8

"¿Te has desmaterializado ya?" González Viaña's *Los sueños de América*

Debra A. Castillo

In his *Latinoamericanos buscando lugar en este siglo,* Argentine author Néstor García Canclini writes from a perspective overtly defined by his appeal to a twenty-first century sensibility: "la condición actual de América latina desborda su territorio . . . América latina no está completa en América Latina. Su imagen le llega de espejos diseminados en el archipiélago de las migraciones" (12: 19). In an analogous appeal from the other side of the Latin American divide, in their special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies,* Chicano scholars Paula Moya and Ramón Saldívar argue for a new, implicitly millennial, change of focus in the self-understanding of the United States and its relation to its American neighbors. Like García Canclini, but from the vantage point of the other America, they find that the U.S. imaginary, like Latin America's, needs to be conceived in its transnational extensions, and they specifically suggest that a more accurate literary historiography of the United States will need to take into account nations other than Great Britain and languages other than English or it will remain both inaccurate and incomplete.

Thus, if Latin American literary history is completed in emigration and by the writers whose imaginary is shaped by this spectrum of experiences, U.S. literary history must necessarily and analogously concern itself with immigration and the immigrant writer's exploration of this condition, in whatever language chosen for the literary text. In each case, the nation-based understanding of literature as defined by political borders will require radical revision, so as to account more fully for these cultural exchanges. Moya and Saldívar contrast the narrow North American with the trans-American versions of cultural analysis: "the trans-American imaginary is 'imaginary' to the extent that it figures a very real but fundamentally different syntax of codes, images, and icons, as well as the tacit

assumptions, convictions, and beliefs that bind together the varieties of American discourses" (2). To the degree that a broadly defined American culture begins to be studied seriously in its continental complexity, it necessarily becomes richer, more complex, and inevitably multilingual.[1]

The rich textual debate thus engendered bears evidence of layers of competing visions and multiple re-appropriations from both U.S. and Latin American points of view. This is not simply a call for a widening and more inclusive body of literary works (inserting, say, *Jicoténcal*, *Lucas Guevara*, and *Los sueños de América* into a more evolved understanding of U.S. literature on the one hand, and into a more expansive understanding of Cuban, Colombian, and Peruvian literature, respectively, on the other). More radically, this opening of perspective to a multilingual United States and to a continental American studies brings with it a necessary rethinking of theoretical assumptions as well. Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez comments, for example, that the normative understanding of modernity in Latin America is necessarily different in kind from the Euro-American version, though propped upon it in inevitable ways, and that this temporal belatedness reflects a qualitative distinction in theoretical structures of thought: "a diferencia de lo acaecido en Europa, la consolidación de la modernidad cultural en América Latina no precede al cine, la radio y la televisón, sino que *se debe* precisamente a ellos. . . . La modernidad en América Latina desafia, entonces, los marcos teóricos generados por el 'proyecto de la modernidad'." There is in his argument a strong claim for a supplementary reading of Euro-identified theory with a perspective that comes from the south, from the peripheries of modernity. It is precisely this anti-normativist perspective that Castro-Gómez analyzes in his recent work delving into the still relatively unexplored territory of modern Latin America's philosophical difference from, and potential contributions to, the metropolis (3–4). Even further: this southern take on theory, suggests Castro-Gómez, will not only serve as a supplement to the metropolis, but can provide the foundation for a counter-theoretical stance that will challenge some of Euro-America's most basic and assumed premises.[2]

Thus U.S. and Latin American-based critics like Moya and Saldívar on the one hand, and García Canclini and Castro-Gómez on the other, differentially weigh the potential contributions of north and south to a more complex theoretical scenario. All are to some extent speaking for critical and theoretical rapprochements, though interestingly enough, with the exception of a few isolated cases, they are neither speaking to each other nor citing each other directly. The nature of the discussion for this reason

is often self-limiting with respect to language and geography: García Canclini and Castro-Gómez reach largely Latin Americans and Latin Americanists; Moya and Saldívar speak largely to scholars of the United States.

