

First chapter of *Talking Back*

Chapter 1:
Towards a Latin American feminist literary practice

Elaine Showalter's well-known article, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," contains an enormously attractive schematic summary of several major trends in recent feminist criticism: "English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression" (186). The temptation to try to complement this formula with one strikingly pertinent to Latin America is almost overwhelming: Latin American feminist criticism, essentially fragmentary, stresses compression. Latin American feminist criticism, essentially communal, stresses concession. Latin American feminist criticism, essentially aesthetic, stresses impression(ism). Latin American feminist criticism, essentially maternalistic, stresses consumption. (No, that doesn't sound quite right.) However, unfortunately for those of us who would like to imagine a new, neatly distinctive category, while numerous works of a feminist bent have appeared in the United States and in the various countries of Latin America in recent years, no particularized, clearly innovative theory has as yet emerged. Perhaps we might conclude that Latin American feminist criticism, essentially underdeveloped, incites depression. Such studies as have appeared in academic publications often seem too easily categorizable into either (a) largely impressionistic, content-based analyses of the representations of women in traditional texts) or (b) efforts to recuperate works by women for the Latin American literary canon with theoretical tools borrowed mostly from the Anglo-American and/or French varieties of feminist thought.¹ Says Vidal, summarizing the conclusions of various colleagues: "in the experience and judgment of our consultants, a great deal of material is circulating whose assumption of feminism, or whose analytic and interpretative criteria reduce themselves to a

mere instrumental application of already-canonized theories from French and Anglo Saxon criticism to a specific work, without revealing the cultural norms that motivated the scholar to select the chosen text nor examining the possible contribution of this exercise to the feminist cause" (8). We may or may not agree with the specific terms and implicit call to social action of Vidal's critique; nevertheless, he quite concisely captures the essence of the most nagging question surrounding Latin American feminist critical activity.

The intent of this book is to explore, first of all, the theoretical issues involved in the hypothetical construction of a (various) specifically Hispanic feminism(s); secondly, to discuss some of the strategies of a feminist literary practice in the Latin American context and to offer sample applications of these strategies to readings of specific texts; and finally, to suggest some of the difficulties inherent in the analysis of "a different writing" by what we might call, with a willfully reversed transvaluation of Cortázar's derisive term, "el lector hembra" (the female reader). This first chapter provides an overview of some of the conditions that inflect the evolving infrastructure of Latin American feminist theory, and also proposes a set of sample strategies that I have found useful in focusing critical practice. In so doing, I borrow advisedly from both first world and Latin American(ist) criticism what is pertinent and insightful, while trying to avoid the pitfalls of adhering too closely to the unsatisfactory recipe of combining Anglo-American and French theory in equal parts and seasoning with a dash of Latin American fiction.

To appropriate theories foreign to Latin America for a Latin American feminist practice is not in and of itself a negative act; too often, nevertheless, the indiscriminate or weakly-motivated application of French or American or British theory can result in continuation of the kind of destructive stereotype described by Jean Franco: "'British intellectuals: Latin American revolutionaries' was the wording of an ad I once saw in the New Statesman in England. It summed up nicely the separation of intellectual and manual labor along the axis of metropolis and periphery, as well as suggesting the flow of revolutionary action into areas where people know no better than to fight. The conclusion is that the Third World is not much of a place for

theory. . ." ("Beyond" 503). In response to this perceived lack of theory, metropolitan intellectuals have frequently attempted to fill the perceived vacuum with more-or-less critically and historically informed ventriloquism. Franco continues: "Metropolitan discourses on the Third World have generally adopted one of three devices: (1) exclusion--the Third World is irrelevant to theory; (2) discrimination--the Third World is irrational and thus its knowledge is subordinate to the rational knowledge produced by the metropolis; and (3) recognition--the Third World is only seen as the place of the instinctual" (504). Strikingly, in this era of gender- and race-consciousness, the First World continues to subject the Third to analyses that relegate its cultural production to that group of activities traditionally associated with the implicitly inferior feminine realm. Even more strikingly, prominent third world and third worldist writers seem to participate uncritically in this subordination.

Such activities on the part of metropolitan critics (and I exclude neither Franco nor myself from this adjuration) require the greatest vigilance. They cannot be dismissed as aberrations unilaterally deriving from a politically untenable assumed relation to the traditionally male preserves of theoretical activity, but must also be guarded against in respect to the varieties of feminist thought as well. We can assume that, as Spivak reminds us, "varieties of feminist theory and practice must reckon with the possibility that, like any other discursive practice, they are marked and constituted by, even as they constitute, the field of their production" ("Imperialism" 319). It is important for the Latin Americanist to resist the categorical work of reason that follows from the special apriori assumptions deriving from insufficiently-considered appropriations of metropolitan theories of feminism carried over into analyses of Latin American literature. It is absolutely essential for the critic to take into account both the vast differences in the field of production and the distinctive qualities of the object of study that may very well, if ignored, lead to either blindness to or erroneous evaluation of cultural products. It is crucial, furthermore, to attend not only to matters of content and context, but also to what we may call, following Jardine, considerations of "enunciation."² In other words, there may be considerable overlap between, for example, Barthes' theories and Glantz' novels, but there are also serious

disjunctions. The careful critic will take from Barthes only what is useful and pertinent and stir that material together with other critical/theoretical approaches that complement it. In such a confection, the French flavoring will and richness and consistency to the broth, without overwhelming or denaturing the soup.

Furthermore, the destructiveness of the stereotype of Latin America as the land of emotion and practice rather than critical thought is not limited to its widespread acceptance in the first world, where it is given various patronizing forms by publications like the New Statesman. More destructive yet is the internalization of the stereotype in a kind of pan-Latin inferiority complex, most destructive when more subtly masked. I am struck, for example, that even so acute a critic and original a thinker as Octavio Paz falls victim to this tendency. Difference and originality continue to elude the Mexicans, and, by extension, other Latin Americans, he suggests, to this day: "The contradiction of New Spain is recorded in Sor Juana's silence. It is not difficult to decipher its meaning. The impossibility of creating a new poetic language was but one aspect of a greater impossibility: that of creating . . . a new thought." We can leave aside the debatability of Paz's critique of Sor Juana; the issue here is the unquestioned acceptance of a posited cultural inferiority complex that aggravates an already overdetermined weight of pessimism. If we follow the lines of Paz' critique, we are forced to conclude that Latin America is a pale copy of the West, unable to think for itself or create anything new because not only is criticism of existing structures unfamiliar and unpalatable; the entire philosophical infrastructure of society is based on the prohibition of criticism. To carve out an access to criticism would, according to this argument, free the nations of Latin America from this impasse, but would also change their natures so radically that they would lose their essential identity. Paz concludes sweepingly, in a much cited phrase: "We Hispanic peoples have never become truly modern because, by contrast with other Western peoples, we never knew an age of criticism" (xiv-xv). Almost every term of this grand overgeneralization is highly contestable, but it is important to signal that the perceived lack of criticism has a way of turning into an actual paucity, and one too

easily explained by way of an appeal to the nature of the "Hispanic" as opposed to "other Western peoples." In this respect, as in others, Latin America requires a rewriting of its history.

Clearly, one of the major difficulties confronting the Latin Americanist is the engrained belief that feminist theory in Latin America, like other aesthetic and political theories, currently lags behind feminist practice, or can be characterized by its subordinate status in comparison to the more highly developed metropolitan discourses. Speech and action sweep ahead of theoretical guidance; scattered bits of formalizations are only beginning to see and conceive and reconstruct themselves after the fact of specific social and political activity, and do so in the tentative theories that, paradoxically and frustratingly, may at times seem more reactionary than the revolution that produced them, or that seem to be marked by an unconscious refusal to attend to the implications of their own discourses. We can read thusly the curious wavering in Marta Traba's simultaneous recognition and rejection of the "universals" of narrative discourse. The resulting "situation of inferiority" depended upon an unquestioning validation of the assumptions encoded in the "universal" qualities of good literature; undecidably, the situation has been superseded either because women's literature now more closely approximates the masculinist model of values, or because that model itself has been rejected. Traba quite rightly points to the problem of pervasive misreading of texts by women, misreadings derived from applying a very specific set of culturally, ideologically, and aesthetically inappropriate assumptions to a very different group of texts as if they were universal values. Several questions remain, however. If women writers of Latin America do not, in general, subscribe to the values encoded in the phrase "of universal reach," why not? Is there in these works a conscious attempt to undermine the masculinist definitions of universality? If women do not write works that, according to these traditional values, are recognizably innovative, what are they doing instead? Is there another set of strategies that can more accurately understand the kinds of under-recognized innovations in these texts by women? Under what conditions and with what limitations can the discerning reader identify and evaluate such discursive practices?

So too might one explore the implicit assumptions behind one of the most well-known and frequently cited essays in the Latin American feminist corpus. Sara Castro-Klarén's "La crítica literaria feminista y la escritora en América latina" (Feminist Literary Criticism and the Latin American Woman Writer) seems to point almost too neatly to a binary division of labors similar to that already intuited by Franco: literary critics on the one hand (or the one side of the ocean), the Latin American woman writer on the other. Indeed Castro-Klarén's paper highlights a call to action in which she recognizes, "We now have a goodly number of texts written by Latin American women, but we still have not elaborated theoretical positions derived from the reading of those texts" (43). In a more recent article, Castro-Klarén specifically takes up the discussion begun in her "Teoría del la crítica literaria . . ." ("In a way, what I would like to do here is to continue the essay written five years ago" [Vidal 95]), in which she updates the debate between Anglo-American and French varieties of criticism through an evocation of the stylized dance of antagonistic partners, contrasting Showalter's "gynocriticism" (cultural and historical in orientation) with Jardine's "gynesis" (writing as a woman). She ends this essay, like her earlier one, with an imperative call to action: "the study of Latin American literature is ripe for a re-writing of its history. The figure of Women and the subsequent problematics implied by its presence should cause a profound re-thinking of the possible history of Latin America and its symbolic systems" (105), that is, both Latin American literature and history, and the history of literature, require immediate and profound re-examination. Such necessary re-examination, with the concomittant reconstruction of a literary genealogy that moves women from the footnotes to the main text, that fills in the temporal and topographical gaps between Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Luisa Valenzuela, represents, indeed a transgenerational biographical (or, radically, an autobiographical) act. It is also a politic and political strategic move.

Castro-Klarén clarifies the need to take into account the special circumstances of "la loca criolla en el ático" 'the criolla madwoman in the attic.' Yet, "La loca criolla en el ático" carries with her a heavy load of potential misrecognitions and wayward double meanings. "The madwoman in the attic" refers specifically to Gilbert and Gubar's classic text, and to Castro-

Klarén's call for critical work of parallel importance in Latin American letters; it refers, in Gilbert and Gubar's work, to Bertha, Rochester's mad first wife in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, a role recreated from Bertha's point of view in Jean Rhys' brilliant 1966 novel, Wide Sargasso Sea. Bertha, of course, is both mad and criolla; in both books her heritage is West Indian rather than British. Brontë, the nineteenth-century novelist, is archetypically British, the daughter of a relatively poor, but respectable family. Rhys, the twentieth-century writer who takes a more sympathetic view of the madwoman, is, like her character, a criolla, born in Dominica, one of the British colonies in the West Indies, of a creole mother and a Welsh father. The first word we must unpack, then, is the word "loca." Clearly, the madwoman means something quite different, ideologically, in Jane Eyre and in Wide Sargasso Sea, a distinction which might well be explored in terms of a colonizer versus a colonized point of view. But in Latin (as opposed to British) America, "loca" has a range of significations quite different from those obtaining in either of the English-language books, as the juxtaposition "loca en el ático"/"loca de la Plaza de Mayo" immediately underlines. Her madness, and her sanity, are differently coded and valued.

Secondly, analysis of "la loca criolla en el ático" would have to take into account specific race and class issues. It will be necessary to complement the study of the "la loca criolla" (i.e., an American-born white woman of European descent) with studies of a series of other women, perhaps less literate, less proficient as writers, or at least less published, but altogether dominant in sheer numbers: la mestiza, la indígena, la negra, la mulata. They too are mad, in both English senses of the word, and perhaps in both the English and the Spanish senses as well. But given the predominance of the criolla voice, who speaks when speaking of them? Who are they? Who is the subject, and who is the object of discourse? Who the writer, and who the critic?

Finally, study of "la loca criolla en el ático" does not occur in a vacuum, but takes its stand in a specific place. Bertha's attic is a forerunner of Woolf's room, and also has its analogous representations in those other rooms where women have been confined by custom and tradition: the kitchen, the bedroom. Furthermore, I find a strange propriety, and unholy delight, in the Spanish definition of "ático." Its first meaning is adjectival; it refers to something Attic (from

Athens), and therefore signifies "elegant." My dictionary gives the example of "Attic taste." A woman of Attic taste would, I suppose, have a facility for both physical and linguistic elegancies; she would also (the criolla again) have to dispose of the economic security to allow her to develop these tastes. The second meaning of "attic" in Spanish is the familiar noun referring to the room under the roof of one's house, that room in middle- and upper-class Latin American households all too easily given over to the maid. It is hard to imagine an Attic attic; more common would be the Attic front room and the cluttered storage space under the eaves. In Latin American women's writing, one way these two rooms intersect is in the vexed and exploitative relationships between mistress and servants, in the sexually-charged contacts between master and servant. In other works, the woman's Attic surface is a subterfuge for the attic where the secret self takes refuge. I cannot hope to deconstruct all the ramifications of "la loca (cuerda) criolla-mestiza-mulata-indígena-negra (¿ática?) en el ático-sala de estar-cuarto propio-cocina (de la casa, de la escritura)" in a single study, and must content myself with a more limited agenda.

Woman's place is in the home, with a broken foot.

Let us begin with a simple definition. In her "Self-Sacrifice is a Mad Virtue," Mexican poet, novelist, and diplomat Rosario Castellanos offered a detailed, if embittered, description of the typical criolla, a woman Castellanos exposes as holding to a value system that is quite mad. When we look at Mexican women, she tells us, our first impression is of irreducible diversity: the Indian girl tending sheep in Chiapas seems not to belong to the same species as the university science student, the provincial girl swathed in clothing from head to toe doesn't seem to live in the same century as the bikini-clad water-skier in Acapulco, the servant girl who has just discovered the blender doesn't have much in common with the airline hostess, bored from so many international flights. Cultural, economic, and temporal strata militate against any attempt to lump these women together. Yet, Castellanos finds, they have much that links them:

In Mexico, when we utter the word woman, we refer to a creature who is dependent upon male authority: be it her father's, her brother's, her husband's, or her priest's. She is subject to alien decisions that dictate her personal appearance, her marital status, the career she is going to study, or the field of work she is going to enter. . . . The Mexican woman does not consider herself--nor do others consider her--to be a woman who has reached fulfillment if she has not produced children. . . .

Love for one's child supplants or substitutes for all other kinds of love, which qualify as less perfect because they presuppose reciprocity. . . . Self-sacrifice is the Mexican woman's most famous virtue. . . . (Ahern 260-1)

In this formulation, women cannot do without a man to mediate for her in any realm of the social, and from this enforced dependency grows an unhealthy (mad) imprisonment in convention. Tradition, law, custom, the educational institutions all militate against a woman's rebellion; there is in this projection, no institutional framework to support such a movement. To say that February 1971 (when Castellanos first published this essay) is not now, and that Mexico is not all Latin America is only too obviously true. Yet her point stands, just as the comparison between the stone-age Chiapaneca and the cosmopolitan woman stands. I let one example, from an Argentinian woman's magazine, August 1, 1988, stand in for further argument. In a published report on the 1989 presidential campaign, the wife of one of the candidates was quoted as saying, "Mi marido es muy machista y yo también. Creo que a los hombres hay que dejarlos ir adelante. Total, desde atrás nosotras siempre hacemos lo que queremos. Hay que ser inteligentes, porque casi siempre las que manejamos todo somos nosotras, las mujeres" 'My husband is very machista and so am I. I believe that men have to go first. After all, behind the scenes we always do whatever we want. We have to be intelligent, because the ones who really run the show are us, the women' (Para Ti). Perhaps this wife is thinking of the unlovely manipulations of the famous Eva Perón, or of her less-apt successor in power, Isabel. In any case, the reference to the supposed, and very feminine, power that women exercise from behind the throne cannot fail to appear both manipulative ("we really run the show") and distastefully sly (we pretend to go

along, give them lip service, and then "do whatever we want"). It begs the question so pointedly addressed by Castellanos that what women want in this context is what men in positions of authority over them allow them to want.

In 1970, Castellanos published her important essay on "La participación de la mujer mexicana en la educación formal" (Mexican Women's Participation in Formal Education), in which she details the manner in which theoretical equality between the sexes as coded in the legal right to a formal education is dissipated in the informal "education" of custom and traditional usage that dictates matrimony and maternity as the only proper roles for women. Salaried employment is, says Castellanos, still conceived of as a temporary measure for single women who have not yet been so fortunate as to catch a man, and as an unfortunate necessity for those women whose men are not able to support the family comfortably. It is, she concludes, considered unnatural for a woman to want a career outside the home. For this reason, the relation of woman and work is seriously compromised: "And it is precisely the manner of taking employment that prevents women who work and receive a salary from developing, that prevents them from acquiring a certain degree of independence, which, although real, is lived as fictitious" (Mujer 29). While the conditions in the workplace have been changing enormously since 1970, and the idea of women who might wish to have a professional career is gaining greater acceptance, Castellanos' statement still resonates as generally correct, still carries a charge of wider applicability outside the strictly defined scene of salaried labor. In the workplace, in the privacy--or nonprivacy--of her home, in the public and political arenas, in the publishing houses, the Latin American woman is still largely a shadow construct. The independent existence of women, though real, is still perceived as a fiction, as an imaginary, incomplete derivative of the self-duplication--the derivative of Adam's rib, the Freudian castrate, the Jungian anima--of an overwhelmingly male ideological frame. To assume otherwise, to allow for a woman's independence or self-possession, would require the complete recalculation of an entire economic and philosophical system.

