las cosas iban a ponerse preciso bien, yo comencé a sentir una asomadita de aburrición. [...] Pasé la noche del jueves con los ojos pelones, imaginando las otras novelas. Lo que fuera, menos la que ya me sabía. [...] Imaginaba, imaginaba sin encontrar bien qué, como papaloteando imaginaba, no quería continuar contando lo que ya conocía. (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 91)

The flatness and agitation while at work forces him to imagine a different, unexpected novel. The deviation from writing with the sensor is getting more and more frequent. Consequently, he reaches the moment that he becomes part of his novel with the other characters that he created such as Ana and Manuel: “El autor, yo, irrumpe en la escena, estoy en el centro de su habitación” (96). While Vértiz turns into an object by Lederer in the previous scene, this time, Vértiz actively participates in his own novel.

Above the presence of Vértiz in the novel, there is another eye called “Ojo de la novela,” which follows the same gaze as the author, Vértiz. It can be understood as a similar perspective as

Vértiz's due to the following sentence: "Estamos – quiero decir, el Ojo de la novela – con Ana bajo la pila de ropa sucia" (108). It normally appears when it describes the background rather than the characters, but the gaze is unstable as it disappears and appears in the middle of the narration. When Vértiz tells about Ana's dream regarding Moctezuma in Tenochtitlan of XVI, he admits that "el ojo de la novela" lost its control over Ana's story: "se ve una escena en la que se pierde el Ojo de la novela" (110). In this part, Ana's dream could be interpreted as a moment of recognizing her desire which is finally revealed through the unconscious state. And this is the moment of inversion between the author and his characters. Even though Vértiz is the one who created Ana, Ana started to escape from the control of the writer, Vértiz. The story of Ana and Manuel seems like it is entering into a state of disorder and dismantles the whole narrative. Finally, Vértiz confesses that:

Apenas pensarlo, me distraigo. No puedo continuar con mi retahíla de mentiras. Me repugna. Dije "distraigo", ¿qué estoy diciendo?, la verdad es que me dio algo parecido a vergüenza, me cayó el veinte de que mi arrojo era una bobada... Perdí por completo el hilo. (111)

The story of Ana and Manuel turns into a "retahíla de mentiras" because he cannot be truly engulfed in his writing. The phrase "retahíla de mentiras" indicates how Boullosa perceives a novel as a fiction. Even though creative writing premises one's invented story, for Boullosa, a novel includes an author's sincere and authentic imagination, not a harsh lie. When Vértiz starts to question what he is doing with Lederer, Vértiz and Lederer's opinions conflict in regards to their project. Vértiz tries to be part of his novel as Cervantes did, but Lederer does not agree with his experimental style of writing.

Eventually, the failure of the perfect novel project is caused by the confusion between the real and hyperreal during the writing process.<sup>94</sup> When Vértiz waits for Lederer to get him a coffee,

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<sup>94</sup> Oswalda Estrada explains the reason of the failure of the perfect novel project indicating the peculiarity of a literary space: "la máquina de Paul Lederer falla porque intenta transcribir un producto pulido y

he sees a vivid image of his fictional character, Ana, in the house:

Ahí estaba: no tenía comparación ni con un lienzo ni con la pantalla, porque tenía toda la textura de lo real sin el resplandor de la luz artificial. Podía ser como una pintura, pero era más que una hiper-realista, más también que una fotografía: era literalmente un trozo de realidad con la salvedad de que representaba algo totalmente irreal, un trozo de realidad que no obedecía las órdenes de lo real, que se había alborotado, que se había deshecho y reconvertido de una manera anómala. (122)

The vivid image of Ana is presented strongly such as a piece of reality. It can be said that it is like real but, at the same time, it is very surreal. This sentence sounds contradictory but this is what hyperreality means. To quote Jean Baudrillard, contemporary media such as television, film, and internet associated with the postmodern era questions the uniqueness of objects and situations. The copy threatens the authority of the original product by representing it almost perfectly. I locate the threat to the originality in the narrative in a similar context of losing the authority of the author. The abundant copies make the author irrelevant.<sup>95</sup>

The hyperreality generated by both Vértiz and Lederer, finally, overlaps with the reality and the fictitious world. First, it starts in Vértiz's dream in which he confuses his wife Sarah with Movita, who is an attractive dark-skinned woman created by Vértiz:

[...] y entonces, frente a nosotros, aparecía una mesita ovalada y baja, y sobre ella estaba ahora Sarah, Sarah que era Sarah pero al mismo tiempo era mi joven actriz imaginada, la Movita, la misma cara de mi Sarah, más una tupida cabellera de mestiza, un cuerpo también de mestiza, la hermosa piel morena, no apenas aceitunada como la de mi Sarita sino morena morena, y ante nuestros ojos la Sara-Movita comenzaba a desvanecerse hasta que no quedaba de ella sino la cara, como una máscara, una cara sin cabeza, y en breve ya sólo su sonrisa.... (139)

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terminado, cuando el verdadero oficio de novelista es, diría Boullosa, 'entrar en aquello que no se puede decir' ("Anatomía" 98), en un territorio ambiguo de realidades y fantasías, de pocas luces e innumerables sombras, hecho de memorias intransigentes o destinos caprichosos que viajan del pasado al futuro para intransigentes o destinos caprichosos que viajan del pasado al futuro para instalarse en el presente ("Memorias" LV).

<sup>95</sup> The weakened image of the writer reminds us of Roland Barthes' theory written in *The death of the author*. Barthes takes the authority of the author from the writing and undermines the criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity.

This passage above offers a hyperrealistic description of the female character that the illusion of multiplicities images of Sarah and Movita makes Vértiz confused. The overlapped images of the real person and his fictitious character in his dream confuses Vértiz. Starting from his dream, the chaos becomes severe even in his real life. The image of Sarah-Movitah is unique in the way that it is presented as a grotesque and fragmented body in which the face of Sarah-Movitah is disarticulated.<sup>96</sup> Not only the images of women but also other male characters are duplicated and overlapped in deformed ways:

La Sarita, sentada en la cama con los ojotes pelados como los de Ana Martín (sí se parecen), con su cara muy de Movita – sí, sí, se parecía tanto a la actricilla de mi nueva novela –, también estaba totalmente aborregada por el sueño. [...] estaba retacadísimo, atestado de gente, la más repetición de los mismos, ¿cuántos habría?, ¿seis Manueles, trece Anas, veinticinco hijitas de Ana, una docena del hijo de Manuel? (141)

It is a complete chaos of simulacres; the copied image of Movita is growing faster and faster until the spacious house of Lederer is finally full of simulacres and as a result, it is impossible to distinguish which one is the original. Vértiz's description of the substance is something in-between

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<sup>96</sup> The grotesque images are often found in Boullosa's novels. Burke concludes her paper on three novels of Boullosa by affirming that: "Boullosa's *Son vacas, somos puercos, Isabel*, and *Cielos de la tierra* all involve bizarre cases of cannibalism that serve to underscore the author's own concerns regarding the destructive impulses behind human behavior" ("Consuming the Other" 178). While *Cielos de la tierra* includes images such as anthropophagi and deformed body that explores "primal and sexual aggression", *La novela perfecta* includes another image of disarticulated and broken bodies caused by the machine of hyperreality (182). When Vértiz realizes that the perfect novel project is going to be ended in failure losing his authority as a writer, he claims that: "¡Y qué dicha la mía, imaginar lo mío sin compartirlo con nadie, sin que otro lo perciba, sin que mis 'cosas' salgan como en chorro de diarrea chutando hacia el ancho mundo, vueltas mierda!" (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 130). It is easy to link the grotesque images to the cannibalism theory of Mikhail Bakhtin who interpreted the grotesque body as a subversive way to protest against the authority by emphasizing the open (the mouth, the anus, the vagina, etc), the penetrative (the nose, the penis, etc), and the "lower stratum" (belly, womb, etc) which is the place of rebirth (303–436). Especially, when the narrator says "mis 'cosas' salgan como en chorro de diarrea chutando hacia el ancho mundo" can be interpreted as a process of producing degrading material which connects degradation to renewal. However, the grotesque body in Boullosa's novels is not related to the grotesque body as a creative and subversive meaning as of Bakhtin's. Rather, the grotesque images are presented as a symbol of dehumanization. The broken body and duplicated body only show how one can lose uniqueness easily with the machine and how it makes a chaotic world at the end.

touchable and untouchable: “*se traspasaban*, como si fueran transparentes, pero no eran transparentes” (142). They are not an illusion nor a human being. It is a chaotic world created by Lederer and Vértiz with a sensor that inverts reality and fiction. This in-between substance links to Braidotti’s explanation of a posthuman body:

The posthuman body is not merely split or knotted or in process: it is shot through with technologically mediated social relation. It has undergone a meta(l)morphosis and is now positioned in the spaces in-between the traditional dichotomies, including the body-machine binary opposition. In other words, it has become historically, scientifically and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically mediated extensions. (“Affirming the Affirmative”)

The posthuman extends the meaning of body and understands it within a social, cultural, and technological transition. Also, in the posthuman view, cognition is understood as a broader sense that extends far beyond consciousness into other neurological brain processes. In this context, analyzing the nature of these multiple images of Movita is pointless. Rather, we should pay close attention to the cognitive process of the narrator who experiences a “nonconscious cognition” (Hayles, *Unthought* 9).<sup>97</sup>

The novel maximizes the complexity of the cognitive process of the narrator by demolishing the boundary between real and fiction. At some point, Lederer and Vértiz go into their novel:

Hasta ahí, va, me fue de algún modo soportable porque yo había sido ya presentado como un personaje más de la novela. Pero en una de esas vi al Lederer también, dos, diez, veinte Lederers, y unos eran cercenados por los diamantes voladores, sus cadáveres eran los únicos varones en medio de esa mortandad de mujeres. (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 149)

The multiplication or proliferation is a complete moment of destruction that occurs with violence.

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<sup>97</sup> In *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious*, Katherine Hayles’ explains the nonconscious cognition process which is applicable not only to humans but to all forms of life including unicellular organisms and plants.

The tragic ending of Lederer has been foreshadowed from the beginning of the novel when he started to use the perfect novel for the material needs. Ironically, Lederer is victimized by the symbol of the material: a diamond. The diamond represents the subject of Vértiz's second novel and turns into a cruel instrument to penetrate the real world. Ultimately, the diamond destroys his image (or maybe the real Lederer) that leads to his complete destruction:

El agua apagó la maquinaria y con ella paró la danza de los diamantes, de los cuerpos rotos o no-rotos pero desnudos de sentido. Sólo quedaba la sangre del Lederer, su cuerpo mutilado por el filo de la carrera de los diamantes. (151)

All the stories that appeared in the narrative finally come together as tangled story threads. At the beginning of the novel, it seems like there was no relation between the story of Ana and Vértiz's diamond story, but they finally become connected. As we see in the image of Sarah-Movitah, the image of Lederer is also presented as disarticulated and incomplete.<sup>98</sup>

The failure of the project ironically offers a new novel for Vértiz. As Vértiz confesses, “Yo no era autor de eso. Yo no puedo ser autor de eso. Era, sobre todo, una imagen SIN autor” (144), the author and the text were dissolved by images without and authorial presence. All the chaos makes the writer “hipnotizar” (149) and he loses the authority as a writer. However, what comes after all the destruction is not a simple failure of the perfect novel project but remains significant to the readers. According to Boullosa's idea about a novel as a literary genre, the words need to be

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<sup>98</sup> The image of “incomplete body” is strongly presented in Boullosa's early works such as *Mejor desparece* (1987) and *Violenta pureza* (1988). In these two collaborative works between text and visual images with Magali Lara, both artists reveal the other side of feminine body full of violence, loneliness, and melancholy. The body which usually is described as an assembly of segmented organ in both artists' works represents the frustration of female body victimized by the patriarchal society. Also, they criticize that the female body has been presented as a fantasy of the “others.” The reflection of the mirror alludes to how female subjects remain as a limited representation by the “others.” Their work tries to explain another way to tell the narrative and creates a space where women could be a complete self instead of being a fragmented part of the body. To shift the male-centered narrative, which is generated by the absolute power of the word as masculine, both Boullosa and Lara approach carefully to the narrative to evoke how the “words” or “texts” have represented the female subject as a “reflection” and have erased the female voices from the narrative.

demolished “para convertirse en materia viva, en materia carnal, con corazón propio, palpitante, y es entonces cuando se vuelve a significar” (“La destrucción” 215).<sup>99</sup> It is important to indicate that the deconstruction of Boullosa is not led to the pessimistic ending but implies another creation. It is worth noting that Boullosa defines the words as an operator “to remove, destroy, and make it alive again (para desnudarlas, destruirlas y hacerlas de nuevo vivas)” (217). In my opinion, this concept of destruction is also closely related to the Derridean “deconstruction.” In the famous essay, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1970) later published as chapter ten of *Writing and Difference*, Derrida decentralizes the discourse and the origin of mythology and construct his own discourse which is “out of nothing” (285). The Derridean deconstruction is a reinterpretation of a center-less and formless structure that is still safe in the world of play. In this sense, the perfect novel could be produced in the process of destruction of writing in which a new creation is made by writers or readers.