Here is where writers like Eduardo González Viaña play an increasingly crucial role as cultural mediators.[3] For him the narrative of culture and border crossing is marked and enriched by the play of us/them, by the stylistic and thematic exchanges between national cultures and iconographic gestures, by an imaginary that cannot be other than trans-American in the broadest possible sense. While his recent collection of short stories, *Los sueños de América*,[4] offers narratives derived from the subject position of individuals typically unobserved and unobservable, these border-crossing subjects estrange the literary landscape by subjecting others to their gaze. The reader, then, whether Latin American or North American, needs to rethink a whole series of cultural presuppositions. These texts expose highly conflicted relations with an ineluctable U.S. hegemonic power that at one level will interpolate them according to an unavoidable representational logic. At the same time, the chain of identification and representation is so over-determined that in effect these crossing narratives create highly ironicized contexts for thinking outside the norm. Thus the stories in the volume continually catch the reader off guard; their narrative location tends to be slightly askew from reader expectations, forcing us to recognize the U.S.-centrism of both dominant culture and traditional Latin@ discourses emanating from the United States, reminding us as well of the blind spots deriving from certain Latin American privileged locations as well.

Moreover, González Viaña provides a point of entry into exactly the question that interests me here: how to articulate a nuanced theory that relates concretely to the conundrums associated with the narratives of coming to the United States, and that supplements U.S.-based stories of immigration with Latin American-based takes on this familiar phenomenon. In this way, he creates at least the possibility for a transnational communication circuit, although in the stories themselves such attempts at speaking across cultures almost always fall short, if productively and suggestively so, as both modern and traditional means of community building are stretched beyond ordinary limits in the extraordinary circumstances devolving from life in the United States. In fact, it would not be overstating the case to say that González Viaña's stories have an almost obsessive focus on communication—its gaps, its failures, its conditional successes—as mediated by everything from the ubiquitous gossip of the small town to its more contemporary analogues in radio talk shows and local television programing. Mass media, for all its problems, serve an

important community-building function, and as Castro-Gómez might intuit, allow González Viaña to insert his characters into a conditioned modernity from a notably Latin angle.

This is far from a utopian project. González Viaña knows that any agglutinative process involves exclusions, and in the trans-American context this play of community and not-community can give rise to dangerous stereotypes. Rey Chow summarizes the conundrum of cross-cultural dialogue in her elegant reading of Derrida's analogy to Chinese writing in his early book, *Of Grammatology,* which she finds productively symptomatic of many other less subtly argued scholarly positions. Chow notes that "Derrida's move to read across cultures . . . involves a moment in which representation becomes, wittingly or unwittingly, stereotyping, a moment in which the other is transformed into a recycled cliché." What is important to note here is that Chow, along with Derrida, not only acknowledges that stereotypes are simplistic—an all-too obvious conclusion. She argues along with the French philosopher that they are also enabling fictions that allow theoretical formulations to take shape, that these clichés are always and everywhere absolutely essential to group relations and cannot be summarily dismissed: "The point, in other words, is not simply to repudiate stereotypes and pretend that we can get rid of them . . . , but also to recognize in the act of stereotyping . . . a fundamental signifying or representational process with real theoretical and political consequences" (70–71).

This is a lesson González Viaña seems to have interiorized in his stories, where egregious stereotype is often tied to humor. One of his characters comments: "no se olvide que la mayoría de los norteamericanos dispone de una geografía diferente a la que se usa en otras partes. . . . En muchos colegios y universidades, los estudiantes creen que su país se llama 'América' y limita por el sur con una nación llamada México de la cual provienen los hispanos. Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Lima, Bogotá y Quito, según eso, están en México" (240–41). Of course, U.S. citizens are not the only people in the hemisphere ignorant of American geography. In another of his stories, González Viaña describes a conversation between new immigrants from Peru and Guatemala in which the Guatemalan solicits the assistance of his fellow Latin American to locate a proper forest in the United States to which *naguales* might have fled (a *nagual* is an animal equivalent or representative of a human individual; it is a human twin soul in the animal world). He is astounded when the Peruvian university professor expresses his ignorance of *naguales* in general, a cultural entity familiar to any Guatemalan child (57–58). This story, with gentle humor, points to the