Among the questions that Latin Americanists need to explore in general in relation to the particularities of Latin American women's lives include concrete questions of their opposition to or complicity in the established orders and their relationships to specific social, historical, political, and legal structures in their respective countries in which the problem of a continuing colonialism in some realms intersects with post-colonial structures in others, and in which the particular relationships between women and development in developing countries demands closer examination. Such concrete questions need to be further explored in relation to the unwritten codes of a philosophical tradition that creates the figure of a fictional woman as "truth-in-law," thus immensely complicating the relationships of women to the quotidian realities of their lives, blurring the imperative steps for the assumption of agency and effective subjectivity. The refusal to abide by old discursive traditions is, as Castellanos intuits and Spivak more directly states, both poetic and political, involving the careful critique of conventions that are both literary/rhetorical and ideological.

Racial issues are also adumbrated differently in the different countries of Latin America than they are in the United States and Europe, and represent another layer of practical criticism that needs close attention. The issue of the "criolla in the attic" signalled by Castro-Klarén represents only one important area of investigation; careful theoretical examinations of "la mestiza" remain to be undertaken, and studies of "la indigena" that go beyond neo-anthropological information retrieval are extraordinarily scarce. Jean Franco has provided the initial hints of some directions these studies may take in her important essay, "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third-World Intelligentsia," where she makes the point that the historic confinement of mothers and daughters of good family is related not only to the systems of economic exchange common to most European societies, but carries as well particular racist inflections. She offers a simple diagram:

mother

virgin

phallus

not virgin
not mother
(whore)

mother
virgin
(Mary)

and suggests in her commentary on this schemata that "the privatized and inward-looking Hispanic house and the fact that the virtual confinement of married women to the home had not only been required by the Church but was also intended to insure the purity of blood that Spanish society had imposed after the wars against the Moors" ("Beyond" 507). Women of good family who escape are madwomen by definition; another ethic rules women from other class or racial backgrounds. Implicitly, women who were not so restricted, who had access to the streets and the beds of more than one man, were women who were not only spiritually, but also racially, impure. As one sort of impurity implies the other, certain kinds of unacceptable practices--the rape/seduction and then discarding of poor Indian or mestiza women for the convenience of upper-class white men--are commonly considered as lesser infractions than the violation of a woman of his own class.

Franco's study needs to be complemented by one developing the implications of her spatial diagram through the addition of a temporal axis that recognizes the progression virgin -> mother -> crone, by work on the anomalous but pervasive figure of the Indian mother-who-is-not-a-mother (girls and women who work as the "nanas" for their more advantaged employers' "pure-blood" children), and by other studies that take into account the very different organizations of female roles in indigenous societies.

Also needed are more profound studies of the multiply vexed relation between the two housewife figures--wife and servant. Cynthia Steele's provocative study suggests several important avenues of investigation. She notes the anachronistic flourishing of use of maids by middle class working families, and posits, among other factors, that for the married woman of middle- or upper-class status, the maid may "defer the need to confront her husband regarding the sexual division of household labor and childcare" (299). The maid buffers and displaces

institutional critique, while well-to-do women retain a vested interest in conserving the class distinctions for the very purpose of insuring themselves the advantages of a fragile feminist rhetorical position within and outside the home. There is no need for discussion or rebellion in the professional class; men do not do the housework or care for the children on a regular basis, but neither do their wives, who can pretend that their careers exempt them from such traditional female tasks. A gender issue is swiftly transformed into a nonproblem resolved in intellectual castes or social class distinctions. Castellanos wryly notes, "When the last maid disappears, the cushion on which our conformity now rests, then our first furious rebel will appear" (Ahern 50). Implicitly unpleasant household duties are no longer, in this modern age more aware of the theoretical intellectual equality of men's and women's minds, assigned over a male/female axis, but rather one of superior/inferior human types. Manual labor is appropriate for those unequipped mentally to take on rigorous intellectual work. This conclusion further supports the twisted maternalism of the power dynamics that obtain in such situations. The mistress, says Steele, "rationalizes that she is doing her servant a favor by 'giving' her work, that in so doing she is protecting and sponsoring the less fortunate" (301).

From one side of the power axis, Rosario Castellanos writes, "Up to this time, I have had two long servanthoods, and I use that word with the full consideration of its ambivalence" (Ahern 167). Exploitation of the women who serve her also keeps the mistress bound up in an unhealthy relation of dependence, keeps her from remembering that in the displacement of housekeeping tasks onto the maid, the upper-class woman insures the preservation of a noxious class-gender system, even if she deploys the rhetoric of feminism. Even worse: the use of rhetoric of liberation sounds like bad faith when coming from a woman who only uses it to her own advantage and averts her eyes from the exploitation going on in her own home. It is not surprising, then, that, from the other side of the power axis, the maids and factory workers look on feminism with suspicion, as yet another imperialist weapon.³ One of the responses to this oppression is a violent rejection of all that privileged women are, and all they represent. Thus, for example, Bolivian mine worker Domitila Barrios de Chungara, in a famous altercation,

confronts the chair of the Mexican delegation to "a Tribuna del Año Internacional de la Mujer" (Steering Committee of the International Year of the Woman) by saying:

Señora, hace una semana que yo la conozco a usted. Cada mañana llega usted con un traje diferente; y sin embargo, yo no. Cada día llega usted pintada y peinada como quien tiene tiempo de pasar en una peluquería bien elegante y puede gastar buena plata en eso; y, sin embargo, yo no. Yo veo que usted tiene cada tarde un chofer en un carro esperándola a la puerta de este local para recogerla a su casa; y, sin embargo, yo no. Y para presentarse aquí como se presenta, estoy segura de que usted vive en una vivienda bien elegante, en un barrio también elegante, ¿no? Y, sin embargo, nosotras las mujeres de los mineros, tenemos solamente una pequeña vivienda prestada y cuando se muere nuestro esposo o se enferma o lo retiran de la empresa, tenemos noventa días para abandonar la vivienda y estamos en la calle.

Ahora, señora, dígame: ¿tiene usted algo semejante a mi situación? ¿Tengo yo algo semejante a su situación de usted? Entonces, ¿de qué igualdad vamos a hablar entre nosotras? ¿Si usted y yo no nos parecemos, si usted y yo somos tan diferentes? Nosotras no podemos, en este momento ser iguales, aun como mujeres. . . . (Viezzler 225)

Madam, I met you a week ago. Each morning you arrive with a different outfit; and nevertheless I do not. Each day you arrive made-up and with your hair styled like someone who has time to go to a very expensive beauty salon and can afford to spend good money there; and nevertheless I do not. I see that you have a car with a driver waiting for you every afternoon to take you home; and nevertheless I do not. And in order to look the way you look, I am sure you live in a very elegant home in an area that is also elegant, right? And, nevertheless, we miners' wives have only a small, borrowed place to live, and when our husband dies, or when he is ill or retired from the company, we have ninety days to leave our home and we are in the street.

Now, tell me, Madam, do you have anything similar to my situation? Do I have anything similar to yours? Then what "equality" are we going to talk about between us? If we are not at all similar, if you and I are so different? Right now you and I cannot be equals, not even as women. . . .

Domitila's rejection of the privileged woman derives from a long history of silencing and oppression; of being spoken about and spoken for, as if her needs were subsumed in the demands of the upper-class women who oppress women like her. Their differences, says the Bolivian mineworker's wife, are so salient as to constitute almost another species; even to say both are "women" is a grave misnomer.

Domitila is, of course, quite right in signalling the bad faith and worse politics that allow a specific, shallow, privileged woman to presuppose that she can speak to and for all women. Women are not a class. Yet, it has become fashionable in certain circles to sneer at all intellectualizing as somehow tainted because most of the women who write do tend to belong to a single class: the bourgeoisie. Since the stereotypical "rich girl" is so easy to mock--much easier, in fact, than the stereotypical rich young man (the instant and overwhelming success of Guadalupe Loaeza's series of satirical articles on "las niñas bien" and "las reinas de Polanco" is a case in point)⁴--it is easy to lump all middle- and upper-class women together under the same heading and discredit them by association. Thus we have the interesting phenomenon of the woman who writes in order to denigrate the value of writing, who theorizes that only the concrete activism of revolutionary politics stripped of romanticism can be valorized. Gioconda Belli's upper-class woman in the novel, La mujer habitada, so redeems herself: "Era lógico que le atrayera la idea de imaginarse 'compañera,' verse envuelta en conspiraciones, heroína romántica de alguna novela. . . . Pero nada tenía eso que ver con la realidad, con su realidad de niña rica, arquitecta de lujo con pretensiones de independencia y cuarto propio Virginia Woolf. Debía romper este interrogatorio constante, se dijo, este ir y venir de su yo racional a su otro yo. . ." "It was logical that the idea of imagining herself a "comrade" would attract her, to see herself involved in conspiracies, the romantic heroine of some novel. . . . But none of this had anything

to do with her reality as a rich girl, as an architect of the rich with pretensions of independence and a Virginia Woolf-type room of her own. She ought to break out of this constant interrogation, she told herself, this to and fro-ing between her rational "I" and her other "I" (105). Belli's heroine, romantically, strips herself of romanticism and of her upper-class pretensions, to deliver herself body and soul to the revolution, to take the place of her (tragically) slain lover, and die, also romantically, in the most worthy of causes: fighting for the freedom of her country at the side of the nobly-inspired comrades from less-privileged backgrounds.⁵

These culturally tagged icons, like that of the "niña bien, the mother, the "muchacha," and the "nana," fraught as they are with the specifically Hispanic variations on considerations of blood, caste, and innate ability, need to be placed into serious studies that do not necessarily take the Eurocentric (French or Anglo-American) psychoanalytic or historical tradition as the crucial, or unique, point of departure. For example, Franco points to the importance of the immobility of the mother as a phenomenon marked by the particular uncertainties of a post-colonial, third-worldist insecurity about the potentialities for independent action in the larger social context: "the mother's body . . . offers the only unchanging territory in an uncertain world" ("Beyond" 508). Furthermore, "in a society scarred by violence and death that inevitably accompanied imperialist penetration . . . it is not surprising to observe a certain 'feminization of values'." It goes almost without saying that this "feminization of values" is ambiguously overdetermined in cultural practices that may, in compensation, overstress "macho" values while at the same time hiding the scars of an inbred inferiority complex that has, in actual historical practice, too frequently found its concrete referent in images of rape. In this manner the woman, as the primordial site for the metaphorical generation of discourse, must of necessity embody those unchanging, pristine values of permanence, privacy, immobility, and purity as the essential core of national identity. Franco again: "It is along this axis that social meanings accrue so that the madre patria in nationalist discourse is productive or sterile, prostituted or sacred" (508), and, we might add, hermetically sealed or torn open.⁶

Streetwalking, even its its innocent variants, is a discouraged offense against this ingrained morality, appropriate only for racially and socially inferior women who are assumed to be promiscuously impure. Streetwalking as a political activity--the "Madres de la Plaza de Mayo"--is officially ignored as unintelligible madness, a displacement made possible by the tradition of seeing all deviance from the model of self-restricted, enclosed femininity as madness. "Una loca" represents the most common appellation for any woman who crosses the threshold of the home and who steps outside the traditional bounds of a proper, womanly "pudor" (decorum, but also modesty, humility, and purity) and "recato" (prudence, caution, shyness, also coyness). Penalties for departure from the norm vary from severe official reprisals (imprisonment of the leaders of the "madres", "the slamming of military boots into the body of a pregnant Domitila, or the murder of Rigoberta's family" [Mora 59]) to the apparently ridiculous: the disapprobation of "decent" society, exclusion from the "better" clubs, a perception of unfitness for the only natural work of women. Thus, says Margo Glantz, "the woman who symbolizes change is unworthy of any man" (*Lengua* 31). Transgression of the norm can be categorized and safely disposed of as unworthiness, even madness. By placing herself inappropriately in the public arena, she can also be subject to public humiliation. I offer only one small, recent instance of the operation of the double standard as it polices transgression of sexual boundaries. Recently, the state-owned Electric Company (*Compañía de Luz*) in Mexico required AIDS tests of all and of only its female employees. There were two or three women who tested HIV positive; the names of these women were published and widely disseminated, causing, as my (male) informant tells me, a good deal of harmless amusement to the majority, who began to speculate on the women's possible sexual partners, and some concealed concern to men hypothetically identified as the probable lovers (their bosses).

Even the ostentatiously chaste rebel suffers gravely for her sins against the established order, which prizes long-suffering motherhood as the only valid female virtue. Condemned by her infractions to remain single, and without the excuse of duties to aging parents to justify her sacrifice of the joys of marriage and motherhood, "la solterona" slips from harmlessly eccentric

into the odd single woman ostracized by her peers. She can be subject to further slippage from respectability in the transformation from the merely ostracized woman to the one who becomes by definition fair game for seduction attempts, since she cannot count on the backing of a man, any man, no matter how deficient as a husband, to provide her with the markers of acceptable social status.

Women active in oppositional political organizations tend to see the emancipation of women as an integral aspect, but only one aspect, of a general necessity for liberation of all human beings from oppression, including internal exploitation of working class people by the well-to-do property owners, the politically-motivated repression of basic human rights by government and social organizations, and the particularly charged issues of exploitation of developing societies by more developed nations. The emblematic example of a woman's organization based on social and political protest is that of the influential and much imitated "Madres de la Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina. In defiance of orders prohibiting public demonstrations, an ever-larger group of brave women in the 1970's began to silently and publicly protest the disappearance of their relatives by forces of the military regime, forcing the issue of the disappeared into the public eye. The focus of their protest was not violence against women, per se, but rather the denunciation of a violent and immoral system; the fact that the protest was organized as the outrage of mothers, taking advantage of all the particular resonances of that word in Latin American societies and the culturally-ingrained reverence surrounding the image of these traditionally silent and self-sacrificing women, lent their protest an added moral weight and emotional charge. The history of these women, and their foremothers, still needs to be written. Guerra Cunningham writes:

In Latin American History there are numerous examples of women, who with obvious and still insufficiently analyzed political commitment, have made strategic use of a feminine identity in order to carry out their activities. In the wars of Independence, apart from espionage and the aid offered by patriotic women from their homes, the "mamas" of Perú ought to be mentioned, women who traveled with the army to cook for

the soldiers, and frequently tricked the royalists by entering a city crying about the patriots' defeat. In the case of La Regalada, a countrywoman left her farm house nude so as to disconcert the royalist army by pretending to be insane to give the patriots time to prepare their assault. The activities of resistance against the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships have in the present day served as other manifestations of the strategic use of the feminine body in its traditional signification as mother. (160)

These women represent what Sara Ruddick in her rigorous and pragmatic book, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace, considers an archetypal example of protective, nurturing components of "maternal thinking:" forced by circumstances to move out of the home and take on an intensely assertive role in public and political affairs, they carry the lessons of child-rearing with them into their new role. They stress restraint, adaptation, active nonviolence. In so doing, these "madwomen" have, as Franco puts it, "not only redefined public space by taking over the center of Buenos Aires . . . but have also interrupted military discourse (and now the silence of the new government)." Even more radically, "these women show that mothering is not simply tied to anatomy but is a position involving a struggle over meanings and the history of meanings" ("Beyond" 513-14).

Other factors also need to be taken into account to trace with any degree of accuracy the multiplicities of the Other Women's relations to feminism, including issues of class, a concept that needs to be considered and complicated far beyond the traditional outlines of a confrontational politics. Ofelia Schutte quite rightly points out the prevalent view that "a fundamental cause of human oppression lies in the disparity in privileges between rich and poor," but demonstrates that under certain circumstances the ever-present complications of class and racial relations need to be complemented by an analysis that looks across class lines for the commonalities of repression of women. It is certainly true, of course, that in certain areas class oppression exercises priority over repression by sex; such is the case in relation to the specific structure of domestic work, where middle- and upper-class women who can afford to free themselves from the pressures of the "doble jornada" of salaried job and housework continue to

use servants to perform housekeeping and childcare chores. Jean Franco's warning, in this respect, is absolutely correct. Citing the much-repeated truism that the category "woman" represents an instance of oppression and can, therefore, stand for other class and racial struggles as well, Franco objects: "It is definitively NOT the same struggle" ("Apuntes" 35). Franco's point is well taken. The danger, however, is overgeneralization in applying the divisive considerations quite properly derived from recognition of exploitation across the board into areas of common concern. Schutte continues: "Moreover, at times feminism is erroneously viewed as a luxury associated with the lives of middle-class women. Important feminist programs such as the movement to legalize abortion are sometimes regarded suspiciously as expressions of bourgeois selfishness" (70).⁷ In such cases, the failure to take into consideration the most basic questions of coercion, abuse, and violence against women that cross class lines, while holding mental reservations about the importance of class distinctions, results in stagnation of an urgently required political agenda. Similarly, a confrontation on the question of class blurs other important and urgently required considerations, and is frequently blind to the socio-sexual division of labor, including the allocation of salaried employment along specific gender lines within and between the various class stratifications.

