

**UCLA**

**UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

**Title**

Las Insometidas de la Ciudad de México: The Novel of Prostitution in Antonia Mora, Sara Sefchovich and Cristina Rivera Garza

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6fz077hh>

**Author**

Gonzalez, Carolyn

**Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

*Las Insomnidas de la Ciudad de México: The Novel of Prostitution in Antonia Mora,*

Sara Sefchovich, and Cristina Rivera Garza

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Carolyn González

2014

© Copyright by

Carolyn González

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

*Las Insométicas de la Ciudad de México: The Novel of Prostitution in Antonia Mora,*

Sara Sefchovich and Cristina Rivera Garza

by

Carolyn González

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Héctor Calderón, Chair

In my dissertation, I examine the representation of prostitution in the novels of twentieth-century Mexicana writers. This study will focus on what I call the Mexicana novel of prostitution, texts that feature female protagonists who have been compelled to enter the profession of prostitution out of necessity for financial or personal reasons. Examples of this genre that I analyze include Antonia Mora's *Del oficio* (1972), Sarah Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor* (1990), and Cristina Rivera Garza's *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999). Although the Mexicana novels of prostitution in some ways are a continuation of the social and historical approach to prostitution established in the nineteenth century, they constitute a literary genre that dialogues

and also breaks with the male-authored literary discourses of the past. In Chapter One, I examine the expansion and industrialization of Paris, London, Madrid, New York, and Mexico City along with the emergence of the male novel of prostitution in this socio-historical context. I also consider legislation that emerged during the nineteenth century to control prostitutes. These important components of the emergence of the modern city are examined in order to establish the literary, social, and historical background of the Mexicana novel of prostitution. In Chapter Two, I focus on Antonia Mora's *Del oficio* (1972). In this urban *testimonio*, Mora professes to be a strong authority on the subject of prostitution, based on her personal experience. Because her novel is in no way a moralizing tale but rather is an honest portrayal of life in "el oficio," a life that has not been appropriated by anyone else, I assert that a strong distinction can be made between Mora's work and that of the male authors that precede her. In Chapter Three, I focus on Sara Sefchovich's Mexicana novel of prostitution, *Demasiado amor* (1990), as a response to and a dramatic departure from the Mexican literature of the mid-eighties. I conclude this chapter by analyzing the novel's relation to Sefchovich's most recent work of fiction, *Vivir la vida* (2000), positing that in both works the main characters live lives shaped mostly by oppressive circumstances that they are unable to escape, even in exile and death. The author uses her novels to reflect on the fact that the situation of women in Mexico has not sufficiently improved. In Chapter Four, I examine Cristina Rivera Garza's *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), arguing that her identity as a *fronteriza* writer with a Chicana/Latina sensibility shapes her novel. Indeed, the novel presents within itself a theory of what a novel should be; it is an "interview" and exploration of a historical document that merges photography, history, and the author's own written voice and lived experience. Finally, Chapter Five, analyzes the current state of

prostitution in Mexico City and reflects on the state of Mexican Feminism manifested in the Mexicana novel of prostitution and in the streets through the activism of *mujeres* “en la vida.”

The dissertation of Carolyn González is approved.

María Herrera-Sobek

Susan Plann

Héctor Calderón, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

*Para Milena y Beto*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Chapter One	
The Birth of the Modern City: Urbanization, Poverty, and Prostitution .....	12
Chapter Two	
“¿Puedo decir lo que pienso?”: Antonia Mora’s Urban Testimonial <i>Del oficio</i> .....	34
Chapter Three	
Aborting the Nation: Sara Sefchovich’s <i>Demasiado amor</i> .....	70
Chapter Four	
<i>La historia desde el “como-si”</i> : Fronteriza Writing and the <i>proceso de creación</i> in Cristina Rivera Garza’s <i>Nadie me verá llorar</i> .....	106
Chapter Five	
Conclusion: Mexican Feminism from the Streets .....	145
Works Cited .....	158

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Héctor Calderón, for his friendship and mentorship throughout my doctoral studies. I could not have completed this project without his hard work, knowledge, generosity of time, and encouragement. (As well as many, many e-mail exchanges.) *Mil gracias*. I would also like to acknowledge my doctoral committee members, Dr. Jesús Torrecilla, Dr. Susan Plann, and Dr. María Herrera-Sobek, for helping me through this process with their wisdom, guidance and enthusiasm. I would especially like to thank Dr. Herrera-Sobek for making an extraordinary effort to attend my defense. I was very moved by her kindness. Thanks go to Gloria Tovar for her patience in answering all of my questions throughout the last phase of this project. I would also like to thank the University of California Office of the President, UCLA Graduate Division and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for the Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship. I owe a debt of gratitude to Graduate Division for the Graduate Research Mentorship Award and the Graduate Summer Research Mentorship. All of this support greatly helped me in the successful completion of my graduate studies.

I am grateful to my fellow graduate students and friends who have accompanied me on this journey. I would especially like to thank Dr. Bethany Beyer, Sandra Ruiz, Valeria Valencia, Goretta González, Dr. Chinyere Osuji, Dr. Ariel Tumbaga, and Dr. Argelia Andrade for their much-needed moral support and the hours spent working together at YRL and various cafes in Los Angeles. *¡Gracias amigas y amigo!* Thank you to my family, especially my mother and father, my sisters and my *tía*, for always believing that I could do this. Special thanks go to my *tía* and sister Lauren for flying out here to keep Milena company while I worked. *Gracias a* Sarita Starliper for coming to visit her L.A. *familia* and for her encouragement and positivity

throughout my doctoral studies. I am grateful to Betty Sainz, *amiga de toda la vida*, for the afternoons of babysitting so I could write. *Al Dr. Sergio Abarca le doy las gracias por su amistad y los mensajitos de texto dándome ánimos. Y gracias a Dr. Margarita Cota-Cárdenas for her friendship, consejos and many pep talks. Finally, thank you to my husband Beto and my daughter Milena for their love and understanding, as well as for making as many sacrifices (porque somos un equipo), if not more, than I have in the completion of this project. Milena, por fin terminé el doctorado. Now let's go play.*

## VITA

- 2005            B.A. in Honors Spanish  
Concentration in Hispanic/ Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
*summa cum laude*  
Roanoke College
- 2005-2009       Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship  
University of California Office of the President, Graduate Division and  
Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2006            Graduate Summer Research Mentorship  
Graduate Division  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2006- 2014      Teaching Assistant  
Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2007            M.A. in Spanish  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2008-2009       Graduate Research Mentorship Award  
Graduate Division  
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2010            Concentration in Women’s Studies  
University of California, Los Angeles

## PRESENTATIONS

- “Crossing Borders Through Prostitution: *Across a Hundred Mountains* by Reyna Grande.”  
American Literature Symposium: The Latina/o Literary Landscape, San Antonio, Texas.  
6-8 March, 2014.
- “The Voice Representing Prostitution in *Esperanza’s Box of Saints* and *Santitos: sexo, humor y realismo en una novela mágica* by María Amparo Escandón.” UCLA Department of Spanish and Portuguese Graduate Student Conference, UCLA. 21-22 April, 2011.
- “Prostitution as a Feminist Practice in Cecile Pineda’s *The Love Queen of the Amazon* and María Amparo Escandón’s *Santitos*.” American Comparative Literature Association Conference, New Orleans. 1-4 April, 2010.
- “The Creation of a Chicana Microcosm by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas.” Department of Spanish and Portuguese Graduate Student Conference, UCSB. 20-21 April, 2007.

“Un deseo inalcanzable: El concepto de *l’amour fou* en el cine de Buñuel.” Symposium on Mexican Cinema facilitated by Professor Guillermo Hernández, UCLA. 10-11 March, 2006.

## INTRODUCTION

In her article “Las putas honestas, ayer y hoy,”<sup>1</sup> Marta Lamas describes her participation in the international *Multi-center Intervention Study on Commercial Sex Workers and HIV Transmission* as well as her own anthropological study from 1989 to 1991 (316-17). For her study, Lamas focused on four *puntos*<sup>2</sup> in México City: “la calle Sullivan, la zona alrededor de la Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), el Puente de Insurgentes, y El Oro (ubicado entre Monterrey y Colima, en la Roma)” (317). Between the months of January and October of 1990, Lamas describes her methodology as follows:

[...] el *punto* de El Oro se convirtió en el lugar donde, durante varios meses, me “paré” cuatro o cinco noches a la semana, de 10 [sic] de la noche a dos, tres o cuatro de la madrugada, dependiendo de la afluencia de clientes.

Además [...] pasé muchas noches en los vestíbulos de los hoteles a donde llevan a los clientes. También visité otros *puntos* (Libertad, Meave), merodeé por La Merced y por El Oro, y excepcionalmente me tocó hacer de chofer y conducir las junto con algún cliente de “a pie” [...] Esto me dio la posibilidad de escuchar muchas pláticas y presenciar distintos tipos de intercambios y negociaciones.

(318)

---

<sup>1</sup> The title of this fascinating piece, which critically examines the history of sex work in Mexico and the situation of *trabajadoras sexuales* today, alludes to a feminist phrase “Todas las mujeres somos putas.” As Lamas explains, “Aunque la llamada ‘prostitución’ es una actividad exclusiva de un grupo determinado de mujeres, también es una actividad complementaria de un grupo muy amplio de amas de casa, estudiantes y trabajadoras que aumentan sus ingresos económicos de esa manera” (338). Therefore, to say that “todas somos putas” really was another way of saying “las putas son honestas” (Lamas 338). “Con la frase provocadora se explicitaba la percepción de que el estigma es injusto, y que hay que acabar con él” (Lamas 338).

<sup>2</sup> Lamas explains *puntos* as “lugares tolerados en la calle, donde se ‘paran’ las trabajadoras” (317).

This time of observation provided Lamas with what she calls “información crucial” and gave her a new perspective on sex work:

Me di cuenta que la situación social de las trabajadoras sexuales es mucho más compleja que los estereotipos y los discursos que hay sobre ellas. Tal vez lo más impactante para mí fue comprobar que el mundo de la llamada “prostitución” no es un mundo separado, que el comercio sexual forma parte de la vida cotidiana, que está inserto en procesos sociales que atraviesan toda la sociedad y que tienen facetas muy sorprendentes. Además es un mundo que, aunque tiene su lógica propia, comparte la lógica cultural general: su funcionamiento obedece a procesos económicos hegemónicos y sus rutinas se incorporan en el imaginario colectivo a través de la literatura y el cine. (319)

With these phrases, Marta Lamas eloquently expresses a surprising conclusion that I too reached as a result of my dissertation research, albeit in a different context. This dissertation began as an examination of a particular type of protagonist—*la prostituta*—or prostitution as “un mundo separado,” yet it became something quite different. The more that I examined the works of three Mexican writers of the twentieth century, the more I realized that their works also “atraviesan toda la sociedad y que tienen facetas muy sorprendentes.” The novels I examine in my dissertation are Antonia Mora’s *Del oficio* (1972), Sarah Sefchovich’s *Demasiado amor* (1990), and Cristina Rivera Garza’s *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), novels with female protagonists compelled to enter the profession of prostitution out of necessity for financial or personal reasons<sup>3</sup> in what I term the Mexican novel of prostitution. These three authors come

---

<sup>3</sup> Novels focused on sexual slavery involving women or children fall outside the scope of this study.

from different places and circumstances, yet are joined in their aim of exploring the theme of prostitution. All three write on prostitution from a position of social, ethnic or geographic marginality respectively: Antonia Mora, a member of the working poor, was raised in the 1930s and 1940s in Mexico City; Sara Sefchovich is a judeo-mexicana writer, considered one of the “judíos destacados de México” by the Jewish community of Mexico City (“Sara Sefchovich”); and Cristina Rivera Garza was born in 1964 on the Mexico-U.S. border in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. After considering these writers’ groundbreaking texts, what began as my examination of an archetype became a more far-reaching reflection on Mexican culture and feminism, Chicana/Latina feminist literature and the historical background needed to understand these important novels.

I begin my dissertation with Chapter One, “The Birth of the Modern City: Urbanization, Poverty, and Prostitution,” in which I examine the expansion and industrialization of Paris, London, Madrid, New York, and Mexico City along with the emergence of the male novel of prostitution in this socio-historical context. I contend that toward the end of the nineteenth century, along with modernization, there also existed general patterns of confinement that limited the movement and speech of social “others,” prostitutes, the insane, and the poor, groups that had (and still have) much to say. I examine these broad patterns of repression in order to establish the literary, social, and historical background of the Mexicana novel of prostitution. Chapter One shows that, although the Mexicana novels of prostitution in some ways represent a continuation of social and historical approaches to prostitution established in the nineteenth century, they also constitute a literary genre that dialogues and also breaks with the male-authored literary discourses of the past. Moreover, the three novels of the dissertation rehearse in their themes and



stories the issues of social control, confinement, and punishment of the marginal from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first century.

My analysis of the Mexicana novels of prostitution begins with Chapter Two, “‘¿Puedo decir lo que pienso?’: Antonia Mora’s Urban Testimonial *Del oficio*,” which examines Mora’s 1972 novel. The author professes a strong authority on the subject of prostitution, based on her personal experience. Because Mora’s novel is in no way a moralizing tale but rather is an honest portrayal of life in “el oficio,” a narrative that has not been appropriated by anyone, I assert that a strong distinction can be made between Mora’s work and that of the male authors that precede her. In this chapter, I analyze past interpretations of Mora’s novel by José Agustín, María Luisa Mendoza, María González, and Debra Castillo. I also engage in a close reading of the novel and contribute to the debate concerning the novel’s end by reading this text as one that not only portrays an accurate account of Mora’s life as she sees it, but that also shows how Mora uses her writing as a way to allow the reader to witness her account and become her active accomplice and ally through the trials she endures while working in “la vida.” Mora’s testimonial novel depicts street life in Mexico City during the mid-twentieth century, and it was published in 1972 during the height of PRI dominance in the twentieth century. Since its publication also came soon after the massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968, it should be read as a poor working-class woman’s voice against the post-World War II Mexican industrial recovery during the Miguel Alemán presidency and the debate over the condition of women in Mexico spurred by Octavio Paz’s *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) and Rosario Castellanos’s “Malinche” (1972). Moreover, it is significant that in his foreword to the 2000 edition of *Del oficio*, writer José Agustín names repressive historical figures featured in Mora’s testimonial novel that it would have been unwise for Mora to reveal. For instance, Agustín names television and radio

personality and PRI supporter Agustín Barrios Gómez who sought to use Mora to sell a particular representation of Mexican prisons as well as to paint a portrait of a repentant prostitute for his viewers. In response to this scheme, Mora's unapologetic narrative asks the reader to move beyond the dichotomy of the prostitute versus people perceived as "clean" and "decent." Mora's urban *testimonio* features examples of police exploitation, medical malpractice, stories staged on Mexican television, and social criminalization of the female body, and it shows how indecent the supposed "gente decente" can be. In sum, Mora fights a larger system of oppression in Mexico, including the marriage between government interests and television that continues to today.

In Chapter Three of this dissertation, "Aborting the Nation: Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado Amor*," I focus on Sara Sefchovich's Mexican novel of prostitution, *Demasiado amor* (1990), as a response to and a dramatic departure from the Mexican literature of the mid-eighties. In this novel, the prostitute-companion Beatriz is exposed to Mexican history and culture, and media by her male lover. Out of necessity in the midst of another Mexican economic crisis, Beatriz decides on prostitution and becomes immersed in two separate realities, with her unnamed lover unaware of her life as a prostitute and working member of the middle class. As the novel progresses, Beatriz, informs the reader on disease and unequal access to healthcare. These issues are related to all women and are highlighted through the protagonist's own experience as a single woman in Mexico who is sexually active against society's mandates. In the end Beatriz, having travelled throughout Mexico, becomes disillusioned and rejects the nation, her lover and his education. I conclude this chapter by analyzing the novel's relation to Sefchovich's most recent work of fiction, *Vivir la vida* (2000), positing that in both works the main characters live lives shaped mostly by oppressive circumstances that they are unable to

escape, even in exile or death. In an interview featured in the 2010 edition of *Vivir la vida*, Sefchovich explains that “Cuando decidí escribir *Vivir la vida*, es porque me entró la urgencia de decir que la vida es maravillosa pero que vivirla es terrible. Lo que me motivó a escribirla es que estoy convencida (y lo quería decir) que la vida te vive a ti. No la vives tú a ella” (252).

Sefchovich uses her novels to resist what she sees as reality by illuminating how easy it is to be swept away by circumstance and reflecting on the fact that, because of this, the situation of women in Mexico has not sufficiently changed. Sefchovich uses the example of the ongoing fight for legalized abortions as an indicator of Mexico’s lack of progress in women’s rights. I conclude that Sefchovich uses her novels to “[...] *hacer visibles verdades evidentes*” (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 11). She challenges the reader to examine this problematic situation and she posits literature as a device that can illuminate “verdades” that may otherwise go unperceived; ultimately, Sefchovich hopes for change.

In Chapter Four of this dissertation, “*La historia desde el ‘como-si’: Fronteriza Writing and the proceso de creación in Cristina Rivera Garza’s Nadie me verá llorar,*” I examine Rivera Garza’s motivation behind her particular novel of prostitution and the idea that this text presents within itself a theory of what a novel should be. In the words of the author spoken in an interview: “Siempre he creído [...] que una novela que realmente es una novela incluye, en mayor o menor medida, de manera más o menos explícita, una teoría de esa novela” (*Nuevo Texto* 32). For Rivera Garza, this particular novel of prostitution constitutes an “interview” with a historical document (the medical record of Modesta Burgos L., a prostitute judged morally insane in Mexico City’s La Castañeda insane asylum) that merges photography, history, and the author’s own written voice and lived experience as a writer and researcher. Since bilingual and bicultural Rivera Garza was born on the border and studied at the University of Houston in the

years, 1988 to 1995, that coincided with the emergence of Chicana/Latina feminist literature, this author gained a decidedly Chicana/Latina and *fronteriza* sensibility that is apparent in her dissertation *The Masters of the Streets: Bodies, Power and Modernity in Mexico, 1867-1930* (University of Houston, 1995). In particular there is a connection between the work of Rivera Garza and Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros. The parallels between the two writers become apparent in the acknowledgments of Rivera Garza's *The Masters* where she echoes Cisneros's playful bilingual style found in her own "Los Acknowledgements" to *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991). She also echoes Cisneros's populist working-class devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. In Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship this is a central figure in the redefinition of Mexican femininity. Furthermore, like Chicana/Latina feminist scholars, Rivera Garza privileges the stories of the marginal in her dissertation. Rivera Garza's dissertation—focused on the poor, on prostitutes, and on the insane—would become the basis for *Nadie me verá llorar*, the story of an *insometida* (an unregistered prostitute in Mexico City) who spent decades confined in the Manicomio General, La Castañeda. I argue that, because of her shared marginality with this woman, albeit in a different context, Rivera Garza makes her protagonist an *insometida*, a figure of resistance against the nineteenth-century regulation of prostitution in México.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Rivera Garza's *Nadie me verá llorar* acclaimed as a Mexican novel, can also be explained through its Chicana/Latina and U.S. frame of reference.

Finally, Chapter Five, "Conclusion: Mexican Feminism from the Streets," analyzes the current state of prostitution in Mexico City through working women's resistance to government abuse and control. It is also a reflection on the state of Mexican Feminism manifested in the

---

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Rivera Garza uses the figure of Gregorio Cortez in her dissertation as will be examined in detail in Chapter Four.

Mexicana novel of prostitution and in the streets through the activism of *mujeres* “en la vida” who work at *centros nocturnos* “por gusto o por necesidad” (Reveles). I also posit that women of the nineteenth-century Mexico working in the field of prostitution as portrayed in Rivera Garza’s dissertation are not so different from those of Mora’s day, or from Sefchovich’s fictional character (an educated woman using prostitution to make money for her family), or from the women of today. Regardless of their motivations behind working in the field, as people, the basic human rights of *sexoservidoras* should be respected. As Lamas argues,

Las trabajadoras sexuales deberían contar con condiciones de trabajo seguras, con mecanismos fiscales adecuados, y tener derechos y obligaciones similares a los de otras trabajadoras. La elección del comercio sexual como la opción menos mala o mejor retribuida se está dando de cara al desempleo y a las opciones mal pagadas del trabajo femenino tradicional. Esta revaloración del trabajo sexual, totalmente distinta a ser engañada, secuestrada o mantenida drogada, requiere una nueva normatividad legal con la cual enfrentar el verdadero lenocinio. (341)

Through exploring these literary treatments of a still-important topic, my study moves beyond existing scholarship by expanding on the work that has been done on novels centered on the theme of prostitution. Although much research has focused on the study of Sara Sefchovich’s and Cristina Rivera Garza’s texts, relatively little has been written about Mexicana-authored novels of prostitution as a whole. The principal sources for information on these novels are two scholarly studies by Debra A. Castillo and María R. González. María González published her work *Imagen de la prostituta en la novela mexicana contemporánea* in 1996. Her study provides historical background on the development and understanding of prostitution in Mexico from pre-colonial times to the present day, and then analyzes the work of male authors. She ends her

analysis with a chapter on Mora's novel read alongside *Las muertas* by Jorge Ibarguengoitia. In her text, González examines the shifting representation of prostitution by male writers and analyzes *Del oficio* as a neorealist novel. González also presents Antonia Mora as the only female author included in her study "por ser la primera mujer que, después de ejercer la profesión de prostituta, decide escribir una obra basada en esa experiencia. La obra de Mora se incluye por su valor testimonial" (110). González's placement of Mora's text as testimonial literature is insightful. However, she also draws connections between Mora's text and the picaresque tradition, believing the author concludes the narrative on a note of repentance where "[...] a pesar de la vida poco limpia que ha llevado, se permite, como el pícaro, dar una lección con su ejemplo [...]" (González 121). Through this judgmental interpretation of Mora's life, I argue that González is replicating negative attitudes toward sex work that criminalize the prostitute by positing her as "un-clean."

Debra A. Castillo's *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction* (1998) is a work of literary analysis grounded in both sociological and historical studies. As she puts it, "I am inevitably less directly concerned with what is objectively true about the loose woman than with how Mexican writers have positioned her in their works" (Castillo 7). It is worthwhile to note that, although prostitution is a central component of Castillo's book, the sexually liberated woman, who is not necessarily a prostitute, is also included in her study. In terms of the female authors I include in my analysis, Castillo's book examines Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor* as well as Mora's *Del oficio*. In her reading of Mora's text, Castillo finds herself unable to place Mora's work in the genre of *testimonio* because of the amount of illicit transactions in the text (*transas*) as well as the author's perceived lack of reliability as a loose woman (Castillo 173). The critic ultimately questions the "truth-status" of the text (Castillo 179). In response to

Castillo's arguments, I argue that *Del oficio* not only tells the truth as Mora sees it, but also exposes multiple *transas* that she has lived for the reader. In fact, by ending her narrative with the exposure of a *transa*, Mora asks the reader to participate in her story (rather than being "transado," the reader is the "transante"). I also argue that, like González before her, Castillo reveals societal prejudices in her assumption that Mora is not to be trusted.

Gay critic Sergio de la Mora has also done work on the subject of prostitution. As part of his broader study of the representation of masculinities and sexualities in Mexican cinema and their relationship to the nation's identity from 1950 to 2004, in the chapter "Midnight Virgin: Melodramas of Prostitution in Literature and Film" in *Cinemachismo*, Mora surveys the Mexican figure of the prostitute as portrayed in literary and cinematic texts from 1903 to 1991. He begins his literary analysis with Gamboa's *Santa* and culminates with an examination of Sefchovich's *Demasiado amor*, reading the text as a re-writing of Gamboa's text. Mora contends that in *Demasiado amor* the figure of the prostitute is a "powerful erotic teacher and self-determining social agent rather than merely a victim, a degraded erotic object, and a safety valve necessary for the gendered division of labor and reproduction of patriarchal relations of power" (27). He does note the contradictions in the text, explaining that "Notwithstanding the celebratory, even euphoric, tone of the pro-sex discourse used in this neonationalist, romantic fantasy narrative about women's sexual agency and sex work, *Demasiado amor* also forcefully highlights the subordinate place assigned to women in patriarchal national projects and cultural nationalist discourse" (S. Mora 46). My reading of Sefchovich's text differs from Mora's in that I place the

novel in dialogue with Sefchovich's other works and I do not see an empowered ending to the text,<sup>5</sup> but rather a strong critique of the situation of women in Mexico.