cultural incommensurability between countries that are often collapsed in the American imaginary, and reminds us that an educated Peruvian from Lima and a *campesino* from Guatemala, despite superficial similarities of language (and given the fact of Quechua in Peru and the many languages of the Maya family in Guatemala, even that assumption needs some justification), have very little in common except the circumstance of coincidentally meeting in the state of Oregon, U.S.A—which the author of this collection of short stories ironically describes as a state "en el lejano Oeste, sobre cuya existencia real la gente tiene algunas dudas" (162). At the same time, the very fact of contact itself creates new realities; in the case of these two characters, Oregon—the imaginary locus—is the catalytic factor that interpolates them into U.S. *latinidad*; at the same time, the form of this newly Latino identity derives from the encounter between Peru and Guatemala in a third space of personal investment, in the mutually contesting and revisionary sense of cultural selves evolving from this contact.

Another story begins with a call to one of the ubiquitous 900 numbers we see advertised on television, the kind that offers a 15 percent discount on the first fifteen minutes of sex talk with a live interlocutor. The opening gambit is an offer to create an imaginary interlocutor and an invented intimacy from the voice on the other end of the line: "Si quieres, dame tu nombre. Dame un nombre cualquiera. . . . Dime cómo te llamas o cómo quieres que te llame y te traeré a mis sábanas y a mis sueños" (88). This first call leads eventually to a repeat client situation, to a gradual unfolding of real (?) identities, to long conversations of mutual confession, to concrete propositions, leading up to a marriage proposal. Throughout the whole story we hear only the woman's side of the dialogue, a device that both aligns the reader with her as the point-of-view character and places the reader in the position of the lonely caller soliciting sex talk: "ya te he contado que soy una divorciada, solita, treintona y con dos hijas" (89); "¿Qué dices? . . . ¿Enamorado de mí? Pero si no me conoces. ¿Mi voz? Pero ¡qué tiene que ver mi voz con mi existencia!" (90). When she finally agrees to the meeting that "Xavier" has insisted upon—confirming her acceptance of a face-to-face encounter—he suddenly breaks off communication, presumably for the last time (98).

From my perspective the most interesting part of the story is not the failed encounter with "Xavier"—an unsurprising appearance of a worn-out cliché in the game of seduction, and an echo of her failed love affair with Peruvian Antonio—but the layering of this love story with that of her failed marriage with American Bill. She tells her caller: "me había casado con Bill para mejorar la raza. . . . Y por eso, desde que nacieron, tan solo

en inglés hablé con las chicas y protegí sus sueños para que la nostalgia de la otra patria no se les metiera" (93). In this revelation, "Susan" signals her acceptance of a racist, assimilationist dream for herself and her children, while at the same time uncovering her own lingering nostalgia, the unquiet dreams that prevent her from totally committing herself to this cliché. And, of course, Susan falls back into the unfortunately familiar structures of her failed love relationships from the past, this time, however, mediated by a new form of highly stylized and vexed (non) communication. The telephone charge call, like the internet chat room and interactive porn sites, famously allows people to play out fantasy lives by creating interesting personas to inhabit, imaginatively, for a limited time and in a circumscribed context. The shadowing of this subculture by reminders of the phone goddess's very real personal and cultural problems in an embodied existence outside the 900-line voice uncomfortably disrupts the fantasy both for the reader and the interlocutor.

Like Susan, most of González Viaña's characters are typically plagued by shadows and haunted by disappearances both atrocious and mundane; they are invisible people whose most common mode of social intercourse involves near-encounters, or dis-encounters, or mutually misunderstood exchanges. These characters suffer from prescient dreams, and if their waking lives are almost too full, they have yet to find a way to articulate them in narrative form. One of the most common complaints involves the inability to tell a story: because the cultures are incommensurate and there is no context for common dialogue, because the storyteller is invisible to the social network around him and thus goes unheard, or because the speaker's English is inadequate.