We also need to account for generational factors. The situation for women twenty or thirty years ago and women now has not remained static. As Doris Meyer reminds us, while "women authors have remained outside many of these literary-political debates until recent years," recently, in both the political and the literary spheres, "the larger profile accorded women's writing in Latin America has focused attention on another side of human experience and has thereby called into question certain assumptions about societal values in a historical context. . . . Women are writing about the problems of being female in Latin America, and their words have a healthy, subversive resonance" (7-8). Women in Latin America are consciously involved in a practice that has long been recognized in their male counterparts. To play on a famous structuralist formulation, to write in Latin America is for them more than a verb, transitive or intransitive--it is a revolutionary act.

Furthermore, there are now younger scholars, in academia and in the public arena, whose attitudes have been at least partially shaped by an ongoing commitment to the developing debate about feminist issues in Latin America, and to the recognition that the discussion of women's specific problems cannot be continually subordinated to and incorporated in the latest version of a masculinist theory of emancipation. Ana Lydia Vega's fictional exchange in "La Gurúa Talía" humorously points out the continuing problems attendant upon the remnants of this type of subordination in a contemporary setting when a modern Desdemona writes to the advice column for help in dealing with the rhetorical dominance of her creole Othello:

[Desdémona the Long-Suffering]: When I shyly express my dissatisfaction with the confined urban status he has imposed on me, he gets hysterical and yells that "Women's liberation is a North American capitalist mythification to destroy the Puerto Rican revolutionary unity." Could he be right after all? . . .

[Gurúa Talía]: This enlightened neo-machismo is much more sophisticated and perverse than the traditional paleo-machismo. It is endowed with "a good conscience" impermeable to critical bullets. Let me explain:

Even if you cite Marx backwards and forwards that "Woman is man's proletariat," he will always find a way to twist you up in his theoretical jungles. . . . His opportunistic rhetoric is infinitely chameleonic. (Tramo 266-7)

The infamous neo-machista of this essay is yet another example of what Vega calls elsewhere, with striking concision, the "pobres-puertorriqueños-oprimidos-por-el-imperialismo-yanqui pero a la vez sinvergüenzas opresores de sus pobres-puertorriqueñas-oprimidas-por-el-imperialismo-yanqui mujeres" 'poor-Puerto-Rican-men-oppressed-by-Yankee-imperialism but at the same time shameless oppressors of their poor-Puerto-Rican-oppressed-by-Yankee-materialism women' ("Bípeda" 45). Imperial imposition, Vega clearly indicates, is only one aspect of the politics of oppression, which have roots both deeper and more varied than the simplistic propaganda formulas used to deflect serious accusations of unequal treatment. The formulation of Antillean writer Maryse Condé offers a concise, general understanding of the

issue that is as applicable to Spanish-speaking Latin America as it is to the French-speaking Caribbean: "the colonial problem was not that of the importation of a foreign culture and of its imposition onto a national reality which it slowly attempted to destroy--as is the case in most colonized countries. Rather, the problem lay in the difficulty inherent in the attempt to construct, from incongruous and dissimilar elements that coexist in such a general climate of aggression, harmonious cultural forms" (qtd in Lionnet 188-89). The result of this process of heterogeneous appropriation and adaptation is what Lionnet calls, in her striking metaphor, a "quilted state" (189). To consider the particularities of a Latin American feminist practice means to take into account the varying textures of the patches and the decorative stitchery of the quilt, to examine the implications of a heterogeneous culture, and to add to the analysis considerations of class and race. The critic must not forget the garment from which the patches were cut, or to put it in another way, the pre-existing, if repressed or fading, ideological loadings, while appreciating the new pattern, with its inevitable misrecognitions and shifts in positionality.

To take only one instance, the lower-class woman--mulata, mestiza, or india--is generally misconceived/misrecognized by the institutionalized culture under the image of an ignorant (uneducated, unused to metropolitan customs, clinging to quaint and inapplicable rural practices or superstitions) or stupid (uneducable) child-bearer (generally as producer of many children), associated with food preparation and consumption (the overweight woman in braids perpetually patting out tortillas), primarily concerned with housework or, if in the workplace, relegated to those jobs traditionally associated with domestic work (as servants, cleaning women, workers in clothing factories). The list of attributes sounds strikingly similar, with a slight shift in modification to accommodate the overlay of a different value structure, to that associated with women from a more leisured class: ignorant (girls don't need schooling) or unintelligent (the better to assuage a man's ego) child-bearer (the cult of the mother), primarily concerned with the state of the house (supervising the servants) or handicrafts associated with genteel domestic labors (fine embroidery, for example). Much work is required on the historical processes that resulted in such inherited ideological loadings; there is an urgent need to study the suturing of

imaginary connotations and real conditions with an eye both to the particular constellations of meaning structures in Latin America and to the woefully misnamed "universals" of female solidarity. A much more nuanced awareness of the contingency of truth is essential whenever we explore the "interpellation" (Althusser's word) of subjects-in-process in a socially-committed reading.

Or to take another example, this one bearing on middle-class preconceptions. Amy Kaminsky has incisively deconstructed the much-abused phrase, "No soy feminista, pero..." (I'm not a feminist, but...) deployed as a protective mechanism by Latin American women critics residing in Latin America (the situation, as she notes, is somewhat different for latinoamericanas who have lived for a number of years abroad). Kaminsky was surprised to find that "feminist activity is much more vital and diverse among political activists than among academics." Why? "One of the reasons that academic feminism . . . is so slow to grow in Latin America and practically non-existent in its literary criticism and theory, is women scholars' fear of having their sexuality impugned." Bluntly speaking, they are nervous about "feminism" being used as a code word for "lesbian" (225). This misreading of feminist activism as a specific preference for same-sex relations is, I submit, only the first and least crucial of the critical misprisons. More importantly, the lesbian, or perceived lesbian, falls into the category of those women exempt from the mandated respect accorded decent women. With her situation already made precarious by her ambition for a career, the further implications in terms of female vulnerability in her perceived rejection of the necessary, and necessarily masculine, protective screen are vast, and understandably give pause. The question for the critic safely ensconced in her U. S. institution is how to read these guarded admissions of support, as well as how to negotiate, as, for example, in the particular case of Sylvia Molloy examined by Kaminsky, the disjunction between an entirely mainstream critical practice and a radically lesbian-feminist fictional production.

It would be impossible for me, in the space of a single book, to fully explore the manifestations and implications of these social structures. Such work, clearly, requires the participation of many scholars from many different fields: historians, ethnographers,

anthropologists, sociologists, labor relations specialists, political scientists, etc. My intention has merely been to underline some of the salient characteristics of these social constructions, so as to provide a minimal understanding of how the social assumptions undergird and infect more strictly literary concerns, to offer a sketch of some of the forms of "la ¿loca? ¿criolla?" and to hint at the boundaries of her attic.

The fact that women often participate in, and actively promote, their own victimization in this respect is commonly known and provides feminist activists and thinkers much puzzlement and embarrassment. Yet, feminist literary critics, too, have been caught in unwitting contradiction. Attentive to the theoretical implications of the subjugation of women, we may still be captured by the metaphor, now turned on its head, of women as the embodiment of nature, and cite with approbation texts that are symptomatic of the historical repression of women. The idealization of motherhood in traditional terms as the nurturing, desexualized woman whose only agency is found in abnegation, for example, is not the exclusive domain of reactionary thinkers and fictional writers. The "Boom" writers of the 1960's and 1970's who engaged in the the deconstruction and resemanticization of so many of the meaning systems of official mythology seem oblivious to the degree to which they reaffirm the myth of the maternal body as equivalent to a state of nature and of maternal "nature" as an unproblematic concept. Terrifyingly enough, this institutionalization of the figure of the feminine as a natural, primordial, but containable and manageable, element, is evident even in the works of Latin America's most internationally well-known female writer, the openly feminist Chilean novelist, Isabel Allende, who has arrived belatedly on the "Boom" scene, twenty years after its vogue, but with the same assumptions intact. In all these works, the maternal body may be a utopic site, but the mother's lack of access to subjectivity is a non-negotiable given. In literature as in life, in Benjamin's words, " the moment women take advantage of the logic of universality and rebel against their confinement to the domestic sphere, the advocates of autonomy trot out the hidden gender clause" (201).

Gayatri Spivak comes as close as anyone to defining this strange amorphousness of the post-colonial woman, this real/fictional existence even in the writing of our male feminist allies. She comments: "it is a bold and helpful thing to restore the female element when it is buried in gender-conventions. . . . It is excellent to posit this female element as the irreducible madness of truth-in-law, but we are daily reminded that a little more must be undertaken to budge the law's oppressive sanity." And she continues with specific reference to Derrida's formulations in his "Living On/Border Lines," the companion piece to his very gender conscious "Law of Genre": "It is not really a question of the 'institution' being able to 'bear' our more 'apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of 'content'" [the quoted words are Derrida's, from "Living On"] because we do not threaten its institutionality. It is rather an awareness that even the strongest personal goodwill on Derrida's [or Donoso's or García Márquez' or Fuentes', etc.] part cannot turn him quite free of the massive enclosure of the male appropriation of woman's voice, with a variety of excuses: this one being, it is not really woman" ("Displacement" 190). Castellanos would agree. And here we are not talking about the simplistically-conceived versions of the notions of truth and falsity or reality and fiction, but the significance of an impacted, overdetermined history in the assessment of identity politics of a particular society at a particular moment.

Moreover, women writers are not exempt. As Castellanos writes in her El uso de la palabra (The Use of Words), in an act of self-criticism, "The recurrent persistence of certain figures--the helpless child, the trapped adolescent, the defeated single woman, the cheated wife--constitutes the unity of those books. Is there no other option? Within those established limits, yes there are. Escape, madness, death. . . . If we consider it carefully, neither the first nor the second set of options are really ways of life, instead, they are forms of death" (229). Thus, even her own work has been unable to locate possibilities for women to fulfill themselves as human beings; instead, she finds herself falling into the stifling pre-established categories: forms of death, not ways of life. Her options are not Attic elegance or imaginative displacement, but rather confinement to a single place--the attic, or the kitchen--or escape into madness.

When we turn from the general socio-literary context to the more narrowly defined one of literary-historical conventions, the field of study is correspondingly open. Questions that might be usefully asked in relation to the under-examined texts produced by Latin American women authors may include a discussion of characteristic genres (Why, for example, the outpouring of lyric poetry and why the narrative emphasis on the autobiography or its near relative, the pseudo-memoir?) and the potential reasons for such genre choice, as well as examination of the strategies employed in the construction of these texts, of the nuances of their enunciative structures, of the influence of ideological constraints in the ongoing construction of the typical narrative --fictional or nonfictional-- of women's lives, of the social function of these texts in the societies of Latin America, of the reception of these texts by women readers, of the role of the critic and theoretician.

Rosario Castellanos, in an article on Simone de Beauvoir discusses in germ many of these issues. She divides women authors into three categories based on their reaction to a generalized ("universal") perception that women are emotional beings, capable of flashes of intuition but unable to maintain the sustained rational efforts of pellucid intelligence. Castellanos turns aside from such traditional expressions of the value of women's perceptions because of their presumed proximity to nature. For her, questions of the "natural" capabilities of women and men, in terms defined by traditional approaches derived from considerations of philosophical or intellectual adequacy as such, tend to short-circuit discussion. Philosophy, after all, is one of those "Attic" domains defined by the absence of women--mad or sane--or of "feminine" qualities. So too, the woman's room, the attic, is philosophically off limits, described from the outside as the absence of valorized, and implicitly masculine, qualities: "lucidity," she writes, "is apparently a quality (or a disgrace?) awarded to women with great parsimony and extreme infrequency."

Castellanos' marking of the word "apparently" and her humorous ambivalence about the value of lucidity--quality or disgrace--signals both her awareness of the operations of the system and her ability to resist the common tendency to be co-opted by the influential structures of power.

Women may or may not be "lucid;" whether lucidity is bane or boon is left undecided. Instead,

she continues, "they are conceded . . . the fugitive lightning bolt of intuitions that light up a phenomenon . . . as long as it doesn't require any previous discipline, any intelligent effort, any effort of attention, or any consistent will" (Juicios 19). Attention, will, and intelligence define the male-appropriated approach to an object of knowledge; to women are left the untutored "natural" responses: animal instinct and unexplained "lightning bolts" of intuition. Castellanos is unconvinced by either the traditional male value of lucidity (in its standard definition) or the traditional female value of intuition (as a second-rate substitute). Nevertheless, she recognizes the power of these long-held clichés in determining a woman's relation to writing, her ability to frame self-concepts. The women who accept this theory follow the path of subordination and abnegation. They have been locked out of the Attic and into the attic by their own inherent disabilities and misperceptions.

To counter such perceptions, she defines the qualities of the strong writer, who is both lucid and visionary. It is, in fact, this quality of a socially-committed, poetically-tinged lucidity rather than a strictly-defined veracity or even verisimilitude that is most outstanding in her own texts, both of prose and poetry, as well, as she intentionally and seriously proposes a counterbalance and counterforce to confront the overdetermined murmurings of official history and the even more deadly substrata of impacted cultural usages. To uncover the hidden aspects of things and name them represents, for her, the primary use value of the fully-realized feminine text as a recontextualization of specific reading and writing practices in terms of political strategies. Her position, and implicitly the position she stakes out for other strong Latin American woman writers as well, is one of alterity, of double-voicing, in an uncommon sense: not the commonplace denigration/apotheosis of woman as a vaguely defined and safely distanced Other, but another woman, a *mestiza/criolla* parallel in another context to what Irigaray provocatively calls the Other Woman, a creative woman for whom social commitment is an enabling condition of writing, the difficulties of which it would be naive to underestimate.

Let me make this point somewhat more specifically with what is only a slightly hyperbolic statement: Latin American women do not write. From this statement depends other corollaries,

other truisms of standard Latin American literary histories. Latin American women certainly do not write narrative. What little they do write--poetry, mostly--deserves oblivion. What narrative they produce, straightforward neo-realist domestic fiction, does not stand up to comparison with the great male writers of the Boom and after, and is mercifully relegated to a mere footnote. The occasional exception--Western-trained and European-oriented women like María Luisa Bombal in Chile, Elvira Orphée, Victoria and Silvina Ocampo in Argentina, the Puerto Ricans Rosario Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega, the Brazilian Clarice Lispector, or Mexican women like Elena Garro, Margo Glantz, Barbara Jacobs, and Elena Poniatowska (whose non-Hispanic-sounding last names are almost too suggestive)--neatly demonstrates the point, but they represent something of a conundrum in traditional literary histories. Certainly these women refuse to subscribe to the synthetic, neatly patterned style typical of the traditional, nineteenth-century realist style of male narrative, or to the other, recognizably constructed, pseudo-disconnected narratives of the "boom." Their works, like their lives, are fragmented, other-directed, marginally fictionalized. Yet these women are the privileged minority in society and in literary history. And even privileged women are discouraged from taking their work seriously; they write, as Castellanos would say, from a fictional but very real state of dependence. Often the women writers of Latin America are denigrated and safely categorized under the heading of the "poetisas" (the poetesses) whose supposedly delicate, "feminine" lyrics are the equivalent of their painstakingly beautiful, equally ornamental, implicitly useless, embroidery. Few are accorded the accolades of strength, lucidity, intelligence: the varonile virtues begrudgingly handed out to the occasional and extraordinary Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Latin American women, unless they have the great good luck of the access to the advantages implicit in names like Glantz or Poniatowska--the advantages of birth, education, and affluence--do not write at all. Period. Black, mestizo, and Indian women tend to be poor and illiterate. The extraordinary campesina may, in extraordinary circumstances, dictate her testimonial to a more privileged, politically-compromised poet, anthropologist, or novelist, but even in such cases the unlettered woman is stripped of agency.

Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal has made the striking observation that the Spanish editions Rioberta Menchú's testimony are credited to Elizabeth Burgos, the ethnographer who took the Guatemalan woman's testimony and edited it with her; in contrast, the English edition lists Menchú as author and Burgos as editor, a telling shift. Feal comments not only on the loss of agency implied in this co-option of authorship, but also on the political significance of such power plays, which in effect counter the testifier's appeal to immediacy and authenticity by screening their words with a veil of art: "To call the speakers subject or object denies the creative, autonomous act they perform when they recount their lives; to call them characters confines them to a fictive world" (101-2). Rigoberta Menchú's is not the only case of such, often well-meaning, appropriation; other examples include Si me permiten hablar . . . Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia (Let me Speak! Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines), dictated to Moema Viezzer, Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia (I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala), dictated to Elizabeth Burgos, Leonor Cortina's Lucia (Mexico), Alegría's No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en la lucha (They'll Never Take me Alive) (El Salvador), Verdugo and Orego's Detenidos-desaparecidos: Una herida abierta (Detained-Disappeared: An Open Wound) (Chile), or Poniatowska's non-fiction novel, Hasta no verte Jesús mío (Until We Meet Again, my Jesus), recreating the life of Mexico City laundrywoman and ex-soldadera pseudonymously named Jesusa Palancares in (more-or-less) her own words. Despite these caveats and concerns, however, it is important to reiterate that all of these works--testimonials, novels, poems, stories, and plays (and I do not exclude those of the misnamed "poetisas" and of the recognizably privileged Ocampos and Glantzes of Latin America)--demonstrate a signal "lucidity," all represent important contributions to the still nascent emergence of women's voices into the public forum, with all of the revisionary resonances implicit in the unstifling of radically different perspectives.