#### **4.2 Vértiz’s Authentic Novel – “My Novel is a Perfect Novel”**

Among the process of writing the novel of Ana and Manuel, the story of diamond is the only novel that is considered to be both authentically and accidentally created by Vértiz. Loustau mentions that the story of diamond, which emerges from Vértiz’s mind from the cracks of unconsciousness while he works on the first story of Manuel and Ana, is the one that belongs to him. The two presented stories seem not related one and another because they do not share the same characters, plot, time, and space. When Lederer continues to interrupt the story of Ana and

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<sup>99</sup> As we can see in the other novels by Boullosa, texts and words are always destroyed and constructed by the writer. The novel itself is a process of destruction. It is noted obviously in a poem but also it can be seen in novels. If the words make cracks to destroy, characters participate actively to destroy the fiction and finally, our reality being threatened by them. Therefore, the real world could be seen from different perspectives, and that is another reality that we have never take into consideration.

Manuel, Vértiz encounters an inspirational moment to write his own novel. His diamond novel starts with an accidental circumstance when he sees the business card of Leon Tigranes:

Fue como si la hubiera visto en la tarjeta de presentación que me dio el árabe.  
¿Cómo les explico? Eso que la gente común llama “la inspiración” me había  
visitado, me cayó de golpe. (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 124)

According to the passage, one must remember that it is an unexpected moment when the story of diamond appeared in his mind. In this sense, the reason why he started to write the story of diamond is very different from the story of Ana and Manuel. While the story of Ana and Manuel is intentionally planned by Vértiz and Lederer, the new story of a diamond which is about Henry Kaplan, who is a rich Jewish immigrant in Brooklyn, New York in the late thirties “le cayó de golpe” (124). The story about a diamond does not go deep into the narrative, but it is enough to convey to readers the fundamental theme of the novel including characters. The most notable thing in the story of diamond is that the narrative mainly focuses on the female character Movita. Even though the story starts with Harry Kaplan, the diamond dealer walking with his family in Central Park, most of the story is about the Mexican actress, Movita.

The main story seems like a romance between Henry and Movita, but the story deals more with how a coincidental event could engender an unexpected result. All the accident started with the “defectos inconfesable” (128) which is the varicose veins of the actress. Ironically, that small misunderstanding victimizes Movita and causes her tragic ending. The fortuity or contingency is not only a special theme for the diamond novel but also it is easily found in Julio Cortázar’s novels.<sup>100</sup> However, the diamond novel represents the fortuity and how the fortuity victimizes the woman character. The last part of the diamond novel confirms the irony of the fortuity in our life:

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<sup>100</sup> Chris Schulenburg indicates the similarity between the Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (1963) and Boullosa’s *La novela perfecta* in terms of hypertextuality. He proclaims that “anti-linear narrative structure anticipates nicely the elements of choice, reader interaction, and infinite inter – (and intra) textual linkings that become



Todos se juegan la vida – y la fortuna – mientras Movita continúa siendo vendida y comprada por los estudios sin jamás hacer una película, como el sueño de una que será y nunca fue. (129)

The biggest difference between the Cortazanian fortuity and the diamond story's is how the narrative expresses the consequences and values the unexpected accident. More specifically, while Cortazanian fortuity focuses more on the chain of fortuity, the diamond story focuses on the tragic result of the female character. The ending with writer's intention makes this story less open-ended than Cortázar's novels. In this sense, the diamond story is the real novel, at least, for him. After writing (or thinking) this novel, Vértiz states that:

De un golpe vi la novela-diamante, claro que sin detalles, aún desarmada, como un bulto, vil trama, piedra bruta nomás pero ya novela, como mandada a hacer para mí, para que yo la hiciera. [...] ¡Mío, mío! ¡Dejar mi cabeza correr por donde nadie puede vigilar, juzgar, marcar, decir o hasta hurtar! (130)

The diamond novel finally turns out to be "his" novel. This part is where we could see what the novel is for Vértiz. While most novels presuppose some potential readers to acquire meaning as a novel, Vértiz redefines the meaning of his text by maximizing the role of the author. For Vértiz, writing is more than publishing, it is an important process of recognizing his identity as a writer and this could be found in Vértiz's self-affirmation. Despite the failure of the perfect novel project with Lederer, "his perfect novel" is situated in the author's consciousness where no one else can interrupt it or possess it.

So how could he write the perfect novel? What makes Vértiz different from Lederer? As I mentioned in the first part, compare to other characters, Vértiz has an unstable identity. If Sarah

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second nature to the hypertextual aesthetic process. Both Cortázar's novelistic experiment and hypertext also share a ludic treatment of their respective artistic spaces; implied author and reader alike cannot help but delight in the truly odd narrative paths revealed, followed or rejected" (438). As Schulenburg mentions, both novels maximize the conversation between readers and the writer. However, what I want to compare in this part is the thematic similarity between the two novels.

and Lederer set their primary goal in life as social and economic success, Vértiz holds a far from realistic goal and is sunk into his literary world. In terms of racial identity, while Sarah and Lederer have a fixed identity, Vértiz has an in-between identity that is located in the boundary between two different worlds. Since he is a Mexican immigrant living in the U.S, and using both English and Spanish, he does not belong exactly to one culture or another. This is why he seems unstable without confidence in his career. However, his in-between identity turns into an important key to be able to write his own authentic novel at the end of the narrative.

The in-between identity of Vértiz evokes a “zone of indetermination” (173) of Deleuze that involves an interchange between two or more elements. The zone of indetermination is also a zone of indiscernibility where is a region of mutation and a milieu of becoming. This alternative zone of Deleuze and Guattari is fluid and makes a protean subject born that represents diasporic experience instead of any binary division. As some critics have noted, Boullosa’s “novel situates the social body’s interstices, where diverse experiences collide with each other and modify all established identities, as the sites of this aesthetics of destruction” (Khan 140). The unstable identity of Vértiz achieves to write his own authentic novel.

Therefore, the debate about the perfect novel is meaningless: the perfect novel could be defined differently because it is not about how it can be perfectly presented but how a reader can maximize an understanding or feeling about the narrative. Despite the advance of high technology, one’s imagination is impossible to be represented perfectly. The perfect novel is not about a perfect representation of one’s imagination but a maximization of one’s perception through the writer’s imagination, insight, and understanding. While Lederer is excited about finalizing the perfect novel, Vértiz wants to sink into his own novel:

Quería echarme a andar tras mi mercader de diamantes, la actricita en perpetua inacción y eterno estado de compra y venta, el doctor de las várices ... Perderme

con ellos. Olvidarme del mundo. Y no entregar a *nadie* mi novela. (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 131)

The different attitude of Vértiz toward the novel demonstrates how he defines the perfect novel. He underlines his possession of the diamond novel which helps him to forget about reality and totally being in his own literary world. The concept of the perfect novel also provides the importance of the text as a written form. Words are the basic elements that are necessary that offer a certain “form” or structure to the novel. We have seen along with the narrative that without words, the visual world could intensify the confusion. The multiplication of images puts the narrative in chaos and there is no space for the author to stay. Images dominate the novel and even threatens the real world. After all the grotesque things happened, Vértiz describes that: “no alcanza la palabra porque aquí había sangre, violencia, aunque era más, era peor que la violencia porque los protagonistas dejaban de ser protagonistas [...] Porque todo esto era frío, frío” (147). Therefore, the power of words is keeping them in a certain form so that they could not be over-controlled. For Vértiz, the novel should be located in between the unconsciousness (or imagination) of the author and the deliberate plan based on the author’s words.

Boullosa’s thoughts on what a good author should be help us to better understand the role of author.<sup>101</sup> The author’s role should be present firmly in the narrative, however, the author should remain as a destroyer instead of a creator or a constructor of the novel. It is obvious that the novel is a space where the author releases one’s memory but at the same time, it is reconstructed through a process of destruction. If we see this novel from the destructive way of writing, Vértiz is the one

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<sup>101</sup> Boullosa wrote an essay titled “La destrucción de la escritura” published in 1995. This short essay about her literary aesthetics was written for an invited talk from Brown University and Universidad de Guadalajara.

who keeps destroying each narrative. During the process of destruction, readers encounter what Boullosa called the “three dimensional mirror of literature”:

La literatura es un espejo complejo y de tres dimensiones materiales de este instinto de destrucción. En su primera dimensión, las palabras son partícipes activas de la destrucción. Esto es mucho más directo en el caso de la poesía, en ella la relación con la destrucción es en “activo”. [...] La verdad es que el novelista no construye, el novelista es un destructor. La realidad existe, está hecha. [...] Las novelas no andan sueltas esperando una voz que las narre. Ellas responden a otra verdad. (“La destrucción” 215-216)

Among literary genres, it is obvious that a novel contains more direct reference to the intention of the author in comparison to a poem. While innovative and destructive language and metaphors are easily found in a poem, the moment of destruction in a novel is less notable. According to Boullosa, it is a common myth that novels are less destructive because of the pressure of having “history” in the narrative. However, if the author’s role should be limited as a destroyer instead of a constructor or inventor, the poetic words exist both in a poem and in a narrative. Boullosa affirms how the words can be served as an instrument to crack the narrative and make creative destruction. The powerful role of words also could be found in *La novela perfecta*. For example, the words written in Leon Tigranes’ business card start to crack the narrative dominated with the visual effect that causes chaos. The few words trigger Vértiz’s inspiration to his own creative writing about diamond. Since a novel is structured by words and sentences, each word is powerful enough to crack and destroy the whole narrative.

Boullosa states that if the first dimension is related to words, the second dimension is linked to the contents of a novel. The body of a novel includes characters, structure and reflects our realistic concerns, thoughts, and social problems:

En la segunda dimensión del espejo del instinto de destrucción que es la literatura, los cuerpos que aparecen en la novela cobran forma y reflejan en activo los cuerpos del mundo, destrozándolos al darles su propia voluntad, nutriéndose de ellos, de su

carne y su sangre, dejándolos inertes, obligados a repensarse a sí mismos, a re-fracturarse, a volver a hacerse. (217)

In an ideal novel for Boullosa, the characters should appear vividly and actively not being a marionette of the author.<sup>102</sup> This is another way of impeding having a constructor figure of the author. The moment of destruction seems to be described as a chaotic moment but for the characters, this is a most liberating moment for them to live in narratives. In *La novela perfecta*, all the characters are vividly presented. They actively participate in the formation of writing by making different layers of stories. The tension between characters and the affirmation of Vértiz's voice at the end of the novel highlight the living characters in Boullosa's novel.