The story "Las sombras y las mujeres" details just such a breakdown in communication. It begins with one kind of performative orality—something like a carnival barker's appeal to the gathering crowd: "¡Atención, señoras y señores! Vengan pronto a ver lo que nunca han visto y lo que nunca más sus ojos volverán a ver" (133). This public address almost immediately gives way to a more private conversation, between the original speaker, don Salomé Navarrete, a Mexican astrologer charged with murdering his *gringa* wife, and his unidentified Spanish-speaking interlocutor, presumably a court interpreter. His appeal for a fair hearing is based on his inability to comprehend that there is a disjunction between two legal systems, sketchily defined by reference to Jalisco and California. This misperception leads to his conviction that if only he spoke good English the authorities would have to let him out of jail: "si yo supiera hablar inglés, ya le habría contado toda mi historia a la policía. . . . A usted sí quiero contarle, para que me traduzca" (134). The issue turns out, however, to have less to do with a straightforward rendition of his words into English than a translation of the conceptual frame implicit in his first, public comment, which refers to a beautiful woman named Moonie who mysteriously and miraculously vanishes with a lunar eclipse. To the police, this is mumbo-jumbo that sounds like an idiot's attempt to avoid a confession of murder: "por eso es bueno que usted me escuche y me traduzca, y les explique que todo esto no es más que una conjunción astral equivocada o un simple error del cielo. Dígales usted esto porque yo no puedo ni siquiera comenzar a contar esta historia: cuando comienzo a hablar en inglés todos se matan de risa" (148). For the accused murderer, however, the alibi seems perfectly reasonable, within the constructs of his local knowledge system.

In this story González Viaña once again places his audience in the role of the unheard and invisible interlocutor, implicitly speaking across the cultural barrier to individuals more able than the LAPD to understand the context of the hapless suspect's alibi. At the same time, the presumably educated reader of the story is as unlikely as the *gringo* police to accept wholesale the allegation of an unfortunate astral intervention in the disappearance of someone's spouse. Yet in the community created by the whole of this text, such happenstances—with a sidewise wink to the remembered conventions of a down-market magic realism—have more substance than not. In this multiply mediated fashion, the author of the story inter-articulates the (non)sensible and the (un)intelligible, pointing to the fissures in each knowledge system and breaking up the grammaticality of what each community assumes to be grounding concepts that serve as the basis from which to speak.

What remains in this story, after the outlines of these structures are exposed, is something like the concept of the heterotopic space as defined by Foucault, that is, those sites "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). Each element in the story speaks to an understanding of how life and the universe are ordered; each such concept is mirrored and neutralized in an equal and opposite understanding. The crux of this story—the explanation for Moonie's disappearance/murder—allows the author and the narrator to juxtapose and even superimpose incompatible meanings without adjudicating between them.

This alternative concept of social organization confronts the stereotypically monolithic American understanding of the ordering of reality. One of the most potent reservoirs for this alternative model of interaction is that

of the community's shared knowledge, as orally transmitted in the margins of the U.S. communication system. These are conversations that occur in the media network, but in its unnoticed corners, its interstices and local connections. At the end of the long short story "La mujer de la frontera," for instance, the resolution of the plot revolves around a series of postulations shared in an undefined communal space, possibilities that finally come to a sort-of consensus in the last line of the tale. The repeated appeals to a community-based understanding—"Algunos comentan . . . Otros sostienen . . . Otros aseguran . . . dicen que . . . la verdad es. . . . De lo que todos están seguros . . ."—all lead up to the final sentence: "lo que otras personas dicen es que se los llevó un angel, y punto" (73–4). "Y punto" cuts off the chain of speculation without resolving the issue in question, allowing it to remain open in its many-voiced, multifarious possibility.

Typically, in this collection of stories the face-to-face communications of a small-town life are extended through radio, telephone, and television as makers of community. The first story in the volume, and one of the book's most successful, offers a gently humorous allegory of immigrant life through the tale of a donkey named Porfirio, which is smuggled across the border into the United States by an equally undocumented family. The story opens with the collective voice: "Cada vez que pensamos en Porfirio, no sabemos qué pensar. Unos dicen . . . otros aseguran" (11). This careful register of public opinion continues to mark the story at each key point, as the achievements of the donkey and of his family become more and more supernatural. The tale begins, though, with a simple and urgent question that sustains the whole of the text and remains both familiar and banal: "hay que preguntarse cómo hace una familia invisible para vivir en los Estados Unidos " (14). Invisibility, however, is more than a metaphor, as it leads to a series of other questions, including speculation about Porfirio's intellectual abilities, about whether he was sold for meat to a fast-food joint, and whether or not a very special donkey might really be able to fly.