The general, if trite, conclusion to usually drawn from such works as appear in adequate press runs, from mainstream Latin American presses, and that make it to English translation is that, in Poniatowska's words, "La literatura de mujeres es parte de la literatura de los oprimidos"

(Women's Literature is Literature of the Oppressed) (Fem 23). It is a realization that has been made many times, in slightly different terms, by writers of the first world as well as the third. Irregardless of the in-fighting and the rejection of similarities between classes, and notwithstanding the real concerns raised, for example, in the problematic attribution of testimonial authorship, Poniadowska's statement is, nonetheless, true on a variety of levels, and has specific implications for Latin America that are more than trite ones: (1) literature by Latin American women can clearly not afford the luxurious impulses nor the strange urges besetting middle-aged European men. The record that needs to be set straight is always a more than personal one; the threat, in countries where intellectuals regularly "disappear," is not existential angst or oncroaching senility but government security forces, (2) for the critic, assertions made about these texts have to be accompanied by readings made cumbersome through the need to introduce, even to a knowledgeable audience, a group of works that barely circulate, even (or especially) within their own countries, (3) the critic feels an uneasy suspicion that she may be behaving, in her own context, in a way parallel to that Spivak uses to describe Kipling in India, as the unwitting, and therefore all the more culpable, participant in a questionable cultural translation from a colonial to metropolitan context that enacts a literary structure of rape.⁸ Well-intentioned mistranslation or misapplication of theory, like the equally unintended misrepresentation or oversimplification of primary texts, are specters than loom large in the minds of dedicated cultural critics.

Nevertheless, having made these assertions, there still remains the bedrock common sense conclusion that in traditional Latin American letters something (however defined) has been left out, and that whatever the social or ideological interests are involved in maintaining these absences or repressions, the result is impoverishment for the entire community. The recognition and re-evaluation of the contributions of women writers will necessarily pose a healthy challenge to the dominant discourse. For many critics this is more than enough. The need to name is in itself a driving force that not only allows for the re-inscription and insertion of feminine voices into the canon, but also provides a space for alteration of the terms of that discourse from a

dynamical stance, both inside and outside the canon, simultaneously. The tension, nevertheless, between a need for an established body of common texts as the foundation that makes theory possible, and a very particularized fear of any intellectual or political versions of totalization is not easy to resolve.

To take the further step and posit that the "Other Women" in Latin America are also and necessarily feminist by political or philosophical orientation, or that they are primarily driven by an agenda that emphasizes women's rights, would, however, be a grave error. The puzzling silence of female academics in Latin America, their pronounced and much noted shying away from anything that might taint them as "feminist" has been variously interpreted (for example, see Kaminsky 225). The fact remains that professional work by female academics in Latin America, whether for fear of impugment of their sexual orientation or concerns about validation in a system that does not recognize Women's Studies as a legitimate area of academic inquiry, is notably and consistently overwhelmingly mainstream in topic and approach. Few academics demonstrate the kind of radical commitment to the broad definition of feminist activity implicit in the words of playwright Griselda Gámbaro. Gámbaro begins: "as a rule, a work is considered to touch on the theme of feminism when its leading characters are women and are repressed or in rebellion." For Gámbaro, however, this narrow definition represents an unnatural restriction of the field of feminist activity: "as far as I'm concerned, a work is feminist insofar as it attempts to explain the mechanics of cruelty, oppression, and violence through a story that is developed in a world in which men and women exist" (18-19). The key words here are "and women"; Gámbaro's comprehensive feminism compels recognition of the existence of women--a step most academic women in Latin America, for whatever reason, have not yet been able to take.⁹

In this respect, the mothers who march silently with pictures of the missing children anticipate the voices of those who use print as a medium for struggle. Writing in Latin America is, for men as well as women, often carried out under dismal conditions either at home or in exile, under the pressure of long days spent in other work, against the instituted situations of subtle or overt censorship, sometimes with the risk of imprisonment, torture, disappearance.

Critics and authors of fiction alike have recognized as one of their prime responsibilities the obligation to commit themselves to the "mad" struggle over the history of meanings, not only to reveal the ways in which rhetorical concerns discursively construct reality, but also to intervene into and counter these processes of reality-construction. As Dasenbrock reminds us in a more general philosophical context, theory politicized is not an adequate political theory (23). A similar statement might be, and often is, made in reference to fictional works in Latin America, where Argentine poet and short story writer Jorge Luis Borges is frequently and legitimately criticized as elitist for eschewing political commitment in his works, and writers like Fuentes may be accused of obscurantism. Fiction politicized is often not enough; the reading public demands more concrete manifestations of commitment. The demands are met, not only in the silent protest of the mothers, but through a vociferous and persistent speaking out against the abuse of human rights (Poniatowska, Sábato, Argueta), taking an active part in political processes (Vargas Llosa, Cárdenal), offering the organs for the circulation of repressed, alternative histories to the official stories circulated by government officials (García Márquez, Allende) opposing repressive regimes that make terror the only definition of injustice, by which tactic governments participate in blurring or evading demands for more equitable laws.

Men and women alert to these baroquely quilted constructions in Latin American post-colonial society in general, and to their specific implications for a gender-conscious evaluation, may still bear the weight of a "pre-feminist" past, but current discussions impinge upon their consciousness, if only as an alluring alternative or as a distanced threat. Despite societal pressures, no longer are women telling themselves, uncritically, the same story men have told them, and told about them, for centuries; no longer is exploitation by colonial powers the sole measure of oppression. No longer are they wholeheartedly accepting the systems of value that denigrate or ridicule activities and language associated with the private sphere. The United Nation's sponsorship of an International Year of the Woman (1974) provided a tremendous impetus to feminist rethinkings of traditional gender relationships, an influence that is still being felt. As men and women from throughout the world met in conferences and symposia in various

locations throughout the world, they began the exchange of ideas and the exploration of issues of significance to women that is continuing today. The Mexican magazine, fem, has been in circulation since 1977. In 1988 the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México sponsored an "Encuentro Internacional de Filosofía y Femenismo," and conferences and publications from established presses throughout Latin America and the United States demonstrate an increasing interest in writing by Latin American women and a growing commitment to research in gender issues on the part of literary critics, philosophers, social scientists, anthropologists, etc. The sign "woman" is remotivating itself.

For Castellanos, the renegotiation of the gap between reality and fiction in the perception of women and woman's work offers an opportunity for reinvention as well: "It is not enough to imitate models proposed to us, and that offer solutions to circumstances different from our own. It is not even enough to discover who we are. We must invent ourselves" (Eterno 194). Implicitly, "we have to invent ourselves" in a continual process of re-elaboration, of reworking the crazy quilt of custom.

Theory or strategy: Tactical considerations

In Latin America, the general bias towards a revolutionary rather than a theoretical mode is quite clear, and strategy has been given, in application, a clear advantage over abstraction. There are a number of reasons for this general preference, though the issue is vexed. On the one hand, since the body of common texts necessary to the elaboration of a theoretical stance is still in the process of being constructed, it would perhaps be premature and overly optimistic to insist upon theoretical interventions when so much of the groundwork is yet to be done. Furthermore, the history of Latin America is one in which revolutionary practice consistently overruns revolutionary theory--the specific cases of the revolutions in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua leap to mind immediately, as do the events surrounding the overthrow of the military junta in Argentina. The political theory of revolution is constructed hastily, in the middle of

fighting, or in a more leisurely manner, a posteriori. Theory following from, rather than guiding, practice, it may be argued, is the only authentic Latin American way.

On the other hand, theory, no matter how provisional, has a way of authenticating itself in academic discourse, and underdevelopment in theoretical work is not viewed with the same sympathy and understanding in philosophical circles as economic underdevelopment. Likewise, the need for considered and positioned theoretical stances particular to Latin America is urgent, not only for the specific conditions obtaining there, but also so as to avoid the more general impasses of work in feminism that Jardine has noted in another context:

. . . what I perceived was a series of impasses between theory and praxis: theories of women or the feminine and their insistence on the (always) potentially subversive power of the feminine in patriarchal culture had produced either no possibility for social and political praxis or had resulted in a praxis that I perceived as being reactionary for women. At the same time, those who had chosen to reject or ignore the major theorists . . . most often produced no theory at all, and, in any case--in their refusal to listen to their own discourse--their praxis was often more reactionary than that of their feminine-minded sisters. . . . (260-10)

One of the most striking aspects of this theory/praxis double impasse is the debilitating effect of a theoretical deficit in preventing women from listening to the implications of their own discourse. One very obvious example is that of the prominent Mexican feminist who, in a radio program, urged women to respond to attempts at sexual harassment in the marketplace by informing their employers that they have an active venereal disease--AIDS by preference.¹⁰ As a method of dealing with oppression the recommendation is, at the very least, theoretically unconsidered.

Furthermore, as we have seen, in the perceived absence of indigenous theory, the Latin Americanist tends to conscript other theories to fill the gap, ironically, and sometimes inappropriately, uncritically utilizing the resources of a first worldist approach in the service of the critique of imperialism, creating strange hybrids of dubious applicability, and--in the context

of the nations of Latin America--with unacceptable political ramifications. The issue remains one of the major unresolved issues of post-colonial feminist theory. The pressures of a continuing fear of cultural imperialism in the post-colonial nations make the questions of authenticity and usability, both in theory and in practice, obsessively repeated concerns of critics as well as writers of fiction. Thus, such qualities as honesty, inclusiveness, and wholeness of being are implicitly weighted as morally superior to, for example, aesthetic concerns, which are implicitly less honest, more selective, less useful or usable. The authentic has the generative and creative force of being able to cut through falsification and mere fantasy; it represents as well a counterforce to both disorder and to the totalitarian imposition of order by violence. Authenticity, says Lionel Trilling in his classic definition, "implies the downward movement through all cultural superstructures to some place where all movement ends, and begins" (12). To be authentic is to have a certain weight and force; its implicit contrast is with experience that does not have this ontological weight and is, therefore, flighty, unauthentic.

I mention Trilling in this context, despite the fact that most post-colonial thinkers would reject Trilling and all he represents out of hand, because his Arnoldian meditations on the nature of sincerity and authenticity in relation to the Victorian frame of mind strike me as extraordinarily pertinent to the postmodern post-colonial discussion. And because they are so strikingly pertinent, the whole discussion needs to be reframed and problematized, its underlying assumptions examined, including basic problems like the non-universality of the concept of authenticity, and the circumscribing of usability in relation to who is allowed access to a tradition and how it can be used. As is the case with the Gioconda Belli character, who sees the logic, and frightening attraction, of the romance of the revolutionary "comrade" as a means of resolving the "constant interrogation . . . between her rational 'I' and her other 'I,'" so too other writers and thinkers are looking for a resolution that guarantees authenticity without having to have recourse to "a Virginia Woolf-type room of her own."

Theory or strategy? Both carry the first requirement of authenticity; "strategy," with its military connotations, also suggests an immediate, weighty, practical--if violent--usability rather

than the more distanced, aestheticized usability of the flights of theory. In Latin America pure theory, like pure blood, has lost most of its metaphorical and rhetorical appeal as a political instrument. Additionally, in an officially mestizo continent, the threat of cultural miscegenation looms less large as a call for alarm. The widely-known anthology of essays, La sartén por el mango: Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas (The Skillet by the Handle: Encounter with Latin American Women Writers), not only provides a touchstone for gender-conscious analysis of Latin American women's texts, but also an implicit positioning in relation to the theory/strategy question. It is divided into three sections, the composition of which I consider highly significant in terms of the orientation of feminist thought in Latin America. Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega group the essays into sections entitled, in this order: "Strategies," "Perspectives," and "Squid in Their Ink: Testimonials." It is worthwhile to reiterate briefly that the importance of the testimonial form, so heavily emphasized in much third world and third worldist work on women, both in the forms of more-or-less traditional autobiography and in the more recent poetic or anthropological reconstructions of oral history, is clearly making its mark on the organization of much feminist thought in the region. Already, in Heath's words, the recognition is widespread that "a woman reading is not the same as reading as a woman," and its logical corollary, "a man reading is never now not the same as reading as a man," ("Male Feminism" 26-7) is gaining currency. What it is to read as a woman in the Latin American context, however, is instructive. It relies, if we follow the implicit rhetoric of Sartén, on the traditional vocabulary of domesticity and the traditional role of the housewife exchanging information and housekeeping tips with her friends. "Skillet by the handle," "Squid in their ink," "the writing kitchen": such titles mark the public, philosophical call for legitimation of a space traditionally associated with and denigrated as female. Such titles also signal by implication the imbrication of rhetorical modes in the production of meaning, and demand a reading other than a traditional, literary, masculinist one.

The final essay of the "strategies" section, Josefina Ludmer's "Tretas del débil" (Feints of the Weak), presents a careful and attentive close reading of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz' "Reply to

Sor Filotea," that is clearly informed about but not determined by the various poststructuralist theories and implicitly engaged in the current feminist debates about representation, power, difference, and the ideological import of masculinist rhetorical and political conventions. Her "strategies" are never naively imagined, however, and imply a specific "perspective" that both takes the woman writer out of a narrow repertoire of options for representability, and at the same time re-evaluates the importance for theory, and for a critique of imperialism itself, of a rhetoric derived from the private sphere:

A fundamental datum is shown there: that the regional spaces which the dominant culture has extracted from the personal and the quotidian and has constituted as separate kingdoms (politics, science, philosophy) are constituted in the woman precisely at that point considered personal, and are undissociable from it. And if the personal, private, and quotidian are included as a point of departure and perspective for other discourses and practices, they disappear as personal, private, and quotidian: that is one of the possible results of the feints of the weak. (54)

Ludmer brilliantly points to a reading practice that repoliticizes writing strategies without collapsing them simply into some reductionist version of use-value, so as to effect a change in the conditions of representability that will assist in rescuing the past--recovering for the modern reader the genius of Sor Juana--but also in offering a repertoire of possible tactics useful in the present and with a continuing importance in the perspectives for the future.¹¹

One of the most attractive features of Ludmer's essay is her deployment of the "tretas del débil" in a more theoretically generalizable framework. The weak (woman) strategically refers not only to Sor Juana, and not only to the colonial nun, but also to Ludmer, the postcolonial critic. In divining Sor Juana's tactics, Ludmer hints at her own: to take from tradition whatever is salvagable and useful, to borrow from other writers what is needful and helpful, to fill in the gaps with her own meditations. Likewise, I propose a parallel construction of a strategic practice for this book, as I try to build a applicable feminist strategy based on an infrastructure

of evolved and evolving Latin American theory, while also taking from first world feminist theory that which seems pertinent and complementary. A pinch of this, and a smidgeon of that.

The sample strategies outlined below offer general approximations that are later tailored and made more specific to a particular author in the subsequent chapters. These outlines are shorter than essays, longer than definitions, and provide some basic theoretical grounding for the strategies. Readers are advised to read in this section as in a recipe book: not beginning to end and top to bottom, but picking and choosing at will or at random. I have one further note: the strategies are not mutually exclusive, even if the readings in chapters that follow may at times seem to give that impression. I could imagine, for example, taking an author and exploring the possibilities of a single brief text as it depicts an entire repertoire of strategic interventions. The current arrangement of the book seemed preferable, as it allowed for more variety in our literary diet.

Tactical deployment

--Silence--

One reaction to the pressures of the dominant social force is silence. Initially, however, silence is not a response but a condition imposed from outside: silencing, rather than silence freely chosen. Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas on women generally do not win him a place in the hearts of feminists, was still able to describe the monstrous quality of an upper-class woman's "education" as a process of repression into silence. "They are supposed to have neither eyes nor ears, nor words, nor thoughts for this--their 'evil,'" he writes. As girls, they learn that they must not know too much, not even (or especially) about their own, originally evil natures. Then, hurled into reality upon her marriage, the young woman is confronted with the "evil" her honor demands she not understand. Her response: "the same deep silence as before. Often a silence directed at herself, too. She closes her eyes to herself" (127-28). Idealized/idolized in myth, in the fantasy constructions of culture, the public show of respect forces the wife and mother into abjection and, due to constraints of the absolute requirement of ignorance as a

condition of goodness and suitability for married life, she is unable to imagine a circumstance in which the silence may be broken. This silence is not always imposed from the outside; women have tended to accept the traditional role allotted them in exchange for the material comforts and social status accruing from a husband's name.