In building on the work of these important scholars as well as on the scholarship devoted to the individual studies of Antonia Mora, Sara Sefchovich, and Cristina Rivera Garza, this dissertation will add to a broader understanding of these individual novels and also propose that they be examined as important components of the Mexicana novel of prostitution. Finally, this study also examines the significance of these works in the context of twenty-first-century Mexico City, a megacity with almost nine million in population, where the fight for the rights of *sexoservidoras* continues.

---

<sup>5</sup> Additional critics have interpreted the protagonist of *Demasiado amor*, Beatriz, as ultimately empowered at the end of the novel in various ways. For instance, in *The Will to Heal: Psychological Recovery in the Novels of Latina Writers*, Felicia Lynne Fahey explains how, "With sexual pleasure—not sexual power—as the centering force, the protagonist creates a salon that heals the wounds of patriarchy not only for women, but for men as well. Her home is not merely the site of her own liberation, but that of her male clients' as well" (114). In "Reterritorializando lo mexicano desde lo femenino en el contexto neoliberal: *Demasiado amor* de Sara Sefchovich," Alicia del Campo explains that "Beatriz decide cortar con el mundo exterior para instalarse en su departamento que queda convertido en un altar de amor. Altar en el que ella quedará reificada para siempre como una especie de diosa. Consigue con ello una mitificación de sí misma, al tiempo que establece una reconexión y un paralelismo con el código mítico prehispánico"(72). See also Martha Lorena Rubí (2011), Elvira Sánchez-Blake (1998), and Javier Durán (1997), amongst others.



## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Birth of the Modern City: Urbanization, Poverty, and Prostitution**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will examine the birth of the modern cities of Paris, London, Madrid, New York, and Mexico City as well as the literature and legislation involving prostitution that emerged during the nineteenth century. The mid-to-late nineteenth century was a time when the aforementioned cities experienced tremendous growth in population and transportation systems, wealth and industrialization. Meanwhile, the poor element of the population was being largely excluded from the benefits of modernization. Social stratification included the working urban poor, beggars, and socially marginal groups such as prostitutes. Social marginalization in metropolitan New York also included racial bias against immigrant groups such as the Irish. The emergence of government agencies and practices concerning hygiene and health were also forms of social control, especially with regard to prostitution. Epidemics of cholera and venereal diseases permeated many of these urban spaces. The fear of venereal diseases created an ambiance where prostitutes were blamed for the spread of these illnesses, and legislation specifically targeting these women and stripping them of their human rights was passed in many cities. These various legislations took the form of the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1883 and 1886 being passed in England, the “Reglamento” of 1865 in Madrid, and the Reglamento de Prostitución en México first issued in 1867 (Marshik 12, Fuentes Peris 31, Rivera Garza “Criminalization” 150). In the Mexican context, in “The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body: Prostitutes, Health Crimes, and Society in Mexico City, 1867-1930,” Cristina Rivera Garza explains that

Critics of the regulatory system claimed that official toleration of prostitution could only increase the already alarming growth of syphilis and other venereal diseases among the Mexican population. Like many other nineteenth-century doctors, they believed syphilis to be a biological condition as well as a bodily sign of moral weakness. This moral defect came to be associated with the overt display of sexuality by prostitutes. Instead of regulation, therefore, they favored prosecution of prostitutes. Prostitution, in their opinion, was a crime against public health. Supporters of the regulation, nevertheless, used similar claims to promote social tolerance of prostitution. Voicing sanitary concerns, physicians and lawyers successfully urged the state to protect the good elements of society from health and moral contagion by creating a stringent system of bureaucratic vigilance to supervise the diseased bodies of prostitutes. (151)

This way, along with this legislation in Mexico, the Sanitary Police were established and the Morelos hospital became devoted to the care of syphilitic women. However, with the close involvement of the Sanitary Police, the Morelos hospital became “as much a jail as a hospital” (Rivera Garza “Criminalization” 150, 158). Along with these negative views towards prostitution, literature, often in the form of cautionary tales on prostitution, emerged. This literature included contradictory views on the figure of the prostitute, mixing desire with condemnation in a combination that paralleled the cities’ attitudes towards prostitution during the time period.

## Paris

In France, the Second Empire (1852-1870) officially began on December 2, 1852, after Louis Napoleon declared himself emperor Napoleon III. During these years the population of France was 37.5 million, an estimate from 1866, with large cities such as Paris experiencing tremendous growth (Horne 264). At this time, Paris was a city known for its masked balls, sexual liberation, consumption, public pleasure, haute couture and fine restaurants (Hussey 277-78; Horne 262). The country was also establishing itself as one of the world's leading industrial powers, through increasing the national railway network, expanding shipbuilding, and doubling industrial production and foreign trade (Horne 264). Emperor Louis Napoleon also made far-reaching social reforms: "He established institutions of maternal welfare, societies of mutual assistance, workers' cities and homes for injured workers; he proposed shorter working hours and health legislation; and he got rid of degrading prison hulks and granted the right to strike" (Horne 277).

As part of the aforementioned consumption and public pleasure, according to police records from 1866 there were 5,000 prostitutes registered in Paris as well as 30,000 more sex workers who worked part-time (Hussey 278). Names and ranks of prostitutes of the time ranged from *grandes horizontales* who worked for the rich, to *comédiennes*, *lorettes*, *grisettes*, and *cocodettes* who serviced people lower down the social scale; there were also *grenouillères* who worked for bohemians, and there were desperate children forced to engage in sex for money as well (Horne 276). The Second Empire was also a time of moral contradictions, as shown by the

ensorship of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in 1857; poverty, venereal disease, and hunger also pervaded the city. Victims of syphilis included Jules Goncourt, Baudelaire, Manet, Dumas *filis* and Maupassant<sup>6</sup> (Horne 277). The city held many struggles for the poor, with the average daily wage rising only 30% during the Second Empire and the cost of living rising 45% or more, with the cost of rent doubling (Horne 278). Food alone could absorb 60% of a person's wage, and along the northern and eastern edges of the city, people were dying of starvation (Horne 278; Hussey 278).

French author and journalist Émile Zola, a mentor and precursor of Federico Gamboa (Olea Franco 22), emerged from this French context. Zola founded naturalism, "a scientific view of literature inspired by the aims and methods of experimental medicine," which aimed to document all aspects of Second Empire society (Nelson 3; Thompson 53). He also wrote a novel, *Nana* (1880), with a prostitute, Anna Coupeau (known as Nana), as protagonist. She leads several men to their ruin, but eventually meets a terrible death as a result of smallpox. He designed this novel to be the ninth volume of his Rougon-Macquart cycle, a series of books subtitled "A Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire." Brian Nelson, in "Zola and the Nineteenth Century," explains that in writing this cycle, Zola was influenced by the novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac, positivist philosopher and cultural historian Hippolyte Taine, nineteenth-century scientist Prosper Lucas, physiologist Claude Bernard, and naturalist Charles Darwin. Zola used this series of novels to expose the problematic underbelly of France. In doing so he also attempted " [... ] to use fiction to demonstrate a number of

---

<sup>6</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *filis* was the author of *La Dame aux camélias* (1848), the story of Marguerite Gautier, a courtesan suffering from tuberculosis who ultimately dies an agonizing, lonely death. Guy de Maupassant was the author of the short story "Le port" (1889), which would serve as the basis for the 1934 Mexican film *La mujer del puerto* starring Andrea Palma, the story of a prostitute in the Port of Veracruz.

‘scientific’ notions about the ways in which human behavior is determined by heredity and environment; and to use the symbolic possibilities of a family whose heredity is tainted to represent a diseased society – the immoral and corrupt, yet dynamic and vital, France of the Second Empire” (Nelson 3).

## **London**

Like its sister city, Paris, at the time London was also a city of contradictions: according to Stephen Inwood in his study *A History of London*,

Nineteenth-century London inspired amazement, pride, revulsion and fear in roughly equal measure. Conventionally it was regarded as a place of contrasts: the unparalleled wealth of the West End and the City alongside the unspeakable poverty of the worst slum districts; the splendour of the Court, of Parliament and high society alongside the shame of overflowing cesspits, cholera epidemics, street prostitution and rampant criminality. (497)

By the end of the nineteenth century, London was the world’s largest metropolitan center with an extensive railway network constructed during this time (Black 234; Ackroyd 591). Along with the construction of the railway network, Peter Ackroyd in his *London: The Biography*, explains that the capital city’s importance grew as its transportation system expanded:

The termini themselves became palaces of Victorian invention and inventiveness, erected by a society obsessed by speed and motion. One consequence was that the city became truly the centre of the nation, with all the lines of energy leading directly to it. Together with the electric telegraph, the railways defined and

maintained the supremacy of London. It became the great conduit of communication and commerce in a world in which 'railway time' set the standard of general hurry. (591)

As part of this "general hurry," many other moving vehicles and modes of transportation populated the city from omnibuses, first emerging in 1829, to hansom-cabs, horses and early cars, the combination of which sometimes created what was then called a "stop" or "lock" in traffic (Ackroyd 592-94).

Along with this modernization, as Inwood explains, there was a great deal of poverty. As for poverty in general, Charles Booth, English philanthropist and social researcher, authored a seventeen-volume study of poverty, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1903). Booth, along with his team of researchers calculated that in the 1890s 8.4% of London's population of just over 4 million, lived in extreme poverty and 22.4% were poor (Inwood 498). Overcrowding in London was a problem and the Royal Commission "[...] found that 88% of poorer Londoners spent over a fifth of their incomes on rent, usually for accommodation in which decent and healthy living was impossible" (Inwood 519). Concerns over these conditions were mostly related to the public associating slums with crime, outbreaks of cholera and fever. London was infected with major outbreaks of cholera throughout the nineteenth century, with 6,000 Londoners dying of the disease in 1866, largely from drinking infected water (Black 256). As Inwood explains,

The earliest legislation to control overcrowded and unfit houses in London, the City Sewers Acts of 1848 and 1851, which gave the City the power to enforce the cleansing of foul houses and to demolish houses deemed dangerous or unfit for

habitation, emerged from the public health movement. The emphasis on overcrowding as a source of disease also permeated the 1866 Sanitary Act and the Torrens Act of 1868, which extended these powers to local authorities (522).

In the nineteenth century, planners and politicians also took advantage of the city's need for new constructions, roads, and railways in order to demolish rookeries or slums (Inwood 526). "In the course of the century, and especially after 1850, the City was transformed from a densely peopled district into a world of banks, insurance offices and warehouses" (Inwood 527). Thus, the city was being modernized, and the poor were being displaced with this modernization.

Also, in 1859, the police knew of 2,828 brothels with prostitution in Victorian London mainly taking the form of streetwalking (Porter 299). As part of the same worldwide pattern of controlling the city's social "others," in England the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1883 and 1886 were passed. In the analysis of nineteenth-century British laws surrounding prostitution presented in her dissertation, *High Art and Low Ladies: Prostitution, Censorship and British Modernism*, Celia Marshik explains that the first Contagious Disease Act was passed by British Parliament in 1864 out of concern for the British armed forces when medical officers reported that, during a span of ten years, they had treated about a quarter of the army for sexually transmitted diseases. According to Marschik, "[t]his statistic represented enormous losses of manpower and money for the army and made prostitution an issue of national defense" (12). Marshik explains that these Acts were not suspended until 1883 and were eventually repealed in 1886<sup>7</sup> (14):

---

<sup>7</sup> The suspension and repeal of these Acts was the work of a National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts formed in 1869, and a separatist women's division, the Ladies' National Association (LNA), constituencies that were "alarmed by the state's incursion into sexual behavior" (Marshik 13). Cristina Rivera Garza

The Act revoked the civil rights of prostitutes in naval ports and army garrison towns so that they could be seized, forced to undergo gynecological examination, and imprisoned for up to three months if found to be diseased. All that was needed to subject a woman to this disciplinary regime was the word of one policeman. Later Acts in 1866 and 1869 extended the areas covered by the law, lengthened the maximum prison term to six months, and required regular exams of all women registered as common prostitutes (Mort 69). There was no provision for appeal. If a woman refused to submit to the initial exam, she was treated as a diseased prostitute and confined for the maximum term. (12)

Despite these attempts to stop the spread of venereal diseases, these laws were not very effective. As Marshik explains, since the Acts only impacted women, men could still spread sexually transmitted diseases (14). Also, physicians during the Victorian era did not have the capability to treat and diagnose these diseases correctly, especially since,

A drug to treat syphilis was not developed until 1909, and antibiotics to treat gonorrhea were not available for another twenty years. The most any Victorian physician would accomplish was to keep a patient in a "Lock hospital" until the disease entered a temporarily dormant stage. In the meantime, nineteenth-century medical treatments could gravely harm an incarcerated woman. Doctors frequently applied acidic solutions to the vagina, cervix, and uterus to "cure" prostitutes of disease, and the physicians themselves confessed that the injections they employed had the "disadvantage" of causing abdominal pain (Acton,

---

notes that the situation in Mexico was different in that "As a normative structure, the regulations of prostitution in Mexico did not face, as in England, the opposition of organized sectors of society. Yet, Mexican prostitutes' disregard for the law ultimately limited the effectiveness of the regulatory system" ("Criminalization" 155).



*Prostitution* 87). As Judith Walkowitz, a social historian, observes, such treatment was "appropriately punitive" and served a "deterrent function" (*Prostitution* 55), but it did not help infected women heal. (Marshik 15)

These laws also had the potential for abuse by law enforcement officers, particularly for those who were in charge of regulating prostitution yet were also consumers of it (Marshik 16).

In her dissertation, Marshik also analyzes laws related to prostitution that impacted literature:

The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 allowed complainants to report the sale of obscene materials to a magistrate or justice, who could issue a search warrant. If a constable seized obscene books or periodicals during the course of this search, the accused vendor would have to "show cause why [the materials] should not be destroyed" (Bewes 28). Lord Campbell, who proposed the Act, promised that it would not apply to serious art, but the Hicklin judgment of 1868 broadly defined as obscene all works "capable of depraving and corrupting . . . readers" (Thomas 193). After the 1888 prosecution of Zola's English publisher, officials applied this standard to literature until a revised Act in 1959 allowed "literary or other merit" admitted as a defense in obscenity cases (de Grazia 194). (6)

In her work, Marshik goes on to cite Leigh Gilmore and argues that "[...] obscenity prosecutions function 'as a legal form of social control' and are exercised against threats to the 'modern social order'" (8). Marshik also points out that, since prostitution may resemble or at times mimic heterosexual relationships, "[...] its deviance is a particular challenge to social and moral norms" (9). Thus, writers who represented these women were seen as assaulting the "sexual status quo" (Marshik 9). Through the Obscene Publications Act, in Great Britain marginal literature, or

literature not considered “serious” until 1959 was vulnerable to seizure and destruction.

## **Madrid**

During the reign of Isabel II (1843-1868), in 1851, work began on the Canal de Isabel II as a way to supply drinking water to Madrid (Stewart 116). The Madrid–Aranjuez railway line operating a steam-driven train was opened in 1851 as well and, because of its commercial importance, it is considered the beginning of Spanish railway history (Stewart 122, 242). This railway system changed Madrid radically and made it reap commercial benefits of having more rapid access to key industrial and manufacturing ports and centers within Spain. New banks and insurance companies opened and a growing mercantile class emerged. Also during this time, when the Compañía de Omnibus de Madrid was founded in 1856, the establishment of an urban-transport network allowed laborers to travel in order to work (Stewart 124).

As with Mexico, Paris and London, in nineteenth-century Spain, according to Teresa Fuentes Peris, in her *Visions of Filth: Deviancy and Social Control in the Novels of Galdós*, negative attitudes

[...] developed around the time to activities considered socially dangerous such as prostitution, excessive drinking, mendicity and vagrancy. These attitudes manifested themselves clearly in a series of social, medical and moral debates among the professional and middle classes that circulated in Restoration Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, at a time when views on poverty had begun perceptibly to change. (2)

Fuentes Peris explains that from the 1830s, “[...] the liberal revolutionary process initiated a series of social transformations – including the dismantling of the guilds, proletarianization and increased migration from an impoverished countryside to the towns” (9). With immigrants increasingly moving to the city, especially to Madrid, which still had underdeveloped industrial structures, mendicity became a problem among the unemployed since the city was “[...] unable to absorb a rapidly expanding labour force” (9). This problem of street begging, along with the social and economic changes of the time, especially at the end of the nineteenth century, corresponded with the previously mentioned change in attitudes. Such attitudes consisted of a more negative image of the poor with poverty being more generally considered a “moral failing” and the poor being classified as either “deserving” or “undeserving” of charity (11-12). The former were considered as living in poverty “due to circumstances beyond their control” whereas the latter were seen as having inflicted this poverty on themselves “[...] resulting from their dissolute ways of life, or from their inbuilt propensity for ‘vices’ such as neglect of cleanliness, idleness, reluctance to work, improvidence, drinking, gambling, general fecklessness and [...] especially in the case of women, sexual waywardness” (11).

Fuentes Peris also explains that, along with poverty, in Restoration Spain (beginning in 1874), prostitution was seen as a threat to public health, particularly when associated with outbreaks of cholera, the last of which took place in 1885 (34). Quoting Fuentes Peris,

In public health discourses, prostitutes became associated with filth and decomposing organic waste. Like dirt and refuse they were also seen as a source of polluting miasmas: as a source of physical and moral disease. Furthermore, the discourse on domesticity constructed marriage and the family as the norm or behaviour, thereby presenting the figure of the prostitute as abnormal or deviant

and, therefore, in need of reform. Given this threat, the need arose to keep prostitution under constant surveillance, to control and regulate it through the deployment of a series of disciplinary strategies. (27)

In Spain, prostitution was particularly prevalent in Madrid as a result of the city's expansion during the second half of the nineteenth century. This increase in the number of prostitutes led to the regulation of prostitution through the "Reglamento" of 1865, a law first established in Madrid that would serve as a model for similar legislation in other cities in Spain (Fuentes Peris 30-31). As part of the regulation of prostitution, the "Reglamento" aimed to seclude prostitutes, prohibiting them from circulating in public places as well as standing in areas of a brothel such as balconies and doorways that were visible to "healthy" people in the area (Fuentes Peris 40). "The legal regulation of prostitution was but one part of a wider network of disciplinary mechanisms, including reformatory institutions for the regeneration of prostitutes as well as other philanthropic activities outside the institutions, such as home visiting" (Fuentes Peris 31). Of course, clandestine prostitution also existed during this period, and in 1872 it was estimated that this type of prostitution occurred with seven times more frequency in Madrid than regulated prostitution. Furthermore, these unregulated women were considered more dangerous and syphilitic than their regulated counterparts since they "escaped the control of authorities, defying containment, supervision and the 'sanityzing' action of public hygiene" (41).<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein, literature involving prostitution also emerged from this context and was influenced by other European novelists of the period. According to Pura Fernández in *Mujer pública y vida privada: Del arte eunuco a la novela lupanaria*,

---

<sup>8</sup> Similar attitudes towards unregulated prostitutes in Mexico can be observed during the early part of the twentieth century and will be examined in further detail in Chapter Four.

[...] tres serán, fundamentalmente, los modelos literarios de las cortesanas y adúlteras recreadas por los escritores españoles: *La dama de las camelias* (1848) de Alexandre Dumas (hijo), *Madame Bovary* (1857) de Gustave Flaubert, y *Nana* (1880) de Émile Zola [...] es a partir de 1880, fecha de aparición de la célebre *Nana*, cuando tal tema cobra una relevancia notable en la narrativa española. (39)

She then goes on to signal Benito Pérez Galdós' *La desheredada* (1881), the Spanish realist author's quixotic novel that tells the story of Isidora Rufete, a character that "[...] glosa la gestación de una mantenida madrileña desde sus orígenes modestos, pasando por su ascensión, hasta su cruel caída [...]" (58), the "detonante de los *dramas de la carne* protagonizados específicamente por prostitutas" (39).<sup>9</sup>

### **New York City**

In the nineteenth century, New York was a bustling and industrial city. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace in their *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, describe mid-nineteenth century New York. During this time, the metropolis was the nation's "premier port" because of "[...] the decision of foreign steamers to make Manhattan their primary port along with the spectacular efflorescence of New York's sailing fleet [...]" (Burrows and Wallace 650). In 1849, over 150 foreign ports had ships sailing into New York harbor bringing in half of the U.S.'s imports and transporting a third of the nation's exports (Burrows and Wallace 653). Aside from maritime congestion, the city was filled with vehicular traffic: "On an average weekday in the mid-fifties, fifteen thousand vehicles rumbled by St. Paul's at the corner of Broadway and

---

<sup>9</sup> For a list of other novels "que demostraron la bonanza literaria del tema de la mujer infame" in Spanish literature of the 1880s see the work of Pura Fernández (2008), page 40.

Fulton [...] Like Broadway [...] dockside streets were clogged with horsedrawn wagons, carts, and carriages which by the 1850s often choked off movement altogether” (Burrows and Wallace 653). The city also received goods in large quantities via locomotives and canal boats: the Erie and Hudson railroad lines, along with the Erie Canal, brought merchandise and cargo from the West Coast to New York. In 1860, the city received \$161 million worth of goods from the west (Burrows and Wallace 655). Along with goods, people were moving through the city at impressive speeds.

By 1852 the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven lines were channeling 2.5 million passengers a year into the city. At the same time, carriers like the New Jersey Railroad funneled traffic from Philadelphia and elsewhere into Jersey City. There, at a new terminal built in 1858, people and vehicles transferred to the 850-ton ferries that carried two thousand passengers plus horses, wagons and carriages back and forth across the Hudson every ten minutes all day, every fifteen minutes all night. (Burrows and Wallace 656)

During the time, banking in the city also grew, and the banking system became more efficient with sixty new banks emerging from 1851 to the mid-1850s (Burrows and Wallace 656). Along with the increase in banks, “During a typical week in the 1850s hundreds of thousands of shares in railroads, banks, canals, and coal mines were traded, making New York one of the largest and most sophisticated capital markets in the world” (Burrows and Wallace 657-58). Finally, the metropolis led the nation in manufacturing, with ironworks employing hundreds of workers in the city (Burrows and Wallace 659).

Burrows and Wallace also described New York City of the time as the “wide-open national capital of commercialized sex” (803). In 1855, with the help of the police, Dr. William Sanger, chief resident physician at Blackwell’s Island Hospital carried out a statistical survey that estimated that there were 7,860 prostitutes in New York City. This number included 38% who were country girls mostly working in brothels, 35% of whom were Irish and 12% were German, with German women mostly working as streetwalkers (Burrows and Wallace 804). “These numbers included children. Not only was pedophilia a popular gentleman’s vice, but the likelihood of contracting disease and producing pregnancy was thought to be lessened by intercourse with prepubescent girls” (Burrows and Wallace 805). The age of consent at the time was ten (Burrows and Wallace 805).

Just as with the other major cities highlighted in this chapter, during the late nineteenth century, prostitution came to light with literature, and, a novella in the United States depicting the life of a prostitute also emerged. In 1893, Stephen Crane wrote his work of naturalism, the novella *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, portraying Irish immigrant life in New York. The novella tells of Maggie, who begins a life of prostitution and eventually dies by committing suicide (as is implied by the novel): “At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence” (Crane 68-69). When she is mourned by her mother at the end of the novel, other female mourners repeat that “She’s gone where her sins will be judged!” (Crane 75). In Crane’s novel, Maggie knows no redemption, except for the forgiveness of her abusive mother. This novella also continues the associations between people at the margins, prostitutes and the poor, and disease, just as they are presented in

the novels of Gamboa and Zola. Gerard M. Sweeney signals in his “The Syphilitic World of Stephen Crane’s ‘Maggie,’” “[...] the entire slum world of Maggie is pervaded by disease, and not merely alcoholism, but syphilis as well” (80). Sweeney also signals that around the time that the novella was published in 1893, there were an estimated 40,000 prostitutes in New York City while an 1874 figure estimated that one in every 18.5 New Yorkers suffered from syphilis (82).