The most fertile speculations in this story are anchored in talk radio, "La Hora de la Raza," a call-in program that creates the conditions for exchange of ideas and information. Efraín Díaz Horna calls in to say he saw the donkey climbing a mountain; a female caller says that she saw him in the sea by Lincoln City; other callers swear that at the same time they have seen him in other sites; the DJ interrupts with his own speculations; and then the story's point-of-view character calls in with a question about whether burros go to heaven, creating another set of calls from clergymen on that issue, with a sidebar discussion of the biblical donkey from Palm Sunday. Speculation and commentary involve the most diverse cross-section of community members: from children to aged hermits, from housewives to prisoners, college-educated professionals to field workers. To cap things off, an exasperated university professor weighs in on the topic:

> Fue entonces cuando intervino un presumido profesor de universidad para rogar a la distinguida audiencia hispana que diera muestras de sindéresis porque los burros jamás podrían aprender a leer ni escribir y nos hizo recordar que vivíamos en el país de la modernidad, y no en una lamentable aldea rural como aquella de la que ustedes salieron, pero cuando iba a continuar su perorata, el locutor lo interrumpió para pasar un corrido de los Errantes de Jalisco. (23)

The professor's condescending remark adds no particular voice of authority; on the contrary, his too prosaic comment remains just one more, equally authorized or de-authorized, voice among many—a little more boring, perhaps; a bit too lacking in poetry, and hence worthy of interruption by more melodious travelers. What the professor absolutely does not understand is the enormous pull of the over-determined correlatives of culture represented in symbolic anchors like Porfirio, the umbilical objects and beings that tie the immigrant to a nostalgically (re)invented home culture. As the narrator says early in the story: "la verdad es que todos hubiéramos querido traernos el burro, la casa, el reloj público, la cantina y los amigos, pero venir a este país es como morirse, y hay que traer solamente lo que se tiene puesto, además de las esperanzas y las penas" (12).

The questions raised by Porfirio are picked up later, in "Santa Bárbara navega hacia Miami," another story in which a powerful umbilical link to the homeland is reinforced in the back-and-forth of media reporting on a mysterious event. Here, the precipitating action is the fortuitous hurricane that brings a statue of the Afro-Cuban syncretic saint to a needy family in Florida. The narrative voice echoes the community's understanding of the cultural divide that the statue needs to cross, a barrier much more significant than the stretch of water between the two nations: "Santa Bárbara no es Santa Bárbara. Es decir, no es una santa, no es una mujer. Es el nombre que los esclavos le pusieron a Orishá Shangó. . . . Todos lo sabemos, pero no lo decimos, y mucho menos en los Estados Unidos, este país donde no hay santos ni mucho menos espíritus" (221–2). Speaking and silence, then, is very much at the heart of this story, as Anglos scramble to deal with an unexpected and inexplicable crisis, while Latinos share with each other their superior information on the nature of this event. The supernatural in

this story derives from the Latin American shore, and in making her entry into this country is clearly collaborating with the most mundane examples of modern media communication, albeit in a coded fashion that only those in the know can readily decipher: the television announcement of the hurricane (215), TV-astrologer Walter Mercado's advice to people born under Aquarius to watch out for an unexpected arrival (216), *gringo* Chuck's alerting of the army and the INS (227–8), the intervention of Kofi Annan and other world leaders (232), the evacuation of the city (233), and, above all, reports of all these strange events in the *Nuevo Herald*. The collective narrative voice concludes: "eso es lo que podemos hallar en los periódicos. . . . El resto no es completamente digno de creerse" (234–5).