Octavio Paz sees a similar dynamic of reality-construction in the specific case of the Mexican woman. In his 1959 classic, The Labyrinth of Solitude, he writes: "woman is an incarnation of the life force, which is essentially impersonal. Thus it is impossible for her to have a personal, private life, for if she were to be herself--if she were to be mistress of her own desires, passions, or whims--she would be unfaithful to herself" (36-7). Like Nietzsche, by whom he is at least partially inspired, Paz sees the socially-constructed figure of woman as a vessel incarnating will, but with no will of her own, as representing sexuality and desire, but with no control over her own desire. By way of "compensation" for this repression, says Paz, "the myth of the 'long-suffering Mexican woman is created," internalizing and institutionalizing a socially-approved iconic masochism. This idealized figure of the woman as nature's victim is hypostatized in the injunction "no one is allowed to be disrespectful to ladies," which officially recognizes and pays tribute to her suffering, while at the same time it further paralyzes the wife and mother behind a spurious mask of custom that insists upon seeing woman as a symbolic function. Paz continues: "this 'respect' is often a hypocritical way of subjecting her and preventing her from expressing herself. Perhaps she would usually prefer to be treated with less 'respect' (which, after all, is only granted to her in public) and with greater freedom and authenticity" (38). We have returned, once again, to the centrality of the concept of authenticity--this time, not as a personal quality, but rather as a masculine social grace associated with the right to a public voice: "authentic" rather than "hypocritical" speech about women.

Paz's sympathetic reading of the repressed plight of Mexican women may momentarily obscure the fact that even in the best of cases these women he describes have not yet been allowed to open their eyes and their mouths. Society does not allow women to express

themselves, and neither does Paz; instead, he speaks for them. Paz' "perhaps" in his hypothetical creation of a woman's response sounds rather strikingly like Nietzsche's acts of ventriloquism or Freud's famous question, "What do women want?" No woman's voice attests to the validity or inaccuracy of his suppositions. And even if women, as Paz supposes, do want to express themselves freely, authentically, Paz suggests that the entire fabric of society would be at risk and would naturally militate against it: "How can we agree to let her express herself when our whole way of life is a mask designed to hide our intimate feelings?" (38) The "our" here requires careful attention. It seems clear that the expansively inclusive phrase omits one half of the species, and suggests an applicability limited only to a community of men: "us men" vs. "them women," in which the function of women is not only to mask themselves in myth, but also to provide a comfortable, silent, malleable mask for their men as well, so that their privacy can be protected. Men, in this model, have the choice of either speech or silence, a choice contingent in either case upon the continued silence of women.

The revolutionary response to silencing is resemanticization: to use silence as a weapon (resorting to silence) or to break silence with hypocrisy. One scenario for a response of the repressed to the oppressor may take form in the strong woman whose mode of resistance consists in playing with the cherished myths of dominant society and secretly reversing their charge, for instance, this hoary tale, much repeated, here in Nietzsche's version: "When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of plans and projects, then he is apt also to see quiet, magical beings gliding past him and to long for their happiness and seclusion: women. . . . Yet! Yet! The magic and the most powerful effect of women is, in philosophical language, action at a distance actio in distans; but this requires first and above all--distance" (124). It is worth pausing at this quote briefly, for the terms of Nietzsche's misogyny are archetypal. In this little scene, the man, energetic, creative, full of plans and projects and the stuff of philosophical discourse, looks on women as the pure, silent, tranquil counterpoint to his own busy materiality and imagines nostalgically the joys of her confinement, a confinement which, he soon admits, is dictated not by the inexpressible wishes of the women,

but by his own need for distance and silence to complement his own close-pressed world of noise. The woman is not, in Nietzsche's scheme, the place of a powerful repressed otherness; rather, she is an open space, a present/absent, voiceless aesthetic object. What is worse is that women have been coerced into accepting this marginal, magical role: it is, after all, the basis for Castellanos' critique of the first, despised category of women writers, the mystic poets.

Derrida, in his comment on this passage, highlights the deconstruction of woman into an abstract figure of distancing: "as non-identity, non-appearance, simulacrum, she is the abyss of distance, the distancing of distance, the thrust of spacing, distance itself--distance as such, if one could still say that, which is no longer possible." I note without comment Derrida's coy marking of the unsayable, "distance as such," the intermission of a Nietzschean philosophical language in the catalogue of negatives, and go on: "There is no essence of women because woman separates, and separates herself off from herself. From the endless, bottomless depths, she submerges all essentiality, all identity, all propriety, and every property. Blinded in such a way, philosophical discourse flounders Woman is one name for this nontruth of truth" ("Question" 179). In a single, lyrical evocation, truth and nontruth, madness, silence, blindness are all convulsively thrown together, along with more prosaic (weighty?) matters of propriety and property as the exclusive preserve of women. The rich stream of Nietzsche's prose, and of Derrida's exegesis, is sufficient to drown any individual woman. Silence and distance require no thinking subject, nothing approaching will or personality, only anonymity and representability. Says Rosario Castellanos: "Because personality is exactly what a woman has yet to achieve. Passively, she accepted being converted into a muse because it's necessary to remain at a distance and keep silent. And be beautiful" (Mujer 23).

A woman who is neither passive nor accepting may yet preserve the advantages of distance and silence for her own reasons, using distance to her advantage, using the mask of silence to slip away. Silence, once freed of the oppressive masculinist-defined context of aestheticized distance and truth and confinement and lack can be reinscribed as a subversive feminine realm. Trinh T. Minh-ha briefly and suggestively sketches another scene:

On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and work in undertones. . . . Silence is so commonly set in opposition to speech. Silence as a will to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored. ("Not you" 74)

Minh-ha's observation, which has been clearly influenced by her own work as a filmmaker, has enormous implications for a Latin American feminist practice, not only in film theory and in the study of films by Latin American women directors, but also in the study of other works that choose not to create a spoken/written matrix of configurative meaning and only point mutely: Rosario Castellanos' novel, Balún Canán, for example, in which the pre-textual silencing of the indigenous population of rural Chiapas is both signalled as the essential plot element, and left essentially unbroken (it would be utopic and misleading to break that historical silence). Other fruitful areas of study would include close analyses of women's paintings, from the colonial period's intriguing "entelequias mudas" (mute entelechies) drawn at the behest of Catholic confessors to the disturbing surrealist self-portraits of Frida Kahlo, and beyond.

Another scenario makes use of misleading speech to mask an essential silence. One such tactic, suggests Castellanos, is to use the myth of silence to create a free space either for intellectual activity or simple privacy: "Women have been accused of being hypocrites, and the accusation is not unfounded. But hypocrisy is the answer that the oppressed give to the oppressor, that the weak give to the strong, that the subordinates give to the master" (25); that is, she suggests that women give the oppressors the response they want to hear, but maintain the mental reservations that permit a minimal independence of thought. "Sir," says Victoria Ocampo to one of the men charged with reforming Argentina's civil code in 1935, "slaves always try to deceive. Only free beings learn to despise lies" (Testimonios X 44). She is referring, of course, to the accusation that women must be treated differently under the law

because they are naturally mendacious, that they tell men one thing and then go out and do something quite different, that they practice subterfuges and covert manipulations.

Under old, traditional codes, the woman--ambiguously the figure of truth or of untruth--remained silent and withdrawn. In the counter-hegemonic response to this official silencing, she executes a dizzying dance of negativity, appropriating silence as a tactic neither for saying nor for unsaying, but for concealing a coded speech between the lines of the said and the unsaid. In the felicitous phrase of Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector: "Since it is necessary to write, at least do not smudge the space between the lines with words" (Legion 114). This tactic of speaking between the lines and selectively, playfully, withholding speech is the essence of what Ludmer calls the transformatory machine of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz' radical manipulation of her rhetoric:

La escritura de Sor Juana es una vasta máquina transformadora que trabaja con pocos elementos; en esta carta ["Respuesta a Sor Filotea"] la matriz tiene sólo tres, dos verbos y la negación: saber, decir, no. . . . Saber y decir, demuestra Juana, constituyen campos enfrentados para una mujer. . . . Decir que no se sabe, no saber decir, saber sobre el no decir: esta serie liga los sectores aparentemente diversos del texto (autobiografía, polémica, citas) y sirve de base a dos movimientos fundamentales que sostienen las tretas que examinaremos: en primer lugar, separación del saber del campo del decir; en segundo lugar, reorganización del campo del saber en función del no decir (callar). (48).

Sor Juana's writing is a vast transformatory mechanism that works with only a few elements: in this letter ["Reply to Sor Filotea"] the matrix has only three: two verbs and the negation: to know, to say, not. . . . To know and to say, Juana shows, constitute opposing camps for a woman. . . . To say that she does not know, to not know how to say, to know about not saying: this series links the apparently diverse sectors of the text (autobiography, polemic, quotation) and serves as the basis for two fundamental movements that sustain the tactics that we will examine: in the first place, the separation

of knowledge from the field of speech; in the second place, the reorganization of the field of knowledge in function of not saying (keeping quiet).

I shall return to this quote later in my argument in order to discuss the manner in which Sor Juana's manipulation of the code is based on an intimate understanding of the function of the negation that goes beyond the symbolic logic of "A"/"not-A"; that is, her intuition of a "no decir" that is quite different from "callar," in which the traversal of speech by the negative allows for a trace of its passage, maintaining her essential self at a safe spacio-temporal distance that both permits her freeplay of thought and subtly establishes her own agency as the concealed subjectivity alone capable of bridging the gap of silence. At this point I merely wish to signal the way in which Sor Juana's letter on the one hand recognizes the injustice of the traditional imposition of silence on women; her argument against St. Paul's statement--"Mulieres in Ecclesiis taceant, non enim permittitur eis loqui" 'Women are silent in church; they are not permitted to speak'--outlines a exegetical practice grounded in the scholastic tradition but clearly departing from it in a prototypical feminist reading. On the other hand, Sor Juana also, in her autobiographical revelations about the necessity to hide her knowledge, intimates that, in Ludmer's words, "silence constitutes a space of resistance before the power of the others" (50). For Sor Juana an obligatory early silence, which could be coded as untruth or as hypocrisy, is unmasked by her present breaking of silence (the confession or autobiography), in which her very frankness could well code other resistances, other silences.

As a political strategy, however, to embrace silence is clearly of limited value. Silence alone cannot provide an adequate basis for either a theory of literature nor concrete political action. The woman must, eventually, break silence and write, negotiating the tricky domains of the said and the unsaid, the words written down, as Lispector would have it, smudging the page, and the words left, for whatever reason, between the lines. I am reminded of Eugen Gomringer's concrete poem, which raises the question of silence as a wall of silence and as the speaking/writing of the word "silence" in a disembodied command, a fact without a speaker,

bricks in the wall:

silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio

Only in breaking silence--the chink in the wall--can the writer hope to establish any form of critique, any potentially revolutionary opposition to the oppressive system.

By its very nature, however, any radical breaking of silence remains a utopic exercise, always impaired by the system of discourse that establishes silence as a norm, and the transformatory mode as a revolutionary praxis. It is more reasonable in such circumstances to reflect upon options for thwarting cooptation or recuperation of the feminine within established models through a practice of tactical resistance, of deliberately eschewing polished definition, deliberately finessing issues of closure, deliberately unravelling the familiar, uncomfortable fabric of self and society. "I write," says Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré, "because I am poorly adjusted to reality. . . . This destructive urge that moves me to write is tied to my need to hate, my need for vengeance. I write so as to avenge myself against reality and against myself; I write to give permanence to what hurts me and to what tempts me" ("The Writer's Kitchen" 228). How to write of this reality that both wounds and seduces is a recurrent problem; Ferré cogently recognizes that her practice as a feminine, feminist writer is inevitably bound up in her involvement with the relations of a dominantly masculinist power structure that seduces as it wounds her. Ferré realistically, and painfully, reminds us that to write is for her to write out of both hatred and love--not mere impossible rejection, but the effective resistance to cooptation inscribed in the bridging of contradiction.

--Appropriation--

In one of her autobiographical notes, Victoria Ocampo comments: "I resisted reading in Spanish I was submerged in French and English literature, which is for us a little like our Greek and our Latin" (Testimonios X 15). Like her countryman Jorge Luis Borges, her early education neatly suggested that Spanish was the oral language, English, French, and Italian, the languages of culture and intellectual activity. The mark of this early training is evident throughout Victoria Ocampo's writings. With the exception of the Chilean mestiza poet and Nobel prize winner Gabriela Mistral, whom she greatly admired, Ocampo's most loving attention and most insistent references are to European authors--Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West; George Eliot, Jane Austen, and the Brontës; Colette, the Countess de Noailles, Claudel, Valéry, and Camus; Dante--many of whom she translated into Spanish for her fellow Argentinians. She dedicates the first volume of her Testimonios to Virginia Woolf, noting that "My only ambition is to be able to write one day, more or less well, more or less badly, but like a woman" and recognizing that all the essays in the volume were written under the particular sign of the spiritual hunger awoken in her by her conversations with, and her reading the works of, her English friend (8-9). But to live and write as a woman in the Argentina of 1935 is not as easy as in Virginia Woolf's England. Argentina, she explains in her letter to Woolf, is more like the England of the Brontës' time: "similar, but worse" (13).

Ocampo's consciousness of living in a infernal version of a Brontëan England rather than the more favorable climes of post-Victorian England, coupled with her desire to help create a more equitable situation for her fellow countrywomen, gives a particular messianic fervor to her prose, a particular urgency to her desire to share the fruits of her vast, polyglot reading with her compatriots. This same consciousness also sparks a recognition of the need to withhold herself from token, politically-motivated praise. Thus, her acceptance speech for the Vaccaro Prize is carefully modulated to avoid the appearance of cooptation. The double-entendres of her opening sentence are obvious even to the most complacent: "The Vaccaro Prize, awarded to me by the commission presided over by Doctor Bernardo Houssay (and that presidency says it all), recognizes excellences of the sort that . . . would justify in my an attitude similar to that of

Sartre with the Nobel Prize" (Testimonios VII 231). Why then, after refusing so many prizes, does she accept this one? Her reasons are clearly, if ambiguously, political. She accepts for the other women, the ones who have not been granted the recognition they deserve. Her speech of acceptance ends thus:

When in 1953 a group of women were locked into the Buen Pastor prison, Mother Gertrudis asked us to each put an identifying sign on our aprons so that we could be distinguished from each other. We got the idea it would be more worthwhile to write our entire names, and wear them on our breasts, where they could be easily seen. A prison-mate, María Rosa González, embroidered my name in green thread on a strip of white ribbon. When I left jail . . . I unsewed my name and took it with me. It is one of my most precious souvenirs.

Gentlemen, friends: I will keep the Vaccaro Prize medal with that little white cloth ribbon. (240)

The whole scene is highly overdetermined. Ocampo reminds her audience of the marking of the prison apron--in itself the symbol of the housewife--with a rebellious sign; not the prison number that de-individualizes the inmates, but with a small, revolutionary act: the entire name, embroidered (the womanly art) on a ribbon. Ocampo's identity is partly bound up in this ribbon, embroidered for her by another prisoner, a reminder both of solidarity within the prison walls, and of the ineluctable walls themselves and the intolerance that puts all adult women into nameless aprons, and encloses them behind the metaphorical walls of their home-prison. To preserve the Vaccaro medal, the almost-rejected award received from the hands of Bernardo Houssay, next to this humble product of a prisoner's making is an ambivalent gesture, reminding her (male) audience of her reasons--à la Sartre--for refusing the "honor," reminding her (female) audience of her ample reasons for accepting in their name. As she says earlier in the speech, referring to a line from Gabriela Mistral: "I see no valid reason for accepting this Vaccaro Prize from you, gentlemen friends, except that I too have chewed stones with my woman's gums" (239).

Ocampo would agree with Rosario Castellanos on the need for women to reinvent themselves, critically and creatively, and, while repeatedly deploring her own inability to reinvent in the more traditionally creative genres--novel, poetry--she puts her vast erudition to the task of a critical re-elaboration in her voluminous essays and in her autobiography. The result of this indirect, but careful, critical attention to the situation of Latin American women through her readings of European women writers is a practice based on selective appropriation of whatever material may be available--A Room of One's Own, the poems of Valéry, the Vaccaro medal, a scrap of embroidered ribbon--for her cause. Through this means, Victoria Ocampo intends to invent the self through a judicious self-distancing, to observe meticulously the practices of her country by first sensitizing herself to its particular adumbrations of difference in her meditations on the works of others, of foreigners, men and women. From this perspective, it is useful to linger on the otherwise unmemorable final terms of Enrique Pezzoni's eulogy:

The pages of Victoria Ocampo must be reread from this perspective [of tearing down myths]. Desire of approximation, heroic decision of distancing. In 1929, Victoria wrote an article motivated by her reading of Henri Michaux' Ecuador. . . She tells Michaux: "Do you remember how much we admired certain ancient Chinese paintings where the void became sensual and significative through a branch or a bird drawn like a title on a corner of the cloth? The title of the void. In that empty space we recognized the protagonist, the principal intention of the artist . . . as that which sometimes issues forth from silence. Our pampa, our river, remind me of those pictures. But in what strikes a chord with our soul, the brief drawing. . . is only sketched: the title is missing." Here, completely defined, is Victoria's adventure. . . . The true title is still missing. May we know how to find it. (150)

What is striking about this quote is not, as Pezzoni imagines, the lack of a proper name--in some sense the "true title" has long ago announced its existence in the embroidered ribbon--but the layering of appropriation and revalorization of appropriation that creates the composite

image of the pampas according to Victoria Ocampo. Inspired by Michaux's Ecuador, she writes to share her definition of the pampas, which is, for both her and Michaux, mediated by her superimposition of Chinese painting: the Argentine landscape recreated through a bricolage of Chinese and French elements.