The third dimension is the climax of the destructive moment in which the novel not only reflects our reality but also twists it, mocks it, and criticizes it. This recalls the concept of "Esperpento"<sup>103</sup> which is a distortive way of reflecting the darker side of reality:

En su tercera dimensión se manifiesta el todo de su poder destructivo. Pone la realidad entera en entredicho. Ahí, los cuerpos en tres dimensiones, vivos y compuestos de palabras, forman un espejo feroz y devorante de la realidad. (217)

The different composition of words and vivid and unique characters depict twisted reality which questions what we see. Many times, in Boullosa's novel this distorted image of reality is easy to

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<sup>102</sup> *Don Quijote* is one of the classic novels that is considered to be a multi-layered and meta text where the characters, readers, and authors play multiple roles. For example, on the one hand, many characters in the novel abandon their position as observers or readers in order to enter into the Quixotic world, thus "transforming themselves into fictional characters and unconsciously participating in Quixotism" (Brookes 79). On the other hand, the readers participate in the novelistic world.

<sup>103</sup> Esperpento is a metaphor of deformed mirrors established by Spanish author Ramón del Valle-Inclán. In *Luces de Bohemia*, the idea of esperpento is declared by Max: "Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada. [...] Las imágenes más bellas en un espejo cóncavo son absurdas. [...] La deformación deja de serlo cuando está sujeta a una matemática perfecta. Mi estética actual es transformar con matemática de espejo cóncavo las normas clásicas" (132-133). According to Valle-Inclán, there are three ways of seeing the world artistically or aesthetically: "de rodilla, en pie o levantando el aire" (3-4); the first method is when the characters get a higher status compare to the narrator, the second method is a view of our own selves, and the third method is to look at the world from a higher plane and depict the characters with irony.

find in some disarticulated figures. To be specific, in *La novela perfecta*, when the story climaxes, all fictional characters merge into the real world. Then, Lederer and Vértiz disclose a brutal scene: “eran puros nádieles sin valor alguno enfrascados en su propia destrucción, enardecidos, embriagados, descorazonados” (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 145). The distortive images represent another side of reality that only the novel can present. Furthermore, this third dimension is the most important phase that decides whether the novel leaves something for readers to think of. *La novela perfecta* poses various questions related to novels, and each reader will take a moment to ruminate on these unanswerable questions. Boullosa does not want us to have the answer but to enjoy the moment of finding the answer.

What Boullosa does not say directly, but perhaps it is already implied in her text, is that the perfect novel could be defined differently depending on the writer (and maybe the reader, but this novel only focuses on the writer’s perspective). However, the following passage may help us to understand that the novel is not only about the story (or history):

La trama sí, yo podría compartirla, ¿pero qué es en el total de una novela? Cabe en la solapa. Y las solapas casi casi siempre mienten, ganchos trucados a medias. Las novelas están en otro sitio, en... Bueno, ya chole, esto no es tratado de crítica literaria. (131)

If a novel is all about plot and story, it should be contained within the book flap, but a novel is more than that. According to Boullosa, novels are in different places as we see Vértiz’s novel and other multiple layers of novels. Even though the novel does not give a clear definition of what the perfect novel is, we could guess it based on what we have read until now. The real novel (or perfect novel in this context) consists of different layers (at least three or more) that emerged in-between space of real life and imagination, the tension between the author and the fictional characters. The cracks that we find in the narrative destroy productively the narrative and, ultimately, reveal

another side of reality. While we encounter destructive narrative, the author performs a role as a destroyer of words, structure, characters, and even the narrative itself.

### **4.3 The Aesthetics of Cracks and Fissures - “An Un-perfect Novel is a Perfect Novel”**

Rather presenting one perfect novel using a technical sensor, Boullosa deals with multiple novels inside a novel and introduces the aesthetics of cracks and fissures. What I call the aesthetics of cracks indicate a literary device that could be found in in-between spaces and marginal spaces inside of the narrative. Through these cracks, first, we find unexpected stories that are not directly related to the main plot or main characters. Each story has its color that makes the novel more diverse and unique. Second, the stories emerging from cracks offer readers the joy of unpredictability that reflects our real life. An unpredictable episode started from a tiny casual incident intensifies the tension of the plot and makes readers to pay more attention to the narrative itself. Third, the stories along cracks make the whole narrative more complicated, and loosely connected stories keep the readers questioning on what the novel wants to tell. As Boullosa states, destructive writing should leave a big question mark at the end of the novel and the cracks definitely lead readers to questioning the novel. The aesthetics of cracks contrasts with the perfection and the accuracy of machines. By showing the failure of the perfect novel project using mechanical equipment, the novel manifests the aesthetics of cracks in literature. Vértiz and Lederer’s project about the perfect novel simultaneously fails and accomplishes his goal. Even though their first novel was not completed, Vértiz succeeds in finishing his perfect novel by examining multiple layers of stories along cracks.

In this part, I will develop further on the different layers of stories raised in the cracks and analyze the value and role of the stories inside of the entire novel. In this novel, there are four layers of stories. The first layer is Vértiz and Lederer’s perfect novel project, and the second layer

is Vértiz's diamond story that he defines it as his own and authentic novel. While the first two layers of stories are narrated from the fictional characters in the novel, the third and fourth layers are narrated from an omniscient viewpoint, broader than the characters' perspectives. The third layer is the story about Vértiz and his wife Sarah and the fourth layer is the entire novel of *La novela perfecta*. Since I have already analyzed on the first layer of stories previously, I will focus on the second, third, and fourth layers in this part. While Vértiz leads the first two stories, he becomes part of the other two stories. Considering Vértiz's different position in each story, each part examines different aspects of Vértiz. While the first layer deals with the perfect novel project, the second layer focuses on Vértiz's own diamond novel, the third layer illustrates Vértiz's personal character within the relation with Sarah, and the fourth layer demonstrates the tension between the real author, and the fictional author, Vértiz.

The second story about diamond contributes Vértiz to have the identity as writer and make Vértiz to be changed. After finishing the first chapter about the virtual novel with Lederer, Vértiz started to ponder the feeling toward his own novel. He is disillusioned by what impedes him and take him away from writing a novel:

Yo soy un escritor flojo- no lo niego- pero momentáneamente no es la flojera o la pereza lo que me domina, sino la desilusión. Mi novela quedó quemada, grabada, impresa en 404 Dean Street, en el cascarón vacío y rojizo de una brownstone sin paredes [...] (Boullosa, *La novela perfecta* 42)

Ironically, Vértiz's solid house, which locked Vértiz and his novel, is pure disillusionment made by Vértiz himself. The collaborative work with Lederer served as a momentum of thinking what novel means to Vértiz. At the begging of the novel, the narrative seems like it is about how both of them create the perfect novel through technology; however, the narrative actually deals with how the representation of the perfect novel is meaningless. Also, the tension between Vértiz and



Lederer makes Vértiz think about his authorship. Finally, Vértiz declares and confirms his possessive right to the novel:

Ahora que lo escribo, no sé quién lo formula antes, creo que fui yo, que yo acuñé la expresión “la novela perfecta”. Si de algo soy autor, es de esto. Pero apenas lo dije, el Lederer tomó la frase como si(e) fuera de él. El maldito Lederer. (47)

Vértiz uses the verb “acuñar” to emphasize that he is the only author of the perfect novel. While Lederer only uses the imagination and not wording any of the words to make a perfect novel, Vértiz makes the perfect novel by writing the actual words. It is a strong affirmation for him as a writer by stressing that the writing belongs to him:

Yo escribo cuando me da la gana – que es muy pocas veces, como di a entender cuando lo de llamarme flojo – y así hago porque es un asunto *mío*. No un asunto personal, no, pero *mío*. Entiendan bien a qué me refiero con *mío*: soy estreñido, soy lo que por ahí llaman personalidad anal, y he dicho *mío*. Eme, ¡acentuada, o. [...] Escribo porque es lo *mío* *mío*. Escribir es mi territorio. O era, porque ya no sé si escribo. (80)

The collaboration with Lederer evokes Vértiz’s passion for his writing. As Vértiz mentioned in the passage above, writing is where he stands and lives such as “territorio.” The moment when he writes his novel, he could be completely comfortable as an authentic writer without any economic or social obstacle.<sup>104</sup> Vértiz’s empowered authority as writer is also appeared through confirming the existence of readers. Vértiz is aware of readers calling them “chulísimo lector” (79). Vértiz’s confidence as a writer, finally, authorizes him as a true writer and the novel becomes authentic and

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<sup>104</sup> It is significant that his writing always reflects some multicultural background. For example, the novel was written collaboratively with Lederer and is a story about Ana and Manuel in Mexico City, and the other novel, only written by Vértiz, is about a Jewish guy whose name is Henry Kaplan who moved to New York. Both the Mexican and transatlantic figures of Henry Kaplan represent the personal experiences of Boullosa as an immigrant from Mexico to New York. Many of Boullosa’s works illustrate the transition of place and characters who embody in-between spaces.

perfect, at least for him. The name “Vértiz,” which sounds similar to “Veritas (truth)” in Latin, contains the meaning of the authenticity of writing.<sup>105</sup>

The third layer of the stories about Sarah and Vértiz discloses how Vértiz has formed his identity as a writer in comparison to Sarah. While Vértiz is presented as an ordinary Mexican writer lacking self-confidence in his social status, Sarah is presented as a highly competent American lawyer. Different social status and cultural background between them cause distance and isolation. From the beginning of the novel, readers understand that Vértiz is “un escritor flojo” who only has published a single novel. In comparison to Sarah’s great achievement as a lawyer, he has no self-confidence as a writer. When he describes his marriage life, he confesses:

Todo ha mejorado, menos yo. [...] Si yo hubiera sido Sarah, ni loca cargo conmigo a Dean Street. Me habría dejado por ahí como pudiera. Pero aunque pasaran los años, aunque ella hubiera hecho una carrera brillante en el bufete del padre y yo ninguna hacia ningún sentido, ella estaba convencida – porque es gringa – de que cualquier día de éstos mi segunda novela sí va a pegar y ¡a ganarnos la lotería, señores! Yo pus cuál fe. Soy, como dije, flojo, un holgazán. (15)

The sense of detachment from his wife is not only derived from socio-economic status but also a racial difference. He directly calls Sarah a “gringa” by indicating the different racial and social backgrounds from the narrator. Even though they live together, they live in a totally different world without real communication between them.