The stories of Porfirio and Santa Bárbara, though deriving from two very different versions of Latin American cultures, have in common this profound link to the ancestral home, on the one hand, and a deep-seated interest in exploring the nature of Latin@ communities in this country on the other. In both stories the resources of the United States—public access to television, radio, and newspapers—supplement the traditional means of knowledge exchange in the smaller, tightly knit communities remembered from the immigrants' homelands. This combination of modern and traditional forms of communication does not, however, merely reproduce the homeland, but adds a double focus to discussion; the characters may believe in the powers of Porfirio or Santa Bárbara, but they also know that the *gringos* work within an entirely different set of presuppositions. At the same time, as Moya and Saldívar remind us, "a writing or a reading of this subject is not always a self-celebratory, utopian, or self-marginalizing endeavor. Rather it can entail a much more substantial theoretical intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past—that rationalize the authoritarian, restrictive tendencies within cultures" (6).

Reingard Nethersole explores a similar question. He notes that each of us inevitably speaks from within a certain differentially defined repository of knowledge, and that the ability to speak across and between two or more knowledge systems relates to their degree of convergence, which often is defined as the ability to share vocabulary and structures of organization. He defines the distance between systems through the concept of the interval, which he uses as a metaphor for the temporal relations of distance, pause, succession, duration (drawing from music), as well as the spatial concept of in-between (drawing from the Latin *intervallum*, a site between fortifications). This is, most crucially, a grounding theoretical concept in his argument: "The interval that articulates the *movens* of

thinking *with*, in accordance to which an interval always proposes the joining and distancing of two instances (tones), seems to me to be the ground and habitat of literary theory today. . . . [T]he interval—as a space of *ontological* and *epistemological* interdependency rather than (post-Enlightenment) emancipation, and as a generator of, rather than as (grammatical) limit for thought—circumscribes a perilous space, from both a thinking and an institutionalized point of view, for an unfolding of thought" (Nethersole 52).

González Viaña explores something like Nethersole's interval in his own terms when he has one of his characters muse: "siempre he querido saber cuál es la duración de la eternidad, y eso es lo que me preguntaba cuando solamente me faltaban dos señoras y un interminable pelirrojo para llegar hasta la cajera del Safeway" (107). Here, in a typically humorous fashion, González Viaña has his soap-opera author bring together the banal and the abstract: eternity as defined by the length of the line in Safeway, the interval measured in his alienation from, and invisibility in, that mundane grouping. The story of the blocked writer is set in this spatialized interval of enforced waiting, and in two other temporal intervals of non-communication: first, between the checkout clerk ("Don't forget your bag!") and the writer ("No hice caso a la cajera, y abandoné mis cosas y la tienda a toda prisa"), and almost simultaneously between the writer and the (imagined?) woman dressed in lilac who interrupts the process with her assertion: "Tú sabes que nos hemos visto en la otra vida" (112). The narrator is an unknown drudge in the television world, an invisible cog in the machine. He is shaken out of his mostly unhappy complacency by the woman's insistence on recognition, on a shared knowledge of him that seems both impossible and threatening, but that certainly is misleadingly out of place in Safeway, where fluorescent lights and American conventions rule.

Such tripping in the interval between two voices, or misdirection in multiple cross-cultural contexts, is one of González Viaña's favored effects. The title story of the volume is typical in this regard. Set in Berkeley in the late 1980s, the story details a series of encounters between a Latin American writer and an eighty-year-old man named Patrick, who "era o aparentaba ser" a Communist who fought in the Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War—or alternatively may be a CIA agent (176). At one point early in the story the narrator comments: "la verdad es que América me parecía un artificio literario en las supuestas historias españolas de Patrick, o una muestra de su adicción por la literatura de Hemingway" (180). Complicating the referent still further, "América" in this quote is purportedly a young Spanish woman who fights with the Republican

forces and has taken on the pseudonym out of her love for Patrick and to honor his homeland. Santiago asks the narrator: "sabes, por supuesto, quién es América, ¿no es cierto?" (179). In this story, however, "saber" (knowledge) and certainty ("por supuesto") tend to lead to abysses of unknowing. Unsurprisingly, for example, the reader is informed, using this favored expression: "por supuesto, Patrick no se llamaba Patrick, y Santiago no es necesariamente Santiago" (178). The series of cultural referents (Berkeley, Spain, Peru) and the complicated lines of storytelling are tangled indeed—America passes through three different narratives of ambiguous political affiliation, none of which can be fully authorized by any grounding authority.