Compare this 1929 comment to her later evocation of the pampa, mediated now not by Michaux and Chinese painting (and, in my quote, by Enrique Pezzoni), but by Emily Brontë, who never knew of the name her books were making for her; of Virginia Woolf, who was finally, posthumously, achieving the name her works deserved; and of Gabriela Mistral, the pen-name of the Nobel-laureate poet whose given name, Lucila Godoy Alcayaga, is never mentioned:

I feel as comforted by the success [of Virginia Woolf] as by that of Emily Brontë, lost in the Yorkshire moors I took Gabriela [Mistral] to several estancias near Mar de Plata, during that Summer, and together we looked at plants, stones, grasses. In Balcarce I showed her the curros, a spiny bush covered, in March, with white flowers that smell like vanilla. The curro is considered a national plague; nevertheless I like it so much that when it flowers I always go to visit it. Gabriela later wrote to me: "I continue to live with the stones, the grasses, and the little animals from our America. . . I see that geometry of thorns, that look and do not touch, that machine-gun of silence. . . . You could be like that" (Testimonios X 20-1)

The empty space defined nostalgically in her 1929 letter/essay to Michaux by a silence broken in the flap of a bird's painted wing has metamorphosed into something quite different by her recollections of Mistral's 1938 visit. The terms have changed, as has the nature of the appropriative gesture; it is now something less akin to the serenity of Chinese painting and more charged with the tensions of Emily Brontë's moors. And here, Ocampo frees herself of her private reluctance to give this affinity a name, the heritage of her training in the honorable shyness of a girl of good family. Through Mistral, she intimates her similarity to the "curro", the "machine-gun of silence," a common plague, a national symbol, a beautiful, ineradicable

weed. In reconstructing the bits and pieces of her vast storehouse of knowledge to fit present needs, Ocampo not only gives herself over to the appropriative gestures of a transcultural bricolage, but also struggles with the various forms and domains of cultural knowledge as they impinge upon, contradict, and clarify each other, outlining her own genealogy as a prickly, persistent weed, sketching clearly the configurations of her own region through a necessary attentiveness to the dual demands of of an audience divided between the nativist and the Eurocentric.

--cultivation of superficiality--

In Julio Cortázar's 1963 novel, Hopscotch, the disaffected thinker-as-potential-novelist Morelli expounds on his classification of readers--lector alondra, lector hembra, lector cómplice (lark reader, female reader, complicitous reader)--and vehemently argues against the perpetuation of the passive, superficial reader, "el lector hembra," the reader who goes to books for (Heaven forbid!) pleasure. He demonstrates his determination to destroy the literature she/he reads as well as his/her reading of that literature: "What good is a writer if her can't destroy literature? And us, we don't want to be female-readers, what good are we if we don't help as much as we can in that destruction" (451). Cortázar's references to "el lector hembra" are tinged by ambiguity even as to grammatical gender, making the apparently obvious English translation--"female reader"--an unacceptably straightforward variation on the original Spanish's tension between "el lector," with its dominantly male, implicitly "universal" gender marking, and "hembra," the sign of the female of the species. What is unambiguous is that Morelli appropriates the female-gendered composite as a symbol of negativity, of all that is wrong with traditional texts and traditional readings of those texts, while at the same time, the nature of the obsession, paired to Morelli's own inability ever to write the much-announced novel, suggests that he needs the "lector hembra" more than he cares to admit. Loved and hated, desired and despised, his/her superficiality permits "el lector hembra" to escape from the commitment (or

pose of commitment) to serious prose typical of the highly touted "lector cómplice." The female reader's passivity allows him/her to be sucked into the text, but that very passivity prevents the text from becoming his/her own.

It seems likely, ironically, that Morelli's "lector hembra," is nevertheless, and despite what I said above about its ambiguous gender-marking in Spanish, itself the insufficiently thought-through appropriation of a hoary tradition designating the female reader ("la lectora") as careless, superficial, "highly emotional" (Traba 24), uninterested in and unable to grasp the deeper, more complex meanings of abstract thought. Certainly the only person marked as a superficial thinker and a "lector hembra" in Hopscotch is a woman, la Maga, whose reading preferences include the works of the nineteenth-century Spanish realist, Benito Pérez Galdós, interspersed with magazines like Elle and France Soir. "Oh Maga, how can you swallow this stuff," Horacio comments interlinearly as he watches Maga read her realist novel, "your ignorance is of the kind that destroys all little gardens now planted where once there had been pleasure, poor girl. . ." (202-3). Nevertheless, when the theoretician of the exile group, Morelli, calls for the modern writer to break with the conventions of narrative: "to provoke, assume a text that is out of line, untied, incongruous, minutely antinovelistic," he is militating for the creation of a text that will alienate, not educate, the "lector hembra," "who otherwise will not get beyond the first few pages, rudely lost and scandalized, cursing at what he paid for the book" (406). Morelli describes this hypothetical, unconventional text, the open text created through the interaction of the author and the "lector cómplice" in terms that remind us of very conventional gender arrangements: "to use the novel in that way, just as one uses a revolver to keep the piece. . . . To take from literature that part which is a living bridge from man to man" (406). The inability of "el lector hembra" to grasp this weapon reflects a subtle feminization of the reading process; when s/he tries to read an antinovel, "will remain with something like a façade and we already know that there are very pretty ones . . ." (408), that is, the "lector hembra" is capable of recognizing nothing but the make-up. And Morelli's own incoherent attraction to the style of the "lector hembra" is defined by an unidentified narrator as a yearning for "a crystallization in

which nothing would remain subsumed, but where a lucid eye might peep into the kaleidoscope and understand the great polychromatic rose, understand it as a figure, an imago mundi that outside the kaleidoscope would be dissolved into a provincial living room, or a concert of aunts having tea and Bagley biscuits" (478).

In her seminal article, "On the Superficiality of Women," Susan Noakes points out, through her readings of Rousseau, Sterne, Flaubert, and Dante, among others, that "it is Christianity that stresses that superficial reading (for 'adventure,' plot, to find out 'what happens') is not, as one might suppose today, merely stupid but, more importantly, morally wrong. . . . Readings that remain on the surface . . . engage the reader's desires rather than the reader's ideas" (347).

Through the agency of desire, bad reading and carnal desires come to be associated; from there, says Noakes, it is only a small step to the effective conflation of terms: "woman as seducer behaves like woman as reader; thus, woman reads in the same way she seduces" (344). Reading for enjoyment is reading as a woman, is reading in a morally deficient manner, is reading woman, woman reading: reading or seducing, she is the tempting, destructive figure of Eve. The horror of that notoriously damning eroticism is evident in Cortázar's text as well as Flaubert's; reading as a woman reads (that is; badly, superficially) is associated with moral depravity or mental derangement: on the one hand, Morelli's pedantic reminder that the new, antinovel "debe ser de un pudor ejemplar" 'must have an exemplary sense of decorum' (408; my emphasis in the Spanish), on the other, Horacio Oliviera's fall, at the end of the novel, from the madhouse window.

One response is to deny the superficiality. Thus, while Marta Traba acknowledges a system of judgment based on "degree of autonomy, its capacity to create a symbolic field through a new linguistic structure, and its universal reach" (23), the traditional criteria for evaluating literary quality, she suggests that women's writing attends to a second, equally profound and valuable, set of criteria. First, women's literature can serve a mediating function: "If the feminine text has been situated in proximity to . . . the culturally marginalized . . . it can, like all countercultures, mediate perfectly between the solitary producer and the untrusting

receiver" (25). Secondly, says Traba, and following upon the recognition of the woman writer's role as a representative marginal and intermediary with the center, the woman writer can learn to speak for herself (ironically, Traba, herself a woman writer, expresses this thought through Pierre Bourdieu): "to speak, instead of being spoken, could be one of the tasks of the counterculture" (26). Women reading/women writing provide, then, a viable, profound, and morally defensible alternative to the dominant cultural mode. Their work is different, surely, but not superficial; rather, it is complementary to the established norms of universality.

Rosario Castellanos' "lector(a) hembra" has another value. Implicitly recognizing and taking into account once again a tradition that marks women readers as superficial and morally deficient, she realigns the terms to right the misappropriation of the reading woman as immoral, while reversing the negative charge on the accusation of superficiality. Openly marked as a celebration of the unexplored potentiality of the female reader and of the female novelist, her essay on María Luisa Bombal provides a counterpoint to Cortázar's meditations on moral and intellectual deficiency and Traba's call for a strategic appropriation of marginality, and offers other possibilities for appropriation of texts, for establishment of rights of property and propriety. Hers is another program, another face, another place, another force, another interlocutor:

Cuando la mujer latinoamericana toma entre sus manos la literatura lo hace con el mismo gesto y con la misma intención con la que toma un espejo: para contemplar su imagen. Aparece primero el rostro. . . . Luego el cuerpo. . . . El cuerpo se viste de sedas y de terciopelos, que se adorna de metales y de piedras preciosas, que cambia sus apariencias como una víbora cambia su piel para expresar . . . ¿qué?

Las novelistas latinoamericanas parecen haber descubierto mucho antes que Robbe-Grillet y los teóricos del nouveau román que el universo es superficie. Y si es superficie pulámosla para que no oponga ninguna aspereza al tacto, ningún sobresalto a la mirada. Para que brille, para que resplandezca, para que nos haga olvidar ese deseo, esa necesidad, esa manía de buscar lo que está más allá, del otro lado del velo, detrás del telón.

Quedémonos, pues, con lo que se nos da: no el desarrollo de una estructura íntima, sino el desenvolvimiento de una sucesión de transformaciones. (Mujer 145)

When the Latin American woman takes a piece of literature between her hands she does it with the same gesture and the same intention with which she picks up a mirror: to contemplate her image. First the face appears . . . Then the body. . . . The body is dressed in silk and velvet, that are ornamented with precious metals and jewels, that changes her appearance like a snake changes its skin to express. . . What?

Latin American women novelists seem to have discovered long before Robbe-Grillet and the theoreticians of the nouveau roman that the universe is surface. And if it is surface, let us polish it so that it does not present any roughnesses to the touch, no shock to the gaze. So that it shines, so that it sparkles, in order to make us forget that desire, that need, that mania, of looking for what is beyond, on the other side of the veil, behind the curtain.

Let us remain, therefore, with what has been given us: not the development of an intimate structure but the unenveloping of a series of transformations.

Castellanos here confronts directly the rhetorical tradition that defines good prose as clear, straightforward, masculine, and bad taste in prose as a fondness for the excessively ornamented, and therefore effeminate. Thus, according to Jacqueline Lichtenstein, "when Cicero attempted to describe a simple style . . . he recommended leaving aside overly gaudy ornament and excessively bright colors, and taking as a model those beauties [the modest housewives] whose simplicity has no need for enhancement by pearls and makeup" (78). In her challenge to this ingrained metaphor Castellanos intuits the startling possibilities of a feminine aesthetics as a radically different model for feminist politics. She rejects the meek, tidy housewife and evokes instead the unmistakable image of the bored upper-class woman, filing her nails (sharpening her claws?), slipping, menacingly, out of her Eve-snake skin, creating herself affirmatively in the appropriation of the polished, superficial, adjectival existence allotted her, making the fiction yet

more impenetrably fictive until it glows as the revolutionary recognition of an amoral forgotten truth. Is excessive ornamentation belittled as the sign of an overly emotional femininity? Fine: she adopts wanton elegance as her rhetorical style and flaunts its seductiveness. The mirror is her talisman, is, like those flashing mirrors worn by the famous Knight of the Mirrors in Don Quijote, a weapon for dispelling, as it creates, illusion: aesthetics and politics brought home, as it were, from their travels, made homey, personal, private, quotidian.

In Castellanos' metaphorical history of language as an instrument for domination, she writes, "la propiedad quizá se entendió, en un principio como corrección lingüística. . . . Hablar era una ocasión para exhibir los tesoros de los que se era propietario. . . . Pero se hablaba ¿a quién? ¿O con quién?" 'Propriety/property was perhaps understood, in the beginning, as a linguistic correction. . . . To speak was an occasion to exhibit the treasures of which one was proprietor. . . . But to whom did one speak? Or with whom?' (Mujer 177). To speak is to create a surface of propriety, of proprietary relationships that can be exploited in various directions. The works of these Latin American women novelists cited by Castellanos do not provide a model to either imitate or appropriate nor do they provide a mimetic reflection to contemplate, but rather a polished surface to triangulate desire in which the apices of the triangle are (1) the adorned body of the text; (2) the implicitly male motivator and first recipient of this textual adornment; and a (3), the female reader, a free space for self-invention. The cultivation of a polished superficiality suggests a willed, willful transvaluation of values that surpasses mere reversal. While leaving the surface of complacency available for the desiring eyes of those whom Alicia Partnoy, based on her bitter experience as a disappeared poet in the "little houses" of Argentina's prisons, calls "el lector enemigo," the woman writer produces a layered look for the discriminating eye of her "lectora hembra" for whom the constructs of life as a staged aesthetic performance are not unfamiliar.

The literary correlative of making-up, ostensibly for the other, covertly for the self, is the romance novel, "la novela rosa," with its profoundly conservative ideological strategies and its severely limited social agenda. The "novela rosa" does not challenge the sorts of conventional

assumptions about male-female relations Castellanos outlines in "The Liberation of Love;" rather, it manipulates them in the service of a fantasy gratification that asserts the power of love to create a psychological space for a woman's victory over man. It is a kind of cosmetic solution to a difficult and intricate problem of gender relationships. At the same time, however, love's victory is evanescent, limited to the single instant of the man's acknowledgement of the power of love, and can only endure for the reader in the formulaic repetition of this single paradigmatic moment of love declared and accepted. The narrative of the romance, then, is not about happiness achieved, but rather happiness frustrated or deferred, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that, paradoxically, romance narrative is premised on lack (of happiness, of love, of the right man). Once the woman receives acknowledgement of her man's love, the narrative ends, with what we could call, playing on words, "the death of love." This inevitable conjunction of reciprocated love and the novel's conclusion may lead us to speculate on the proximity of death and marriage as the two traditional forms of narrative closure, but that would be another project.

Nevertheless, while the formula is restrictive, it at least allows space for a kind of resistance, a sort of control. Projecting beyond the end, to the dream of middle-class life these novels sell, we can also imagine in them a paradigm for a woman's shrewd investment in the phallic stock market. Jan Cohn notes:

Love was once suffered by lovers, by men entranced, enthralled, held in thrall by the eyes and mouths and hair of unobtainable mistresses. But men are now busy elsewhere, and they have left the field of love to women. Women have become the experts in love. . .; as it turns out, though, women are considerably less futile as lovers than men. Love has an appropriate use and necessary consummation in marriage. So if love continues, in popular romance, to torment its victim, it is no vain enterprise; at least it pays off (5).

The woman, once the idealized dominant, but passive, pole of the love relationship has, through the romance novel, inverted the schema, and, while appearing sweetly subordinate, has

managed to accede to power and authority by the only route possible to her, through her emotional sway over a powerful man. Moreover, her values are revindicated as his values. As Modleski reminds us, in novel after novel, men recognize the importance of careful grooming and love of shopping: "the novels literally reverse the hierarchy pointed out by Virginia Woolf, for 'worship of fashion, the buying of clothes' are important--to both the woman and the man, who is usually even capable of identifying a material as 'tulle'" (17). Make-up revindicates itself in the land of make-believe.

The academic reader, trained to look beneath the surface, will recognize herself to be in the presence of such a militantly superficial text when her efforts to deploy the prevailing apparatus of knowledge seem to flounder, or to render readings that are plausible but unsatisfying, readings that somehow fail to take into account the most arresting aspects of the work under consideration: the incongruities of its style, the twists of its plot, the elegant adornment of its form. In Rosario Ferré's story of the melding of upper-class white wife and lower-class black mistress, "When Women Love Men," discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, such superficial elegancies provide the motor force of the plot, for example in these complementary descriptions of the twinned protagonists: Isabel the Black, "the one one who danced with the children to the rhythm of their cry Hersheybarskissesmilkyways" (178), and Isabel the White, at the end a symbiote of the two women, "swaying myself now back and forth on my red heels, through which come down, slow and silent like a tide, that blood that was rising from the base of my fingernails from so long ago, my blood soaked with Cherries Jubilee" (185). A feminist discussion of the humiliation of the two women, chained unhappily to the same man, a neo-Marxist study of the imbrication of race and class issues, a postcolonial political analysis of cultural infection in the highlighting of consumer products cited in English, a semiotic or hermeneutic dissection of the symbolism of the phrases--all are possible, enlightening, and finally, insufficient, for they fail to take into account the sheer sensual delight, the colors and the tastes, the richness of the chocolate, the smoothness of the nail polish sliding through the veins, the pleasures, moral or immoral, of superficiality.

--negation--

I have cited Josefina Ludmer on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz at several points in this chapter, and reiterate here my admiration for her superb article, "Tretas del débil" in which she delicately deconstructs the minimalist transformatory mechanism of Sor Juana's "Reply." In this letter to the Bishop of Puebla, writes Ludmer, "the matrix has only three elements, two verbs and the negation: to know, to say, not" (48). Ludmer's analysis of the successive displacements of the verbs is brilliant; she places less emphasis, however, on the negation. I would like to return to the particularly "full" quality of the negation for Sor Juana that, in the particular instance cited by Ludmer, makes "no decir" (not speaking) and "callar" (remaining silent) actions of a different order. The negation, it seems to me, is not a transformatory mechanism at all in the sense defined by Ludmer. Rather, the insistent "no" of Sor Juana stands out in her text as the concrete, fully realized correlative of something like that which Pascal called the silence of infinite spaces, except that for Sor Juana, the silence evokes not fear, but a sense of homecoming: a life-affirming negation that fills the emptiest zero-degree of her self-portrait with meaning. The "no" defines Sor Juana: not legitimate, not (unfortunately) a student, not quite a scholar, not a dilettante (though she has been accused of it), not a wife, not a typical religious woman, not a mystic certainly, not openly rebellious either.