### **Mexico and *El Porfiriato***

Jonathan Kandell’s *La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City* describes the Porfiriato as a time period wrought with contradictions. During that time, Porfirio Díaz served as president eight times, accompanied by his famous dictum “Order and Progress”; and, indeed, Mexico did achieve striking economic advances. Yet, although there was a 350% rise in the gross national product, poverty in Mexico was at its highest level ever, with more than 80% of Mexicans living agrarian lifestyles (Kandell 353-54). Inequality was also rampant in other aspects of city life; for instance Díaz created a modern police force in Mexico City known as the *gendarmería*, and by the end of Díaz’s rule, Mexico City had more than twice as many policemen per capita than Paris, London, or any other major city in the United States. However, police protection and resources were still focused on foreigners and areas inhabited by the wealthy; Mexico City had one of the highest murder rates in the world. Rather than benefitting from this sophisticated police system, the poor were victims of urban criminals and rural bandits and also suffered from police corruption and abuse, which began during this period and continues today (Kandell 354, 361-63). Meanwhile, the wealthy inhabitants of the city embraced ideologies from France, Britain, and Germany such as positivism and social Darwinism, and used them to justify the inequality of wealth and power of the time (Kandell 373).



During the Porfiriato, prison reforms were taking place in Europe and the United States, modeled after more progressive ideas of rehabilitating and treating convicts humanely (Kandell 366). Díaz also contributed to the prison reform<sup>10</sup> in Mexico:

In 1900, Mexico City, inaugurated its own monument to prison reform—the Lecumbérri [sic] Penitentiary. It was hailed abroad as yet more imposing evidence of Díaz’s commitment to eradicate his country’s social ills [...] Behind a red-brick façade designed like a European castle, Lecumbérri [sic] held more than one thousand cells in seven brightly illuminated wings. Each cell had running water and a flush toilet. Inmates, who never had access to baths outside prison walls, were allowed hot showers daily. For most of them, Lecumbérri’s [sic] meals were a distinct improvement over their usual diets. Epidemic diseases were almost nonexistent. Located in the eastern district of Mexico City, the penitentiary was easily accessible for visits by relatives. And its workshops, equipped with electrical machines, were supposed to prepare convicts for useful employment after their release. (Kandell 366)

Still, conditions in other prisons in Mexico such as the main prison of Mexico City Belén jail, continued to be deplorable<sup>11</sup> (Kandell 366).

---

<sup>10</sup> It is believed that the design for Lecumberri was based on that of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault explains that

In the 1830s, the Panopticon became the architectural programme of most prison projects. It was the most direct way of expressing ‘the intelligence of discipline in stone’ (Lucas, I, 69); of making architecture transparent to the administration of power; of making it possible to substitute for force or other violent constraints the gentle efficiency of total surveillance; of ordering space according to the recent humanization of the codes and the new penitentiary theory [...] In short, its task was to constitute a prison-machine with a cell of visibility in which the inmate will find himself caught as ‘in the glass house of the Greek philosopher’ (Harou-Romain, 8) and a central point from which a permanent gaze may control prisoners and staff. (249-50)

In addition, according to Cristina Rivera Garza's dissertation *The Masters of the Streets: Bodies, Power and Modernity in Mexico, 1867-1930*, during the late nineteenth century in Mexico there were increasing attempts to control the growing vagrant population in the capital through an increase in the production of medical knowledge, public health legislation,<sup>12</sup> public welfare systems and sites of confinement (vii-viii). Thus,

The bodies, experiences and social relations of prostitutes and the insane constituted an important battleground in the making of modern Mexico. The emergence of modern institutions to assist and confine them, such as the Morelos hospital in 1868 and La Castañeda insane asylum in 1910, expressed state concerns with the domain of the bodies in terms of their economic roles and medical danger. In a time of rapid modernization and state formation, both prostitutes and the insane came to embody the weakest link in the fabric of society and a major threat to a nascent modernity. (Rivera Garza vii)

Along with the prison reforms, these endeavors to enforce social control emphasized the stark contrasts that existed between rich and poor; such efforts, together with other attempts to control society's "others," were not unique to Mexico City, but could be seen in continental cities as well. Certainly, other regional capitals and large cities in Europe, the United States, and Mexico experienced similar problems with urbanization, social inequality, and marginalization of those deemed physically and morally diseased. Mexico City, as we have seen, was no different than these other Western economic capitals. Another point of reference for this chapter was literary

---

<sup>11</sup> One of the protagonists in Cristina Rivera Garza's novel *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), Joaquín Buitrago, works as a photographer at the prison of Belén and later at La Castañeda, when the institution is no longer in its glory days.

<sup>12</sup> Public health legislation in Mexico as related to prostitutes is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

naturalism, which gave rise to a new genre: the male novel of prostitution. European writers and novels included in this chapter were part of the celebrated feminization of literature, cautionary tales of fallen women written by males for males, which is dramatically countered and transformed by the Mexicana feminist writers in this dissertation.

### *Santa*

The first and most notable male novel of prostitution in the Mexican context is Federico Gamboa's *Santa*<sup>13</sup> published in 1903. The novel narrates the story of a young woman, ironically named Santa, who is seduced and later impregnated by a soldier. With the abortion of her child as well as the abandonment of her lover, she is exiled from her family and life in Chimalistác and begins a life of prostitution in a brothel in Mexico City. Through the novel, Gamboa paints a portrait of nineteenth-century Mexico City and also portrays Santa's rising popularity and increasing wealth as she loses her moral scruples; the author also reveals her descent into illness, poverty and disgraceful death. At the novel's end and at the end of her life, Santa's only guardians and companions are Hipólito (Hipo), described as a blind man with "terribles ojos blanquizcos" and Jenaro, a small boy that served as Hipo's "lazarillo" or guide (Gamboa 22). As an epigraph to *Santa*, Gamboa introduces a passage from a French novel about a prostitute, Edmond de Goncourt titled *La fille Élisa* (1877).<sup>14</sup> The parallels between *Santa* and *La fille Élisa*

---

<sup>13</sup> This novel would also inspire the first Mexican narrative sound film by the same name in 1932 starring Lupita Tovar.

<sup>14</sup> In his review of the latter novel Peter Vantine summarizes the text as follows:

The protagonist of *La Fille Élisa* is the daughter of a Parisian midwife and is exposed early to the uncensored realities of adultery and prostitution (venereal disease, unwanted children, abortion) as she overhears the consultations and confessions of her mother's clients. Élisa flees her mother's drunken violence and difficult profession by becoming a prostitute, first in the provinces and then back in Paris. While working at a brothel near the École Militaire, she falls in love with a soldier. When he tries to force himself on her in the Bois de Boulogne, Élisa is overcome by a sudden desire for a more chaste kind of love and by a homicidal rage that drives her to fatally stab her

are quite striking. The epigraph affirms the “austere” and “chaste” nature of the French text, which causes the reader to experience “*méditation triste*.”<sup>15</sup> Gamboa parallels Edmond de Goncourt in his intentions for the text, as Sergio de la Mora explains in his *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*,

The novel *Santa*, written for a male audience, forms part of a social and moral hygiene campaign implemented by government agencies and promoted by the Catholic Church. *Santa*, Gamboa’s now-legendary novel, establishes the paradigm of the simultaneously sacred and abject prostitute who is absolved of her “sinful vices” through her path to Calvary and martyrdom involving expulsion from her family home, sex work, alcoholism, disease, suffering, and eventual death. (26)

However, Gamboa’s success in achieving this aim, of maintaining the text purely “chaste” and “austere” is questionable. Thus, Mora points to the contradictory nature of *Santa*, a combination of “[...] both a voyeuristic invitation to gaze at what is morally forbidden but a socially sanctioned and precautionary tale with a morally edifying conclusion” (32). Mora explains that Santa dies a martyr and also “a symbol of degeneration, disease, and contagion”; her dual nature

---

lover. She is condemned to the guillotine, but her punishment is commuted to a life sentence at a women’s prison, where she is subjected to a strict regimen of silence that ultimately wears her down to a state of imbecility and then to death. (186-87)

<sup>15</sup> The text that Gamboa chooses for the epigraph in the original French, is as follows: “Ce livre, j’ai la conscience de l’avoir fait austère et chaste, sans que jamais la page échappée à la nature délicate et brûlante de mon sujet, apporte autre chose à l’esprit de mon lecteur qu’une méditation triste” (4). Rafael Olea Franco, in his “La construcción de un clásico: Cien años del mito de *Santa*,” notes the contradictory nature of this epilogue,

[...] no obstante, este declarado propósito edificante herencia de una estética decimonónica, no se cumple a cabalidad dentro del texto, uno de cuyos mayores atractivos es precisamente provocar en las y los lectores una irresistible seducción por la sabrosa vida de pecado de la protagonista, más que por su castigo y eventual proceso redentor. (36)

merges a simultaneous desire to redeem this figure and to induce fear in the reader, leading to the impulse, satisfied by the novel's end, to contain and isolate this dangerous, diseased woman<sup>16</sup> (32).

*Santa* emerged during the final years of the Porfiriato, the time-period leading up to the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1876 to 1911. It makes sense that Gamboa, a man of his time, would incorporate discourses and ideologies of the period into his novel. A well-travelled man—he served as a diplomat for Porfirio Díaz both in America and in Europe—he kept a journal that is considered an important historical document of the time. The diary also documents the date that Gamboa began work on *Santa*: April 7, 1900. Thus, the novel was not only published, but also composed during this time period (Olea Franco 15), this epoch of transformation, modernization and the birth of the modern city.

### **The Mexicana Novel of Prostitution**

Influenced by and departing from the novel of prostitution written by male authors such as Federico Gamboa, the three writers discussed in this dissertation use a female-centered approach in their discussion of the topic of prostitution. Antonia Mora writes what I call an urban testimonial novel through *Del oficio* (1972). In her work, she merges fiction and reality and posits her own story as the central tale in the narrative, placing the dominant history of the time at the margins. She also re-writes Gamboa's text and presents a tale of life in "el oficio" without an attempt to moralize. Sara Sefchovich in *Demasiado amor* (1990), rather than creating a moralizing tale in order to condemn society's "others" and protect the larger "healthy"

---

<sup>16</sup> Cristina Rivera Garza also speaks to the contradictory attitudes towards prostitution present in *Santa*, stating that [...] "the author, Federico Gamboa, used equal doses of horror and sympathy to describe the fall of a young girl to prostitution. Although *Santa* was punished for her behavior at the end of the novel, the prostitute nevertheless remained holy, at least in name" ("The Criminalization" 154).

population, instead writes towards the improvement of women's sexual and reproductive rights in Mexico. Finally, Cristina Rivera Garza, at the center of her historical narrative, *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999), has the story of Matilda Burgos, an *insometida*, one of the women instrumental in the failure of the legislation regulating prostitution in Mexico. The name employed for these women is "A term bearing strong connotations of power, the "nonsubmissive" woman was described in article 31 as a prostitute who eluded the vigilance of the police and was not enrolled in the registry books" (Rivera Garza, "The Criminalization" 153). Through their works, these three authors become the literary *insometidas* that leave a powerful form of writing etched in their own books.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **“¿Puedo decir lo que pienso?”: Antonia Mora’s Urban Testimonial *Del oficio***

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

- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Redondillas”  
(150)

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I examine the nineteenth-century birth of the modern cities of Paris, London, Madrid, New York, and Mexico as well as the literature and legislation involving prostitution that emerged during this period. I end the chapter by signaling Federico Gamboa’s 1903 novel *Santa* as the precursor to the Mexicana novel of prostitution. In Chapter Two, I will study the first of the novels in this genre, Antonia Mora’s 1972 fictional autobiography, *Del oficio*. Little has been written on Mexican writer Antonia Mora, with most of the information on her life limited to forewords to different editions of her above-mentioned novel and these sources often present contradictory information. The author has only recently received critical attention from scholars María González and Debra Castillo. In addition, the film *Toña, nacida virgen*, based on *Del oficio*, directed by Gustavo Alatríste Rodríguez, was released in 1982. From the limited amount of information available on Mora, we know that she was born in the early 1930s in Guadalajara, Jalisco and, aside from her testimonial narrative, she published a novel in first-person narration, told from the perspective of a boxer in Mexico titled *Los cuarenta chatos* (1978). She worked as a prostitute in Mexico from a very young age and was incarcerated in the 1950s for participating in a string of robberies with her Cuban partner. In the 1970s, after her release from prison, she married a lawyer, took an interest in film and literature,

particularly Gothic literature, and cultivated friendships with Mexican intellectuals of the time such as Salvador Elizondo, José de la Colina, Emilio García Riera, and María Luisa Mendoza (Agustín 8).

*Del oficio* is a dramatic departure from the novels discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation in that Mora avoids the narrative of the fallen woman. Instead, she simply narrates the story of her life. Through this narration this straightforward novice writer becomes the first woman to write a novel based on her actual experience of working as a prostitute (González 110). Also, appropriately, as previously stated, this novel marks the beginning of the Mexican novel of prostitution. As is explained in Chapter One, with her testimonial narrative Mora marks a change in the representation of prostitutes: she joins later writers such as Sara Sefchovich and Cristina Rivera Garza who explore this new female subjectivity through novels and fiction. These novels by Mexicanas utilize multiple literary devices to aid in understanding their protagonists. Mora's novel is unique in that the author uses the testimonial novel to write herself and the story of her life in the "oficio," rather than having a male voice or outside narrator speak for her protagonist.

In her dissertation, *Body, Voice, Memory: Modern Latin American Women's Testimonios*, Carolyn Hutchinson, explains that a *testimonio* is a mode of consciousness or a cultural form that responds to social, political and, economic circumstances and "[...] narrates, in the first person, an event or series of events experienced or witnessed by a protagonist or narrator whose actions and perspectives tend to place him or her in opposition to the status quo ante" (3). In privileging her own story over the official discourse through her *testimonio*, Mora joins the ranks of other Latin American female writers such as Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Rigoberta Menchú.

Domitila Barrios de Chungara is the Bolivian author of "*Si me permiten hablar...*":



*Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* (1977). Hutchinson explains that Domitila's work

[...] presents her personal experiences first as a daughter and later as a wife of a Bolivian tin miner, while also detailing the Bolivian tin miners' collective fight against their government to improve their horrendous living and working conditions. [...] During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Bolivia, like many Latin American countries, witnessed a string of dictatorships, military coups, false democracies, and vast government-sponsored violence. This turmoil perpetuated the oppression and exploitation of the Bolivian miners and their families. While presenting both Barrios' individual story and her people's collective story, "*Si me permiten hablar...*" also illustrates the tension found between her private, individual life and the public, collective fight of which she is a part. (25)

Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* also details government oppression. Menchú, a Maya-Quiché indigenous woman born in Guatemala, is the voice behind *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), which was edited and transcribed by Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. In this work, Menchú describes the birth of her political consciousness in this climate of oppression of indigenous people in Guatemala. Bridget Kevane's dissertation *The Autobiographical Voice and the Making of the Self in Bernardo Vega, Sandra Cisneros, Rigoberta Menchú and El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega* examines the definition of testimony in the context of the law, explaining that a witness aims to offer adequate evidence—meant to aid in the revision or reconstruction of potentially questionable events—to a jury responsible for evaluating this evidence. Yet, Kevane points out that Menchú's testimony emphasizes the written rather than the oral nature of evidence by presenting it in an arena outside a court of law (128). Furthermore, Kevane signals

the fact that “Testimonials also attest to a person’s qualifications or character that attempt to legitimate and authorize a self. In many ways testimony is the witness, alongside the evidence, and if we trust the witness we believe the testimony” (128). Thus, in her testimonial writing, Menchú

[...] bears witness to the repressive actions of Guatemala’s government, presenting her evidence to a jury, in this case the reader, in hopes that justice will be done. The question that elicits her testimony, though not asked in a court of law, is in response to the “official version” of political and social turmoil in Guatemala from the late sixties to the early eighties. The readers, as if a jury, listen to the evidence that Menchú offers. (Kevane 128)

Kevane also points out Menchú’s use of the phrase “testimonio vivo” in describing her testimony. Menchú’s *testimonio*, unlike one presented in a court of law where events are re-created, was published in the early eighties and aimed to expose contemporary injustices that were still occurring while Menchú composed the *testimonio* in exile (128).

Through identifying this text as an urban *testimonio* that privileges Mora’s story along with that of prostitutes and social “others” that she encountered in Mexico City in the 1940s and 1950s, this chapter aims to highlight how the text, following the words of Kevane, “attempt[s] to legitimate and authorize a self” (128). Given the previous definitions of *testimonio*, it would seem that the notion of a testimonial and of a novel counter each other. I would argue, though, that Mora uses the text to establish herself as a legitimate witness and that the text is fictional because it includes literary references to works by authors such as Octavio Paz and Federico Gamboa. Also, the author omits names that could mark the text as being complicit with the master historical narrative, or the official history. By calling this text an urban testimonial novel,

this chapter also inserts itself into the ongoing debate over a point of contention in scholarly criticism of Mora's narrative: the discussion about what is the purpose of, or greater message behind *Del oficio*. This chapter will begin by discussing some of the previous perspectives on the novel that must be understood in order to effectively construct an alternate reading of Mora's text as an urban testimonial novel.

María Luisa Mendoza, also known as la China Mendoza, writes an early interpretation of the novel in her 1972 foreword to the first edition of *Del oficio* published by Editorial Samo. Mendoza, in a description of what the text is *not*, successfully establishes what the text *is*

Antonia me trae su novela, su cuento, su escrito, su vida pues, convicta y confesa, sin clasificación literaria porque no es un estudio sociológico ni la exaltación del erotismo ni menos de la pornografía, ni tampoco una moraleja que sirva de escarmiento, ni nada de nada. Es simplemente decir lo que vio, lo que supo, lo que es cierto. Sin ninguna pretensión de psicoanálisis a la Lettera, o cura de culpas por sus teclazos. Es contar desde la raíz del grito el caminar por barrios y callejones, banquetas y cabarets, para terminar en la cárcel, de Tepito Dios mediante ... (10)

Although Mendoza's words are insightful, her mistake lies in straying from the text and reading it from her own reality, that of: "[...] niñas que no supimos más allá de los garambullos el sexo es funesto, no sabemos cómo creer que haya otras niñas abrazadas a la calentura de la madre, en un zaguán, sin comer, sin dormir y con una sola salida: **darse a la vida...**" (10-11). She then ends her foreword, having ascertained that Mora has no intention of moralizing, by engaging in a kind of moralizing herself through her comments on the text. She implies that if we understand

this “other,” this woman, this Mora, then tragedies like her life will no longer occur: “Todo esto no volverá a pasar nunca más. Cuando el lector como usted y como yo entendamos a la mujer de otra manera, a la manera de imagen de Dios. Y cuando México sea un país de hombres mejores ... de hombres, simplemente” (Mendoza 12). She critiques patriarchy in Mexico, and then says that if there were a different type of patriarchy “... de hombres, simplemente,” these injustices would not occur. Thus she not only manages to subvert her own meaning by staying within the limits of patriarchy but she also adds a moralizing note to a text which, she opines, was written with no such aim.

José Agustín’s foreword, included in the 2000 edition of *Del oficio*, also offers a brief analysis of the novel. He views Mora’s strategy in writing the novel as a means of presenting her life realistically, in that she wishes to

[...] contar desde su niñez hasta su salida de la cárcel de una forma directa que no oculta nada, ni su propia inocencia de niña ni las experiencias terribles que vivió después; se trata de un flujo narrativo sencillo pero eficaz, que sin artificios pero con enorme fuerza evade el melodrama, la truculencia o el tremendismo. Antonia no se presenta como víctima ni como Santa ni como una Juana Genet, y su novela está llena de verdad; se lee notablemente bien, dado el evidente instinto narrativo de la autora y la carencia de materiales innecesarios. De pasada, también es un documento impresionante que muestra los laberintos de la prostitución en México de mediados de siglo y la manera como los grandes ricos del alemanismo la fomentaban con sus perversiones. Por supuesto, a la vez es una denuncia de nuestras cárceles y del sistema en general. (Agustín 8)

Agustín distinguishes Mora's text from the larger genre of novels of prostitution by pointedly signaling her as different from Gamboa's *Santa*. It is possible he is also referring to the character of Santa as portrayed in the 1932 film by the same name. It should be noted that Mora offers the reader a vivid testimonial of life on the streets which may also be read against this and other Mexican films, particularly those of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema such as Emilio "el Indio" Fernández's *Salón México* (1948) and *Víctimas del Pecado* (1952). The last two films mentioned portray dance hall prostitutes, Mercedes in *Salón México* and Violeta in *Víctimas del Pecado*, whose lives are told through the classic religious lens of saint and prostitute, sin and redemption, which Mora rejects in the portrayal of her life. Agustín also differentiates Mora from French author, Jeanne Louise Henriette Campan, who focuses on the life of another in her *Memoirs of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette* (1823). Furthermore, Agustín paints Mora's novel as a denunciation of the injustices of the historical time period in which it takes place, during the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952). It is significant to point out that during the Alemán presidency the national political party formed by President Plutarco Elías Calles in 1929 as el Partido Nacional Revolucionario became el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) that remained in power through 2000. Agustín's foreword provides the names of historical figures with whom Mora interacted and names that Mora intentionally omits.

In her analysis of the representation of prostitution in Mexican literature, *Imagen de la prostituta en la novela mexicana contemporánea*, María González reads Mora's text as not simply narrating Mora's life, but as also including an underlying message that adds complexity to the narrative. She explains that: "El texto *Del oficio* es un discurso narrativo subversivo en el sentido de la estructura; porque aunque parezca a un simple nivel superficial que ese *yo* narrativo nos está contando algo, al nivel intrínseco está llamando a la solidaridad de la mujer en general

para hacer un cambio” (González 112). González reaches this conclusion by first establishing the novel as testimonial literature and then explaining that Mora uses this genre to add a seemingly objective perspective to her text. In other words, Mora purposefully tells the story in such a way that she separates herself from “Antonia,” who lives in a world of prostitution yet manages to vindicate herself in society’s eyes (113). Despite this apparent separation between author and narrator, it is significant that writer and narrator continue to be the same person: this unity allows Mora to disguise herself as an objective narrator when, in fact, every part of the narration is intentionally and carefully crafted by Mora. Through this means, she can tell her story exactly as she wants it told.

In the end, according to González, Mora concludes her text with a sense of optimism because while on a television program she delivers a statement of repentance and a call to women to learn from her example. For González, this statement indicates the incorporation of Antonia into the “sociedad decente,” thus allowing her to leave behind her life of prostitution (120-21). The critic sees the reproduction of this statement near the novel’s conclusion as Mora’s intent to end her work on a didactic note, drawing parallels between this novel and the picaresque tradition “[...] a pesar de la vida poco limpia que ha llevado, se permite, como el pícaro, dar una lección con su ejemplo, aunque la intención no es moralizadora en el sentido tradicional de la palabra” (González 121). This interpretation would be plausible if it did not fail to account for the fact that the prepared statement that Mora reads is given to her by the television program’s reporter. In this way, the novel’s conclusion is scripted not by Mora, but by someone looking to teach viewers a lesson.

Debra Castillo examines Mora’s text in her chapter “Signifyin’, Testifyin’: Mora, Bandida, Serrano,” along with Irma Serrano’s three memoirs, *A calzón amarrado* (1978), *Sin*

*pelos en la lengua* (1979), and *Una loca en la polaca* (1992) and Eduardo Muñozuri's *Memorias de "La Bandida"* (1967). In interpreting these texts, Castillo finds herself unable to place these works in the genre of *testimonio* because of their perceived lack of reliability and she also rejects the category of autobiography. According to Castillo,

[...] unlike canonical *testimonios*, where the very root of the word defining the genre involves a presumption of judicial truth-telling, the loose woman's *testimonio* is presumed to be less trustworthy. Since the narrator is, again by definition, an inherently unreliable storyteller — we readers may uneasily suspect that we are victims of a *transa* on her part — and the life described in the text continually involves *transas* of one sort or another (in bodies and stories and goods), then what is finally authenticable is only the staged performance of the *transa* in the referential frame of the narrator/ author/ testifier. (173)

Because of the inability of the above-mentioned texts to fit into these genres, Castillo creates a third category for this type of writing, adapting the African-American practice of “signifyin’” as defined by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Castillo posits the women are “testifyin’,” or “signifyin’,” and she defines signifyin’ as

[...] both a linguistic style of expression and a cultural ritual that always involve a double-voicedness, repetition with formal revision, and a play of ambiguity. Signifyin’ is aggressive and ambiguous. It is performance talk that both calls attention to its performativity and is only completely successful if it convinces the target. (170-71)

Along with positing *Del oficio* as a testifyin' text and identifying *transas* in Mora's writing, Castillo focuses on the overall purpose of the novel.