The reader is understandably reluctant to accept any seemingly definitive statement in such an atmosphere of misperception, misdirection, and mistake. We recall, for instance, that the narrator's comment "aquí comienza la verdadera historia" is used to make reference to a flamenco dancer defined as something from an illustrated Washington Irving text or maybe one of the Hollywood *Zorro* movies (189). This Hollywood flamenco/América, thus, is related to a cross-cultural invention triangulated through Spain and the United States by way of Latin America: "creía que tanto esas peinetas como esas españolas eran un invento de los gringos" (190). When, at the end of the story, the narrator takes a taxi to the cemetery, which is "donde comienza para mí la verdadera historia," he also tells us that this story cannot be expressed in words, only dream images. Instead, in the final paragraph the apparently pseudonymously named Santiago introduces the narrator, with a wink, to an audience that includes the dream-figure doña América, and the narrator begins his tale again: "comienzo a decir algo que es probablemente la verdadera historia" (194).

The entire volume is full of similarly tortuous artifices. One of the most successful stories in the collection is "Esta es tu vida," ostensibly rerunning an episode from the Spanish-language network's variation on a famous U.S. show dating to the early days of television. Like the original show, the story's pretext involves reuniting, in a Miami studio, key individuals from the honored guest's past for an evening of surprises and celebration. In this case, the honored guest is a distinguished businessman and "orgullo latino," Dante León. In this richly imagined story, González Viaña successfully mimics not only the hype involved in the staged recognition event, but also opens up the question of what it means to talk about a person's "life" on various levels: one that is constructed for a TV audience for a particular political and social purpose, one that has been really lived, with the roads not taken and the choices and regrets involved. Thus, for instance,

from the outside Dante León is an extremely successful individual, a role model, a fitting example of the small and highly visible group that represents Latin pride in terms of the U.S. measures of achievement. This superficial appearance of success comes with a high price. Dante León reminds us of his fears, and is aware that the secrets he has to hide separate him in kind from other American dream success stories, even though outward signs apparently assimilate him to the dominant culture model: "yo reconocía cada día que todos los inmigrantes podemos ser sujetos de chantaje . . . hasta un alto ejecutivo como yo que había tenido que falsear su vida" (273). León has become a Latino success story, ironically, by stripping himself overtly of his Latin American past, while secretly and almost shamefully remaining tied to that life-preserving and betrayed umbilical. His success story comes with the spiritual baggage of a green-card marriage, an alcoholic ex-wife, and negotiations with the mafia. In order to reach his current status, therefore, León has given up his country, the woman he loved, his dignity, a life he understood, "y, en cierta forma, a todo lo que hacía mi identidad personal. Y también a todo lo que me parecía perfecto en este mundo" (278).

When asked what he does know, what he can communicate about how to become a success in the United States, which is the pretext of the show, his internal monologue tells a very different story from the official tale of individual achievement. This second story shows a devolution of someone to no one in particular, invisible and assimilated. The provocative question "¿Te has desmaterializado ya?" (261) in the beginning of the story thus inevitably leads to the character's anchoring in objects at the end, "para que no se desmaterialice" (282). Yet the review of objects past and present offers no real consolation; instead, they mark another interval between two different and incompatible understandings of success and point to León's current invisibility even as he takes center stage; point as well to his future existence as ghost.