Although her discussion of Sor Juana does not develop the implications of the insight, Ludmer hints at a possibility for another type of resistance in which negation does not serve only as an oppressor's means of establishing difference, recuperated for other reasons by the oppressed: "the tactic . . . consists in that, for the assigned and accepted place, one changes not only the sense of that place but also the very sense of what is installed in it" (53). This tactic also implies a methodology for retaining a fertile spatial and temporal distance that allows the action of thought to occur, while at the same time suggesting the potential for a creative reappropriation of the negated elements, a transvaluation of values that permits bridging the gap

of difference on her own terms. The logic of such reappropriation is neither symbolic nor political, but poetic, and based on the affirmative and constitutive power of the metaphor. Sor Juana Inés' "no" offers her both a mode of concealment and a method for discretely opening a passage for self-realization. Negation in the first, simple, merely oppositional, sense neglects the possibilities for individual or communal agency in effecting the type of reciprocal adjustments suggested in Ludmer's reminder that not only is the meaning of place changed, but also the meaning of what is included in that space. The double negation--refusal of subsumption in the dominant, refusal of alienation in the marginal--creates a disturbance in the fields of discourse, recalling the mutual dependence and reciprocal relations bridging the metaphorical gap between antagonistic ideologies. Or, in Derrida's words, "There are always two pas's, the one in the other, but without any possible inclusion, the one immediately affecting the other, but overstepping it by distancing itself from it. Always two pas's, overstepping even their negation, according to the eternal return of the passive transgression and the repeated affirmation. . . . Pas is forgetting, pas of forgetting, doubly affirmed (yes, yes)" (cited and translated, Fineman 140).

Sor Juana, as the wunderkind of her time, the cherished court poet who evolved into the misunderstood nun, forcibly silenced by jealous and bigoted churchmen, lived the hypostatization and the antagonism in her own body. Her "Reply to Sor Filotea" is its own testamentary ruin, studded with negatives. From the very first words of the letter, "no will of mine" (205) to the final exhortation to "Sor Filotea" to change any aspect of the letter, "if the style of this letter . . . is not as it ought to be" (243), Sor Juana's letter is an insistent litany of negation: "there was nothing he could say" (205), "silence will say nothing, for that is precisely its function, to say nothing" (207), "he says he cannot tell it" (207), "and in truth I have never written except when pressured and forced to do so" (209), "my purpose in studying is not to write . . . but simply to see whether studying makes me less ignorant" (210), "I have studied many things, yet know nothing" (215), "for me, not learning (for I am not yet learned), merely wanting to learn has been so hard" (217), "still lacking mention are the outright difficulties which have worked directly to hinder and to prohibit my pursuit of learning" (218), etc. Ludmer

categorizes this minimalist dialectic in terms that recall the structuration of a musical piece:

"First: separation of knowledge from speech," condensable into the formulation "not to say what she knows" (48-9); "second movement: to know about not speaking." It is, significantly, this second movement that is accompanied by the annexation of other potential spaces for the freeplay of knowledge. Sor Juana writes:

Pues ¿qué os pudiera contar, señora, de los secretos naturales que he descubierto estando guisando? Ver que un huevo se une y se fríe en la manteca o aceite y, por contrario, se despedaza en el almíbar; ver que para que el azúcar se conserve fluida basta echarle una muy mínima parte de agua en que haya estado membrillo u otra fruta agria. . . . pero, señora, ¿qué podemos saber las mujeres, sino filosofías de cocina? . . . Y yo suelo decir viendo estas cosillas: Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito. Y prosiguiendo en mi modo de cogitaciones, digo que esto es tan continuo en mí, que no necesito de libros. . . . (Obras IV; 460-1)

What could I not tell you, my Lady, of the secrets of nature I have discovered while cooking! That an egg holds together and fries in fat or oil, and that, on the contrary, it disintegrates in syrup. That, to keep sugar liquid, it suffices to add the tiniest bit of water in which a quince or some other tart fruit has soaked. . . . But, Madam, what is there for us women to know, if not bits of kitchen philosophy? . . . And I always say, when I see these details: If Aristotle had been a cook, he would have written much more. And continuing with my meditations, let me say that that this line of thought is so constant with me that I have no need of books. (Anthology 225-26)

The interval between philosophy and books, cooking and Aristotle, is measured out like the discrete ingredients of a recipe, each in its proper time and space, each in its contribution to the whole, culminating in the surprising formulation, "I have no need of books," a statement that is, like much else in this subtly ironic essay, both clearly false and profoundly true. Popular mythology tells us that Sor Juana, deprived of her books and music, did not turn to the consolation of the cookstove; she died rapidly, miserably (folk myth, of course, has her dying

considerably more rapidly and more miserably than biography). Still, the affirmation stands; the proper knowledge for women is limited to "kitchen philosophies." Yet as Sor Juana astutely recognizes, and her modern successors agree, the apparent limitation--women have no knowledge but knowledge of cooking--can be turned around: there is no knowledge that cannot be enriched by a knowledge of cooking, thus inspiring the image of an Aristotle among the eggs, or those modern celebrations of a woman's traditional sphere recorded in La sartén por el mango (The Skillet by the Handle) or Las mil y una calorías, novela dietética (A Thousand and One Calories: A Dietetic Novel; Glantz, 1978), among other academic and literary concoctions we swallow with glee.

--marginality--

One of the more significant aspects of women's writing, says Marta Traba, is its nature as a marginal activity. Women naturally write from and of, if not necessarily to, the margins. Thus, the signal criteria of value in Traba's revised scheme of judgment is how well women perform this essential function of giving voice to the margin, both her own marginality and that of other marginalized groups: "the feminine text remains located in a space neighboring on . . . the cultural margins; in other words, if it operates, as it in fact does, from the perspective of marginalization, it can mediate perfectly well . . ." (25). For this reason, the women writers of Latin America are in some sense privileged in their accessibility to the peripheries of culture, licensing them to speak not only of issues relating to private spaces, but also to speak to and between and as intermediary for other marginalized groups: implicitly, the disadvantaged social groups, the Indians, the blacks.

Jean Franco would agree with this identification based on marginalization. She too categorizes women with blacks and indigenous peoples, and finds them sharing a common quality of archaism, a protective coating of anachronism that buffers them against a hostile system: ". . . the belief systems of the indigenous, blacks, and women were of necessity archaic,

for no other options were open to them. At the same time, this very anachronism provided them with 'regions of refuge' . . . that could be explosive when the state encroached on them" ("Beyond" 505-6). Ambiguously visible and invisible at the same time, negated and neglected by indifference, what Franco calls the "regions of refuge" of the marginalized could be turned into a political tool, could become central if the center turns its eye on them. Pragmatically then, one of the jobs of the woman writer is to probe delicately at the edges of this official indifference, to force the dominant culture to recognize these regions, to unleash their dormant power, to impinge upon official consciousness without inciting it to even harsher reprisals.

Accordingly, one of the springs of vitality in women's writing comes from its association with other marginalized groups: Cuban Lydia Cabrera's retellings of black folk tales, Mexican Rosario Castellanos' "indigenismo," which takes the form of passionate depictions of Yucatecan Indians for whom Spanish is a foreign tongue, Chilean Marjorie Agosín's militant giving of voice to her countrywomen's quilted handicrafts, the "arpilleras." In this, as in much else, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is the forerunner. Recall, for example, the music of her villancico, "Entre un negro y la música castellana" 'Between a black man and Castilian music' that begins with her attempt to capture the rhythm of the spoken dialect:

--Acá tamo tolo
Zambio, lela, lela,
que tambié sabemo
cantaye las Leina. (Obras II; 26)ⁱ

In others of her villancicos, the linguistic salad--she calls these poems in mixed dialect "ensaladillas"--is even more highly spiced. In several of them she employs an exuberant and strikingly modern onomatopoeia that anticipates the more recent celebrations of oral poetry by contemporary poets like Nicolás Guillén: "¡Ha, ha, ha! / ¡Monan vuchilá! / ¡He, he, he, /

ⁱliterally translated: "Here we all are / zambio, lela, lela / we also know / how to sing to the Queen."

cambulé!" (Obras II; 72) Or here, where a song to San Pedro Nolasco is seasoned with the music of Nahuatl in a "Tocotín mestizo":

TOCOTIN

Los Padres bendito
tiene on Redentor;
amo nic neltoca
quimati no Dios.

Sólo Dios Piltzintli
del Cielo bajó,
y nuestro tlatlácol
nos lo perdonó.

Pero esto Teopixqui
dice en so sermón
que este San Nolasco
miechtin compró.

.....

Huel ni machicáhuac;
no soy hablador:
no teco qui mati,
que soy valentón. (Obras II;41-2)ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱSpanish text, literally translated: "The Fathers have blessed / a Redeemer / amo nic neltoca / quimati no Dios. / Only God Piltzintli / came down from Heaven, / and our tlatlácol / forgave. / But this Teopixqui / says in his sermon / that this Saint Nolasco / miechtin compró / . . . / Huel ni machicáhuac; / I am no gossip: / no teco qui mati, / I am brave."

Sor Juana's boundless interest in the music of the oral folk heritage leads her not only to these "mestizo" songs, but also to record, in her famous "Villancico VIII" dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe, a nine-verse "tocotín" (a type of Aztec dance) entirely in Nahuatl (Obras II; 17).

Likewise, the poet Gabriela Mistral proudly wrote of her half-Indian heritage, and even that quintessential creole, Victoria Ocampo, discovers in her ancestry an Indian foremother whose presence she carries with her before the Academia Argentina de Letras in her ingression speech as a symbolic reintegration of two marginals--woman and Indian--into the literary mainstream:

I learned then, that on my mother's side I descend from Irala, one of Mendoza's companions, and from a Guaraní Indian, Agueda. This Spaniard and this American had a daughter, that the father recognized. . . . I pay no attention to either demagoguery nor pedantry. But in my capacity as a woman, it is for me both a luxury and a compensation to be able to invite my Guaraní ancestress to this Academy and to sit her between an Englishwoman [Virginia Woolf] and a Chilean [Gabriela Mistral]. . . . because I in my turn recognize Agueda.

You might tell me that this all has nothing to do with literature. No. It has to do with immanent justice and perhaps with poetry. (Testimonios X 22).

The particular weight of writing about marginals, from a position of marginality that creates an indissoluble bond of solidarity, is, perhaps, one of the particular twists Latin American women give to the more general recognition of the cultural and racial diversity of the continent common among Latin American writers and intellectuals.

Ocampo writes of her long-ago foremother, the Indian woman taken as a mistress by the white invader, known to her distant descendent only through the fortuitous circumstance of the invader's "recognition" of his illegitimate daughter. Ocampo heals that peremptory invader's recognition with one of her own. In her condition as woman she empathizes with her; she recognizes her and places her next to Woolf and Mistral, next to the theorist and the poet, with Ocampo on this dais of enshrined respectability in the world of letters. In recognizing her, Ocampo symbolically gives her back her name and place in history and in literature, and forces

her listening public, her future colleagues of the Academy, to recognize her as well, with all the implications their recognition implies. In inviting Ocampo to that body, they are opening the door for other ruptures of traditional restrictions. Thus, insofar as Ocampo, albeit distantly, breaks custom in her quality as mestiza as in her condition as the first woman to be invited to membership in that body, she also signals an act of retribution: the official recognition and validation of the voices of its marginalized citizens.

One might object that Ocampo's evacuation and reconstruction of her pedigree in her recognition of Agueda is only a poetic flourish, a rhetorical trope, mere superficiality. But the fiction of America as a mestizo continent is also a rhetorical construction, an unexamined official trope that forecloses any real knowledge and sanctions both ignorance and abuse. Official benevolence, as Ocampo reminds us, is no assurance of legitimacy nor even a guaranteed recognition of the Indian's essential humanity.

What remains to be said is a warning on the seductions of marginality. The Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, recently published a position paper on African literature and criticism that is as applicable to Latin America as it is to the other side of the Atlantic where he finds his principal focus. "We need to transcend the banalities of nativism," he writes. ". . . On the one hand, we find theorists who emphasize the processes of demonization and subjection, the ways in which the margin is produced by the cultural dominant; . . . on the other (Other?) hand, talk about the production of marginality by the culturally dominant is wholly inadequate by itself." He concludes, "The point to be borne in mind here is that ideologies, like cultures, exist antagonistically, but that they only exist antagonistically" (175). Appiah's acute observation reminds me of the multifarious ways in which the production of difference becomes a self-generating mechanism fueled partly by a legitimate need to assert autonomy, to maintain those "regions of refuge" and partly by demands understood to be emanating from the center, by what Barbara Johnson calls "the public's indifference to finding out that there is no difference," that, so to speak, "difference is a misreading of sameness, but it must be represented in order to be erased" (284). Marginality is a tool both to mark and mask very real differences, as well as to

create false differences out of the cultural, economic, philosophical, and ideological exigencies of an antagonistic politics. Double talk, talking back, if unattended, can fall into the double crossing of that resistance.

--Writing in the Subjunctive Mood--

It is out of a similar operation of resistance to what Spivak calls "the structure of certification that we cannot not want to inhabit" ("Post-Coloniality," personal notes) that makes the tactical, textual resistances of deconstructive practice so attractive to many feminist theorists, offering, as it does, a powerful mode of double-voicing a text, of demonstrating a complex relationship to an oppressive system that allows for both the seductiveness and the hatred involved in the complex relationship to, for example, Ocampo's academy. It allows affection without the risk of recuperation, and also creates a space for opposition without alienation and, thereby, a simple reversion into the field of acceptable, if inscrutable, otherness, a trap that even so acute a critic as Rosario Ferré cannot avoid because she cannot not want to inhabit that particular myth:

Our literature very often finds itself determined by an immediate relationship to our bodies. . . . This biological fate curtails our mobility and creates very serious problems for us as we attempt to reconcile our emotional needs with our professional needs. . . . That is why women's literature has, so much more so than men's literature, concerned itself with interior experiences, experiences which have little to do with the historical, the social, and the political. Women's literature is also more subversive than men's because it often delves into forbidden zones--areas bordering on the irrational, madness, love, and death. ("The Writer's Kitchen" 242)

In her efforts to carve out a valid space for women's writing between the twin demands of a professional and an emotional life, Ferré falls back into the association of women's writing with a specific thematic content--love, death, madness--already reified as emblematic of women's

writing by dominant discourse. It is only a small step from such celebration of women's typical themes to the patronizing enforcement of difference experienced by Victoria Ocampo when, enthusiastically committed to writing on Dante's Divine Comedy, she is advised by her mentor "she ought to write on a topic more within in reach, more personal" (Testimonios X 17). Leslie Rabine has expressed her awareness of this risk very well at the end of her excellent Signs article on Maxine Hong Kingston: "Such is our present sociosymbolic order that feminine difference has to be expressed in a way acceptable to these institutions in order to even be recognized as feminine difference" (492). It is a chilling reminder in the context of gender studies as a whole, and, unfortunately, an absolutely correct one. There is a degree of sanctioned illegitimacy, of authenticable, and therefore licit, license, in which the conflictual violence of difference and the same are resolved and reconciled in the mocking surface of reflection, a game of continually changing positional references, of changes that end up always and only as the same thing.

What Philip Lewis says about deconstruction is equally applicable to feminist practice, and indirectly offers Rosario Ferré both warning and consolation: "insofar as it exposes such instances of recuperation as structurally determined, it shows the folly of any attempt to overcome or escape them once and for all" (13). How then, if not thematically, is one to account for the often-expressed conviction that women's texts just "feel" different? One form of tactical resistance to such overwhelming pressures from the thematic conventions involves a practice of the deliberately conditional, what I would call, taking my example from Spanish grammar, a life lived in the subjunctive mood, attentive to nuance and capable of taking a cue from context without losing its autonomy. It embodies "a metonymy of words," as Abraham and Torok would have it, representing the slippage as well as the continuity between the roles, an impassioned relationship to syntactical relations that reveals the covert markings of a cryptotype, a function without a concrete form. Its repertoire of techniques is varied, or, alternatively, we could perhaps say that it is a unitary principle, characterized by the multiple manifestations of a single theme. I will borrow others' words to circumscribe this practice (or practices) with helpful

metaphors. Philip Lewis might say it involves "an impulse or pressure to cultivate artifice, affabulation--an infection, as it were, that pervades philosophic writing and promotes its resistance to the regimen of the same" (23). It is, therefore, like a benign virus that gives immunity to the onslaught of other diseases. Luce Irigaray sees not illness, but war, and childbirth, and the murder of philosophy: "All that remains to be known is whether what they caught was not already dead: the poor present of an effigied copula. And whether in this fight they did anything but tear themselves apart. Making blood flow from their wounds, blood that still recalls a very ancient relationship with the mother Mimicking once again in that gesture what Plato was already writing, Socrates already telling. 'No question, they would put him to death.' It has long been inscribed--surely in the conditional tense of a myth--in their memories" (364).