According to Castillo, María Luisa Mendoza's foreword offers proof of the physical existence of Mora and simultaneously alters the meaning of the text: "Mora's story of her life as a ghetto-bred, second-generation prostitute and thief, as framed by novelist María Luisa Mendoza's foreword, becomes a moral tale of sin and redemption" (162) wherein "[...] the prostitute's tale, [is] one in which the protagonist's core goodness is recognized and everything falls into place for a perfect, happy ending of upper-middle-class prosperity" (214). With Mendoza's foreword framing the text, Mora's life becomes a Cinderella story in which the positive outcome to the protagonist's life is made evident by the description of Mora as a lawyer's chaste wife (Castillo 173-174).

This didactic interpretation and foreword by Mendoza is problematic for Castillo because of the final sentence of the novel, a sentence ignored by the other critics presented in this chapter. After Mora reads her prepared statement she ends her *testimonio* with the reporter's farewell to the viewing public and with an exchange between him and Mora that she describes in her own words: "El hombre me dio las gracias junto con cien pesos" (137). This ending for the novel puzzles Castillo. With the amount of illicit transactions in the book (*transas*), Castillo concludes that a *transa* occurs between Mora and the television producer, and takes this idea further by implying that perhaps this analogy (with its use of the words "el hombre") can be extended to the book publisher with the audience also participating by willingly receiving this (mis)information; in this way the text is signifyin' or testifyin' (178). After this analysis, Castillo throws out an unsettling question to her reader: "Would it not be totally naïve at this point to ask about the truth-status of this *testimonio*, this confession we have just finished reading?" (179).



This chapter answers Castillo's rhetorical question by arguing that *Del oficio* not only tells the truth as Mora sees it, but also exposes this and other *transas* that she has lived; her novel ends with this exposure. By exposing this *transa*, Mora asks the reader to participate in her story (rather than being "transado," the reader is the "transante"). In this way, Mora uses her urban testimonial as a way for her reader to witness her account and become her active accomplice and ally through the trials she has endured in "la vida."

Mora's novel begins in Tepito, a barrio in Mexico City located in Colonia Morelos, in the Delegación (borough) of Cuauhtémoc. In Mexico, it is currently known for its piracy and climate of insecurity. The novel also opens with a quote by French poet and founder of Surrealism, Paul Éluard, "Yo digo lo que veo/ Lo que sé/ Lo que es cierto." With these words, Mora hints at the lens through which the novel should be read, an indication that "seeing is believing," and that readers will see (and should believe) much. In her text, Mora also overrides the general sense of place and instead highlights only the geography that is significant to her. Like every other chapter, Mora's first chapter is titled by the name of the place where it occurs. Tepito will be described as Mora knows it, with the important markers and characteristics being those from her life: "Tres patios anchos, llenos de tendederos, con lavaderos de cemento donde muchas mujeres lavaban, hincadas. Margarita y Lucía rentaban una vivienda con dos cuartos y cocina sin excusado. De éstos había varios en el patio"(11). In this way, Mora shows the reader her Tepito, (along with other places mostly in the geopolitical spaces of Mexico City, described in subsequent chapters such as Tacuba or Paseo de la Reforma); she displaces how it might be categorized by her readers and instead makes her own view of the place Tepito's defining factor. Thus, Mora constructs a new geographical space in every chapter by re-claiming pre-existing names and places as her own. After all, "Yo digo lo que veo/ Lo que sé/ Lo que es cierto."

The novel's narration begins impersonally, in third person, when Mora is a young child (then called Toñita). The narration starts before Toñita's recollection, but the narrative tells based on what she knows, until there is an abrupt shift from a third-person narrative voice to that of a first person narrator that actually remembers the events being told: "Tendría yo tres años, acaso cuatro. Sólo recuerdo que corría, corría y jugaba" (A. Mora 11). The memories of playing and running initially block all others until Toñita receives a gift from the "reyes," a doll dressed in yellow. As the doll's dress color fades, Toñita becomes aware of the fact that her mother becomes pale as well (A. Mora 11). When Toñita is a child, her mother's story parallels her own, with her mother being run out of the house where they are living, despite being terribly ill, Toñita leaves with her and thus begins a series of migrations that continue throughout the novel.

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Toñita's feelings, often left unarticulated, are instead conveyed through her actions. Antonia indicates an inability to name the emotions of the past because her feelings and childhood sensibility often lacked adult understanding. The following example demonstrates how her feelings are expressed:

Estaba yo una tarde con Cecilia en el balcón, cuando pasaron dos niños y me gritaron:

—Esa que está ahí, esa güereja, se deja coger.

No sé cómo llamarlo: vergüenza, miedo, coraje. Pero sentí sensaciones raras...

Cecilia me miró sonriente. No sabía qué hacer. Salí corriendo, pero ella me detuvo.

—Brótales, brótales, no te dejes. (A. Mora 16)

Using the present indicative in describing these feelings, the adult narrator, Antonia, puts herself on the same level of understanding as her childhood self. She makes an effort to not go beyond

her childhood capabilities when describing her feelings (“lo que siento”) from back then. Thus, she can only describe the sensations as “raras,” strange. This lack of words to describe these emotions leads to a physical reaction—trying to run—and an equally physical reaction from her friend who attempts to stop her and then tells her to just ignore the boys, to implicitly be unaffected by the emotions Toñita fails to understand.

At other times, conversations between adults indicate that Toñita has misunderstood something, and that she has made a mistake. These exchanges let the reader understand exactly what is occurring, although this child does not fully comprehend the events that surround her. By using this technique, Antonia makes certain to avoid a narration that goes beyond Toñita’s age and childlike comprehension. So, when Toñita and her friend are playing with what they believe is a balloon, the adults’ reaction of horror and disgust teaches them that they were instead playing with a “porquería,” something dirty that makes them have to wash out their mouths, “un hule.” The children have done something foolish (“¡Pendejos!”), and the interruption of their game and transcription of the adult’s conversation is all the (mis)understanding with which the children are left (A. Mora 18).

Toñita’s lack of understanding continues as the novel progresses. For instance, when Toñita’s mother finds a more permanent partner, Toñita expresses disgust for him: “No me gustaba porque sabía que se cogía a mi madre” (A. Mora 20). Yet, this explanation clearly emerges from an assertion gleaned from adult conversation and not from an understanding of what “coger” actually means: “Pepe y ella estaban de acuerdo en que era más decente [trabajar en el Guadalajara de Noche]. Como dijo él, ahí no tenía que coger con nadie” (A. Mora 20). After this conversation, Pepe arrives at Toñita’s house, letting her mother know that he wants to “coger” and by doing so causes the woman to blush; this episode explains how the child gained

this limited knowledge. From this conversation, Toñita can only assume that her mother's profession is indecent, since to "coger" with someone is reprehensible and therefore the fact that her mother does this with Pepe is unacceptable to Toñita.

After interiorizing this lesson, Toñita realizes that she does not want to be the person that someone else "se cogía." She leaves the house before being asked to do so when Pepe comes over; this way she leaves by choice then thinks: "Me desesperé de no crecer pronto. Lo deseaba: crecer, crecer y coger, ser una cogedora. Más que mi madre, más que Lucrecia, más que todas" (A. Mora 20). By being a "cogedora," she will be the one acting, rather than the person being acted upon, and this way she will manage to be stronger than all of the women she knows. Toñita will not be content with playing the passive role her mother has taken, but instead decides to choose her role aggressively.

Over time, the relationship between Toñita and her mother deteriorates and becomes abusive. Antonia describes this abuse in the present "Me llueven golpes, insultos" (A. Mora 31). The narration in the present is an interesting choice, indicating that the aggressive acts she suffered in the past continue into the present. This aggression leads Toñita to turn away from her mother and to look for another form of support: "Por un momento de olvido, madre. Siento que soy feliz. Pido un milagro: quisiera que Él enviara a su madre para que me suba al cielo. - ¡Mentira, mentira! Ella no baja" (A. Mora 31). In forgetting her mother, she tries to shift her consciousness through religion; however, over time, she also abandons this hope expressing this realization with her acknowledgment that God's mother will not arrive. It should also be noted that Toñita's need to ask God to send his mother means that this feminine figure is powerless in coming to rescue Toñita: she is dependent on God's permission and power to help the girl, just like the rest of the women in Toñita's life that are bound by the rule of the father, or *padrote*.

Toñita, therefore, as a woman who wants to be a “cogedora,” or an active participant in her actions, will not receive any relief from the traditional Mexican religious icon who is under the rule of patriarchy. In acknowledging that this figure will not arrive, Toñita comes to the further realization that happiness can only be found in herself: “Me doy cuenta que el milagro me lo hago yo misma, que yo sola me doy alegría. Vagando me siento libre” (A. Mora 32). Her wanderings both physical and imaginary, empower her.

Toñita’s early rejection and re-interpretation of a religious icon, along with the assertion that “el milagro me lo hago yo misma,” echoes a later similar idea posited by Sandra Cisneros in the short story “Little Miracles, Kept Promises,” from *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991). Héctor Calderón, in his *Narratives of Greater Mexico: Essays on Chicano Literary History, Genre, and Borders* explains Cisneros’s short story as a collection of written ex-votos, “[...] literary portraits, each composed of an invocation to a religious figure, followed by a narrative requesting spiritual assistance or expressing gratitude for a miracle granted, ending with the believer’s name and place” (197). Calderón points to the fact that all twenty-two portraits, though they mark changes in Mexican culture, still privilege religious spiritual agents over the people asking for *milagros*. Yet, the last of these vignettes is different: “In the ending story, Cisneros subverts the traditional form of the ex-voto: a young woman confronts her gender’s history of oppression through the orthodox Catholic representations of the Virgin. Rosario empowers herself by remaking a religious figure into her own identity” (Calderón 199). Rather than finding the pre-Columbian and universal roots of Guadalupe, as Rosario does, in order to accept this part of her own identity: “When I could see you in all your facets [...] I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me” (Cisneros 128). Toñita, instead finds the miracle solely within herself.

Unfortunately, this empowering wandering is still punished by society, and by her mother. When Toñita is out late one night, she makes up a story to justify her absence, saying that some men took her out to the movies, to the fair, and to eat. Her mother believes she has been raped. In a horrific scene her mother takes her to the Cruz Verde (Red Cross) to find out the truth. Once there the nurse orders her:

—¡Entra, mocosa! ¡Anda!, quítate los calzones y súbete ahí. ¡Obedece! —me dijo tronando los dedos.

—Hice lo que me ordenó. En ese momento entraron dos médicos. Me hundieron un fierro que me hizo daño.

—¡Me duele!

—¡Vamos, ya levántate! ¡Quién lo dijera, tan chiquita!

—Lo siento mucho, señora: su hija ya no es ninguna niña. (A. Mora 32)

As her mother screams in reaction to the doctor's erroneous assumption that Toñita is no longer a virgin, Toñita feels raped and violated by the doctors. This scene is reminiscent of the horrific medical examination in Gamboa's *Santa* when a protesting Santa is taken to the *registro*, by Pepa, her *madrota*.

—Cuidado y me contradigas, ¿oyes? Yo responderé lo que haya de responderse, y tú deja que hagan lo que quieran...

—¡Qué me hagan lo que quieran!... ¿Quién?...

—¡Borríca! Si no es nada malo, son los médicos que quizá se empeñen en reconocerte, ¿entiendes?

—Pero yo soy buena y sana, se lo juro a usted.

—Aunque lo estés, tonta, esto lo manda la autoridad y hay que someterse; yo procuraré que no te examinen. ¡Abajo!, anda...(14).

Yet, despite Pepa's assertions, there *is* a medical exam, in which “la hurgaron con un aparato de metal,” just as with Toñita and the doctors “la tutearon y aun le dirigieron bromas pesadas” (Gamboa 15). At first, Santa is indignant, for this is no way to treat a woman, then she remembers that she is no longer a woman: “No era una mujer, no; ¡era una...!” (Gamboa 15). In a similar experience, Toñita, after this scene is, due to medical authority, no longer considered a *niña*. At the end of the examination scene in *Del oficio*, Toñita likens herself to an animal fur: “Veo pieles de los animales colgadas. La mía, mi piel también, con esas manos y la cueva abierta [...]” (A. Mora 33). This assertion by Toñita parallels one made about Santa. When she first arrives at the brothel, the woman opening the door likens her to a lifeless animal part, thinking of her as “carne joven que ignoraba seguramente todos los horrores que le esperaban” (Gamboa 10). Unlike Santa, who is infantilized by this woman, Toñita, despite being a child, holds wisdom beyond her years. When she sees women wearing animal pelts wandering the streets of Tacuba she despises them: “¡Que despreciables me parecen las señoras con pieles! Me pregunto qué sentirán con tanta pielecita de los animales. ¡Qué culpa tienen ellos de tener una ropa tan suavecita!” (A. Mora 31). She recognizes that, as a child, she is blameless.

Yet despite her mother and the doctor's assumptions, Toñita is still a child with a limited understanding of her body who longs for physical affection from her abusive mother. Toñita

wishes for the type of affection Pepe gives her mother, which culminates in a child and implicitly could produce someone who will love her. However, not understanding what this form of affection actually entails, she attempts it on herself: “[...] me encerraba en la cocina. Mis dedos recorrían desde el ombligo hasta la escasa nubecilla. Manipulaba, frotándome al mismo tiempo que pedía un hijo. El balbuceante espasmo llegaba. Quedaba feliz. ¡Ahora a esperar! Pero los meses pasaban y mi vientre no crecía” (A. Mora 43). Desperate, she asks Pepe for a kiss and repeats the whole attempt to create a child. With the failure of this attempt Toñita hums a children’s song that takes on a sinister meaning: “La oca se fue a casar, el ogro se deplomó. El vientre se reventó y la nena salió a llorar. La oca se fue a casar, tra la la la...” (A. Mora 43). In this song, birth is caused by an ogre, implying that Pepe, or any man her mother has been with, can cause an explosion of the womb and subsequently a crying child. Instead, some part of this formula fails for Toñita and she is left with a lifeless womb, “[...] el hijo no daba señales de vida” (A. Mora 43).

Her mother, however, does become pregnant, and Toñita is to be sent away to live with her grandmother while the “cigüeña” arrives. At this point in the narrative, Toñita knows enough about fairytales to understand that this excuse she is given for being sent away is simply not true. Unwilling to play along, she shocks her mother with her conception of the truth: “¿Por qué mientes? Tú vas a tener a mi hermano como la perra de aquí enfrente tuvo sus cachorros. Empezó como tú. Le creció el estómago y después le salieron los perritos por donde orina” (A. Mora 44). What she says, turns her into a “malvada,” and adds to her mother’s belief that she is no longer a virgin (A. Mora 44): “Me fui a llorar a un rincón y me alcé el vestido para mirarme lo malo que tenía en medio de las piernas; quería arrancarme lo podrido aunque me quedara sin



orinar” (A. Mora 45). Thus, her sex is stigmatized and she sees her body as evil when she is sent away with her grandmother.

When Toñita finally comes back, she receives even less physical affection from her mother, who, upon returning from work, is scared of infecting her new baby and Toñita. The woman calls herself “sucia,” though Toñita sees nothing wrong with her mother’s appearance (A. Mora 48). This idea that she is filthy extends even to the days when she is not working:

Las noches que no trabajaba, se tapaba aparte con otra cobija. Esto último me molestaba. Le rogué muchas veces que se tapara conmigo, pero siempre se negaba.

—Estoy sucia.

—¿De qué? No te veo nada. (A. Mora 48)

With this scene, Mora demonstrates an awareness of larger cultural attitudes held towards women in Mexico. Toñita’s mother’s attitude towards herself closely parallels the internalization of sin demonstrated by female characters in the town of Comala, in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955). In the novel, a woman known simply as “la mujer” who was raped by her brother, explains to the protagonist, Juan Preciado,

— [...] Yo sé tan poco de la gente. Nunca salgo. Aquí donde me ve, aquí he estado sempiternamente... Bueno, ni tan siempre. Sólo desde que él me hizo su mujer. Desde entonces me la paso encerrada, porque tengo miedo de que me vean. Él no quiere creerlo, pero, ¿verdad que estoy para dar miedo? —y se acercó adonde le daba el sol—. ¡Míreme la cara!

Era una cara común y corriente.

—¿Qué es lo que quiere que le mire?

—¿No me ve el pecado? ¿No ve esas manchas moradas como de jiote que me llenan de arriba abajo? Y eso es sólo por fuera. Por dentro estoy hecha un mar de lodo. (Rulfo 110-11)

Like “la mujer,” and other women in the small Jalisco town, who are held to be responsible for sin when men in the town remain blameless, Mora’s mother has simply internalized the negative discourse that people around her use to refer to her. In contrast, for Toñita, her mother has a “común y corriente” body, like anybody else’s. In her own mind, the mother does not lay blame on the men she is with, but rather acknowledges that she has become the person responsible for the act of prostitution, which is seen as ugly and dirty. For Toñita, who holds no such judgments, her mother’s concerns seem absurd.

Faced with this reality, a more mature Antonia/ Toña slowly starts to emerge. A gap in the narrative indicates that the physical and emotional separation from her mother continues until one night, when Toña’s sister is older and expects a gift from the “reyes.” Toña’s mother arrives home drunk, having been robbed of the money meant to buy a gift for her sister. In a moment of desperation, thinking of her sister’s disappointment at not receiving any toys, Toña steals money from a neighbor. This robbery makes her feel free; she gains independence from her mother and seemingly becomes an adult through this rule breaking. Upon her return, her innocence is further shattered as she overhears her mother talking about how Antonia’s father sold her to a brothel. Toña is fourteen years old and cries over what she hears. Her tears are no longer simply those of

a child, but tears of understanding; significantly it is only the second time age is mentioned in the narrative, marking Toña as a teenager when she decides to find a job.

A sharp turn in the narrative occurs when Toña is abducted by a group of men. Again, limited by childhood feelings, she describes the initial sexual assault she suffers: “[...] Sus dedos se metían como arañas, de la rodilla hacia la ingle haciendo a un lado mis pantaletas. Sentía miedo y calor, luego la humedad dulce, rara, con mareos” (A. Mora 54). Despite this assault, she cannot help but feel an almost positive physical reaction, although it is caused by something ugly, an “araña” like the “ogro” from her childhood song. She then begins to feel “[...] ansias por que me entrara algo que desgarrara” (A. Mora 54).

The trauma she undergoes and her inability to fully process the rape she suffers, due to her tender age, parallels the situation of another Mexican woman: La Malinche. Hernán Cortés’ translator and concubine during the Conquest of Mexico, and the symbolic mother of all Mexicans, La Malinche, leads the reader to recall her own young age and to recognize Toñita’s role as a victim. In view of the fact that Mora’s text was published the same year as the release of the founder of Mexican feminism, Rosario Castellanos’ poem “Malinche” (1972), as well as after Octavio Paz’s publication of *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), Mora’s use of the verb “desgarrar” seems intentional. The mid-twentieth century years during Miguel Alemán’s *sexenio* also coincided with the search for Mexican identity and one of the key books in that search was Paz’s *El laberinto de la soledad*. Mexico, Paz argued, had reached adolescence and Mexicans needed to return to the lessons of its history to renounce the fatality of old habits. In Paz’s essay, “Los hijos de la Malinche” featured in *El laberinto*, he denominates “La Malinche” as “La Chingada,”

Si la Chingada es una representación de la Madre violada, no me parece forzado asociarla a la Conquista, que fue también una violación, no solamente en el sentido histórico, sino en la carne misma de las indias. El símbolo de la entrega es la Malinche, la amante de Cortés. Es verdad que ella se da voluntariamente al conquistador, pero éste, apenas deja de serle útil, la olvida. Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche. (94)

He takes this label further and extends it to all Mexican women by stating: “[...] toda mujer, aun la que se da voluntariamente, es desgarrada, chingada por el hombre. En cierto sentido todos somos, por el solo hecho de nacer de mujer, hijos de la Chingada [...]” (Paz 88). The naming, the identification of Doña Marina as La Malinche, “the fucked one,” occurs around the same time period as Antonia’s adolescence and horrific rape. However, Paz ignores that “La Malinche” also referred to as Doña Marina and Malintzin Tenepal, was only fourteen years old when she was taken by Cortés.

Rosario Castellanos, in 1972, responds to Paz’s writing by arguing that Doña Marina was in effect betrayed by her own people, and specifically by her mother. Marina’s mother, according to Spanish Conquerer Bernal Díaz del Castillo in his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, falsely claimed Malintzin was dead and sold the girl into slavery in order to protect her son’s inheritance after her husband’s death. As expressed by Castellanos, Doña Marina was:

Arrojada, expulsada  
del reino, del palacio y de la entraña tibia  
de la que me dio a luz en tálamo legítimo  
y que me aborreció porque yo era su igual  
en figura y en rango  
y se contempló en mí y odió su imagen  
y destrozó el espejo contra el suelo. (186)

By portraying herself and her experience and by expressing the specific desire to be “desgarrada,” so similar to the discourse employed by Paz, Antonia seems to answer Paz. Like Castellanos, Mora leads the reader to question whether or not such a “crime” could be attributed to a young teenager. Castellanos’s poem was an answer to Paz and to victimization of woman at the hands of men and male intellectuals. Mora adds her mid-twentieth century real victimization of her body to Castellanos’s intellectual response. Thus, Mora should be considered part of this dialogue among intellectuals. Also, similar to the experience of “La Malinche,” Toña suffers a betrayal by her mother who beats her after she comes home from having been raped; her mother sees her as no longer decent, just as she sees herself. Society in general agrees with this condemnation, just as the condemnation of “La Malinche” has been preserved throughout Mexican history in post-independence Mexico. A member of this society who witnessed Toña’s abduction, also looks at the child with disdain while young men mockingly sing to her: “Muchachita, quién te rompió/ tu mucurita de barro?/ la-la-la-la-la” (A. Mora 55). After hearing

taunts such as those above, Toña realizes she is broken within and she concludes from her mother's reaction that it is only acceptable to "coger" if you are being paid for the act.

Her mother's physical and psychological abuse after this incident drives Toña to leave home with a boyfriend, Gil, and head to Poza Rica, Veracruz, where his *padrino* owns a *rastro*, a slaughterhouse. There, Gil turns sinister and, understanding Toña's plight, the slaughterhouse accountant gives her money to leave. He also understands that she is in danger of being raped and killed by any one of the men there who have their eyes on her ("El padrino de Gil me anda espiando") (A. Mora 57). Again, paralleling Gamboa's *Santa*, in the *rastro* Toña becomes akin to one of the animals about to be slaughtered but, unlike Santa, served up for the eager eye of the reader, Toña escapes and writes her own story.

After a brief job as a maid, and a return home, Toña leaves her mother permanently and enters the world of prostitution where she decides that she will be the best in the profession by intentionally tossing aside any negative connotations associated with it. The first friend that Antonia makes in "la vida" quickly lets her know that her profession is acceptable: "Elena me decía que no me arrepentiría de haber escogido esa profesión que era tan noble como cualquier otra, como la de ingeniería o la de doctor" (A. Mora 59). Initially, her attempts to "practice" for her job in her room, moving her hips around her bed and screaming are reminiscent of similar attempts from her childhood (A. Mora 59). Yet, as with her previous attempts, once the gaze of others is upon her—specifically during her first day working at the cabaret—she feels shame, and lacks the experienced response to stares:

Me levanté y con mucho trabajo procuré caminar, ya que no estaba acostumbrada a andar con tacón alto. Sería el escote del vestido o la manera de caminar, pero

varias gentes se quedaron mirándome, y al sentir las miradas me dio vergüenza y me encogí, me encogí de tal manera que Elena me dio un manazo en la espalda.

Sentí vergüenza de mi cuerpo, aún ahora tengo vergüenza de él. (A. Mora 60)

This situation parallels the earlier situation in her childhood where Antonia runs from taunts from boys. With this experience, Antonia reacts by shrinking away from the looks she receives, but this time she is also showed by Elena, not Cecilia, what to do through receiving a “manazo” on her back. Just as she had in childhood, Antonia engages in another physical action. The difference is that now she can articulate her feelings and her own reaction to people’s stares. The other significant aspect of the quote above is that Antonia still feels shame with regard to her body, as indicated by the use of the present indicative at the end. By choosing this tense, Antonia brings her experience back then to the now of her writing process.