The failure of communication between Vértiz and Sarah is found in different parts of the novel. First, the actual conversation between them is barely found in the narrative. And even when they have a conversation, they speak English which is not the language that he uses in his novel (and this novel that we are reading). When the readers encounter the conversation between them

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<sup>105</sup> Zoya Khan agrees with the idea of Vettenranta who understands the name “Vértiz” in relation to “the social body” that intersects with different identities. Khan interprets Vértiz’s own name as “vertex” in Spanish which means a point of intersection (140).

in English, they could automatically find a certain distance due to the language difference. Language is more than a communication method. When Vértiz says, “[...] siempre hablamos en inglés porque la Sarita no le entra al español” (51), he confirms the divided world between them is also based on language. While English belongs to Sarah and her life, Spanish belongs to Vértiz and his Latin culture. When he describes a Dominican restaurant *Yayo*, he demonstrates a certain distance from Sarah: “El volumen de las pláticas, los olores, el aspecto de la gente, el decorado del *Yayo* y los guisos son un viaje: de pronto estamos en nuestras tierras. Ni qué decir que la Sarita odia el sitio, casi tanto como me gusta a mí” (86). Not only language but the food is another important factor that indicates a cultural barrier between them. These sense of distance also comes out in the physical distance between them:

El caso es que los días libres ella no para, si acaso está en casa, se esconde atrás de su remolino hace y hácele orden – hasta se anuda a veces un pañuelo Aunt Jemima a la cabeza -, baja y sube, no deja de menearse, va que vuela de un hilo. (53)

If we see the passage above, it is hard to find any physical contact between them. Their house described as “una *brownstone* sin paredes” is not a house without walls for them. Vértiz’s tension with Sarah in real life is comparable to his novel in an imaginary world. While Sarah symbolizes an obstacle for Vértiz, his novel gives him liberty. Sarah is a counterpart of Vértiz’s novel and each on them represents reason/emotion, reality/imagination, U.S/Mexico, and English/Spanish. From the opposite characters of Sarah and Vértiz, Boullosa, first, exposes the reason why Vértiz was supposed to be absorbed in his novel, second, blends the issue on cultural difference between U.S/Mexico into the personal relation between Sarah and Vértiz.

The fourth layer of the stories is the entire novel which includes all the stories and events that happened in this novel. It is understood that the entire novel is written by Boullosa, the real author; however, there is a twist at the narrative’s conclusion. The last page of the novel ending

with Vértiz's signature surprises and confuses readers. The indication "Fin" seems to be added by Boullosa, but it is actually written by Vértiz who confesses that everything that we have read such as Lederer's tragic death seems like a fantasy or illusion but is really what happened to Lederer: "El millón de dólares que me pagaron sigue en el banco porque la interrupción del trabajo no fue imputable a mí. La Sariux negoció bien el contrato" (153). Also, Vértiz admits that he is still writing his novel:

Por el momento, aquí escribiendo, si es que esto es escribir, me desahugué. Me siento mejor: ya no podía más. Terminé de contarlo. Como dice la canción, *¡Suspiro – suspiro! – Suuuspiro yo, suuuspiro cuando me encuentro a mi amooor*. Lo que aquí dije ocurrió. Ya quedó atrás. Lo he dividido en capítulos para tomar el aire de vez en vez y para aparentar que es una ficción. Pero no es mentira, aunque darlo por imaginado me alivie. Ocurrió. Fue verdad. *Es verdad*. Por un pelo existió la novela perfecta. (153)

Vértiz emphasizes the veracity of writing and also admits that the perfect novel existed at some point. He does not mention directly which one was closer to the perfect novel, but one thing that is clear about the perfect novel is what Vértiz was able to write and define for himself as the perfect novel. The last part of this novel keeps the tension between the real author and Vértiz. Especially, Vértiz's address adds verisimilitude to the novel:

Brooklyn, Nueva York, a 6 de enero del año 2005. Día de los Santos Reyes. ¡Que vivan Gaspar, Baltazar y Melchor!

Yo, Vértiz (153)

Vértiz's Mexican identity is also presented at the concluding remarks by stating "*Día de los Santos Reyes*." Lastly, his signature with the pronoun "Yo" emphasizes again his authorship of the entire novel. At the end of the novel, Boullosa hands over the narration to Vértiz and opens space for destructive writing.

*La novela perfecta* is a novel about novels. There is no doubt that technology improves many aspects of human life, but it may be asked whether technology changes the way of creative

writing. The narrative declares the failure of the perfect novel project by Lederer, who was victimized by his own machine, and demonstrates multiple layers of stories emerged along cracks and fissures of stories. Presenting the failure of the perfect novel project does not indicate an anti-post-humanism stance by refusing the technology related to human enhancement. Rather, the novel focuses on the value of writing in the new era.

Four layers of stories woven in one novel complicate the structure and broaden the boundaries between one story to another. While the main plot about the perfect novel project triggers Vértiz's passion for his own writing, the second layer about the story of a diamond turns into Vértiz's own novel. The third layer about Vértiz and Sarah gives readers a deeper understanding of Vértiz's cultural background as a Mexican immigrant in the U.S. The tension between Vértiz and Sarah represents Vértiz's struggle of his identity as a writer. The fourth layer, which is the entire novel embracing all inserted stories, presents readers with the tension between the real writer, Boullosa, and the fictional writer, Vértiz, and raises the final question on the authorship of the novel.

Through the different layers of the stories, Boullosa introduces the aesthetics of cracks that only a novel written by humans could provide. The aesthetics of cracks celebrates spontaneous writing merged in-between spaces in the narrative. These cracks in the novel play a prominent role in making destructive writing which creates different perspectives of stories that are unique and authentic. The characters move freely in each story instead of being controlled by the author. Also, multiple characters presented with similar portions blur the hierarchy based on the importance of the role between characters. To conclude, the stories that we are reading under the title of *La novela perfecta* are all about writers and writings. In this fictional world about novel, Boullosa manifests the contradictory way of seeing the world artistically and aesthetically. The multilayered stories in

the novel demonstrate writing with destructive creativity and a free imagination within a textual form.

## CHAPTER 5. A HISTORY TOLD BY A NONHUMAN AGENT IN *LAS PAREDES HABLAN*

In 2012, Boullosa wrote the script for Antonio Zavala's Mexican film *Las paredes hablan*. With the script of *Las paredes hablan*, Boullosa actively engaged "a project in which she, her actress daughter, and her son, Juan Aura (another of the film's producers), could work together" (Gallagher). She found a director and a production team who were willing to turn her script into the cerebral romance film *Las paredes hablan*. The film, set in the southern suburb of San Angel, was shot at Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City and at Molino de las Flores in Texcoco. Considering Boullosa's effort to make the film, *Las paredes hablan* occupies an important part of Boullosa's literary trajectory by continuing to disrupt the linear narrative forms and singular perspective of history and memory.

The script of *Las paredes hablan* has also published in the form of a novel in the same year when the film was released. Unlike film adaptations of novels,<sup>106</sup> *Las paredes hablan* is a film that appeared before Boullosa's novel. In this way, she created her written text based on the detailed visual medium of the film. Both the novel and the film cover three important historical events of the past three centuries in Mexico; Mexican Independence (1810), Mexican Revolution (1910), and the war on drugs (2010). Even though both novel and film deal with the three historical events in Mexico,<sup>107</sup> they are not mainly presented as the principal narratives but as background events

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<sup>106</sup> Among them, there are movies such as *Pedro Páramo* (1967) based on Juan Rulfo's novel, *Como agua para chocolate* (1992) based on Laura Esquivel's novel, *La casa de los espíritus* (1994) based on Isabel Allende's novel, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1999) based on Mario Vargas Llosa's novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001) based on Julia Alvarez's novel, *La fiesta del chivo* (2006) based on Carlos Fuentes' novel, *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (2007) based on Gabriel García Márquez's novel, *Arráncame la vida* (2008) based on Ángeles Mastretta's novel, *El secreto de sus ojos* (2009) based on Eduardo Sacheri's novel, *El tiempo entre costuras* (2013) based on María Dueñas, etc.

<sup>107</sup> While the film naturally marks the different periods of time through the actor and actress' way of dressing and the backgrounds, the novel indicates each year before starting a story of a different period.

behind the romance between the main characters, Javier and María. Boullosa has described this hopeless love narrative as a Mexican version of Romeo and Juliet.<sup>108</sup> Boullosa's narrative differs from the Shakespearean tragedy by reinterpreting this story throughout different centuries and situating Javier and María's romance within Mexican history.

One of the most notable features of this film is its nonhuman narrator. The story is told through the perspective of a wall in the house called Casa Espíritu. Similar to human narrators with human names, the nonhuman narrator also has a name. Casa Espíritu has been a witness for three centuries watching everything that happened there. Mexican paintings on the wall of Casa Espíritu also serve as other historical witnesses. When I asked Boullosa about the idea of using paintings in the film in an interview that I conducted with her, she asserts that:

I used Rivera, Velasco, because they are the hyper-classics. Most of them always are there in my life. Except, there is this private collection that has pieces that were taken out of the narrative and I wanted them in. I chose some that were like making an intrinsic part of the story. In this case, the script was written from the paintings. There were the paintings, then came the script. (Kim)

As we see in her interview, the paintings have a significant roll. The wall of Casa Espíritu, which the film describes as the “piedra cargada de recuerdos” (*Las paredes hablan*), narrates all three stories of María and Javier.

To underline the circularity of Mexican history, the film presents actors Kuno Becker and María Aura in each iteration of Javier and María's story. Through a similar structure, all three different stories are naturally connected. In an interview with Zavala, the director of the film stated, “the past is an echo of the present time” (Gallagher). The connection between the past and present

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<sup>108</sup> In an interview about *Las paredes hablan*, she commented that: “De esta manera era una especie de Romeo y Julieta mexicano contado en tres tiempos, un Romeo y Julieta que se juran amor eterno y que regresa cada 100 años para intentar volverlo a conseguir. Esto era la idea para una película que empezaron a producir y filmar” (Boullosa, “Conviven literatura”).



also alludes another connection to our future. Through the three parallel stories of Javier and María, the film portrays a visual journey of the memory of the house that tells about the past, present, and even the future of Mexico.

Javier and María's story is presented with circularity and simultaneity which elucidates the history not as a linear development but as a circulating event. Eventhough each story of Javier and María takes place in a different century, the film connects these fractured segments, switching back and forth between time periods. Time functions as the only thing that changes while the other elements such as space, the love story between Javier and María, and the tragic ending are repeated throughout the centuries. Each story of María, Javier, and Esperanza travels beyond the time that makes it possible through ordinary objects such as paintings. Also, the film punctuates the scene changes between different timelines by using transitional devices. For example, when the film shifts from one period to another, an echoing voiceover calls out to María right before the scene changes. Later, this transition is marked by the physical touch between Javier and María.

The circularity of history also could be found in the previous analysis of *Duerme* through the nomadic subject, Claire. While *Duerme* displays the circularity of history focused on Claire's mutable identity, repeated unconsciousness, and the movement from one place to another, *Las paredes hablan* exhibits three different periods with parallel structure. The film structure emphasizes the circularity of human history and demonstrates how people continue to repeat past events. In an interview, Boullosa affirms that:

Time is not linear for us Mexicans by tradition it runs in circles. So the couple promises each other eternal love, and they keep their word: they come back to life every 100 years, same houses (they are neighbors), (and) in a way both have the same identity — though their centuries shape them differently. (Gallagher)

The circularity of time challenges the linear conception of time that refers "the assumption that once something new emerges, everything preceding it vanishes does not leave much room for

maneuvering beyond current market philosophy” (Mignolo 75).<sup>109</sup> In other words, the linear time illuminates the notion of progress and leaves the peripheral events behind the center/periphery dichotomy. The official history generally simplifies past events to create a sense of a linear history based on the hegemonic power relation. The circularity of time and three-dimensional space opposes the linear time of the official history and rediscover marginalized voices in history.