Alice Jardine takes her metaphor from the description of "superficial" effects and marginal linguistic displacements: "I discovered that differences between male-written and female-written texts of modernity were not, after all, in their so-called 'content', but in their enunciation: in their modes of discourse ('sentimental,' ironic, scientific, etc.); in their twisting of female obligatory connotations, of inherited genealogies of the feminine; in their haste or refusal to use the pronouns 'I' or 'we'; in their degree of willingness to gender those pronouns as female; in their adherence to or dissidence from feminism as a movement; in the tension between their desire to remain radical and their desire to be taken seriously as theorists and writers in what remains a male intellectual community. . . ." (260-1). For Jardine, the cryptotype slips from function to function, from enunciation to modes of discourse to pronoun usage (always slippery), among other factors that help delimit its field without resolving into any simplistic form.

After all this, it is almost a relief to turn to the homier formulation of Luisa Valenzuela, who uses a simple, familiar, evocative scene to make her point. It is a scene that, moreover, echoes favorably with the elaborately framed appropriations of Victoria Ocampo, who in talking about Argentina filters her perceptions through French writers and Chinese art and Ecuadorian

landscapes. Instead, Valenzuela makes use of a humble, native metaphor for her aesthetic practice:

When I was a girl in the schools of my cattle-raising country, they used to make us write a composition about a predictable theme: The Cow. Today, trying to compose an essay about body and writing, I naturally think about the word (which is both body and writing) and naturally I think about the cow. . . .

Cow-words like cow-women. Although the expression may appear to be an insult, it is simply the image of an interior cud-chewing, of digesting and understanding, which ultimately generates discourse.

That's why I say that I believe in the existence of a feminine language, even though it may not yet have been completely defined and even though the boundary between it and other language . . . may be too subtle and ambiguous to be delineated. . . .

What we women will do, and are now doing, is to effect a radical change in the electrical charge of words. ("Word" 96)

Resistance to the same; the slight but crucial differences of enunciation; the lyric evocation of the conditional tense of myth; the electrical charge of cow-words: these delicate distinctions and subtle displacements cipher a particular repertoire of linguistic practices that respond and correspond to the need of the Latin American woman writer to encode, in a more than trivial manner, her shifting set of mutually exclusive, equally valid, alternate roles. Since there is no syntax, no lexicon outside of language, women writers must refine such tools as they are given, transforming vocabularies and focusing attention on particular usages so as to achieve a greater working knowledge of the byways of cultural production. Commentary is intended not only to describe the ellipsis, but also to recuperate, reintegrate, recodify the fragmented language of the female body, to construct, if such a thing is possible, a tentative dictionary of the unspoken.

The critical project in this respect bears a striking resemblance to the project of naming set Luisa Valenzuela's protagonist in the story, "Other Weapons." For her, "the so-called Laura," all of her past life is an ellipsis. Nouns are particularly elusive: "the so-called anguish," "the so-

called love," or "What might the prohibited (repressed) be?", as are verbs: the meanings of verbs like to love and to hate, to make love and to torture slip indistinguishably into each other. Her experience is conditional, hypothetical, based on a series of subordinate clauses responding to the main clause, the spoken orders of the man: her lover, her torturer, her one friend, the enemy she must assassinate. Her touchstone is her own wounded body--"una espalda azotada" (a wounded back)--which is continuous with her wounded mind, her aphasia: "la palabra azotada," in which the weight of reference falls not on the noun, but on the adjective, "azotada." The nameless protagonist, for convenience, "the so-called Laura," tastes the bittersweet of her blood in the slash on her back, the shattered words on her tongue; denied refuge, she has no place to treasure up her scattered bits, no force to bring them together out of their fragmentation. Her story, like Santa's, is that of a veiled and unspeakable pornography, rescued--by Glantz, by Valenzuela--through the tentative workings of the subjunctive.

Writing in the subjunctive mood also provides a response to Derrida's query, informed by his reading of Hegelian dialectics: "And if the relève of alienation is not a calculable certitude, can one still speak of alienation and still produce statements in the system of speculative dialectics? . . . What might be a 'negative' that could not be relevé?" (my italics). For Derrida, one response might be the machine defined in terms of its functioning rather than its product (Margins 107). In Luisa Valenzuela's word-milk-woman-cow, in her evocation of the madwoman-housewife-torture victim Laura, in Ferré's impassioned recollection of her own love/hatred of writing, in Margo Glantz' exegeses of women's feet and women's hair and women's missing genitalia we see examples of machines that work, and work without calculable certitude and without relève, struggling with the old cautionary rituals, attempting to bypass old myths of the Same and the Other, risking loss (of readers, of self), and forcefully suggesting new kinds of feminine difference. Puerto Rican Mayra Santos-Febres evokes this furious commitment, this impatient patience with the old rituals:

pronto pronto al cuerpo le pasan cosas
tantas.

.....
 esquinitas
 por donde la rabia
 se escabulle
 rompe los diques que la mano, mantiene en éóptimas condiciones
 la furia
 secreteándose rutas escabrosas que la ensañan más
 contra ésta
 su mano enemiga
 puliéndola, pienándola
 pasándole aceites y sabila (mss)ⁱⁱⁱ

Rosario Castellanos calls one variation on such writing adjectival, and defines it as the motivating force behind her novel, Balún-Canán: "I wanted to tell about events that were not essential like those of poetry : adjectival events . . ." (Miller 125-6). Prose, let us say, is typically conceived of as a concatenation of nouns and verbs; Castellanos' intuition of the basically adjectival nature of her work surely deserves note as a revolutionary transvaluation of prose, rejecting agency and action (the essential and the essentialist, both touched, for Castellanos, with the suspicion adhering to typically male preserves) in favor of what is often downgraded as mere ornamentation: superficial, attractive surely, but of lesser significance. The title of Valenzuela's story, "Cambio de armas," is in the official English translation--Spivak's translation-as-violation--perversely appropriate here: "Other Weapons." In Spanish, ambiguously, "cambio" is both noun and verb: "I change weapons" and "Change of weapons."

ⁱⁱⁱliterally translated: "soon soon things happen to the body / so many things./ little corners/ around which hatred / scuttles / breaks the dikes that the hand, keeps in prime condition / the fury / hiding itself uneven paths that enrage her more / against this / her enemy hand / polishing it / combing it / rubbing it with oils and bitter aloe."

Here we can see another, quite different examination of the deadly significance of this denigration--"la palabra azotada"--as well as the potential for a creative reworking of the stereotypes, by violent means if necessary: changing weapons, taking them up, using them against a repressive order. In Castellanos, "la palabra enemiga," is transformed, polished, held close to the body and to the reader, and that reader, Castellanos' ideal reader, knows the precise mechanism of its formal construction, the particular resources and uses of its form. In Valenzuela, "la palabra azotada" the wounded word, serves a similar function, and step by step she teaches her readers to take up this weapon and use it.

Back in the Attic

What room, as Virginia Woolf might ask, does this space leave the woman writer, what theoretical space does it open for the critic? The Latin Americanist must first of all combat the tendency so succinctly described by Jean Franco as the perception, from the first world, of the intellectual underdevelopment of the Third: "Anyone involved in Latin American studies knows what it is to be placed last on the program, when everyone else has left the conference. . . . The conclusion is that the Third World is not much of a place for theory; and if it has to be fitted into theory at all, it can be accounted for as exceptional or regional" ("Beyond" 503). Thus, the Third World is neither perceived as a fit place for theory to grow nor as a appropriate or worthwhile place for theory to be applied. The result is a serious underdeveloping of potential in and for Latin America, a lack of recognition as such of those theoretical positions that do exist, scattered in novels and poems, fragmented in the journalistic occasional essays that sap the strength and energy of so many Latin American intellectuals, collected in anthologies and conference proceedings. This not-so-benign neglect is troublesome enough. By when, as Spivak notes, neglect on the one hand is accompanied by condescension on the other, the soup becomes a poisonous mess indeed:

It seems particularly unfortunate when the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. A basically isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America establishes the high feminist norm. It is supported and operated by an information-retrieval approach to "Third World" literature which often employs a deliberately "nontheoretical" methodology with self-conscious rectitude. ("Three Women's Texts" 243)

This two-tiered system of feminist thought ignores the ongoing interaction among the postindustrial and postcolonial nations of the world, ignores as well the history of intervention and influence that informs Homi Bhabha's notion of the ambiguity residing in a society that is, in his words, "not-quite/not-white," a fundamental blindness to the "worlding" of nations that are not merely exceptional, regional, exotic, exploited (but otherwise untouched) outposts of quaint customs mainly of interest to the anthropologically minded.

However, the underdeveloping of Latin American theory is as much--or more--a product of internal forces as it is of external perceptions. Too often, Anthony Appiah reminds us, attempts of nativist thinkers to create an alternative to traditional Eurocentric studies fail to take into account the implications of the concepts they manipulate: "attempts at counterhegemonic cultural analysis are short-circuited by a failure to recognize the historicity of the analytic terms--'culture,' 'literature,' 'nation'--through which the sociopolitical margin is produced as an object of study" (161). Ironically then, failure to deconstruct these cultural models creates, in effect, an embedded counterdiscourse--the implicit Eurocentric contestation to the model intended as a contestatory declaration of independence. Appiah continues, "Indeed, the very arguments, the rhetoric of defiance, that our nationalists muster are, in a sense, canonical, time tested. . . . Nativist nostalgia, note well, is largely fueled by that Western sentimentalism so familiar after Rousseau; few things are less native than nativism in its current forms" (162). Thus, both Appiah and Spivak point to what might be called, harshly, an unconscious fetishization of cultural forms that colors the critics' relation to the object of study, that contaminates as well the efforts to construct or reconstruct a literary tradition of/for Latin American women. It is not

enough, they remind us, to find refuge in a vaguely-defined "otherness", nor to decry rational structures in an unspecified manner as theoretically contaminated and hence inapplicable. We need instead to do serious, concrete, and meticulous work that will allow us to learn more about the repressed motor forces of canonical forms, that will help us to deconstruct their relève, as Derrida has it, to uncover the way they work. Says Satya Mohanty: "Notwithstanding our contemporary slogans of otherness, and our fervent denunciations of Reason and the Subject, there is an unavoidable conception of rational action, inquiry and dialogue inherent in this political-critical project, and if we deny it or obscure it we ought at least to know at what cost" (26).

The cost is clear. The traditional, rational mode requires coherence as the mainstay of great intellectual achievement. But coherence and profound insight, as Paul de Man reminded us long ago in his Blindness and Insight, has a price: the selective forgetting of dissonant elements that is the point of blindness, the dark Nietzschean afterimage of staring into the bright sunlight/insight. This dialectic of blindness and insight is, in the context of a Third World feminist theoretical undertaking, complicated by yet another twist, another uncomfortable turn of analysis. We cannot speak, even of this, other than in a discourse given us by the West, by Western history, Western politics, Western metaphysics. We must use this discourse to open the conditions of possibility for a radical change in discourse.

If such are the concerns of the rational, verging on essentialist, side of the feminist project, the other side--not irrational, certainly--will emphasize the importance of the tropological deconstruction of truth-claims. At a risk of replacing a bad, old coherence with a bad, new incoherence, this side of the feminist project rejects absolutes. We have been too coherent for too long, and now take up arms in favor of a willed undecidability in which all the component parts of our theoretical enterprise remain, like the project of Cortázar's Morelli, in a continual flux of constitution and deconstruction, composition and decomposition, distortion and dissimulation. The style is enormously attractive even though, ironically perhaps, woman herself becomes the major trope, the controlling metaphor for this pervasive undecidability. In Derrida's

version, explicating Nietzsche: "Woman (truth) does not allow herself to be possessed" ("Question" 179). If we deconstruct "truth" as one of those iconic figures like "Wisdom" and, in the United States, "Liberty," if we deconstruct the myth of the inability ever to really possess woman as one of those inexplicable vagaries of abstract Western philosophy, dating at least from the times of courtly love, that is at total odds with the realities of women's existence during the last few thousand years, then we are still left with the figure of woman as a figure of indeterminacy. "Beyond this double negation," of woman as figure of truth or woman as figure of lying, writes Derrida, "woman is recognized, affirmed, as an affirmative, dissimulating, artistic, and Dionysian power. She is not affirmed by man; rather, she affirms herself both in herself and in man. . ." ("Question" 185-6). In this statement, the margin is always withdrawn from control, remains, even when possessed, impregnable. Accordingly, the play of the woman's text is always interminable, as the concept of the correct reading is multiply disturbed from another direction. Not only are the laws and conventions of reading a text, the inherited truth-claims, placed into question, but also the tenacious claim of a text to establish its own law, in conjunction, as Morelli would say, with a conscientious "lector cómplice." But what if we take seriously the play of undecidability? Where then does interpretation rest, when the fiction of the text becomes our (un)reality, and we can only be sure that our reading is in some degree a misreading? The ambiguous task of reading becomes in itself a kind of force perpetuating difference through its attention to the literal, and literary disturbances in the text, between the text and the reader, between this text and other texts. We must, in such circumstances, abandon the specious security of our rooms for the precarious existence of the itinerant storyteller, with no theoretical room of our own, but only a series of temporary situations, a repertoire of useful strategies, our meager handful of weapons.

Notes

Chapter One

¹Examples of the representation of women in traditional texts would include Sharon Magnarelli's 1985 book, The Lost Rib: Female Characters in the Spanish-American Novel, or any number of the recent anthologies of essays on women writers. Sandra Cypess' magnificent discourse analyses of Rosario Castellanos' novels offer one variety of the second type of appropriative strategies; Margo Glantz' Barthesian-influenced explorations of peculiarly Latin American mythologies and literary styles provide another.

²"I discovered that the differences between male-written and female-written texts of modernity were not, after all, in their so-called 'content', but in their enunciation: in their modes of discourse ('sentimental', ironic, scientific, etc.); in their twisting of female obligatory connotations, of inherited genealogies of the feminine, in their haste or refusal to use the pronouns 'I' or 'we'; in their degree of willingness to gender those pronouns as female. . . ." (119)

³See, for example, Domitila Barrios de Chungara: "yo considero que el machismo es también un arma del imperialismo, como lo es el fememismo" 'I believe that machismo is also an imperialist weapon, as is feminism' (Viezzer 8)

⁴Loeaza's articles appeared in various Mexico City newspapers in the mid- to late eighties, and have been collected in various best-selling volumes including Las niñas bien (1987; with the, for Latin America, astronomical sales of over 50,000 copies the first year, and nine reprintings by early 1990) and Las reinas de Polanco (1988).

⁵Carolyn Heilbrun marks a somewhat similar phenomenon in U. S. feminist circles. She writes: "Sneering at privileged women, whether or not they recognize their difference in experience from working-class women, has done nothing to aid the cause of feminism" (64), as she finds that the complaints they have to make "are at the very heart of women's oppression: they include sexual abuse and the miseries of a hunger that is not physical and that can be felt by women of all races and classes" (63). Her observation remains generally valid for Latin America, although the connections linking issues of sex, race, and class are adumbrated somewhat differently.

⁶Jessica Benjamin would expand on this very acute observation from the framework of an ideologically committed psychoanalytic practice. She writes, "I believe that this insistence on the division between public and private is sustained by the fear that anything public or 'outside' would merely intensify individual helplessness, that only the person we have not yet recognized as an outsider (mother and wife) can be trusted to provide us with care, that the only safe dependence is on someone who is not part of the struggle of all against all, and indeed, who is herself not independent" (202).

⁷For example, Schutte cites a fem study indicating that in Mexico, "where there is a limited abortion law, it is estimated that as much as twenty percent of female mortality may result from illegal abortions" (70), and that as many as one million illegal abortions (recall that the population of Mexico is about 60 million) are performed in that country each year.

⁸Spivak writes: "the incantation of the names, far from being a composition of place, is precisely that combination of effacement-of-specificity and appropriation that one might call violation" ("Imperialism," 329). And she continues with a more general lesson derived from her reading of Kipling: "unless third-worldist feminist criticism develops a vigilance against such tendencies [e.g, the structure of translation-as-violation], it cannot help but participate in them. . ." (331).

⁹I do not mean, in my turn, to be inappropriately dismissive here; and I applaud, for example, the efforts of Ana Rosa Domenella, Elena Urrutía, and other organizers and participants in the Colegio de México's "taller de literatura femenina mexicana," and the labors of that same

country's "Centros de Documentación sobre la Mujer." To date, relatively few contributions have appeared in print, however.

¹⁰The radio program was aired in the Summer of 1988. I might add, also, that my companion, a female university professor, was enthusiastically supportive of this clever way of defusing unwanted sexual advances.

¹¹I would also like to recognize the work of Lucía Guerra Cunningham in the same direction, especially the passionate and provocative material included in the subsection of her article "Las sombras de la escritura," entitled "Estrategías discursivas de la mujer latinoamericana como sujeto/objeto de la escritura" (Discursive Strategies of the Latin American woman as Subject/Object of writing) Guerra Cunningham, like Ludmer, and González and Ortega, uses the metaphor of discursive strategies to outline a potential feminist literary practice. Her list of suggestions includes: "the aesthetic phenomena of silence and the void, the palimpsest, the diglossia of the feminine, mimicry with a transgressive value, and the feminization of other dominated groups, visible or blank margins that modify the assimilated intertextual space creating signifying fissures in the phallogocentric ideological system" (143). As this project was far advanced when Guerra Cunningham's essay came to my attention, I welcome the partial overlap in our categories as independent validation of their significance.