Such experiences encourage Antonia to turn to Elena who acts as her mentor and helps Antonia shift some of her thinking regarding the profession. For instance, she teaches Antonia to steal, re-framing stealing as simply taking something that already belongs to them. According to Elena, when men ask women out to dance, they impose their thoughts on them, and the women somehow fulfill men’s desires purely through letting them be their dance partners: “Cuando un cabrón te toca al bailar, piensa en hacerte chingadera y media. Pues hay que quitarles algo, pero sin dar nada...., ¡pero nada!” (A. Mora 61). These men have implicitly already taken something from the women they are dancing with, so this “stealing” is simply a means of retrieving their own pay. This repossession of goods gives Antonia the upper hand, and distances her from the role of the victim.

Yet, along with moments of empowerment come times of deep personal conflict. As Antonia puts it, Elena made her suffer. One moment she would proclaim the dignity of their profession and the next she would break into tears, lamenting what she had become. The sadness was also implicitly caused by a lack of options for women. When Antonia would remind Elena of her comments about the profession being good, she would quickly respond that their job was far better than “ser la puta con gasto fijo de un cabrón de esos que van por la calle diciendo: ‘Mi esposa, mi esposa’” (A. Mora 63). However, Elena’s words, sadness and tears are internalized by Antonia, and eventually she no longer feels proud of her profession.

Several different women also shape Antonia’s perception of the “oficio.” Throughout the novel it is important to note that clients are referred to as “gordos,” a term implying they hold political influence or wealth, and only people important to Antonia are referred to by name. Through these linguistic choices, Mora privileges the story of social outcasts, prostitutes, like herself over those of famous politicians for whom she works. Thus, her story becomes a testimonial for herself but also an urban *testimonio* recounting the stories of her people. After parting from Elena, Antonia details the story of her friend Alicia. Alicia’s pimp, referred to only as “Tiburón,” has Alicia work and will only let her into their room when she earns a certain amount of money for the night. He beats her and keeps her by his side, using monogamy as a form of control. As Alicia explains: “No puedo dejarlo. Se enoja porque dice que ninguno de su profesión tiene nada más una sola vieja, ¿no?, así que tengo que talonearle” (A. Mora 68). Using the limited funds she brings in as a pretext, he decides to leave her and she is left with no home, no food, and falls ill with tuberculosis. By the time Antonia encounters her and comes to her aid, a doctor alerts her that her friend has only eight days left to live.



In the hospital, Alicia holds on to life as Antonia lies and tells her she will live: “Diariamente veía cómo ella con mis mentiras se agarraba de los días. Comía, se peinaba. El último día se maquilló. ¡Qué bella estaba! Con sus ojos azules, su cabellera ondulada, larga, negra” (A. Mora 73). Even on her last days Alicia, she still longs for Tiburón, saying once he saw her, he would beg to have her back. In the end, Antonia gathers money for the burial and goes to Tiburón to ask for money for the flowers. When Antonia tells him Alicia needs him, he quickly replies that she is wasting her time, and that he will not go back with her. Antonia’s response to Tiburón gives her friend the last word: “Ni ella tampoco” (A. Mora 74).

After Alicia’s death, Antonia lives strange and horrifying experiences. They range from finding herself in the home of a man paralyzed from the waist down who likes to burn prostitutes with a cigarette butt to working for a man who throws violent dogs at them. In this second circumstance, before the dogs are released Antonia thinks: “Al entrar a la casona tuve la sensación de que un día un hombre como éste, que vive tan solo, enloquecería y se convertiría en el demonio y yo tendría que gozar y sentir, sentir hasta el infinito” (A. Mora 86). This premonition is reminiscent of when as a child she spoke of wanting to be torn apart, or “desgarrada,” and viewed relationships as being hinged on an unequal balance of power, with the men somehow being evil. Yet, although she expresses, as she did in the past, a sort of confused desire based on an unfamiliarity with this particular experience, when the horrid act of being attacked occurs, she realizes that this is unacceptable. This is not what her experience should be. These realizations and all of these experiences make her angry, “No había noche en la que no pasara por cosas desagradables, juntando odio, sintiendo latigazos, juntando cada noche más y más” (A. Mora 85).

The repression and abuse that another friend suffers simply adds to this hatred. Her friend Sonia is a woman who has enjoyed her sexuality until one night she is gang raped and beaten by a group of men. Unable to escape, paralyzed by fear, Sonia relates: “Quise correr pero el miedo no me dejó gritar ni moverme. No sabía qué hacer. Pensé que si recordaba las cosas que hacía de niña no sentiría feo, pero por más que quise no pude; sólo sentía dolor” (A. Mora 94). After this experience, the woman is not the same psychologically; she stops eating, ceases speaking, and is unable to leave her house. After describing Sonia, it is apparent that her friend’s and her own experiences lead Antonia to pick up some of this fear. Antonia knows that reality is not as it should be and realizes that the so-called “clean” people and spaces are actually the ones to be feared:

Yo sentía odio y miedo. El miedo no me dejaba nunca, lo tenía en mi cuarto, en la calle, pero no en todas las calles. El miedo me ahogaba por esas calles: Madero, Gante, Filomeno Mata, Cinco de Mayo. Por esas calles donde anda la gente limpia. Empezaba cuando distraidamente me seguía por toda la avenida Juárez hasta que no podía escapar, porque ya estaba caminando por Madero. (A. Mora 95)

These “gente limpia” in Mexico City’s center were politicians who hired sex-workers to fulfill horrific nighttime fantasies, hotel and hospital workers who rejected her ill friends, and men who beat her once they realized what her profession was. The areas of the city of so-called normalcy, of “clean” people, become her nightmare, the spaces in which she feels unsafe. However, although these dangers will persist, and she will make mistakes herself, she challenges herself to at least lose the fear that haunts her: “Mañana voy a regresar, y todos los días hasta que se me quite el miedo” (A. Mora 97).

The final, destructive relationship that Mora narrates is with Yemen, a Cuban man who becomes her partner. What scares Antonia about him is his apparent love of mind games, such as when he asks her to pretend to have left him and then has her emerge from a closet after he issues an implicit threat of violence. The unsettling aspect of this relationship is that she never seems to be sure whether or not these fantasies are truly games to him: “Todo lo que él hizo me dio miedo, pero se veía tan contento que no me importó. Varias veces repetí la misma travesura porque él me lo pedía” (A. Mora 103). Yet, Antonia’s bubbling anger and hate finally boil over after she and Yemen commit a string of robberies and the robbery of a famous, but unnamed (by Mora) “artista de cine<sup>17</sup>” leads to her arrest (A. Mora 109). In this particular case, “el periódico hizo gran escándalo” (A. Mora 109). She knows that the police will come for her, and her overwhelming feelings emerge: “Una furia sorda me invadió. ¡Cuánto odio! Imaginaba ver caras gordas. Una neblina llenó la sala. [...] Luego brotaron de las paredes penes diminutos encajadas en el espacio” (A. Mora 112). The tiny penises that permeate the space around her seem to represent the values of this troubling, patriarchal society that have invaded her life and her interpersonal relationships, including her relationship with Yemen and even the relationship with her mother.

Once Antonia is arrested, she undergoes various brutal interrogations and torture to the point where she aborts a baby she was unaware she had conceived:

[...] eché fuera lo que tenía. Casi no sentí dolor, sólo muchas ganas de zurrar. Me senté, pero no pude levantarme. Sentí que algo caliente me salía de muy adentro y nomás pujaba y pujaba. Primero me salió mucha sangre, y luego una como bolsa

---

<sup>17</sup> Agustín says the actress is Ana Luisa Peluffo, who is most known for her appearance in the 1977 film *Flores de papel* directed by Gabriel Retes (7).

pegada con unos pedazos de carne como de hígado. Después de que salió eso seguí pujando. (A. Mora 116)

When she stuffs the fetus, wrapped in newspaper back in her body, to use as evidence of the beatings against her, it is discovered in a full-body search and only leads to more beatings. These brutal events make it apparent for the reader that the police and the authorities are, like the “gente decente,” also a source of fear far more threatening than prisoners incarcerated for being a danger to society

As Antonia is taken to Lecumberri prison, the differences between her and the police start to become clear to her, although she cannot determine from where these differences stem:

“Parece que todos los policías son iguales. Iguales en facciones, iguales de alma. Mi madre decía que la maldad les sale de la cara. Hay una diferencia entre ellos y yo, pero no puedo precisar cuáles” (A. Mora 119). As she starts to carve out her individuality she wonders, “¿*La gente se dará cuenta de que yo existo?*” (A. Mora 119). With this phrase, the difference between her and the police becomes apparent: unlike them she has not lost her humanity, and she wants other people to realize that she exists and to know her story. This trip to the prison where Antonia reaches this epiphany becomes akin to a symbolic journey towards death, until she stops at Purgatory:

“Siento que al estar aquí se me niega el descanso, el derecho a una caja abullonada, tranquila, con sedas y terciopelos... roja, encendida por dentro, y por fuera negra” (A. Mora 119). To Antonia, the final destination which lies beyond Purgatory, is not her arrival in Heaven, but rather her entrance into a silky box. She expresses specific desires as to burial clothing as well, highlighted by her use of the subjunctive; in her death she wishes for a gauzy dress, and no shoes: “Quisiera que me vistiesen con tules blancos y que no me cortaran el pelo, que lo dejaran

suelto. Me enojaría que me pusieran zapatos” (A. Mora 120). Upon expressing this seemingly insignificant desire she is made to remember something greater, the value of her life:

*Alguien me dijo que también lo queman a uno y que las cenizas se las dan a la iglesia para que el cura tizne frentes el miércoles de ceniza. Me aterra que me quemem. No, yo quisiera que la gente se dé cuenta que dejé de existir. Podría matarme pero la gente diría: “Se arrepintió de lo que hizo y se suicidó.” Las madres me pondrían de ejemplo a sus hijos ... No, no lo voy a hacer. (A. Mora 120)*

As long as she remains alive, she still has a chance to not be, as she sees it, defiled. She would not be used as an example for that which she does not want to represent, and she consciously chooses to live again.

After this symbolic re-birth, Antonia arrives in a female prison, simply identified as “Kilómetro 16.5.” As soon as she leaves the prison to enter the infirmary, everything seems different from what she normally experienced; the space is white and full of light. The infirmary and the prison are two different institutions. The director of the prison holds absolutely no authority over the doctor. Because of this, from the doctor at the nursing station Antonia receives treatment unlike any she has ever received before. It brings her to tears, and she recognizes a hurt she never knew existed: “Pasó sus manos por mi vientre. Me sentí lastimada; nadie me había tratado así jamás, y el llanto me ahogó. Ella me calmaba pero yo no podía detenerlo” (A. Mora 122). For the first time, because of this act of healing, her body and feelings are exactly in tune with each other.

Once Antonia is well enough to go back to prison, her friend Elvia teaches her about the dynamics of the jail. For instance, she learns that the doña (the director of the prison) practices favoritism preferring murderesses and women who are imprisoned for fraud. She also learns the nature of the different crimes the women in the prison committed and is made aware of the romantic relationships that exist between different women. Elvia also recommends that she obtain a job, otherwise the director will hold not having one against her and she will have too much time to think. It seems though that the contrary is true, and time to think at the prison is rare. Before Antonia has a job in the prison, she wanders around the grounds and, as she sits in the theatre room in solitude she begins to reflect on why she stole: “Lo hice porque siento y siempre he sentido que me quitan algo . . . , pero no sé qué” (A. Mora 129). She is rudely interrupted so someone can clean the floor. After completing a walk around the prison, she decides she will work in the fields, where there is more of a sense of freedom as well as the opportunity to eat from what the women have cultivated.

When Elvia is sent off for sentencing, Antonia heads to the theatre again to wait for her friend, and begins to think of what will happen when she leaves prison. She contemplates returning to her old life (starting by seducing someone to give her a ride from prison). Then this idea scares her. Her other option is being rehabilitated, but it seems the prison fails to offer the resources to achieve this goal although, “*La doña dice: ‘No, esto no es una cárcel, es un centro de rehabilitación femenil.’ ¿Y si tratara de rehabilitarme? Pero, ¿cómo le hago?’*” (A. Mora 134). The only concern in the prison seems to be that the women work. Elvia is given thirty years, with no apparent rehabilitation in sight while Antonia is called to the doña’s office.

Antonia arrives at the director’s office to find a robust blonde man of medium height and clear eyes. He is a reporter who is not named by Antonia but she does share that he seems

difficult to trust. This man has become interested in Antonia's story and wants to film her routine in prison. Both the doña and the reporter, hint that this television appearance will benefit Antonia, and may even set her free. Once the filming begins, it quickly becomes obvious that her whole daily routine is staged, with a religious undertone permeating the recordings. The reporter acts out exactly what he would like her to do in each take: "—Ahora sí, Antonia. Entrás, te acuestas y te levantas, te persignas y rezas, juntando tus manos y mirando al cielo. No, así no. Mira cómo lo hago yo —el periodista se hincó, indicándole los movimientos" (A. Mora 136). Although Antonia protests saying that she never does the duties she is told to perform, her comment is brushed aside and the filming continues. The novel ends with her reading a prepared statement and the monetary exchange discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This reading occurs after the doña clarifies that she does not want Antonia's legs filmed in the program and the reporter preversely mumbles "¡Lástima!, las tienes muy buenas" (A. Mora 137).

In prison, up until the final fragment of the novel, Antonia is told what to do, with the doña even dictating what part of her body can be exhibited on camera as the reporter gazes at her legs lasciviously. According to Elena, the friend who trained Antonia when she began her entry into prostitution, this reporter has already taken from Antonia so she can implicitly collect her pay. She has also played a role on camera and in prison. Yet, Antonia refuses to be taken advantage of ("siempre he sentido que me quitan algo..., pero no sé qué") and this attitude makes it so that the novel cannot be fully understood until the very end. When Mora reads her public statement, with the religious undertone of the filming, this event is reminiscent of seventeenth-century Mexican scholar and nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's infamous renunciation of her studies near the end of her life in 1694 when

[...] she signed a couple of documents of abjuration—one in blood—and thereby officially renounced humane letters, declared her loyalty to the Catholic faith, repented her sinful actions, and asked the Holy Spirit for forgiveness. “I beg your Sacramental Majesty to grant me license, to all Saints and Angels I ask for mercy, especially those assigned for voting, so that I can be proposed and received by vote of the entire Celestial Community” (Stavans xlii).

Critics such as Octavio Paz<sup>18</sup> and Ilan Stavans have questioned the sincerity of Sor Juana’s statement. Stavans in his “Introduction” to *Poems, Protest and a Dream: Selected Writings* points out the contradictory fact that, at the time when she signed this document, Sor Juana still owned copious books, manuscripts and letters. For Stavans, the ownership of these writings signals that “Obviously her spirit had not full [sic] taken *el camino de la perfección*, the road to Christ, as is also indicated by another fact: as the convent’s accountant, apparently she had secretly and illegally invested her own funds and those of the institution with a banker” (xlii). In turn, Mora’s statement, also questioned by critics, reads as follows:

—Estoy arrepentida de haber faltado a las leyes y de haber delinquido, insultando de esta manera a la sociedad, así como a la seguridad y la moral de todo ciudadano honesto. Hago un llamamiento a las madres y a las jovencitas para que tomen ejemplo de mi caso y no cometan el mismo error, porque el que mal anda, mal acaba. (137)

---

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed analysis of Sor Juana’s life and times see Octavio Paz’s *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe* (1982).



As with Sor Juana, the prepared statement is neither the true story, nor the last word. The answer to Antonia's question: "¿Puedo decir lo que pienso?" (137), partially answered by the reporter in telling Antonia that her story "no causa simpatías en el público" (137) is ultimately and definitively provided by Mora herself: Yes she can, and these thoughts will be presented in the form of this book.

With this final exposure, the end of the book signals Mora's *propuesta* to the reader. She wants the reader to move beyond the realm of social distinctions ascribed to women and break with the dichotomy of the prostitute versus people perceived as "clean" or "decent." Through her *testimonio*, Mora shows that this dichotomy is fundamentally flawed. With Mora's urban *testimonio* of police exploitation, medical malpractice and society's criminalization of the female body, it is obvious how indecent the supposed "gente decente" can be. Thus Mora's *testimonio* dramatically challenges the view of prostitution inherited from nineteenth-century writers, which unfortunately is repeated by writers and critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Critics who have misinterpreted this text, such as González asserting "la vida poco limpia" (121) led by Mora or Castillo who perceives the text as unreliable, have unconsciously fallen into society's judgments and criminalization of Mora's, of the prostitute's body. Instead of taking the blame herself, Mora judges men ("los grandes ricos del alemanismo"), such as the reporter who interviewed her, who we learn from Agustín's foreword was celebrated Mexican reporter and PRI supporter Agustín Barrios Gómez, through her silence (Agustín 8). Barrios Gómez is left nameless but it is important to note that Barrios Gómez, who was very well-known in Mexico City for his society column "Ensalada Popof" in *Novedades*, was also a ranking member of the PRI, Mexican ambassador to Canada in the José López Portillo presidency (1976-1982). After the student massacre in Tlatelolco of 1968, Barrios Gómez defended President Gustavo Díaz

Ordaz for his military action against the students. In a Youtube video titled “Periodistas mercenarios y vendidos de México,” Barrios Gómez is captured on television commenting on the necessity of strong action against the student movement (MX sin Mercenarios). In 1972, it would not have been wise for Mora to name the reporter who bribed her to tell a fictitious story of a woman disciplined in Lecumberri and Santa Martha prisons to change her ways. In her narrative, instead, Mora will highlight her particular experience, and her negative view of this man.<sup>19</sup> Thus readers who pay attention to the last line and become her accomplices, can look back at the novel and follow how the author sees her life and prostitution, taking back what has been taken from her, and substituting the master historical narrative with her own.

This way, with her narrative, Mora has made Mexico D.F. and its history from the 1930s to the 1950s her own. Mexico City is a place where she lives and in it the unsympathetic group of people she characterizes as “limpia” simply serve to cloud the narrative. Ending the novel in this way, with this ending that exposes her *transa*, indicates that, for those who follow the text as truth, Mora’s truth, she has the final word. She narrates what she knows, what she thinks, and what she knows is true and was not allowed to express in the interview. Her body is not defiled and her final escarmiento is nullified. Readers, “la gente,” will realize “que dejé de existir,” and mothers will not use her as an example for their children, since, she declares, with reference to taking her own life, “*No, no lo voy a hacer*” (A. Mora 120). The “oficio,” rather than overtaking her, becomes her own.

---

<sup>19</sup> Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlateloclo: Testimonios de historia oral* was published in 1971. Poniatowska and Mora wrote two urban street testimonios that challenged the false morals of the PRI and the ruling “gordos” in Mexico.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Aborting the Nation: Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado Amor*

*[...] es mío todo lo que he pensado y leído y escuchado y visto y vivido, sin importar si lo hice yo o lo hicieron otros, si sucedió ahora o hace quinientos años, en mi país o en cualquier otro.*

- Sara Sefchovich *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* (24)

*Debemos asumir posiciones críticas frente a la literatura, aunque sea hecha por mujeres. Esto es hoy lo más necesario e importante para la causa de las mujeres.*

- Sara Sefchovich *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* (306)

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I highlight Antonia Mora's *Del oficio* as the novel that begins what I will call the tradition of the Mexicana novel of prostitution. In that chapter, I also argue that Mora's novel is the first of this genre in which the author uses testimonial writing in her fictional autobiography to write herself and the story of her life in the "oficio," rather than having a male voice or an outside narrator speak for the protagonist. Finally, I contribute to the debate concerning the novel's end by reading this text as one that not only portrays an accurate account of Mora's life as she sees it but that also shows how Mora uses her writing as a way to allow the reader to witness her account and become her active accomplice and ally through the trials she endures while working in "la vida." Mora's testimonial novel depicting mid-twentieth century street life in Mexico City and published in 1972 during the height of PRI dominance after the massacre of students in Tlatelolco should be read as a poor working-class woman's voice against the post-World War II Mexican industrial recovery during the Miguel Alemán

presidency and the debate over the condition of woman in Mexico through Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) and Rosario Castellanos's "Malinche" (1972). Moreover, it is significant that writer José Agustín in his foreword to the 2000 edition of *Del oficio*, names repressive historical figures in Mora's testimonial novel such as television and radio personality and PRI supporter Agustín Barrios Gómez. In sum, Mora offers another view of repression and violence on Mexico City streets as a figure of resistance against the predation of wealthy males and *políticos* on a working woman. Mora's *Del oficio*, though unacknowledged as a unique voice in Latin American women's literature of the twentieth century, is as political as Domitila Barrios de Chungara's and Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonios*. From a Mexican perspective, Antonia Mora is a link with the next generation of feminist writers.

The second novel that I analyze is *Demasiado amor* (1990) by Mexican socio-critic, historian, and best-selling novelist Sara Sefchovich (born in 1949). This chapter considers *Demasiado amor* in relation to the literature of the 1980s, examines the place it holds among Sefchovich's other works, and also situates the text within the tradition of the Mexicana novel of prostitution. Similar to Mora's novel, *Demasiado amor* is narrated by the female protagonist, leaving her in control of the narrative and the construction of the image of prostitution depicted in the novel. Besides this novel, Sefchovich has written an extensive body of work that includes two other works of fiction, *La señora de los sueños* (1993) and *Vivir la vida* (2000), as well as several critical studies such as a two-volume anthology entitled *Mujeres en el espejo, Antología de narradoras latinoamericanas del siglo XX* (Vol. 1, 1983 and Vol. 2, 1985); a sociological reading of Mexican literature entitled *México: país de ideas, país de novelas* (1989); and, most recently, she published a compilation of fragments from her writing entitled *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* (2011). She also penned a vast historical study called *La suerte de la consorte. Las*

*esposas de los gobernantes de México: historia de un olvido y relato de un fracaso* (2011).

Sefchovich completed a Master's degree in Sociology and a Doctorate in History at the National Autonomous University in Mexico. For over three decades she has been a researcher at this same university. She is also a public<sup>20</sup> intellectual who has worked as a weekly columnist for the Mexican newspaper *El Universal* for over fifteen years.

In her *México: país de ideas, país de novelas*, Sefchovich explains her view of the literary and historical context of the decade preceding *Demasiado amor*. Since the latter text was published in 1990, the works that immediately precede her novel emerged in the 1980s, when Mexico was in the midst of an economic crisis; one example of a novel of this period is *Arráncame la vida* (1985) by Angeles Mastretta. According to Sefchovich, rather than focusing on the economic crisis, these novels sought to provide a means of escape and entertainment.<sup>21</sup> In a harsh critique of these works, Sefchovich opines that they lack textual complexity and are formed by a simple formula that combines sex, love, political gossip, and an official view of history with very few characters (*México* 227). However, because of their popularity and the success they have had in the market, these novels have become “literatura democrática, es decir, la que rompe con el elitismo de la cultura, acercándose a las masas y terminando así por cumplir una importante función política” (Sefchovich, *México* 227-28). She signals that this type of literature portrays life as the reader wishes it were. Yet,

---

<sup>20</sup> In an interview, Sefchovich refers to herself as a “mujer pública” and explains that

En el español de México, una mujer pública es una prostituta. A las feministas y a mí en particular nos gusta jugar con el término a propósito. Yo siempre digo que soy una mujer pública y lo soy en los dos sentidos: en el sentido norteamericano de alguien que participa de la cosa pública, pero juego también con la idea de la prostituta porque justamente creo que hay que reivindicar ese nombre. Yo juego con eso pero hay gente que no. (Holcombe 107)

<sup>21</sup> Excluding Mastretta, Sefchovich does not name any other female novelists whose works embody these characteristics.

[...] *Arráncame la vida* es una propuesta narcisista: la mujer es siempre la más bella, la más inteligente, la más rica, la más poderosa. Se divierte sin culpa, se libra de sus responsabilidades sin remordimiento y nunca sufre de verdad, y por si fuera poco un final feliz le augura el mejor de los futuros. Se trata de un personaje que, vestido de mujer, realiza el sueño de todos los clasemedios de hoy: la riqueza, el poder y la libre sexualidad. La novela resuelve además la contradicción en que se mueve la cultura del día: la de vivir en una época y en un lugar y pensar como en otro. (Sefchovich, *México* 228-229)

Although Sefchovich's novel appears to employ many of the plot devices that the author criticizes, *Demasiado amor* in fact attempts a dramatic departure from Sefchovich's own definition of this literature in many ways, which will be analyzed later in the chapter.