Each story focuses on the intimate relationship between Javier and María, but at the same time, their love story serves as a site to reflect collective history. As Casa Espíritu mentions, the memories are the alternative history which consists of fragmentations and multi-dimensional structure: “la memoria es un rompecabezas en tres dimensiones” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan* 59). Different from official history told by an authoritative male voice, this narrative recovers different voices from the peripheral history. The nonhuman voice leads the narrative to go beyond “binary oppositions such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman, paving the way for a non-hierarchical and hence more egalitarian relationship to the species” (Braidotti, “Posthuman Critical Theory” 23). According to Braidotti, the “posthuman turn” is triggered by the conjunction of anti-humanism and anti-anthropocentrism which focus on the “critique of the humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the universal representative of the human” (13). The posthuman criticism states that the “human” is not a neutral term but rather a hierarchical one that only could be fitted “masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity” (15). For these reasons, posthuman theorists understand the posthuman as post-gender and in an alliance with other organ systems such as nonhuman forces

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<sup>109</sup> According to Walter Mignolo, “the linear conception of time that Wallerstein identifies as a third basic characteristic of historical capitalism, along with its newness, works toward an image of capitalism as a totality that erased all other existing economic alternatives from the face of the earth. In a sense, it is true that capitalism began to overpower all other alternative economic organizations it encountered in the history of its expansion, from the fifteenth to the end of the twentieth century” (75).

and agents including animal, insects, and other objects.<sup>110</sup> The point of the posthuman theory is, first, rethinking the concept of “human” with a careful approach to see the complex relations of power and, second, understanding the complexity of human/nonhuman interaction. In this sense, Boullosa expands the spectrum of the narrator to a non-human narrator as a way to offer a non-biased view separate from the hegemonic power.

In the first part of this chapter, I address the function of the nonhuman narrator, applying Braidotti’s posthuman theory that rejects the enlightenment-based ideals of the human which excludes the voices of marginal subjects. Focusing on the history told by a nonhuman agent, I analyze how the official history is rewritten from a different perspective. More specifically, I aim to discuss how this new narrative told by a nonhuman agent engenders solidarity between all the marginalized subjects. In the second part, I examine women characters in the narrative to see how women take an important role in Mexican history. While the official history does not include the voices of women, *Casa Espíritu* illuminates women’s social role over history and makes them visible in its version of history. In the third part, I argue that paintings drawn by Mexican painters, which have inhabited the same place in the house, are other nonhuman agents that function as active agents and witnesses to preserve their ancestors’ stories in the future. The paintings that symbolize personal and collective history of Mexicans weave together these memories. Furthermore, in this part, I interpret the role of art as another type of nonhuman agent that

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<sup>110</sup> According to Braidotti, “the posthuman knowing subject is a complex assemblage of human and non-human, ecological, technological, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, organic and technological relations. This subject is inscribed in the power formations of the current phase of cognitive capitalism and ubiquitous mediation, ‘bio-piracy, necro-politics and world-wide dispossession, expulsions and migration. The posthuman subjects need to develop an ethics that combines the recognition of our collective belonging to the totality of a vital material universe, with respect for the structural differences and inequalities that compose our social existence and the desire to develop a collective ethics of becoming” (“Posthuman, All too Human” 29).

magnifies peripheral voices in the narrative. Through the nonhuman perspective of history, I center the overlooked history that is often silenced by the official history.

Even though *Las paredes hablan* is published as a novel and made as a film, this study is not focusing on the comparative study between two different genres. This study considers the film and the novel as an independent literary work and examines both textual analysis of the narrative and the visual techniques. For example, to highlight the important role of nonhuman agency, who sees and tells the events, I delve into the function of nonhuman agency in both written text and pictorial images. The reason why I approach this rejection of anthropomorphic agency in nuanced ways is because nonhuman agency is presented differently in the novel versus the film. While the novel mainly focuses on the nonhuman narrator, the film implicates different types of nonhuman narrators through the camera lens. Therefore, instead of finding the corresponding representation of one scene to another, this study focuses on the interrelation between the visual and the text respecting the peculiarity of each genre and medium.

### **5.1 Nonhuman Voices: The Wall Speaks, not the Human**

The wall hears and speaks. The nonhuman voice that dominates the narrative inverts the familiar structure of human as a subject and material as an object. If humans are always witnesses while nonhumans are background objects, the narrative creates an uncanny moment by positioning these objects as historical storytellers. This inverted role of humans and the house helps readers to take a certain distance from historical events and brings the reader's attention to see personal and collective memories of Mexican people. The narrative successfully explores Mexican culture including architecture, city, food, and family traditions through their memories. The nonhuman narrator establishes the personal memory of the main characters, María and Javier, and collective memory of Mexican historical events in a parallel structure.

While the official history is written by a “human” as a “self-appointed measure of all things and the domination and exploitation of nature” (Braidotti, *Posthuman Critical Theory* 15), this narrative suggests a new form of historical narrative by the nonhuman narrator. The stone of Casa Espíritu not only bears witness to the personal story of María and Javier but also sees what happened to the other Mexicans. Subverting the idea of a humanist or anthropocentric perspective, the narrative proves another way to tell the history told by the other species which are located totally outside of the power structure.

The first sequence of the film raises some questions on Mexican identity and history by presenting María’s internal conflict with her past. Throughout the conversation between María of 2010 and her psychotherapist in New York City, the audience understands that María has left Mexico to escape from the patriarchal figure of her drug dealer father. However, it seems that it is time to confront her father, childhood, and her identity when she decided to attend her grandmother’s funeral: “debo ir a México y enfrentarlo. No puedo seguir así” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*). Even though the psychotherapist advises her to not go to Mexico mentioning the dangerous situations in the country, she says, “¿Olvidas el pasado, la historia?” and admits that she prefers “el dolor físico a la soledad” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*). Even though she originally had settled down in a new country, she keeps thinking of her Mexican roots. The act of returning to Mexico can be read as an important turning point for her to reconnect with her Mexican identity.

María’s mixed feelings and her drive to revisit her past illustrate how this narrative addresses Mexican identity, memory, and history. Through a nonhuman agent, both the film and the novel connect personal identity or memory with a collective one. Seemingly, this narrative focuses on María’s personal history and memory, but the first sequence only opens the door to tell

the history and memory of all Mexicans. The “soledad (solitud)” of María gestures to her feelings and also those of other Mexicans.<sup>111</sup> Néstor Braunstein argues the relation between memory and identity in *La memoria, La inventora*<sup>112</sup>:

La “memoria compartida”, eso que mucho se apresuran en llamar “la historia”, en otras palabras, el registro documental del pasado, aderezado por mitos y leyendas, funda la existencia comunitaria. Se dice que la identidad del grupo, tanto como la del individuo, depende de los recuerdos acumulados en narraciones cuyo tema y cuya gramática son los del tiempo pasado: “lo que pasó.” (68)

As states Braunstein, the memory of the past is normally formed on what defines one’s identity, asking the fundamental question of who we are. These memories are the foundation of the future. The individual and collective memories have different functions but both contribute to form one’s identity, interrelating simultaneously with one another. While collective memories help to create a sense of homogeneous community based on the memory shared by different people of the group, individual memories keep each individual to have their own history and recognize their position inside of a community. For these reasons, both memories should be understood in mutual relation.

The concept of collective memory was developed by a philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who studies memories in relation to social context.<sup>113</sup> According to Halbwachs,

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<sup>111</sup> The “solitude” also reminds us *Cien años de soledad* written by Gabriel García Márquez. In 1982, when García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, he gave a discourse entitled “La soledad de América Latina.” García Márquez highlights the unique place of Latin America indicating the isolation of 600 million people who face poverty and violence. The “solitude” that María mentions could be understood in a similar context.

<sup>112</sup> In this book, Néstor Braunstein analyzes the characters of memory of the psychoanalytic context and the existentialism context using Nietzsche’s theory. He develops the argument applying to literary works such as the novels of Borges, Eric Kandel y Aleksandr Luria. (*La memoria*)

<sup>113</sup> According to Néstor Braunstein, “memoria” and “recuerdo” is not the same word: “La memoria es la que puede guardarse en los archivos de acceso más o menos público” pero “el recuerdo es, en cambio, privado, intransferible, resultado de una elaboración personal a partir de un acontecimiento supuestamente pasado” (73).

collective memory is shared, transmitted, and constructed by society.<sup>114</sup> In this sense, the collective memory could be considered as a counter-history based on different voices in the narrative.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, collective memory includes all the feelings of the past, and pain is conveyed intensely in the future:

*Las paredes hablan* es una novela, en realidad, sobre la especial manera de violencia o guerra que se está viviendo en México ahora. Esa realidad me causa una ansiedad enorme porque es un presente que uno no puede cambiar, y al estar trabajando con él, reelaborándolo para hacer ficción, he tenido que pasar de un dolor colectivo a un dolor interno: 32,600 muertos son el material con el que yo he trabajado al escribir esta novela. (Flores)

In this interview with Flores, Boullosa explains that the country is full of violence and pain: from the Mexican Independence War and Mexican Revolution movement to ongoing drug-related violence in the twenty-first century, the life of Mexicans is closely linked to violence. The other name of Casa Espíritu, “la piedra viva cargada de los recuerdos” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*), represents the collective memory of Mexicans that includes their internal suffering. If the stone in Casa Espíritu represents the collective memory, the house itself represents Mexico. When the camera shows Casa Espíritu where Javier lives with his father, it also pans over the Mexican colonial-style patio, Mexican foods in the kitchen, and paintings on the wall drawn by Mexican artist such as Diego Rivera, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Jesús Guerrero Galván, etc. Both the novel and the film cover three decades, and both Casa Espíritu and Casa Santo remain constant in their position next to each other throughout that time.

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<sup>114</sup> Maurice Halbwachs was a disciple of Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson. Halbwachs refers to the memories and memories that treasures and highlights society as a whole entity. Jeffrey Olick is the one who follows the study of collective memory.

<sup>115</sup> Memory is one of the main themes in Roberto Bolaño’s novels as well. Like Boullosa, Bolaño also develops the theme of memory in relation to fragmentation. The questions on identity in Bolaño’s books usually shifts towards fragmentation, towards the incomplete figure. In a similar context, Juan Antonio Sánchez Fernández mentions that: “Si el testimonio pretende ser memoria colectiva, los de Bolaño pueden ser entendidos como memoria individual, o, mejor aún, como ‘olvido’ individual” (140).

In this narrative, personal memory turns into collective memory, and official history turns into a personal history. The parallelism between the personal story of the main characters and the collective story of Mexican historical events is mediated through personal experiences. Thereby the two stories are overlapped and connected tightly to one another. The connection between María and Javier's story and the historical events is intensified through shared narrative structures. For example, both elements of this story host mirroring introductions, development, change, and conclusion. The text intertwines the budding relationship between María and Javier with the start of the Mexican Revolution. When Javier faces death, the narrative parallels his imminent passing with the revolution's failure and the subsequent massacre in 1910. These overlapping images with symbolic features could be found more intensely through the medium of film rather than the written novel through the scene change techniques between juxtaposing narratives. In this way, the thematic parallelism is magnified by putting the similar developing stage of the sequence of the personal story and the historical event.