León's deep regrets, the loss of self that accompanied the step-by-step process of choices that brought him to this point and this place, remain silenced in the celebratory television event. They are trivialized with the hyperbolic appearance of TV astrologer Walter Mercado with his warnings to the Sagitarians in the audience (277). More: León's nostalgia for what he has lost grates uncomfortably against the double story of the American dream as stereotypically imagined by the dominant culture, and as adapted by Miami Latino culture in an unrecognized assimilationist gesture. The program has no real interest in León or his life in terms of a cautionary tale about the cost of living between Latin America and the United

States and having to sacrifice the former to satisfy the latter. Instead, the story ends with the grand finale of the program and the unveiling of the parting gift, hidden behind a door in a studio mock-up of the Statue of Liberty: a Mercedes Benz car "full equipo de calidad Liberty." In the final scene, the narrator urges the studio technicians: "prendan otra vez los faros de la Liberty y apunten a los ojos de Dante para que no se quede dormido, para que no se desmaterialice y para que tenga tiempo de contar a los que van con él toda su vida y milagros en los Estados Unidos" (282). This episode seems a perfect example of the phenomenon described by Khatibi in "The Colonial Labyrinth": "Memory survives in melancholy. . . . The implosive memory dreams up therefore an imaginary exchange. It implodes in two ways: on the one hand, it closes itself in the nostalgia of a dead time and its entropy; on the other hand, it *endures* the present as if it were a dream, or rather, a nightmare" (10). León's past, the memories of loss, cannot sustain themselves in the "reality" evoked by the American dream—on the contrary, his memory of an alternative and unreachable past can only survive in melancholy daydreams.

The collision of Dream and dream implodes in Liberty's blinding headlights; the present is endured as if it were a dream; the inaccessible past is locked in the nostalgia for a dead dream. The movement of nostalgia and melancholy in the context of a media extravaganza celebrating a commodified Dream reminds the reader of what happens when an individual loses his bearings in time and space, no longer able to articulate precisely what his life is, or is about, in this site of cultural collisions. In González Viaña's stories, the Statue of Liberty or the local Safeway store offer cultural markers that provisionally and very ambiguously serve as overdetermined symbolic sites for these cultural collisions, as well as the actual locations for the crisscrossing (non)exchanges among the invisible people within the U.S. borders. Dematerialization is always the threat for these characters, and yet, in the shape of the collection as a whole, as Nethersole intuits, a tone has been sounded in the interval between two knowledge systems, and the echo of that tone generates a new music for reflection.

Notes

1 To be sure, other scholars have pointed to a crisis in literary studies—J. Hillis Miller goes so far as to argue that "in spite of the inertia that will keep what we have called literary study going for a few more years, the handwriting is on the wall. Literary study's time is up" (59). It seems to me entirely noncoincidental that the death of literary study is being proclaimed precisely at the point in which formerly excluded voices are beginning to make a claim on our attention. This is large issue, however, and one that I do not have the space to argue here. Miller himself, for instance, sees the most hopeful response to this difficult crisis in studying U.S. literature as a branch of comparative literature (65).

2 To be more accurate, from another perspective, people like Castro-Gómez and García Canclini—along with other scholars such as Ernesto Laclau, Enrique Dussel, Gayatri Spivak, or Homi Bhabha, to name just a few, represent courtesy members of the First World "us," always marked by (and often celebrated for) a putative or real aura of otherness, that in turn and paradoxically makes them "other" to the intellectual institutions of their home countries as well as, obviously, other to the subaltern citizens inhabiting those local realities. Furthermore, as Samuel Weber argues, more often than not in the United States, globalization theory has become identified with a spurious internationalism—it only happens in English (16). His warning reminds us of the countervailing voices to the proponents of multilingual U.S. literature.

3 Eduardo González Viaña was born in Chepen, Peru, in 1942. He is the author of several collections of short stories, among them, *Los sueños de América* (Alfaguara, 2000), *Las sombras y las mujeres* (Mosca Azul Editores, 1996); and *Batalla de Felipe en casa de las Palomas* (Editores Losada, 1969), which garnered the Premio Nacional de Fomento a la Literatura. He currently teaches Latin American literature at Western Oregon University.

4 This book topped Alfaguara-USA's sales list for over a year and won France's Juan Rulfo Prize (l999, for the story "Siete días en California"), the United States' Latino Literature Prize (2001), Peru's National Literary Prize (2001), and Egypt's Celebration of Latin America Prize (2002).

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Part Four

BRAZILIAN IMMIGRATION