*Demasiado amor* tells of two single, middle-class sisters who have saved enough money for one of them to leave for Italy with the intent of establishing a small guesthouse so that they may re-locate there. In order to achieve this goal, the protagonist of the novel, Beatriz, begins—first accidentally then purposefully—a life of prostitution in order to gather money for this venture. She soon finds work as a prostitute to be a more enjoyable way of making money for her sister than bringing home extra work from her dull office job.

As mentioned previously, with *Demasiado amor* Sefchovich, like Mora before her, writes from the perspective of the protagonist. Yet, this story is not a testimonial narrative nor is it a novel of the urban poor in the central core of Mexico City like *Del oficio*. Mora's protagonist, a working prostitute eventually ends up in prison; this is the narrative of what may occur to a poor woman in *el oficio*. Instead, Sefchovich focuses on an office worker from the lower middle class

who finds herself engaged in prostitution through meetings in a well-known chain of restaurants, Vips. In tandem, these novels reveal the necessity of sex work for economic survival for young women. Unlike *Del oficio*, *Demasiado amor* is stylistically complex; the novel alternates between a series of diary entries written in the second person singular and directed at an unnamed male love interest and letters that protagonist Beatriz writes to her sister detailing her life in Mexico and asking for information about her sister's life in Italy. Beatriz's sister's letters are noted in the text because of their absence; they are present only through references to them that Beatriz makes as she writes to her sister. In these letters, Beatriz is often unwilling to share details of her romantic relationship. Because of this reluctance, her letters are incomplete, and leave out any discussion of her lover to whom she refers as "la vida" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 69). In this way, Beatriz only shares snippets of her love affair after she has processed the events that have occurred in the relationship and has decided how to articulate their meaning in her life.

In terms of her diary entries, rather than dealing with spoken interactions that routinely characterize a relationship, they are saturated with physical encounters as well as descriptions of and lists related to Mexico. Because of their repetitive, senseless nature, these lists read like chants that lose all meaning. They lack any mention of her quotidian life, her sister, and her work as a prostitute. Any conversations included in this portion of the novel are one-sided in the sense that when Beatriz asks her lover a question he provides answers that seem irrelevant; the only things they have in common are their love and their travels through Mexico. This paucity in terms of true communication presents a sharp contrast to the excess that exists in terms of the consumption of experiences and the sexual encounters in the novel. Other characters' voices are generally absent; apart from being absent in the form of conversations, Beatriz's sister and her

lover are seldom quoted directly. This lack of expression from other characters ensures that Beatriz's story remains her own.

The novel begins by tying the development of Beatriz's relationship to the development and exploration of her love for Mexico. The first line of the novel reads "Por tu culpa empecé a querer a este país" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 11). With the use of this phrase, Sefchovich frames her novel within popular formulas. For instance, the title, *Demasiado amor* evokes Mexican melodramas repeated in songs, film, and television. And the first line of her novel is also a reference to similar phrases in songs of love gone wrong, such as "por tu culpa, por tu culpa" in the *ranchera* "Puñalada trapera" or in a similar vein the ever popular *ranchera* "Por tu maldito amor." Thus, the traditional Mexican romance narrative of female-male love becomes psychologically complex from the point of view of Beatriz; in closing her story she tells/writes that she has offered "mi historia de amor." This first line of the novel also creates a parallel between the protagonist's love for her country and the love of a man. In her article "(Un)romancing Mexico: New Sexual Landscapes in Sara Sefchovich's *Demasiado Amor*," Felicia Fahey draws from Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* and explains that the text makes use of the "most powerful trope in romantic narratives, metaphorical triangulation, or the process by which the amorous identity of the couple is sedimented in space" (110). Along with her love for the unnamed man, the country becomes her sustenance, the "país nuestro de cada día" as she calls Mexico, echoing the Lord's Prayer (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 11). In the journey that Beatriz and the man undertake she becomes his shadow as they explore the country, since she follows his every whim. He becomes her life, like the "pan" that she replaces with her "país." The author often uses the reflexive form of verbs to describe what the unnamed man does and these actions become Beatriz's activities as well. The reader also follows the man's whims



through her words and her elevation of him, “Porque tú me llevaste y me trajiste, me subiste y me bajaste por veredas y caminos, por pueblos y ciudades” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 11). What he experiences, he wants to experience repeatedly; he explores, seemingly, every manifestation of an activity, object or place to the point of exhaustion, an exhaustion that impacts the narrator as well as the reader. “Over and over again in these chapters, the language of consumption confuses itself with the language of love, as if the only way Beatriz and her lover find to express their love for each other is through a checklist of tourist sites and the accrual of tourist objects” (Castillo 147). For Beatriz, the souvenirs she has amassed become a physical manifestation of their love. According to Debra Castillo in her chapter “Reading Women: Sefchovich,” through this excessive consumption, Sefchovich is offering a strong criticism of “middle class enslavement to objects” by saying that these objects make women complacent with their traditional roles (150). Through the acquisition of these objects Beatriz is also kept content in the relationship by gaining material possessions in place of emotional satisfaction.

The book begins with the commonplace of the lover’s lives exploring themselves and Mexico together and then, after the inclusion of the first letter that Beatriz writes to her sister, their first meeting is inserted. The timing of the novel moves in both a linear and circular way with the narration moving forward, going back in time, and also repeating experiences more than once, a duplication that mirrors the excess and repetition of the activities in which Beatriz and her lover engage. The second chapter, which details the first meeting between Beatriz and her love interest, begins with Beatriz describing the state of her body: “Veintiséis años y setenta y dos kilos tenía yo aquella noche de viernes [...]” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 16). The local Vips<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> The restaurant chain’s webpage details the early history of the establishment as follows: “Bajo el concepto de VIP “very important person” nació Vips en 1964 en Lomas de Sotelo, pensado por los dueños de Aurrera para dar servicio a su clientela y ofrecerles un lugar agradable para comer, antes o después de hacer sus compras”

restaurant, we later learn, has become her space, a place where she is seen but in which she also roams “más para echar yo una ojeada a los parroquianos que para que me vieran” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 16). Her lover defies the traditions of her space as he sits alone at the bar “sin leer ni mirar ni comer ni nada” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 16). He ignores Beatriz and this rejection draws her to him like a magnet that inevitably follows his every move: “Y de repente, tú te paraste y yo me paré, tú caminaste hacia la caja y yo caminé detrás de ti y te formaste en la cola y yo me formé atrás de ti, como advertencia de lo que sería mi vida pero que entonces no supe ver” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 17). However, upon asking her for her check, to pay for what she has consumed, he looks at her and truly sees her, and at this point she becomes a woman that he acknowledges, “[...] por fin mirada por ti. Y todo el mundo me empezó a dar vueltas a mí, la experta en hombres, la que no se toma nada en serio, la que se ríe de todo, la soñadora, la ilusa” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 17). This look changes her identity and makes her his mirror-image from Friday to Sunday when he would “volv[er] por mí con tu silencio, con tu mirada” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 25). Through using non-verbal communication the two characters initially speak minimally, and the relationship instead begins with him taking over her space, just as he has taken over her agency.

Sefchovich uses this particular portion of the novel to critique cultural paradigms of the woman blindly following her man, present in melodramas<sup>23</sup> of the Golden Age of Mexican

---

(“Historia”). Later in the novel these “very important” people also consume Beatriz, with the restaurant manager complicit in what the clientele is being offered.

<sup>23</sup> In her work *Latin American Melodrama: Passion, Pathos and Entertainment*, Darlene J. Sadlier defines melodrama as follows:

[...] *melodrama* derives from the Greek *melos* or “music,” and it originally was used to designate early nineteenth-century stage productions in which the drama was interspersed with musical numbers and backed with an orchestral accompaniment that heightened emotional climaxes. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, melodrama had become associated less with music than with

Cinema. Specifically, Beatriz's decision to mirror the actions of the unnamed man in the novel is reminiscent of the final scene in Emilio "El Indio" Fernández's 1946 film, *Enamorada*. In this film, an upper class, strong and willful woman, Beatriz Peñafiel (María Félix), leaves her family and her fiancé to follow the General José Juan Reyes (Pedro Armendáriz). Upon making the decision to leave her fiancé, Peñafiel rips a string of pearls off her neck and clothes herself with a *rebozo*. This way she stops being a "gente decente" and instead becomes one of the "mujerzuelas," as she referred to them in the film, or *soldaderas* that she had previously scorned (*Enamorada*). Implicitly she also adapts General José Juan's perspective on them. He is quoted as saying: "Yo sí las conozco, son humildes y abnegadas y saben trabajar, sufrir y morir sin esperar nada, nada más del cariño del hombre que quieren" (*Enamorada*). In this quote, José Juan expresses a deep understanding of these women, stripping them of political agency. The film ends with Peñafiel, proudly walking behind her general on foot, while he rides his horse. In *Demasiado amor*, Beatriz also follows her lover and enters Mexican history behind him.

The novel continues when Beatriz hears her lover's voice for the second time, after a long period of silence, he uses it in excess. It is immediately clear that he speaks with the intent of making her listen but not respond: "Oí tu voz por primera vez un día en el camino. Sin más, en esa carrera infinita que cruza todo el país hasta la frontera, te soltaste a hablar [...] Hablaste todo el tiempo [...]" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 30). He names everything but, although she hears, she does not truly listen. In this way, Beatriz begins to assert her independence from this man

---

plots featuring spectacular action, improbable twists of fate, intense expressions of emotion, last minute rescues, and vivid conflicts between bad and virtuous characters. Melodramas of this sort typically involved the persecution of the innocent by the powerful, but their endings were usually happy, illustrating the triumph of good-heartedness over every sort of social or moral evil. Whether conservative or leftist in their political implications, they were vehicles for what literary theorist Peter Brooks describes as the "moral occult" (5). (2)

through her writing. In her diary, she lists what he intends for her to notice and then she establishes her alternative view of space that is blatantly superficial and focused on consumerism, excluding the history he has painstakingly narrated:

Me llevaste a San Miguel de Allende donde decías que era la ruta de la Independencia pero yo sólo veía azulejos. Me llevaste a Oaxaca donde hablaste de Juárez el héroe y de Díaz el dictador, pero para mí era sólo un lugar lleno de huipiles y animales de madera pintada. Me llevaste a Orizaba y a Córdoba para contarme de Maximiliano pero yo sólo vi la neblina y los mariscos. Me llevaste a Michoacán por aquello de Cárdenas pero yo sólo me acuerdo de las guitarras y el cobre. Me llevaste a San Luis Potosí a ver un ayuntamiento en manos de la oposición pero yo sólo vi las enchiladas rojas y el agua de Lourdes. Me llevaste a Juchitán por lo mismo pero yo sólo vi mujeres gordas y fuertes que trabajaban sin parar. (34)

Although he seeks to impose his views of history on her and he names people, places, and things for her, she finds no meaning in the stories he narrates full of male, masculine heroics. The names and places are Mexican history in miniature from Independence to the rise of modern Mexico with the mention of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) of the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, forerunner to the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional. In the end, what she chooses to remember is all her own focusing on the present, what Mexico has become in the 1980s. And, although Beatriz fails to note their significance, Sefchovich highlights the female bodies being exploited in the production of the objects that Beatriz is being sold as a tourist.

In commenting further on the conversation with her lover, sometimes Beatriz states that she believes everything he says: “Y yo te creí, todo te creí” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 85). Yet, although she had let herself be controlled physically in the past through mirroring her lover’s every move, in the re-creation of this story she is in control. Beatriz demonstrates this control through the freedom she feels to give the impression that she is writing on a whim, for example when she contradicts herself, saying she has forgotten everything that happened with him, and then goes back and says she remembers everything (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 28, 42). These inconsistencies are intentional markers of freedom in her writing, showing how in the end she chooses what she remembers and chooses what she forgets as well. This way, the reader is left with only Beatriz’s interpretations of conversations, events, and places.<sup>24</sup>

Beatriz covers the rest of the week for the reader through her letters to her sister. Initially Beatriz is lonely and hopes what her sister shares with her will fill this void. In asking her sister to wet her bathing suit with ocean water and spread Italian sand all over it Beatriz hopes she will somehow experience these things and physically feel what her sister feels, even across the ocean. However, through this inability to transfer experiences between Italy and Mexico, Sefchovich emphasizes the difference between the situation of women in different countries. She also shows that, for Beatriz, being the woman left behind is a kind of hell, highlighting the dramatic

---

<sup>24</sup> Nuala Finnegan in her *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico Since 1980*, in this particular section of the text sees

[...] a rather problematic enactment of dual histories, suggesting an opposition between history and *herstory*, a concept central to so much feminist research. In this case it is problematic because it simply reinforces the binary positions so often assigned to male and female: hers is the frivolous sensual memory while his is the logical, rational route of history and progress. Hers is the memory of objects and things and serves as a reminder of how she is deeply immersed in the economy of her country, informally as a prostitute and formally as a tourist. Her refusal (‘pero yo sólo vi’) however, to countenance his view constitutes an interesting rejection of official histories and a resolute instatement of an alternative vision. (48-49)

inequality that exists between women from one country to the next, and emphasizing the need for a greater solidarity and concern across borders. By constantly reminding her sister of her need to join her and using language that brings to mind an inferno, Beatriz pleads with her sister to chose a reasonably sized guesthouse so that she can be with her sooner: “Si el plan aumenta de precio, estoy condenada a quedarme aquí demasiado tiempo hasta juntar lo que falta. Acuérdate de eso y ten piedad de mí”(Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 29). Eventually this extreme loneliness is what leads Beatriz to travel to the Vips and find men to combat her solitude. Irma M. López in “‘The Will to Be’: Mexican Women Novelists from the Late 1960s to the 1990s” signals *Demasiado amor* as part of the narrative of the 90s with stories that

[...] highlight the absence of relational models that in different circumstances or moments of growth might inspire women as friends to find alternative forms of self and mutual fulfillment. The lack of figures that represent new kinds of relationships prompts inquiry, and, in the case of the female protagonists of the aforementioned texts, stimulates the desire for individualization and autonomy that these women perceive in men. In some ways, the masculine figures of these plots represent a point of reference for confidence and autonomy, as well as – paradoxically – reveal paternalistic or irresponsible attitudes which lead to self-reflection and the search for self-generated solutions. (39)

As a result of this inquiry, on February 28, seven months exactly after her sister’s departure, Beatriz shares the story with her sister of how she met her weekend lover. With the presentation of this story, the reader can connect this chapter with the earlier personal account narrated in the journal. The lapse in time is explained by Beatriz’s need to process the relationship in writing before sharing it with her sister: “Lo que pasó es que me sucedió algo

tremendo, muy fuerte, tanto que me cuesta trabajo contarlo” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 68). For her sister, Beatriz again describes the sensory experience of being with her lover, tells of the general lack of words exchanged between them, and states that he has become her life: “Vivo para los viernes, los demás días sólo transcurren y no me interesan. Y hasta me olvidé de escribirte a ti, hermana querida, perdóname” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 68). This love surpasses all other personal relationships, even that with her sister.

However, as this love affair develops, Beatriz’s life working as a prostitute also evolves. Beatriz falls into prostitution accidentally, much like falling into the romance that she describes in the first line of the novel as being “tu culpa,” or her lover’s fault. The first time that a man that she takes home unmistakably pays Beatriz for the act of having sex she feels indignant, cries, and later sees justice in being paid since time with this man meant time away from the work she had taken home from the office. She first has sex with the clear intent of receiving payment when she accidentally sends her sister all of her funds and is left with no money for rent. This line of work continues as her sister’s demands for money for the guesthouse increase.<sup>25</sup> Her own feelings in regard to her profession oscillate between feeling like her work is difficult or on other occasions feeling that it is relatively simple. She expresses indignation at the assumption some men hold that they can sleep with a woman that they just met for free, perhaps due to personal vanity and without taking into account the work she puts into the act. Other times she feels like she does little for men seeking to impress her, all in exchange for a large monetary reward.

---

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that, the fact that Beatriz is not benefitting financially from all of her hard work, and instead the money is being sent to another country, indicates a strong critique of foreign exploitation of Mexican resources and labor.

Although she typically enjoys her work, this novel differs from Sefchovich's characterization of the novels of the mid-eighties in that the protagonist does indeed feel guilt for her life choices. The judgment of society and family is never far from Beatriz's mind. She dreams that family members reject her and shun her profession. Even her sister writes her a hurtful letter that evokes "el recuerdo de mis padres" and assures her that the guilt she feels over her new profession is warranted (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 93). She also informs Beatriz that her work "tiene un nombre muy claro' y las tres veces [le pone] ese nombre con mayúsculas" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 93). The name that society gives her profession is clear to her and now the knowledge that her sister thinks of her this way as well permeates her psyche. Yet, she will not use that word to refer to herself. She intentionally does not reproduce the word in the text or include it in the rest of the narrative.

Initially this label is left out of the text out of shame for her profession. As she explains to her sister "[...] tengo que reconocer que me llegó muy hondo lo que dices, porque yo misma no sé cómo me fui metiendo en esto. Ni cuenta me di, simplemente pasó y como era una forma fácil y agradable de ganar dinero, pues seguí" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 94). Her shame and guilt is such that she promises her sister that she will no longer go to the Vips, she will no longer engage in her profession. Following this decision, Beatriz's diary entries to her lover enumerate religious places they have visited and experiences they lived together, indicating a time of penance and sacrifice. Her next letter to her sister is dated two months later, with an explanation for this period of silence.

Beatriz indicates that she went through a period of depression and alternated between leaving the profession and returning to it, since she felt unhappy either way. When a man offends her by referring to her job by using that "nombre tan claro" she once again feels the pain and



anger that she felt at her sister's offensive letter (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 101). Instead of letting every person who offends her remind her of her sister, thus making their opinions of her gain in power because of the love Beatriz feels for her sister, Beatriz decides to group her sister and that man into the same category, thus devaluing the love she feels for her sister. "Creo que por eso te escribo hoy, para ponerlos juntos a ti y a ese hombre y a todas las gentes 'buenas' y 'decentes' que aprovechan lo que les conviene de las mujeres como yo y después salen con sus reproches y sus insultos" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 101). By grouping them together, her sister becomes like one more person who uses her for a service; unfortunately, in this case her sister becomes, in a way, Beatriz's madam. However, to her this manner of regarding the situation makes it less personal and this way the pain she feels over her sister's betrayal and also her own guilt may be lessened. Like a boss with whom she only discusses business, Beatriz explains to her sister how she will make up the money lost on her weekends off: "Así espero compensarte por los días que estoy con mi señor de los viernes del que no quiero hablar, que no me paga y al que no voy a dejar jamás" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 109). In the rest of the narrative, in what has now become an act of rebellion, she refers to sexual acts that she performs in detail. In the end she gives the impression that it is simply the outside imposition of a negative label that she repudiates however, the reader is left to recall the guilt that Beatriz expressed and the distance from her sister that happens because of that guilt.

Through including Beatriz's sister's reaction to her line of work and Beatriz's successive distancing from "las gentes 'buenas' y 'decentes.'" Sefchovich points to the fact that women may also oppress other women and that women do not necessarily possess positive qualities by virtue of being women. In *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* Sefchovich signals her disagreement with the concept of "mujerismo," which assigns inherent positive qualities to women because of their

gender: “Y en efecto, vemos que las mujeres están peleando una contra otra y contra los hombres por puestos y prebendas y reconocimientos y que pueden ser tan ambiciosas, agresivas, duras, racionales y frías como cualquier hombre [...]” (299-300). She also positions herself in a larger literary debate also addressed by her predecessors, which discusses the need for a distinction between male and female literature, and which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The novel also signals the outside imposition of shame, guilt and punishment on Beatriz when she goes out of societal bounds through her work as a prostitute. During the timeframe of the novel, there is no established space for her to make choices in terms of reproduction. Initially, in order to obtain birth control pills Beatriz asks a woman at the pharmacy for them. When she has a sexual medical problem, she tries to find a female doctor to attend her, but she only finds men in the profession: “¡Qué cosa más desagradable!” she complains (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 105). In order to obtain the care she needs from a society that shuns her profession, she must lie and fabricate a story about how she is married in order to be given an alternative to birth control pills. However, she does not permit herself to be limited by the fact that she needs to go to a man to get the care that she needs. Instead, she says she is married because she knows she will not receive the same care if it is found out that she is working as a prostitute. In believing her lie, she feels assured that the doctor provides the best care possible for her. In the end, she fights her own shame concerning the female body by distancing herself from her body parts and referring to self-care as “cuidar la herramienta de trabajo” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 105).

The novel also departs from others of the time in that the protagonist suffers in the novel. Beatriz lives a cycle of exploitation with her sister’s growing demands for money and the manager at Vips wanting physical payment for letting her pick up men at the restaurant. A period

of extreme suffering is brought on by a bout of bad experiences consisting of abuse by a client and the painful experience of having an abortion. The alternative method of birth control that the doctor prescribes fails to work, signaling a lack of understanding in medicine about the needs of the female body. This lack of medical knowledge also leads her to find an unsavory end to her pregnancy with a “medicucho” that overcharges her and exposes her to “burlas and malos tratos” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 148). Through this series of unfortunate events, Beatriz also comes to understand that her suffering encompasses the body and the mind and the attempted mental separation between her body and the discourses she creates for others as well as her “herramienta de trabajo” as she refers to her sexual organs in a detached form, cannot be disconnected from her feelings: “Ya sabes hermana, que a mí no me da por filosofar, ni por insistir en las cosas tristes o feas, pero esta vez te digo que esas lastimaduras no sólo afectan el cuerpo sino también el alma” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 148). In the end Beatriz returns to her original method of birth control that she had obtained from a woman signaling a need to re-connect with body and soul.

In a further attempt to distinguish herself from her predecessors, Sefchovich includes social and economic issues of the time period in both sections of the narrative. In this epistolary portion of the novel, problems occurring in the 80s surface and contribute to Beatriz’s own suffering. For example, in keeping with the more confessional tone of letters to her sister, the problems that Beatriz discusses are mostly related to intimacy and interpersonal relationships; they include the problem of violence against women, the difficulties in obtaining an abortion in Mexico, and Beatriz’s mention of sickness of all kinds including sexually transmitted diseases: “¿Crees que no dan miedo las enfermedades, desde un estornudo o una tos hasta las peores cosas que una sabe que existen?” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 100). The “peores cosas” are obvious

allusion to the AIDS scare in the 80s, with AIDS having been detected in Mexico for the first time in 1983 (Tuñón-Pablos 109).

Through the inclusion of women's rights, healthcare, and reproductive rights, Sefchovich is paralleling Mexican feminism of the 90s.<sup>26</sup> According to Elizabeth Cummins Muñoz in her dissertation, *Writing the Past: Women's Historical Fiction of Greater Mexico*:

While the feminism of the eighties dealt with women's social and economic independence and the psychosocial issues related to interpersonal relationships in patriarchal society, in the nineties the movement took a strong academic turn. The journal *Debate feminista* was founded by Marta Lamas in 1990 to serve as a bridge connecting the theoretical to the political elements of Mexican feminism (Cano 358). Examination of issues of *fem.*, and *Debate feminista* during this period reveal an increased focus on the concept of gender and the centrality of the body to feminist theory. (124)

This way Beatriz's spoken awareness of the connection between her body and her mind, mirrors the new centrality of the body to feminist theory of the 1990s.