Figure 8 Mexican colonial-style patio of Casa Espiritu



In both film and novel, the nonhuman narration offers a new angle from peripheral voices that have been excluded from the Eurocentric vision of history and peripheral objects that have been considered as trivial things. While the audience hears the voiceover of Casa Espiritu and the camera lens introduces the small town where the house is located in the film, the novel starts with detailed descriptions of the surroundings including neighboring houses, plants, insects, and even street such as Callejón del Fuego and Callejón de Atrás. In the novel, the voice of the nonhuman narrator is presented more directly with “Nota de la piedra.” This “Nota de la piedra,” which is a parody of the “author’s note,” reveals already who narrates the story:

Yo soy la piedra que a veces despierta. En mí, la vida recomienza. Soy la memoria que excede a las palabras, soy la mirada. La luz, las sombras, el piso, las paredes de quienes soy materia, son conmigo. [...] Soy el oído. Llena de mí, sitiada en mi epidermis, sé que nada bueno traen los callejones, las noticias llegan revueltas; el detalle, el chisme, el rumor, el secreto van mezclados con lo que se dice a cuatro voces. (13)

As the narrator, Casa Espiritu offers a voice more powerful than words, text, and history. The house is immovable and exists as an observer. It awakens intermittently to tell different stories about its surroundings. While the official history tells refined stories, this nonhuman agent tells all different forms of stories such as “chisme, rumor y secreto” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*). The nonhuman voice creates an interesting atmosphere, describing other characters and nonhuman agents from its own perspective. For example, the nonhuman narrator compares a human character to a tree. In other words, Casa Espiritu sees its surroundings from its own perspective: “Felipa es como un árbol de hule, alta, dura, con la flexibilidad y fortaleza del caucho” (27). Instead of personifying materials, the nonhuman narrator depersonalizes the human.<sup>116</sup> This is a moment of

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<sup>116</sup> When the readers perceive the narrative told by a nonhuman narrator, they tend to reach the narrative based on the putative experience of “what it is like” (in Thomas Nagel’s phrase). Many nonhuman narrator’s narrative play with readers’ familiarity with human experience: “Along the lines of R. D. Laing’s analysis

inversion between human/nature and observer/inspector implies a recognition of peripheral voices that had been excluded from the male-centered voice of history.



Figure 9 Paintings hanging on Casa Espiritu's wall

The nonhuman agents and other background objects are also important metaphors. Especially, the image of ivy vines<sup>117</sup> and the description of a boiling hot day are important

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of depersonalization in *The Divided Self* (46–54), a lot of non-human narratives point to the fact that people may conceive the other (person, animal) as an object in order to cope with reality and to maintain one's own subjectivity or superiority. In many non-human life stories, the reverse is also foregrounded: we—humans—have the cognitive habit of animating the inanimate and anthropomorphizing animals” (“The Storied Lives” 70).

<sup>117</sup> The image of ivy also appears strongly in *Mejor desaparece* which presents is the inversion of the patriarchal house through the collective image of ivy. The house covered by ivy impedes the father to find the bell and the address of the house. The house is not familiar to him anymore and it turns into a different “thing” because of the walls covered by ivy. At the beginning of the novel, he could not think that the ivy would destroy the bricks of the house, but they started growing fast and twined the wall. The fast and mass growth of ivy is threatening because its presence covers the entire house and it makes another entity from the exterior. The one stem of ivy cannot affect the whole change but many ivies creeping the walls has enough power to make the house invisible. Compare to the image of vine in *Mejor desaparece*, the one in *Las paredes hablan* is less subversive than *Mejor desaparece*. However, it is hard to neglect that Boullosa uses the metaphor of ivy to reveal its strong viability.

metaphors that signify a difficult time of Mexico. In the part of “La temporada del muérdago,” it is notable how the ivy vines stand out in the hot weather of Mexico:

Esa mañana hacía un calor exagerado, inusual. No había llovido en semanas. [...] Porque sólo el muérdago se aventaja con este clima. La parásita crece a costa de los truenos, colorines, ficus y pinos; montada en ellos echa nuevos brotes con una rapidez que contradice su naturaleza vegetal, bestia entre las plantas. Sus opulentas ramas, sus drupas gorditas y flores espurias se reproducen de lo lindo con el seco calorón. El muérdago crece asfixiando a la planta huésped persistente, hipócrita como el invitado que finge sobre el rico mantel su amistad y su entusiasmo agradecido.... (17-19)

The image of ivy is ambivalent: on the one hand, it could be seen as an invasive plant that damages other plants, but it could also be seen as a strong plant which overcomes adversity symbolized by the hot weather in summer. Given the long-suffering existence of Casa Espiritu as part of Mexican history, the vines also symbolize a nonhuman entity that has survived throughout time.

The story told by the nonhuman narrator rejects the anthropocentric perspective by inverting the human/nonhuman binary. The intimate voice of Casa Espiritu draws attention to the surrounding objects adding its own history of how Casa Espiritu has been constructed:

Yo salía de mi estado de anonadamiento. En la parte extrema de mi cuerpo, ya separada de la vida doméstica, levantaron una bodega que el padre Acosta usaría para almacenar los vinos y las conservas. [...] Cuando el cantero terminó de tallar mi nombre, Casa Espiritu, el padre Acosta llamo al yesero. [...] En piedra estaba, y había sido tallado y picado para quedar ahí por siempre. Si algún día Casa Espiritu cayese (que no lo permitan los dioses, me digo yo), la piedra tallada iría a dar a otra construcción con sus inscripciones. (78-80)

Nevertheless, the nonhuman voice in the novel replaces a human narrator’s voice and elevates its status to the same level as a human narrator as seen in the parenthetical aside above. While human narrators communicate definitively or rigidly through a result-oriented focus in main historical events with an authoritative voice, the nonhuman tells the history about small events or peripheral stories with a friendly neighbor’s voice. If the human narrator fails to cultivate an objective point of view for events, the nonhuman narrator opens boundaries of history for open interpretations of

past events. For nonhuman narrators, the stories of the past are not dead, finished stories of the past but are still vivid in the present. Through the voice of Casa Espíritu, both the novel and the film emphasize the action of awakening from the dead and the moment of lethargy:

Por mi parte, no sé si he sido fiel a los hechos, y no sólo lo digo por los del desenlace. Lo que conozco a pie juntillas es el escenario, hable lo que hable éste no cambia, es el nuestro. También sé con certeza que yo desperté. Cobré voz. Fui la piedra que se levantó de la inercia, dejó atrás la muerte, se llenó de vida y reveló algunas de sus memorias. (345)

As we see in the passage above, the voice of Casa Espíritu is humble, modest, and honest about what she narrates. The only voice filled with conviction is that she has awoken (“desperté”) and has revealed some of her memories (“reveló algunas de sus memorias”). Casa Espíritu awakes from a death-like sleep to reject the fossilization of history.

Casa Espíritu rewrites Mexican history from peripheral perspectives and create solidarity between all the marginalized subjects, especially, women and nature. The nonhuman voice of Casa Espíritu, which is narrated by a female voice of Marta Aura,<sup>118</sup> serves as an important medium to connect all the marginalized subjects. Casa Espíritu’s female voice and the women characters are strongly connected and stand against the male-centered vision of reality and history. In the following part of this chapter, I will examine how the women characters have been presented, how they contribute to major historical events in Mexico’s 1810, 1910, and 2010, and how their voices deviate from the male-dominant voice in official history.

## **5.2 Nonhuman and Women: Women Speak, not Men**

Casa Espíritu mainly describes the romance between Javier and María focusing on women’s role in each of the three different time periods in Mexico: 1810 during Mexican

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<sup>118</sup> Marta Aura is a Mexican actress and she is the aunt of Boulosa.

Independence, 1910 during the reign of Porfirio Díaz, and 2010 during the war against drug dealers. Throughout the text, all three Marías<sup>119</sup> are presented as rebellious and active women who are deeply engaged with the social movement in each century. These three characters deny the traditional image of women as María Teresa Priego indicates as follows:

Las tres Marías andan el mundo (cada una en su siglo) con los aires de esos personajes femeninos lunáticos y disruptivos que ama Carmen. Fuera de “época”. Las que saben inventarse su modo de ser humanas y libres. Rompen con los decretos de la feminidad “ambiente”, y viven —sin siquiera preguntárselo— sus feminidades de elección.

The anti-traditional female characters lead the relationship with Javier, by not being sexually and physically dominated by him. María of 1810 never loses when sword fighting against Javier. This vigorous version of María also leads the insurgent group to keep fighting for independence. Her strong and clear voice, yelling “Viva la Independencia de México” (*Las paredes hablan*) rediscovers women’s contribution to Mexican Independence which has not received attention in official history. In this same sequence, María also speaks for the right of indigenous people in Mexico. She shouts that “El indio está en todo su derecho” and helps them to be part of Mexican Independence (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*).

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<sup>119</sup> María, which is the name of the daughter of Boullosa, the main actress in the film, is a name that is constantly used in various works of Boullosa. María Teresa Priego also points out that the name María is used in different novels of Boullosa: “Como María la bailadora, en *La otra mano de Lepanto* (María, nombre fetiche de Carmen). Como el personaje de *La virgen y el violín*, novela biográfica en la que indaga la vida de la pintora renacentista Sofonisba Anguissola” (Priego).



Figure 10 María's sword fighting against Javier in 1810

María of 1910 is a professional photographer who had studied in Spain and recently returns to Mexico. Even though she is the daughter of General Bernardo Goríbar, a member of the cabinet of ministers of Porfirio Díaz, she decides to send to the Press the tragic photos of the massacre that she took in the manifestation against the dictator, Porfirio Díaz, to disclose hidden facts to the public. In this sequence, María is the one who takes the most important role to report the photo evidence of the massacre that serves as a shred of important evidence to accuse the cruelty and injustice of Díaz's dictatorship.





Figure 11 María and her father General Bernardo Goríbar in 1910



Figure 12 María taking pictures of the massacre in 1910

María of 2010 is a gallerist who lives in New York, a daughter of the drug dealer Gutiérrez. The story of this María takes place when the Mexican government declares the war on drugs. Like the other Marías, this version exposes when she accuses her drug dealer father of violence. María reports his father to Esperanza who works in the Press. Further illustrating the importance of nonhuman characters, María also fights to get back her house, Casa Santos, from her father. Here, she resists both the patriarchal figure and social collapse due to the drug trafficking in Mexican society.

Esperanza is another female character who takes an important role in revealing peripheral historical voices, particularly those of women, both in the novel and in the film. She is described as an intelligent and independent woman who supports María to fight against injustice. Each version of Esperanza is a reporter with the exception of her character in 1810. While Esperanza of 1810 is not described as being as rebellious as María, Esperanza of 1910 and 2010 adopts the important role of exposing the injustice of María's father, Gutiérrez. She captures evidence of Gutiérrez's voice threatening Javier. Unfortunately, Javier is killed by Gutiérrez, but the recorded conversation between Javier and Gutiérrez is enough evidence to send him to jail. As her name indicates, Esperanza is one of the keys for the bright future of Mexico. While the ambiance of Mexico of 1810 and 1910 are full of violence, pain, and sadness, the last Mexico of 2010 contains a positive tone of their future with hope. It is presented with the last sequence where Esperanza's report of the apprehension of Gutiérrez, which may not fully change Mexican society, but it means a significant step toward a bright future in Mexico. These intertwining structures suggest that although Mexico has continued to struggle with similar forms of corruption and violence, there is still hope for resistance and a better future.





Figure 13 Esperanza and María



Figure 14 A reporter delivering news about the apprehension of Gutiérrez

In an interview with Videoconsulta, Boullosa mentions that: “La idea (de este película) es pensar en México como un país posible. Como pensaron originalmente los insurgentes, los independentistas” (“Carmen Boullosa platica sobre la cinta *Las paredes hablan*”). The voice of the house and the struggle and resiliency of women evaluate revolutionary movements in the past not to remember as a consequence of certain events but to clarify the importance of the act of “being awoken” from the darkness. Casa Espíritu offers a voiceover of María’s awakening when she rises among the dead insurgents of in 1810: “Yo, la que se levanta de la mortal inercia a pelear contra el sol” (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan*). The nonhuman voice confesses that it/she fights for not becoming lethargic. If the Casa Espíritu uses an alternative voice that “wakes up” sometimes to tell what it has seen from a peripheral perspective, María strengthens its voice by telling history from her perspective. Either way, readers and audience are able to hear peripheral history from different voices.

The narrative proposes different versions of María’s story and lets readers and audience actively conclude the ending of María. The first version recounts that María becomes a cruel “guerrera” joining with insurgents, and the other version tells that María forms a women-group who is well-armed against violence. Also, there is another version that María forms a group of women and indigenous people. Then, finally she enjoys the moment of independence before she dies.<sup>120</sup> However, more interesting things here is not what really happened to María but what happened after all these events:

Hay una que difiere: María conforma un batallón selecto con mujeres y arrojados indios, acumula victorias, concierta alianzas, ocupa un lugar sobresaliente en las luchas insurgentes, y, llegado su tiempo, participa de la miel de la victoria independentista, aunque por poco tiempo: en breve, nadie se acuerda ya de ella ni de los que lucharon a su lado, las otras mujeres y los indios. La memoria

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<sup>120</sup> *Duerme* also concludes with a similar ending by offering different versions of stories regarding the main protagonist Claire. By giving different version of story, readers are invited to participate actively to the ending of the story.

consagratoria la borra con los años, al punto de que no queda huella de sus acciones y logros, como si ella nunca hubiese existido. (161)

No matter what version is true, we have to pay attention to her history which is buried in oblivion after years. The nonhuman narrator demonstrates how the role of women represented as María in history has been excluded from male-centered history. In this context, the nonhuman narrator successfully rediscovers the voice of women and indigenous people from Mexican history. In the next section, I will examine more closely how the boundary of personal memory and collective memory dissolves through the secondary nonhuman object, which is the paintings hanging on Casa Espíritu's wall (see fig. 9).

### **5.3 Other Nonhuman Agent: The Paintings See, are not Just Seen**

The film discloses not only the joy and sorrows of Mexican history but also the beauty of Mexican culture through paintings, sculptures, and architecture. As Boullosa announces in an interview, this film starts from “el homenaje al arte mexicano” (“Carmen Boullosa platica sobre la cinta *Las paredes hablan*”). Related to Boullosa's interest in Mexican art, each iteration of María and Javier are always dedicated to something related to art, especially, Mexican paintings. For example, María and Javier learn how to paint in 1810, María is a photographer and Javier is a painter in 1910, María is a gallerist and Javier is a doctoral student who writes a thesis on Mexican contemporary art. The paintings highlight key Mexican figures such as Diego Rivera, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Jean Charlot, Roberto Montenegro, Carlos Orozco Romero, Jesús Guerrero Galván, Fernando Castillo, Manuel Gonzáles Serrano, María Izquierdo, Fermín Revueltas, Julio Castellanos, José Clemente Orozco, Juan Soriano, and Luis Martínez, etc.<sup>121</sup> Like

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<sup>121</sup> The paintings in the film are part of the collection of Andrés Blaisten who has around 130 pieces of Mexican painting realized between 1900 to 1960. This collection is open to the public in Museo Andrés Blaisten. Boullosa mentioned that she wanted to approach to Mexican history through paintings and that's

Casa Espiritu, these portraits imply another type of nonhuman narrator that tells periphery history being a witness and connects the personal story and the collective story (see fig.15).



Figure 15 Javier and María in Casa Espiritu

The paintings not only represent the beauty of Mexican art but also serves as another nonhuman narrator who tells what they have seen. The wall full of paintings turns into a witness of Mexican history since the house was built, being part of the nature of the house. The following part explains how the paintings become another nonhuman agent based on the intimate relationship with the house:

Tal vez el que más me afectó mi persona fue el amor por la pintura y con ésta la afición por los artistas. Comenzó a acumular telas pintadas, y a desplegarlas en mis

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why she intentionally included Blaisten's collection: "Quería contar sus pasos al pasado, guiándose con algunas pinturas mexicanas de nuestros clásicos, no precisamente las más conocidas, no las que están en el Museo de Arte Moderno, entonces las fui seleccionando e incluí a la colección Blaisten" (Boullosa, "Conviven literatura").

muros. Me vi en mi interior, en los rincones más alejados de la luz directa del sol, en áreas que cualquiera diría “íntimas” .... (81-82)

The paintings have been put in a wall by humans but they have been actively watching what happens to people and occupies an important part of history. The paintings contribute to telling peripheral histories through their own memories. The room where the paintings are placed is an “intimate” space far away from the “sun,” which reminds us of the authoritative image of “sun” previously in the following sentence: “Yo, la que se levanta de la mortal inercia a pelear contra el sol.” The image of the sun could be understood as a patriarchal father or dictator depending on each period, but it is certainly a metaphor for authoritarianism. By seeing all the incidents in the past, the paintings turn into memory and identity itself. According to Medina García, art and cultural identity have a strong connection:

La identidad cultural está siempre en recreo y enriquecimiento por influencias que pueden venir de muchas fuentes, entre ellas el arte, con su carácter social, en tanto síntesis, conocimiento, descubrimiento, y revelación de los aspectos esenciales de la realidad, que se transmiten en forma de imágenes artísticas. El arte cumple las funciones de comunicar, educar y formar valores, donde el hombre puede adquirir visiones, concepciones y conocimientos relacionados con su arraigo cultural y su identidad, que permiten la conservación de elementos socioculturales necesarios para compartir un mismo espacio cultural y de pertenencia. (“La identidad cultural”)

Art is one way to approach the idea of identity and history. It is relatively free from power relations of the dominant discourse as we can find in the official history. Instead of pursuing one single established history based on written text, paintings leave open space for free interpretations and consideration from different perspectives. The art makes conversation possible between different elements and never attempts to define in a single-institutional definition. It is meaningful that the art offers another way of thinking of the past, present, and future by revalorizing nonverbal expressions. In this sense, the paintings are metaphors for a witness from peripheries that transgress any racial and sexual binary distinction.

Furthermore, the paintings solidify personal and collective memories that form Mexican identity. While an official history written by humans suggests that the formation of one's identity is a consequence of the shared historical event of one country, nonhuman agents invite us to think inversely on Mexican identity. Indeed, other artworks and cultural properties such as paintings and architecture take an important part to form one's identity along with history. Debra Blake theorizes how nonhuman agents reinforce human culture and historical narratives:

Among peoples of Mexican descent or origin living in the United States, historical narratives and cultural practices often are maintained through oral traditions and reinforced by visual representations including objects and images in the home. (23)

Cultural art, especially paintings in this film, has a similar function as an oral tradition and helps to rethink the history and identity from different perspectives. Through the paintings, the narrative highlights the value of art as another mechanism to tell peripheral histories. Ironically, the paintings are not just seen, but actively see what happen to human beings. The subversion between human and nonhuman indicates how peripheral elements decentralize official history.

The paintings also encapsulate political tension over history. Instead of indicating all the conflicts and evaluate what happened in the past with written words, paintings capture people's soul and pain and express it on a canvas. For example, Casa Santos, which is the house next to Casa Espíritu constructed in 1910, is described as an opposite character as Casa Espíritu. While Casa Espíritu is a place for ordinary people who fight for justice, Casa Santos is the place that is implacable against the rebellious people. However, the paintings are the only object that "las dos casas vecinas teníamos un gusto en común" (Boullosa, *Las paredes hablan* 173). Here, the paintings not only witness but also dissolve the tension between the two opposite characters.

Lastly, the paintings make personal and collective histories fuse together through them. The paintings evoke memories and connect María and Javier to their past memories transferring

through time. The journey back to the past is starting from Javier's portrait of María in 1810. Notably, the overlapping between personal history and collective history is realized through Miguel Cabrera's painting, *Alegoría de la Santa Eucaristía* (1750)<sup>122</sup> which includes three hearts surrounded by angels (see fig.16). The painting depicts the bullet mark on one of the hearts, gesturing to when Javier and Father Acosta were shot during the Mexican Revolution. While the film focuses on the painting to show implicitly the fight between two political groups, the novel describes the fight between two bullets which dehumanize the political action of humans:

Las dos balas pelean: Realista quiere atacar Casa Espíritu. Insurgente quiere destrozar a Realista antes de que toque la pared de Casa Espíritu. Insurgente recurre a la fuerza de cada uno de sus granos de pólvora, se tuerce un poco a su derecha, rebota de nuevo contra Realista y, a escasos milímetros de la pared, estalla. (154)

The description of the fight is centered on the objects in the house. The nonhuman narrator takes a certain distance to tell the tragedy but recognizes all the victims of the Mexican revolution including Javier's sacrifice. When the camera close-up the painting with the bullet mark, the nonhuman narrator says: "¿Quién dice que el corazón es un órgano privado? El corazón de Javier, en cambio, iba de un sueño al otro, era el de un hombre feliz, o un ángel" (335). This is the moment when the personal memory of Javier and María turns into the collective memory of all victims of the tragedy in past history in Mexico.

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<sup>122</sup> Miguel Cabrera is a painter from the Viceroyalty of New Spain, in today's Mexico. He is known for his portrait, *El Retrato de sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (1751), *Santa Gertrudis* (1763), *La conversión de san Francisco de Borja* and many others. In the film, *Alegoría de la Santa Eucaristía* (1750) is caught on camera a couple of times.





Figure 16 *Alegoría de la Santa Eucaristía* (1750)

The last scene expresses an illusion or dream implicated the happy ending of Javier and María reconciles personal and social conflicts and implies a positive future of Mexico. In the last scene, which only could be found in the film, not in the novel, Javier and María run around the surroundings of the fountain “El paraguas”<sup>123</sup> manifesting their reunion even though their love ended tragically over three decades (see fig. 17). This last scene can be interpreted in three different ways: first, on a personal level of history, it means María and Javier’s love came together. Although Javier was killed by the father of María in 2010, the last ending sequence denotes an

<sup>123</sup> The fountain “El Paraguas” is located at the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. “El paraguas” signifies the union between two different cultures and two elements: the column seen from the west includes a figure of an eagle, faces of indigenous people and Spanish, a Ceiba tree, a sword, rising sun; These symbolize a new stage of life of Mexicans. The column seen from the east includes a figure of a dove of peace, a human, a symbol of nuclear which represents modernity.



unrealistic projection of their dream that overcomes all the obstacles. Second, it could be declaimed as a prediction or expectation of another Javier and María's story in the future. As seen in the narrative with the repeated structure of Javier and María's story, their story can be repeated similarly in our time or future. The circulation of history will keep going on in the future and let another Javier and María live. For the last, as the fountain symbolizes, the last sequence can be seen as a born of a new stage of the hybrid identity of Mexico. The ending can be read as the birth of a new identity as a result of a reunion of two different cultures, Mexico and the US, represented by Javier and María. While Javier suggests the authentic Mexican culture, María embodies a hybrid identity who is born in Mexico but lives in the US. This third interpretation could be linked to the first sequence of María in New York who was confused about her identity and decided to find her roots visiting Mexico.



Figure 17 *El paraguas*

*Las paredes hablan*, both the novel and the film, subvert the voice of a human narrator and tell Mexican history and memories from a marginal perspective. The history told by nonhuman

agents such as the house Casa Espíritu and the paintings on the wall, form a bond between marginal subjects such as women, indigenous people, and objects to recover their voices from history. Here, the objects are no longer belong to a human, but actively uncover their real voice by telling what they have seen. It challenges the anthropocentric history, which is considered as the official history and demonstrates histories from different perspectives. During this process, the nonhuman narrator comes to rediscover various voices beyond the binary distinction. This is how history is rewritten by different voices of peripheries. The art presented with paintings also reinforces to retell peripheral history. Instead of focusing on the painters, the nonhuman narrator focuses on the paintings to emphasize the important role of the objects that have been overlooked many times in the past. Through the narrative, Boullosa reveals the new role of the nonhuman agent as opening the way in which see our past by decentralizing the official history. This is why the narrative infers interrelated memories of personal and collective without making any categorical distinction.