As Beatriz grows into her profession, the two sisters become more and more different. In fact, their lives are the inverse of each other. Beatriz points out several times that her sister acts like a wife and mother, whereas she has taken the opposite path. However, they both combat loneliness through their associations with men, with the difference that her sister finds one steady, older partner. Beatriz fills her guesthouse with clients and her sister picks tenants that embody family life. Finally, Beatriz's sister becomes pregnant and keeps her children, in contrast

---

<sup>26</sup> Merging fiction and Mexican feminism, it should be noted that Sefchovich dedicates the first volume of her anthology *Mujeres en el espejo* (1983) to Marta Lamas "la más generosa de las mujeres."

to Beatriz's aforementioned abortion. Beatriz explains all of this in one of her letters: "Tú ya pareces una buena italiana gorda y preocupada por darles de comer a tus gentes y yo aquí preocupada por darles también a mis gentes, pero no precisamente de comer" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 188). Yet, Sefchovich does not follow the typical virgin/whore dichotomy with these two women. Although Beatriz's sister seems like the perfect wife and mother, she still remains unmarried and Mexican society looks down upon this unmarried state. When Beatriz tells her neighbor that she is going to be an aunt "[...] estaba muy sorprendido, ¿a qué horas se casó su hermana?, me preguntaba, ¿con quién?" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 185). With the inclusion of this comment in her letter Beatriz makes a not-so-subtle jab at the sister who so liberally bestows judgment on her.

Also, although Beatriz hints at her desire to marry, she admits that marriage is not for her. "A veces quisiera también tener un hijo. Detenerme y empezar otra cosa. Vivir con el hombre que una quiere y formar un hogar. Yo tengo un hombre al que amo, te diría que con locura, del que tú sabes que nunca hablo. Con él me quisiera casar. Pero creo que eso no sucederá porque ni él dice nada ni yo estoy hecha para esas cosas" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 201). With time she also realizes that her lover's concept of love is different from hers and the turning point in the romance begins. "Pero las cosas se empezaron a poner difíciles" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 190). Her love is a crazy love that she would like to keep until death. "No quisiste empaparnos en tormentas ni dejarnos llevar por huracanes y remolinos hasta el fondo del mar. No quisiste dejarte llevar por la barra en el mar ni pararte bajo un rayo" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 190). In his refusal to take these risks, her lover signals himself as a person who is far more conventional than she. Sefchovich uses this particular scene in the novel to mock the romantic, melodramatic literature of the time. For instance, Beatriz's desire for crazy, irrational love and desires are

reminiscent of the ending of Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), where the female protagonist Tita, consumes matches to join her lover whose "petite mort" became his final death and "En ese momento los cuerpos ardientes de Pedro y Tita empezaron a lanzar brillantes chispas" (247). Although not precisely through lightning, the novel ends with Tita and Pedro's bodies consumed by flames. Sefchovich pokes fun at this absurd ending through Beatriz's exaggerated requests.

As her love story with the man unravels, Beatriz realizes that this country that she had felt held the promise of happiness is no longer perfect. This change in attitude forces this particular section of the novel to face the imperfect country of the 80s that had been idealized through historical inaccuracy. As Nuala Finnegan points out, much of the ugliness that Beatriz begins to notice all around her is tied to modernity

[...] as exemplified in the incidence of corruption, gas leaks, the presence of maquiladoras, and the arrival of refugees in the south. For the first time, the narrative emerges from the frozen static time of its landscape descriptions preserved for touristic consumption, to enter into the chaotic modernity of Mexico in the 1980s. The reference to 'real' elements of Mexico's present enter the text in force. (44)

Sefchovich shows a critique of Mexico/ foreign relations through the inclusion of *maquiladoras*<sup>27</sup> in the text specifically a critique of the exploitative relationship between Mexico and the United States: "Vimos subir dinero a un avión y sacarlo de este país [...] Por el norte

---

<sup>27</sup> Stephen R. Jenner in his "Maquiladoras: Una mirada crítica desde la frontera" explains that "Una maquiladora es una planta manufacturera ubicada en México, que utiliza componentes extranjeros para ensamblarlos en productos terminados para su exportación, en principio, para los Estados Unidos, pero también a otros países" (221).

vimos entrar cajas con televisions y salir personas sin nada en los bolsillos” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 208). Mexican people in the text are often portrayed as working hard and often suffering from poverty and inadequate access to food, healthcare and water: “Vimos a niños que morían de epidemias, atacados por tuberculosis, paludismo y sarampión, por hambre y por deshidratación. Vimos niños con panzas hinchadas de bichos, niños descalzos, niños que pedían limosna y movían la panza, que vendían chicles, cargaban bultos y robaban bolsas” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 209). At one point, the narrators also succumb to different illnesses: “Y entonces pasó que un día nos dolió la garganta, un día tuvimos jaqueca y otro una infección intestinal. Un día fue una hemorragia, otro una caída, el tercero caspa y el cuarto salpullido. Un día nos dio una gripa muy fuerte y otro un cansancio atroz” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 203). Finnegan interprets this portion of the text as

[...] a powerful reminder of the diseased body politic of Mexico in the 1980s. The juxtaposition of middle-class afflictions (sore throat, migraines) and the illnesses that commonly afflict the poor of a country (intestinal infections from poor hygiene, flu, skin diseases or rashes) reminds the reader of the utter collapse of the lines between middle-class and poor during these years. (43)

It should be noted that the poverty level in Mexico increased from 46 percent in 1981 to 60 percent in 1988 (Tuñón Pablos 106-107).

Also, the economic crisis in Mexico caused by the oil scare and later devaluation of the *peso* in 1982, “precipitated a tremendous change in work practices for women, leading to the creation of a body of female consumers eager to read fiction, for the first time in Mexico’s history” (Finnegan 11). Many of the sexual exchanges in the novel begin at the Vips, a place

where culture may also be purchased in the form of books, books like Sara Sefchovich's own novel or that of her literary predecessors. As Norma Vega explains, citing Carlos Monsiváis, the 80s was a decade that,

[...] witnessed the collapse of high and low culture. Seen as a commodity under the logics of postmodernity, culture is now available for anyone who could pay for it: magazines, cultural supplements, soap operas, television, etc... At the cultural level (which includes consumption practices), Mexico was a consuming society, like its Northern neighbor; however, at the social level the uneven implementation of modernization continued to create even greater contradictions between the discourse of postmodernity and social reality. (167)

Beatriz has access to a variety of products and clothing, but she sells them or gives them away in order to save money to send to her sister. For instance, in lieu of buying a gift for a friend: “[...] le llevé una loción que me acababan de dar, con tal de no gastar nada. Te confieso que sentí feo porque me gustaba mucho su olor, pero ni modo” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 110). Furthermore, the implication also exists in the novel that with the oversaturation of culture brought on by modernity, none of this culture is truly internalized. To show just one instance of this problem, Beatriz speaks of movies that she watches with her lover: “Nos dormimos con una película de Pedro Infante, con diez películas de Jorge Negrete, de Arturo de Córdova, de María Félix, Dolores del Río, Libertad Lamarque, Sara García, los Soler. Cuántas películas vimos” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 70). In this instance the names of so many actors are inserted that they lose their true relevance, their names are pulled from the films the two watch and any interest in plot or film analysis becomes irrelevant. Writers, poets, song lyrics and even full quotes from poetry are inserted in Beatriz's writing with no hint of a deeper understanding of the original



cultural production behind the brief reference. These cultural markers may make her feel that she “knows” Mexico better, but in reality show how artificial her relationship with the country truly is. Culturally significant figures, such as the above-mentioned icons of Mexican melodrama, are meaningless for Beatriz.

Her superficial-at-best relationship with the cultural production of the nation leads her to realize that she has somehow become a kind of product for her lover, with him never gaining a deeper understanding of her as an individual: “Fui dos, tres, diez mujeres para ti. Todas las mujeres que tú querías yo las fui [...] Pero tú no te diste cuenta, tú nunca supiste nada de mí” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 220). The ultimate reason for the unraveling of their love, which makes her love turn to hate, is that “Pero sobre todo te odié porque nunca me preguntaste nada de mí” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 224). In the accusatory tone of the protagonist, Sefchovich reveals that there is responsibility on the part of the male protagonist for the end of the relationship.

Returning to the historical context of the novel, Irma M. López explains that:

The loss of social and economic guarantees that were predominant in the period from 1968 to 1984 poses for the average citizen the same problems of frustration and personal importance that women have long been dealing with in the face of patriarchy. The narratives of the 1990s show us that contemporary social conflicts demand self-assessment on the part of both men and women, and reveal as never before each sex’s opportunity to bring about significant changes in both the individual and the shared relational sphere. These fluctuations in roles question absolute claims of power, and the repercussions of those claims, in the life not only of the couple but of society. As a result, although the work of this group of novelists focus is upon the progress made by women, it does not avoid the visions

of men, and thus allows for more open and egalitarian relationships, something that was unthinkable decades earlier. (39-40)

In her novel, Sefchovich signals the need for men to examine the effectiveness of their roles in interpersonal relationships.

With this new change in her and in her awareness, Beatriz realizes that the time for dreams, illusions, and imaginings is coming to an end and that her love affair is quickly becoming plagued by routine:

Pero no podía luchar contra la costumbre. Contra este amor que amenazaba con durar para siempre y por siempre igual. Tuve miedo de no poder preservarlo sin corromperlo, sin aburrirlo, sin saciarlo, sin saturarlo, sin que se volviera insulso, vacío. Tuve miedo de que los cuerpos no pudieran renovar su alegría, miedo de que el sueño no perdurara. (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 229)

Because of this cognizance, Beatriz decides to end her love affair.

Finally she realizes that she is not the heroine of a love story. In a striking allusion to Sefchovich's earlier description of the literature of the time, when Beatriz's sister expresses that she feels entertained by Beatriz's stories which seem like those of a novel and pull her away from her own reality, Beatriz clarifies for her sister that she cannot be a fictional character, and that she does not fit into what she sees as the archetype of the fictional characters of the time: "No, hermanita, yo no podría ser personaje de ficción porque no soy alta ni delgada, no tengo las piernas largas, ni el vientre liso y los pechos pequeños y duros, ni los ojos azules y el cabello rubio y lacio como tienen todas las heroínas de los libros y de las películas" (Sefchovich,

*Demasiado* 230). Beatriz is the antithesis of the typical heroine in a clear allusion to an ideal of beauty adapted from the United States. Instead she is overweight with a short, easily maintained haircut; mestiza; rounded-faced and without a tinge of makeup.

Having established herself as different from typical, idealized fictional characters, she will no longer serve as entertainment for her sister through her letters. Thus she writes one last letter to her sister that she does not date. Although letters and journal entries still remain separate in the novel, which is indicated when Beatriz writes to her sister that she is also sending her a notebook of her reminiscences, stylistically Sefchovich brings the two parallel narratives together for the reader with the intent of merging both of Beatriz's identities in her writing.

In her final letter to her sibling, Beatriz indicates her decision to seclude herself in what has become her own version of a guesthouse, a place of endless orgies where her guests enter and leave at will and she services all of them, focused on their pleasure. She ends her love affair by bringing her lover to this place and making prostitution the reason for the end to their affair. Through this series of events, Sefchovich critiques the narrow-mindedness of the male protagonist who sees Beatriz unable to perform two roles at the same time, that of being a prostitute and simultaneously existing in a romantic relationship. However, although Beatriz claims that she is at peace with her choice of leaving her lover, this decision is not one with which Sefchovich ultimately signals prostitution as empowering. Instead, the decision to stay in the profession is guided by defeat: "Hoy ha terminado mi historia de amor y con ella todo el sentido de mi vida. En adelante voy a desaparecer, a perderme en las sombras, a dejarme llevar por los amores fáciles, gozosos, que son los únicos que no hacen daño, que no lastiman" (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 240). It is only because of this loss of love that she makes the choice to fully dedicate her life to prostitution.

With this resolve being lost “en las sombras” the idea Sefchovich posits is that the “final feliz” in the novel would have meant a continued struggle through daily routines, difficulties and the ugly parts of the romance as well as the country. Instead of continuing Beatriz has loved the illusion too much, and thus left the truth behind: “Y así como en el séptimo día Dios descansó, orgulloso como estaba de su creación, así en el séptimo año yo decidí descansar de ti, orgullosa como estaba de nuestro amor” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 238). She states that she ends her romance while her love is still ideal in her mind. Yet, Sefchovich makes the reader aware that the perfection in the romance is gone anyway and thus, rather than ending the story on a note of love, the author ends it as a story of falling out of love. For Fahey, “Rather than plot a happy ending where the woman consents to birthing the nation, Sefchovich plots a rejection of the heterosexual institutions of marriage and mothering, and an ultimate escape from these patriarchal traditions” (*The Will* 109). However, I would argue that this text instead rejects the traditional model of a woman birthing the nation by complicating this narrative by ultimately presenting Beatriz as a non-traditional mother. Instead of an outright rejection of mothering, this text challenges traditional archetypes and ultimately rejects the view of prostitution as an escapist fantasy.

In her new role, Beatriz has become more of an object than a person, molding herself to the needs of her clients, left to be used at their will. The text replicates the same passive language that she uses when describing the beginning of her relationship with her lover, only this time she is a woman-object for multiple men: “Y aquí estoy yo, dispuesta siempre. Con algunos es el cuerpo lo que doy, con otros el oído. Algunos quieren caricias mías, a otros los dejo hacer. Mientras unos se afanan haciéndome alguna cosas, otros me hablan, me miran, me tocan” (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 237). Furthermore, as Norma Vega points out

By the end of the narrative, what was the private realm of the female is converted into a mythical space where the impossibility of historical praxis and the reification of love lead the protagonist to live a frivolous and superficial present eliminating all forms of conflict and having no future projections. (183)

With this chapter the final differences distinguishing Sefchovich's novel from those of the mid-eighties is marked. The novel does not have a happy ending nor does it signal a promising future for the protagonist. Instead the happiness Beatriz claims she experienced rings false.

In what will be her life from that point on, although she seems to be isolated from society, the walls of her apartment are open making her actions public. This contrast between isolation and openness becomes a commentary that the way many people run their homes and maintain the intimacy of their daily lives, has wide-reaching repercussions on the outside, as exemplified in Audre Lorde's notion of the "personal is political."<sup>28</sup> As Sefchovich stated in *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* "[...] en la vida privada, esa que se lleva a cabo dentro del hogar y la familia, es donde se define lo que somos"(31).

This novel does not have the tone of a cautionary tale or warning for women who step out of bounds. There is also no punishment at the end for the protagonist meant as a lesson of what may befall women who break established norms, as we see in Gamboa's *Santa*. Instead, the tone is one of class-based female solidarity and advice. In the end, Beatriz leaves behind for her niece what the reader now realizes is a notebook of memories, rather than texts actually intended for

---

<sup>28</sup> This particular phrase is significant for Sefchovich. In *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* Sefchovich fondly recalls her first encounter and identification with feminism: "Recuerdo con emoción el principio, cuando conocí a las feministas: las noches en que no podía dormir por la excitación de las nuevas ideas, de las conversaciones, de conocer a las mujeres que iban a las reuniones, de participar en los pequeños grupos y vivir en la piel aquello de que 'lo personal es político'"(22).

her male lover. As her niece's godmother, a role that holds more weight than that of an aunt, she is her niece's second, spiritual mother. With her withdrawal from the novel and her final silence Beatriz also signals her ultimate defeat that came from loving too much because of a dream. In the notebook she writes:

Te mando un cuaderno con mis recuerdos, los del hombre amado y los del país amado. El amor por los dos fue lo mismo, uno solo. Enséñaselo a mi sobrina, a mi ahijada. Dile que su tía Beatriz se lo dejó para que sepa que existe el amor y que existen los sueños. Dile que se puede amar mucho. Dile que hasta es posible amar demasiado, con demasiado amor. (Sefchovich, *Demasiado* 240-41)

With the journal's move from being a set of personal musings to being intended for somebody else the meaning shifts. The significance is doubly altered by Beatriz's intending one meaning for her niece, the aforementioned warning against loving too much and forsaking everything, including one's individuality for a self-created romance. Sefchovich's work also goes against the traditional plot of romance, presented in novels such as *Como agua para chocolate*. In this novel, as previously mentioned, the main character dies for love and leaves a recipe book behind "[...] que narra en cada una de sus recetas esta historia de amor enterrada" (247). The second meaning is that intended for the reader by Sefchovich, whose protagonist has chosen a self-imposed exile from any sort of significant relationship under the guise that this will make her happy. With this plot twist, Sefchovich includes another critique of her predecessors and indicates that what she views as the "propuesta narcisista" of the novels prior to hers should not be the ultimate goal: "Aside from brief moments of lucidity, the text ends with a nihilistic approach to life. After having suffered from 'excess love' as she commonly stated, Beatriz decides to live her life frivolously, engaging only in superficial relationships and converting her apartment into a

paradise on earth, deifying passion and love and reifying images of herself as a love goddess” (Vega 196). This ending of Beatriz as a prostitute/ goddess is simply an escapist male and female fantasy. A further intention behind the ending will be discussed later in the chapter.

It is interesting to note that regardless of Sefchovich’s own rejection of the previously noted aspects of her immediate literary precursors, her own work has become defined as a part of the wider *boom femenino*. This term refers to the sudden increase in publishing by Latin American female writers beginning in the 1970s (Finnegan and Lavery 1). In its Mexican manifestation, the boom femenino is often associated with novels such as Ángeles Mastretta’s *Arráncame la vida* (1985) and Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* (1989). The *boom femenino* in Mexico and beyond, even for authors such as Mastretta whose names are tied with this literature, “frequently carries derogatory connotations and it is invariably linked to ‘commercialism,’ the concept of the ‘best-seller’ and by inference, ‘light-writing’” (Finnegan and Lavery 4). Furthermore, many of these writers, Sefchovich among them, are critical of and question the notion of “literatura femenina” in general. In *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* Sefchovich reflects upon why literature by women should not be read differently from literature by men.

Exigimos a la literatura de las mujeres aquello que tenemos derecho a exigirle, y que es lo que la crítica literaria tiene que buscar: la riqueza del texto, la ampliación de las dimensiones de la escritura, el uso cada vez mejor de las técnicas, el compromiso estético e ideológico. Como crítica literaria a todo esto que pedimos debe agregarse la posibilidad de decirlo en voz alta, sin represalias cuando se trate de demostrar que algunos escritos no lo cumplen. (305)

However, while authors such as Mastretta have commented on the problems with the categorization of “literatura femenina” and have rejected the *boom femenino* specifically because of these connotations, Sefchovich is unique in that she makes her own previously unnoticed attempt to respond to and engage aspects of what she has categorized as the writing after the mid-eighties rather than being completely dismissive of this literature. She does so first critically in her *México: país de ideas, país de novelas* and later through her works of fiction.

In addition to incorporating these critical reflections in her work, it is important to note, however, as Debra Castillo points out, with reference to her first two bestselling novels “[...] Sefchovich has cannily tapped into an audience that reads widely but without high cultural pretensions: what she calls the nonacademic reader or *lectora común* [common reader] who does not enter into the Mexican critical discourse: “[S]e les considera poca cosa” (140-41). This book, apart from containing elements that attract critical attention is also meant for the middle-class woman. So Sefchovich focuses on what it could be saying about and to the middle-class woman. It should also be noted that, although Sefchovich rejects the aforementioned thematic tendencies that she perceives in her predecessors, with her novel also gaining huge popularity, she does not reject the democratization of culture. “In a postmodern pose, she refutes elitist literary practices by blurring the boundaries between art and life and by producing cultural representations that horizontally cross the social field” (Fahey, *The Will* 77). Sefchovich makes literature accessible and relatable to multiple audiences.

I will end this chapter with a brief analysis of *Vivir la vida*, Sara Sefchovich’s most recent novel, focusing on the striking similarities it presents with *Demasiado amor* since it clarifies some of the questions left by the earlier text. This text narrates the story life of Susana, marking the beginning of life with a marriage that is never consummated along with days of



refusing to take off her wedding dress as she waits for her husband to initiate her into womanhood. This choice is due to the firm belief that bad luck will befall her if she removes her wedding dress herself. Yet, she soon realizes:

Me di cuenta de que la mala suerte que a toda cosa quería evitar era precisamente lo que ya me estaba sucediendo, de modo que con las tijeras de la cocina yo misma me hice mujer: corté el vestido de novia, me lo arranqué de encima a tirones, me vestí con una falda y una blusa, tomé el dinero que Paco le había dejado a la portera y las llaves que estaban colgadas en un gancho atrás de la puerta y me fui. (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 28-29)

With this decision to leave her husband behind, as she lives “la vida” the seeming pinnacle of her existence is an odd friendship/partnership formed with a homosexual man:

Por las tardes cuando salíamos a caminar, éramos un grupo extraño: un hombre maduro que por fin se había dejado blanco el escaso cabello y que lucía con orgullo su prominente estómago [...]; una mujer joven con el largo cabello rojo, metida en enormes vestidos de algodón pintado y una jauría de perros que le ladraban a cualquier mortal pero que jugaban alegres entre sí. (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 139)

This strange happiness occurs along with horrible tragedies that befall her such as a violent rape almost immediately after her decision to become independent from her first husband as well as a later misdiagnosis and treatment for breast cancer. With this novel, Sefchovich parallels

*Demasiado amor* in that her character truly suffers in life. Susana, takes a completely different

path from Beatriz, since Beatriz falls into prostitution accidentally, and yet Susana also stumbles from one adventure to another, with her life seemingly falling out of her control.

Yet, this particular novel is strikingly similar to *Demasiado amor* in its ending. The novel nears its conclusion as the protagonist approaches the close of her life. In the end, she goes through a brief bout of happiness after having lost the burden of taking care of her second husband and she writes a notebook of memories to the person most like a daughter to her, Rosalba Goettingen. In her writing she reflects that:

Yo no sé si en esta vida las decisiones las tomo yo o ellas me toman a mí. Creo que más bien ha sido esto último. A mí las cosas me han sucedido: éste me empujó, aquél me jaló, uno me ofreció, el otro me arrebató. Yo sólo obedecí y no tuve nada que ver.

¿O sí tuve?

A lo mejor cada vez que me fui, cada vez que hice por olvidar, cada vez que guardé silencio, estaba eligiendo. Quién sabe, puede ser (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 227).

In the end, her brief attempt to infuse power in her passivity, marked by the repeated use of the reflexive, is reminiscent of the vocabulary Beatriz uses to describe her lover's, as well as her clients' actions upon her, and is unconvincing.

Similar to Beatriz, Susana also gives up on her life but, rather than retiring, as Beatriz did, she decides to literally commit suicide, stating a reason that is completely absurd: "No quiero vivir más, porque no soporto seguir escuchando a Luis Miguel" (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 234).

With the actual reason for her suicide being not because of the popular Mexican pop star but instead because of her feelings of invisibility upon reaching middle age, “[...] he dejado de existir dado que soy lo que se llama una mujer madura” (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 234). The lack of agency in her life is made doubly evident when she is unable to even end her life on her own terms, dying of a heart attack before she has the chance to commit suicide.

In the epilogue, the reader becomes aware of the fact that the novel is the story of Susana’s life that the protagonist has submitted to a literary contest after having written it for and under the pseudonym of Rosalba Goettingen. The epilogue is formed by a series of e-mails that Rosalba writes her husband in Sweden, where she now lives. This literary device parallels with Beatriz’s writing the notebook that she leaves for a goddaughter who will also grow up in a European country. However, with the inclusion of these letters from Rosalba, the reader obtains an idea of what the reception of this notebook will mean to this daughter.

The epilogue begins with Rosalba establishing the importance that literature has had in her life as she speaks to an audience present at the reception of a literary prize she has been given for a novel mysteriously written in her name. (Initially she is unaware of the fact that this novel is in fact the story of Susana’s life):

Dije que los libros trastornan, especialmente a las mujeres, y conté de la madre de Susana que leyó unas cuantas páginas en su vida pero eso bastó para que lo abandonara todo, de Susana que siempre soñó con escribir aunque fuera sólo uno, de mi madre que me crió obedeciendo al pie de la letra las instrucciones de varios, de mí que partí a un país lejano y desconocido en busca de lo que ellos prometen y de mi hija que ni los mira. (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 237)

With all of these possibilities that literature opens up for women, Susana has left Rosalba her own piece of literature and, through giving the literature her name, she is telling her that Susana in fact lived a life for Rosalba. Now, because of the distance created by not being the person who lived this story in the flesh, not to mention the obvious geographical distance of her location in Europe, this novel brings Rosalba back geographically to reflect upon Susana's life and also on the situation of women in Mexico as an outsider.<sup>29</sup> Through the inclusion of this European character, the novel, like *Demasiado amor* with the inclusion of Beatriz's goddaughter, is trying to move beyond the limitations of Mexican history and Mexican culture.