As noted in other Boullosa's narratives, this narrative also deals with questions on identity and a nostalgic retrospective of historical events in Mexico. However, what makes it more unique different from the other narratives is not only the way of finding Mexican identity and telling the historical events from the nonhuman agent but also the way it through the beauty of Mexican culture as part of Mexican history. *Las paredes hablan* proposes a unique way to see the collaboration between text and film in which expanding its horizons with an experimental narrator and subverting the anthropological perspective to tell an alternative history from peripheries and marginalized voices.

## CONCLUSION

The five narratives by Boullosa examined in this study, *Mejor desaparece*, *Duerme*, *Cielos de la tierra*, *La novela perfecta*, and *Las paredes hablan*, exemplify a challenge of transcending limits and rejecting any form of fixed binary opposition. These five narratives, in particular, introduce multiple types of mutable and nomadic subjects that blur the binarism between male/female, human/posthuman, and human/nonhuman. Boullosa's narratives often present the nomadic characters as grotesque, fragmented, monstrous, rebellious, and ambiguous. The narratives describe the complexity and multiplicity of each character and reveal various spectrums of one's subjectivity. Boullosa's nomadic subjects refuse the essentialism of fixed identity and trouble boundaries of identity and a monolithic representation. These unique nomadic characters are one of her strategies to destabilize the European hegemonic power, patriarchal social structure, and binary division. More specifically, through these nomadic subjects, Boullosa seeks to reconsider Mexican history before the conquest and recognize the voices of indigenous and mestiza who have been dismissed from the official history. Her consciousness of Mexican history is what makes her create a unique Mexican nomadic figure who embodies postcolonial aspects and what I define as a nomadic mestiza.

Compared to European nomadism, Boullosa's nomadism aspires toward sexual and racial difference as a nomadic strategy. Boullosa tries to avoid the simple antagonistic confrontation between man/woman and white/black. She problematizes different layers of confrontation which reflect the cultural and regional features of Mexico. Her nomadic subjects resist the stability or certainty of identity and decenter the hierarchical power structure, but this does not mean that Boullosa insists on eliminating the entire racial or sexual identity. Rather, Boullosa's nomadism proposes an important revision of the Eurocentric vision that causes racial and gender hierarchy.

Through the uniqueness of nomadic mestiza, the narratives revisit the Spanish conquest and colonization to criticize the racial discrimination toward indigenous people and mestiza. Consequently, Boullosa reaches salutary and constructive destruction which creates open space for classlessness and sex-egalitarianism. Through this space, she draws attention to the in-between space and celebrates the aesthetics of cracks where the readers can find the beauty of contingency. This space captures the other side of reality and presents different dimensions of our life. As such, her nomadism stimulates her readers to perceive all the possible dimensions and the dark side of reality by crossing various boundaries.

My study takes Braidotti's theory of posthuman as a main theoretical framework and proposes a new approach with feminist and deconstructive perspectives. Each chapter could be enriched by Braidotti's theory complementing some Latin American postcolonial theorists such as Dussel, Mignolo, and Beverly, feminist theorists such as Butler and Irigaray, and poststructuralists such as Deleuze and Guattari. In chapter 1 about *Mejor desaparece*, I borrow the term "undutiful daughters" from Braidotti's notions in which women need to refuse the paternal law and develop "conceptual disobedience." In this chapter, I analyze how Braidotti's notion of "undutiful daughter" stresses the rejection of the social institution posed by the sexual dichotomy in the social contract of phallocentrism and is metaphorically presented as *becoming plants/ becoming weeds* in *Mejor desaparece*. In chapter 2 about *Duerme*, I focus on Braidotti's concept of "becoming," to illustrate Claire as a nomadic mestiza who crosses gender and racial boundaries. Here, Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject is revisited and reconsidered in the Latin American socio-historical context. In chapter 3 about *Cielos de la tierra*, I take Braidotti's posthuman theory about technologies or digital information to demonstrate the conflict between human/posthuman and human/cyborg. On the one hand, the cyborg figure of one of the characters is understood as "body without organs,"

or “becoming machine,” which propose a non-normalized and non-Oedipalized sexuality, on the other, the cyborg posits questions on dematerialization, in which the meaning of the object is no longer tangible because of media digitalization. The novel portrays certain concerns on dematerialization through the three different narrators who try to maintain their memory and history throughout the writing process. In chapter 4 about *La novela perfecta*, in a similar posthuman context, as I analyzed in chapter 3, Braidotti’s ideas on the posthuman body explain the tension between virtual reality/reality and virtual body/material body. Braidotti’s idea on the posthuman body illuminates how technology penetrates our body and makes it hard to distinguish bodies from their technologically mediated extensions. By evaluating the process of human writing, the novel reveals the aesthetic of cracks, which only could be found in human writing. The aesthetic of cracks celebrates the beauty of contingency, marginal space, and the in-between space of the narrative. In chapter 5 about *Las paredes hablan*, Braidotti’s concept of anti-humanism and anti-anthropocentrism is applied into the nonhuman agent in *Las paredes hablan*. Braidotti’s theory criticizes the humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the universal representative of the human which only could be fitted masculine and white. The non-human agent represented as the voice of a wall proposes an alliance with other organ systems, nonhuman forces and agents including animals, insects, and other objects. By subverting an anthropocentric perspective, the narrative suggests an alternative way to recover the voices of marginal subjects and pursue non-hierarchical relationships.

My reading of Boullosa’s five narratives based on Braidotti’s theory offers a deeper understanding of nomadic subjectivities within the global and technological society that goes beyond the discussion of feminism. To be more specific, first, Braidotti’s theory embraces the major argument of sex/body started from the second and third waves of feminism. By focusing on

the complexity of subjectivities which are not limited to women and introducing mutable, multiplicities, and flexible subjects who cross binary oppositions, readers can see other layers of feminism in Boullosa's narratives. In Boullosa's narratives, the feminist perspectives are linked to other layers such as race and class in Latin American context. In this sense, Braidotti's theory of nomadism serves as a new lens to see a political and ethical intervention into the current posthuman landscape in Latin America. Even though the posthuman figure starts to appear in Boullosa's third period of writing around the late 1990s, her first and second periods of writing become the foundation for creating the new nomadic subject in her later narratives. Second, Braidotti's theory helps the understanding of Boullosa's deconstructive writing style. Boullosa's narratives that include lots of ambiguity and metaphors are enriched with the deconstructive perspective of Braidotti transmitted from Deleuze and Guattari. Both the characters and the structure of Boullosa's narratives are similarly presented as a rhizome that is non-deterministic and non-linear. What Boullosa tries to achieve as a writer is to be a destroyer of the narrative instead of being a creator of the narrative. Her stance as a destroyer invites readers to be part of the narrative blurring the boundary between author/reader. Lastly, the application of Braidotti's theory demonstrates a posthuman reading of Boullosa's narratives within the Latin American context. Some of Boullosa's narratives have been studied under the category of science fiction but my reading illustrates a posthuman reading that raises an important epistemological question on the subject. As such, my reading will open another path to transformative feminism through Boullosa's fictional world.

In chapter 1, "Becoming "Undutiful Daughters" in *Mejor desaparece*," I analyzed both the images and texts that present a wild and grotesque image of weeds/plants that discloses the dark side of the home. While Lara's images of flowers illustrate the escaping flowers from the vase that

symbolizes the patriarchal house, Boullosa's narrative demonstrates wild daughters who dominate the house and expel the father from the domestic sphere. Ironically, the young daughters take the visualized image of flowers represented as their names and are reborn as another category of flower: weeds. The process of becoming weeds, which is also the process of becoming "undutiful daughters," helps the young daughters not to be victimized by the male gaze and reaffirms the solidarity between the daughters. In this sense, the image of ivy at the end of the narrative emphasizes the solidarity between women which topples oppressive systems. Therefore, being "undutiful daughters"/being weeds is a way to challenge the patriarchal norm and seek to destabilize the conservative definition of home and daughterhood by presenting grotesque and rebellious images of women.

In chapter 2, "Nomadic Mestiza in *Duerme*," I scrutinized the fluid and multi-identity of Claire who rejects sexual and racial binarism. To understand the mutable image of Claire within the Mexican colonial experience, I interpreted Claire as a nomadic mestiza that values her constant change as a nomadic subject and her mestizaje. Here, nomadism refers to epistemological and ontological questions of oneself. Through the story of Claire, readers not only experience Claire's nomadic life but also understand the mestizaje as the central axis which embraces the pain of Mexican people. Recognizing the mestizaje is an important key to decenter the Eurocentric vision that sets a binary opposition of white and nonwhite. Through Claire's nomadism, the narrative aims for an unfixed and mutable subject to overcome certain boundaries and broaden its boundaries to revisit the voices of subjugated others. Finally, nomadic mestiza embodied multiple race, gender, and class offers an alternative history of Mexico.

In chapter 3, "Writing as Embodied Subjectivity in *Cielos de la Tierra*," I examined a posthuman society where language and writing as material are confronting a dematerialization due

to the omnipresence of technology. Also, I evaluated how the text makes it possible to decenter masculine narrative discourse through Estela and Lear who revisit Hernando's version of history. While Hernando's manuscript symbolizes the first written and official history dominated by a male voice, Estela and Lear's retouch into Hernando's manuscript represents an act of adding women's voices into history. The representation of historical text as a material object embodies subjectivity and different narrative discourses and distinguishes humans from the cyborg. Through the three different narrators, Hernando, Estela, and Lear who are living in a different period, the novel shows writings as an important medium that helps human to feel that they hold past, present, and future and proves individual and collective history.

In chapter 4, "Writing and posthumanism in *La novela perfecta*," I explored the tension between machine writing and human writing. By presenting the failure of machine writing, the narrative proposes how *un-perfect* human writing could be perfect writing. Through the conflict between Lederer and Vértiz, the novel pinpoints the limitation of a perfect representation of a writer's imagination by using a machine. The novel establishes multiple layers of stories and complicates the structure of the narrative that broadens the boundaries of a novel. What we can find from Vértiz's novel is the aesthetics of cracks merged in-between spaces. These cracks in the novel play a prominent role in making destructive writing, which creates different perspectives of stories that are unique and authentic. The multilayered stories in the novel demonstrate a writing with destructive creativity and a new way of writing a novel.

In chapter 5, "A History Told by a Nonhuman Agent in *Las paredes hablan*," I evaluated a nonhuman narrator who recovers the voices of marginal subjects such as women and indigenous people from history. The nonhuman narrators presented as a house and paintings challenge the anthropocentric history, which is considered as the official history and disclose histories from



different perspectives. As such, the history told by the nonhuman narrator depicts the periphery of the main dominant discourse and successfully changes the view from the center to periphery. During this process of power inversion, the nonhuman narrators represent the marginal voices from history and help their voices to be heard. Finally, the eco of peripheral voices blurs the hegemonic power structure in history.

My dissertation fills the gap between third world feminism and postcolonialism within the Mexican historical and cultural context. Many times, gender and sexuality studies focus on the oppression and struggle of women in relation to the opposite sex. However, Boullosa understands Mexican women as fluid and mutable subjects who experience double marginalization as women of color. My reading of Boullosa's mutable subjects is enriched by a new term, nomadic mestiza who moves beyond the sexual and racial binary and resist rigid categorization. Nomadic mestiza contests and transgresses the boundaries between men and women, history and memory, reality and fantasy in order to problematize established dichotomies and reaffirm differences. This nomadic mestiza is not an ambiguous subject floating around boundaries. Rather, nomadic mestiza declares oneself by impeding coherent narration through various literary techniques such as fragmented structure, multi-voiced narrators, and silence. To conclude, my dissertation will contribute to the field of Latin American literature by examining how Boullosa opens the boundaries of one's subjectivity and reevaluates subjectivity as multiplicitous and gender-fluid.

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