In returning to Mexico, Rosalba finds Susana's actual writings, composed in "su letra tan fea" (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 247) and is impacted by what she reads:

No sabes lo que fue eso, ya no los pude soltar. Me divertí, me conmoví, aprendí, lloré, reí, extrañé, recordé. He seguido paso a paso su vida, esa que tantas veces me contó a pedazos y que antes de irme le pedí que me escribiera. ¿Y sabes una cosa? ¡Me sorprendió ver cuántas cosas les suceden a las personas que nos rodean y parece que no pasa nada! Lo que más me llamó la atención es que lo relata como si todo hubiera sido muy sencillo, como si todo hubiera fluido, como si hasta las situaciones más terribles o más felices no le hubieran afectado.

(Sefchovich, *Vivir* 247)

---

<sup>29</sup> It should also be noted that, in thinking that the book is written by a European, a critic who was known by Susana because he "[...] gritaba a los cuatro vientos que los escritores extranjeros eran siempre mejores que los nacionales" (238), praises the novel that he believes Rosalba had penned. Through this, Sefchovich gives the not-so-subtle hint that Mexican writers do have a great deal to say.

In reading Susana's work, Rosalba is able to see the difficult life that a woman so close to her lived. She reflects upon it above and beyond what Susana herself even realized. In both *Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida*, the reader is able to note that terrible events happen to both protagonists and yet they find ways to minimize them. These women may not have noticed that they were being swept along by circumstance yet, through this writing both Beatriz and Susana leave behind a history and testimony of who they were as females for the edification of their loved ones as well as the reader. (Susana may have also intended for the reader to receive this message, given her decision to enter the novel in a literary contest for publication).

From the appearance of *Demasiado amor* until the publication of *Vivir la vida* in the year 2000, Sefchovich indicates through her writing that not all that much has changed. One obvious example of this intent behind Sefchovich's writing is when Rosalba comments with dismay that she encountered: "[...] un mitin por el derecho de las mujeres al aborto. Es increíble pero cuando yo era niña ya estaban luchando por lo mismo y es la hora que no lo pueden conseguir [...]" (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 243). Furthermore, both women in Sefchovich's texts are swept along by circumstance, with their whole lives made up of one coincidence after another. The ultimate fall of both women to patriarchy is also underlined by the fate of Susana's body after she dies. Like Beatriz's body being used by men after her retirement to her guesthouse, Susana is literally consumed by her male friend. Her ashes are in a shoebox, having been placed there with the intent that they will be buried with her friend, however, he "[...] cada vez que pasa por allí, toma un poco entre los dedos y se las come" (249). In a strange mix of cannibalism and love her gay male friend ingests and thus possesses her body wholly.

With that being the end of Susana's life, the ending of Sefchovich's novel itself circles back to its beginning. Rosalba mentions that the author of the larger narrative of which she is a

part of (Sefchovich) has asked for permission to use one of her own phrases as an epigraph for the novel that reads: “*Las palabras hacen visibles verdades evidentes*” (Sefchovich, *Vivir* 11). With this epigraph, the final message of both of Sefchovich’s novels becomes a reflection on what writing means. Women such as Susana or Beatriz may not fight for something more because they have been consumed by the demands of routine and they no longer notice that they are floating through life. As Sefchovich herself said in an interview published at the end of the *Vivir la vida*, referring to this particular novel, “Lo que me motivó a escribirla es que estoy convencida (y lo quería decir) que la vida te vive a ti, no la vives tú a ella” (252). In reading Susana’s story as well as Beatriz’s, the problems with how they have led their lives become evident and now it is up to the fictional reader (Beatriz’s goddaughter or Rosalba) and the external reader to decide by examining their own lives as well as the lives of those around them: “¿Qué no habrá una forma de librarse de ese mismo y único camino en esta vida?” (Sefchovich *Vivir* 78).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***La historia desde el “como-si”:* Fronteriza Writing and the *proceso de creación* in Cristina Rivera Garza’s *Nadie me verá llorar***

In my previous chapter on Sara Sefchovich’s *Demasiado amor* (1990), I focused on a middle-class woman from Mexico City who entered the profession of prostitution during Mexico’s economically difficult decade of the 1980s. Sefchovich’s character Beatriz and her troubled life in Mexico City were dramatic departures from contemporary Mexican women’s literature. I concluded that chapter by analyzing the novel’s relation to Sefchovich’s most recent work of fiction, *Vivir la vida* (2000), positing that in both works, the main characters live lives shaped mostly by oppressive circumstances that they are unable to escape, even in exile and death. The author uses her novels to reflect on the fact that the situation of women in Mexico has not sufficiently changed, using the example of the ongoing fight for legalized abortions as an indicator of the lack of progress in women’s rights that she perceives. I conclude that Sefchovich uses her novels to “[...] *hacer visibles verdades evidentes*” (*Vivir* 11). She challenges the reader to examine this problematic situation and she posits literature as a device that can illuminate “verdades” that may otherwise go unperceived; ultimately, Sefchovich hopes for change.

The final Mexicana novel that I analyze where prostitution is a major driving force in the narrative is Cristina Rivera Garza’s *Nadie me verá llorar* (1999). Besides *Nadie me verá llorar*, Rivera Garza has published other works of fiction (novels, short stories, poetry, and essays) and non-fiction in both English and Spanish,<sup>30</sup> including *La guerra no importa* (1991), *La cresta de Ilión* and *Ningun reloj cuenta esto* (2002), *Lo anterior* (2004) and a work of detective fiction *La muerte me da* (2007). Among her non-fiction texts is a book that she has called the “hermano

---

<sup>30</sup> The collection of critical essays edited by Oswaldo Estrada (2010) is devoted solely to the analysis of the work of Rivera Garza in its multiple manifestations.

siamés” to *Nadie me verá llorar* (the respective “hermana siamesa” because “la novela” is feminine in Spanish (*La Castañeda* 11)) titled *La Castañeda: Narrativas dolientes desde el Manicomio General. México, 1910-1930* (2010).<sup>31</sup> Rivera Garza also wrote “La mano oblicua,” a weekly column, for the Mexican newspaper *Milenio* for seven years and maintains a blog, “No hay tal lugar.”

Originally from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and having lived in both Mexico and the United States, Rivera Garza (born in 1964) is aware of her Mexican identity on the border. She is a Mexican writer because “[...] no sólo porque he nacido en México y me reconozco como elemento de una tradición literaria específica, sino también porque he abrazado una realidad fronteriza y ambivalente donde las raíces relacionales de la identidad y las relaciones sociales en general resultan más patentes, más punzantes” (Hind 186). This bilingual and bicultural writer is from the Matamoros-Brownsville area in the Lower Río Grande Valley, an area that has produced significant studies of Greater Mexico, a concept first introduced by Américo Paredes, the founder of Mexican American studies with his Ph.D. dissertation of 1956 published by the University of Texas Press as “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”: *A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958). It is well known that Paredes was born and raised on the Brownsville-Matamoros border and that his Greater Mexico refers to Mexico in a cultural sense beyond political borders. Yet, there is still an institutional border, a bias separating Mexican literary studies from Chicana literary studies. For instance, in her dissertation, *Writing the Past: Women’s Historical Fiction of Greater Mexico* (University of Houston 2007), Elizabeth Cummins Muñoz includes Rosario Castellanos, Silvia Molina, Rivera Garza and Alicia Gaspar de Alba and places Rivera Garza in

---

<sup>31</sup> Rivera Garza explains that this book “Primero fue una tesis de maestría y, años más tarde, de doctorado. Luego, de entre las páginas de ese manuscrito salió otra cosa: su contrario [la novela *Nadie me verá llorar*]” (*La Castañeda* 11).



“the dynamic moment of 1990s Mexican intellectual feminism and literary activity” (122). She notes that Rivera Garza is from the border and expresses her marginality as part of her identity as a Mexican writer. According to Cummins Muñoz,

[...] the author has preferred to maintain a certain distance from the pull of this centrifugal center. She [Rivera-Garza] explains: “Lucho todos los días por mantener esa ex-centricidad. No me interesa ni ‘normalizarme’ ni ‘centralizarme’ ni ‘desperiferarme,’ ni ‘desmarginalizarme.’ Todo lo contrario” (personal interview 2006). This biographical and professional identification with spaces and cultures outside of central, well-defined identities is consistent with Rivera Garza’s approach to her intellectual and creative work. (127)

However, though Cummins Muñoz does cite Héctor Calderón’s *Narratives of Greater Mexico*, she does not cite or use Paredes’s study of Mexican culture on both sides of the Rio Grande or his concept of Greater Mexico. Cummins Muñoz only includes Paredes’s concept of Greater Mexico as part of the title of her dissertation.

Despite this academic divide, there is a decidedly Chicana/Latina sensibility that informs the personal acknowledgements and the focus of Rivera Garza’s Ph.D. dissertation *The Masters of the Streets: Bodies, Power and Modernity in Mexico, 1867-1930* (University of Houston, 1995). This dissertation on the Mexican working class, prostitutes, and the insane would be the genesis of Rivera Garza’s acclaimed novel *Nadie me verá llorar*. Rivera Garza studied at the University of Houston from 1988 to 1995. The years that Rivera Garza lived in Houston coincided with the emergence of Chicana/Latina feminist literature. Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, on Mexican American and Mexican women in Chicago, was published by

University of Houston's Arte Público Press in 1984. *House on Mango Street* was an immediate bestseller, the first novel by a woman published by Arte Público. Cisneros's collection of short stories *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, situated in south Texas and in Mexico, was published in 1991. In her dissertation, Rivera Garza echoes Cisneros's populist working-class devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe when she ends her acknowledgements with "Last, but not least [...] *virgencita de Guadalupe Tonatzin* [...] thanks for the hope" (v). It is important to note that, the reference to *la virgencita* in her Spanish and Indigenous names is not at all common in Mexican scholarship and creative literature, which is almost always the product of literate elites. However, in "Los Acknowledgements" to *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros writes "*Virgen de Guadalupe Tonantzín, infinitas gracias*" (x). And, in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" from *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros refers again to "Virgencita" several times. In Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship and creative literature Guadalupe Tonantzín occupies a special place in the redefinition of Mexican femininity. Rivera Garza thanks "*la girlfriend*" (iv) as had Cisneros before in *Woman Hollering Creek*, "*Las San Antonio girlfriends*" (ix). In a similar playful bilingual fashion to Cisneros, Rivera Garza begins her acknowledgements with "In this moment of *dar las gracias* I wish to acknowledge [...]" (iii). Rivera Garza ends her acknowledgments thanking *sup Marcos* (v). Rivera Garza was completing her dissertation during the 1994 Indigenous uprising of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional in Chiapas. Rivera Garza's knowledge of the border, her understanding of the criminalization of the marginal (she refers to Mexican immigrant Gregorio Cortez, the subject for Paredes's "*With His Pistol in His Hand*") go a long way in explaining the crucial moment in her dissertation on the morally insane in the

Manicomio General La Castañeda when she sees archive photos of the inmates<sup>32</sup> which she titles “A Mad People’s Portrait: A Dossier of Terror.” She writes:

The immediate, bureaucratic function of these standardized pictures was to provide information, naked information as straight-forward as possible. Yet, in the reduced space of the portrait, the pair of eyes, the mouth, the nose, the hair styles, the shoulders, hats and clothes, also constructed a social identity. The insane were dark-skinned, men often wore peasant hats while long-braided women wrapped themselves with the traditional *rebozo*. These objects and styles laid bare the class and ethnic traits of the insane and clearly delineated as well visual representations of the Mexican working poor. The portraits also constituted

---

<sup>32</sup> María Díaz González, a student in the Academia de San Carlos, opened the first photographic studio in Mexico City five years after cameras first arrived in the country in 1839 (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 189). This studio was the first of many, mostly owned by foreigners, that would photograph the Mexican elite at the end of the nineteenth century in what were called “tarjetas de visita”

[...] que consistía[n] en un retrato montado sobre una tarjeta y patentado[s] por el francés André-Adolphe Disdéri en 1854. Como detalle de prestigio y lujo, las tarjetas de visita también hacían visibles las imágenes aceptadas de la normalidad individual y familiar en el México porfiriano. Motivados por el estatus de clase tanto del fotógrafo como de la clientela, los primeros retratos exponían las prendas, características y poses que distinguían a los miembros de la élite y de la creciente clase media, con lo cual creaban el perfil visual de un carácter nacional con todo vigor. Los políticos, hombres de negocios, comerciantes, intelectuales, damas acaudaladas y miembros del clero posaban ante los ojos de fotógrafos capacitados y formaban una colección de identidades de poder, una cierta familia de rostros. (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 189-190)

The difference between these “tarjetas de visita” and the photographs taken of the patients of the Manicomio General is quite striking:

[...] in these portraits we only see faces and nothing else but faces. The insane appear in isolation, totally dispossessed in the middle of a social vacuum. These men and women are not only *out* of society, they are nowhere. As all aberrations they had no roots and no future; they appeared, left a visual mark in the lens of the camera and, then, they disappeared. (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 314-15)

Yet, it is significant that in *Nadie me verá llorar*, Matilda is able to show power (“la socarronería y altivez de una señorita de alcurnia posando para su primera tarjeta de visita”) when being photographed by Joaquín (Rivera Garza *Nadie* 19).

illustration of a mute yet all-encompassing classification of insanity and deviation, of violence and terror. (306-307)

Rivera Garza's dissertation in English draws on her bilingual, bicultural border background. Here we have a scholar who makes a frightening discovery with the ethnic profiles of the insane housed in La Castañeda,<sup>33</sup> the insane asylum inaugurated by Porfirio Díaz in 1910. Díaz was driven out of power by Francisco I. Madero, leader of the Mexican Revolution, in 1911; but the insane asylum continued and was ultimately demolished in 1968. In the 1970s through the 1990s students of history, sociology, anthropology, and literature in a United States academic institution with a theoretical and critical repertoire focusing on state repression, on the critique of the emergence of the modern state, and social control tended to read English translations of Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Jean-François Lyotard, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Antonio Gramsci and practitioners of the new critical anthropology such as Michael Taussig, James Clifford, George E. Marcus, Ruth Behar, and precursors such as Américo Paredes. These too add to a study of repression and marginalization necessary for the emergence of modern Mexico in Rivera Garza's dissertation. These marginals, the poor, prostitutes, and the insane on the streets were a threat to the established order, to *gente decente*, hence the ironic title "masters of the streets." Moreover, Rivera Garza finds agency in the so called "insanity" of the inmates. Through written records, Rivera Garza find inmates offering critiques of Porfirian Mexico;

---

<sup>33</sup> The general asylum La Castañeda was founded by Porfirio Díaz as part of a commemoration honoring Mexican Independence. At the time it was the largest institution of the kind in Mexico (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 249). In "Diálogos subversivos: Ficción e historia en *Nadie me verá llorar*" Cristina Elena Magaña Franco explains that

El manicomio no sólo fue representativo de la bonanza del régimen de Díaz, sino que fue también, hasta su demolición en 1968, reflejo de la decadencia y de la falta de cuidado de los regímenes que le sucedieron al de Díaz. La poca atención no era solamente en cuanto a las instalaciones se refiere, sino también al desamparo en el que dejaron a los enfermos mentales en México, y, en un sentido más amplio, a los estratos más bajos de la sociedad. (70-71)

doctors could not make sense of the logic of the critiques. However, years later, scholar Rivera Garza did. Thus, Rivera Garza demonstrates that she is scholar who notes the critique and resistance of inmates, their ethnicity, class, and gender. In brief, she is following Chicana/Latina scholars. Rivera Garza's *Nadie me vera llorar* acclaimed as a Mexican novel can also be explained through its Chicana/Latina and U.S. frame of reference. Readers have failed to see the bilingual and bicultural genesis of this novel along with her shared marginalization, albeit in a different context, with a prostitute judged morally insane<sup>34</sup> in *La Castañeda*. This chapter will consider the English and Spanish language intersections, scholarship and creative writing among *Masters of the Streets* (1995), *Nadie me vera llorar* (1999), and *La Castañeda* (2010).<sup>35</sup>

*Nadie me verá llorar* is the story of Matilda Burgos, a patient at La Castañeda, and Joaquín Buitrago, a photographer for the same institution who becomes interested in her story after he recognizes her as a woman he photographed at a brothel years before. He remembers her because of a question she asks him as he takes her picture: “¿Cómo se convierte uno en un fotógrafo de locos?” This question leads Joaquín to reflect on his past and to try to figure out Matilda's as well. As both of the characters' stories are told in a non-linear narration, with one life, at times, intersecting with the other, a partial portrait of the characters emerges along with snippets from the lives of other characters that impact them:

---

<sup>34</sup> During the 1910s, women in the Manicomio General were often diagnosed with “moral insanity” if they went against accepted models of femininity of the time. The symptoms of this so called disease were considered particularly strong in prostitutes (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 138). For instance, when Modesta arrived at La Castañeda: “The medical personnel at the asylum reported her current symptoms. Modesta was sarcastic and gross. She made long a [sic] incoherent speeches about her life, notably including florid verbal descriptions of her beauty. The medical diagnosis elaborated at [sic] the same day of her arrival was decisive: Modesta Burgos suffered from Moral Insanity” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 324). It should be noted that diagnoses of “moral insanity” disappeared by 1930 (*La Castañeda* 148). According to Rivera Garza, “[...] ésta fue, sin duda, una victoria de las pacientes sobre la psiquiatría porfiriana; es decir, un cuerpo de ideas leales a los puntos de vista punitivos de la enfermedad mental en los cuales el sexo y la locura estaban vinculados de manera íntima” (*La Castañeda* 148).

<sup>35</sup> *La Castañeda* was published in 2010 in the centennial of the Mexican Revolution.

Así las repetidas conexiones que se establecen entre los personajes y las distintas líneas narrativas forman una red que el lector sólo puede percibir a medida que avance de capítulo en capítulo. Se relacionan estas redes con la temática central de la novela: los personajes andan siempre en una serie de orillas temporales y espaciales, tanto entre sí como con la historia. (Price 120)

The novel's historical time period ranges from the end of the nineteenth century, encompassing part of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, or the Porfiriato, to Matilda's death in 1958. In contrast with the other two works of fiction examined in this dissertation, *Nadie me verá llorar* is told through third-person narration. Yet, the narrative voice shows such familiarity with the characters that, at times, it reads like first-person narration. In this chapter, I will situate *Nadie me verá llorar* within the tradition of the Mexicana novel of prostitution produced by a writer with a *fronteriza* sensibility. Because the novel incorporates quotes from various sources, including Gamboa's *Santa* and faithful transcriptions of the writings of Modesta Burgos L. (known as Matilda Burgos in the novel), I will read this novel as a hybrid text that successfully merges fiction and non-fiction. I will also examine the role of photography in the work, positing it as another medium central to the text<sup>36</sup> and a major driving force in the narration connecting the lives of several characters. Although no actual photographs are present in the novel, this text can be read as one that includes and also becomes a series of "verbal" photographs<sup>37</sup> or images painted by words.

---

<sup>36</sup> It is telling that the artwork included on the Tusquets 1999 cover of the novel is Frida Kahlo's *El suicidio de Dorothy Hale* (1939), one of Kahlo's paintings that is also a hybrid because it is completed by a written text similar to a traditional religious ex-voto. Kahlo was a collector of ex-votos.

<sup>37</sup> In an interview "Desde México para Corea. Entrevista a Cristina Rivera Garza," the writer explains that the manuscript had several names before becoming *Nadie me verá llorar*: "Se llamó 'Agujeros luminosos,' un título con el que yo quería aludir a la estructura del libro pero que fue rechazado por el primer editor que entablé

During her participation in the television program *Discutamos Mexico*, Cristina Rivera Garza remarked,

Yo comparo mucho el trabajo en el archivo al proceso de escritura en general. Que uno entra a un archivo sabiendo más o menos qué hay porque consulta los índices pero no es hasta que uno está ahí investigando, tocando los papeles, que sucede la epifanía [...] que el archivo habla con uno. Y a mí, [...] me pasó en el Archivo de la Secretaría de Salubridad de Asistencia el primer día que llegué buscando los documentos del Manicomio General La Castañeda. [...] Uno de ellos desde el inicio llamó mi atención, era de una mujer que había llegado al manicomio de La Castañeda en 1921, su retrato fue increíblemente perturbador, una mujer que está a punto de ser recluida, ella no sabe todavía, pero por 28 años en esta institución, está sonriéndole a la cámara en una actitud que a mí me causó estupor [...] Y fue ahí, a partir de ese encuentro, que empecé a hacer una investigación sobre el manicomio, sobre las mujeres, sobre esta historia que ahí está, nada más hay que aprender a ir la buscando, viendo, oyendo. Y después llegó a ser este personaje de esta novela *Nadie me verá llorar* con la que he vivido ya muchos años. De alguna manera creo que este documento se ha convertido como en la parte fantasma de mi vida o a lo mejor yo me he convertido en el fantasma de este documento, dependiendo desde qué punto de vista se vea. Pero el encuentro fue importante a nivel personal, a nivel de proceso de creación, [...]

---

negociaciones debido a su alto contenido ‘intelectual.’” This title alludes to the photographic structure of the novel, implying that each scene appears to shine through a lens.

creo que es a ese otro nivel de cómo un documento, cómo un hallazgo nos puede permitir ampliar nuestra idea de qué es el relato. (Gobierno de la República)

I transcribed this lengthy explanation because it is important on several levels. First, in this quote Rivera Garza parallels the work of a novelist with that of a historian, indicating that her novel merges her two professions. She also explains that this novel began with a hybrid document consisting of a photograph and a text. As though to allude to and parallel the encounter with this document, the novel itself begins with one of the main characters taking a picture. Her quote also indicates the fact that an encounter with a particular document, in this case a photograph and a written file, expands the definition of what a “relato” is, and this novel is the result of that expanded meaning. In this chapter, I will discuss what this enlarged idea of narrative entails and what Rivera Garza means to achieve with her particular novel of prostitution.

In the final chapter of *La Castañeda*, Rivera Garza answers the following question: “¿es posible entrevistar a un documento histórico? Esta pregunta, a la vez, es sólo otra manera de plantear la posibilidad que tiene o no tiene el lector contemporáneo de establecer una relación dialógica, interactiva, presencial, con información que viene del pasado y desde el pasado en forma escrita” (247). She posits that it is indeed possible to “interview” writing and that it is possible to approach writing in more than one way in order to produce the effect of immediacy often attributed to oral interactions (Rivera Garza *La Castañeda* 249).

Pero, para hacer esto, hace falta algo más que una simple enunciación o una firme creencia. Es necesario construir las estrategias de lectura y las estrategias de escritura que permitan tal aproximación –una aproximación dentro del como-si, una aproximación engañosa, una aproximación, en resumen, ficticia–. La



aproximación de la escritura como escritura, es decir, como artificio: la marca del trazo. (Rivera Garza *La Castañeda* 250)

One of Rivera Garza's interviews, as she terms them, with a particular file (which was also referenced in *Discutamos Mexico*) is further explained in this final chapter of her *La Castañeda*. This file that I have called a hybrid (the file for Modesta B.) also included notations by the doctors that cared for and diagnosed her. These notes were revised at times and previous notes were crossed out but not erased, which indicates the presence of several voices on one page (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 260). This file also included a set of personal writings by Modesta or, as Rivera Garza calls them "una especie de diario que ella llamó sus <<Despachos presidenciales<sup>38</sup>>>" (*La Castañeda* 256). In these handwritten notes Matilda details the state of the country as well as the mental health facility, and her particular perspective on "la vida real del mundo" (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 256). Rivera Garza also mentions that in *Nadie me verá llorar* this particular "interview" with these documents was tellingly originally titled *Yo, Matilda Burgos* (*La Castañeda* 256). I would posit that it could easily have been titled *Yo, Joaquín Buitrago* since the voices to which the author gives expression are certainly not limited to that of Matilda. It should be noted that, in addition to these "voces" or responses to Rivera Garza's interview, *Nadie me verá llorar* also includes other fiction that the author has also heard and internalized and that Rivera Garza's interpretation of the "voces" she hears is shaped by her<sup>39</sup> border and Chicana/Latina sensibility. With a historian engaging in fiction then, in this

---

<sup>38</sup> In her dissertation *The Masters of the Streets*, Rivera Garza instead writes that Burgos called these writings her "Cuerpos Diplomáticos" (325).

<sup>39</sup> Cheyla Samuelson draws a similar conclusion in her dissertation *Lineas de fuga: The Character of Writing in the Novels of Cristina Rivera Garza*,

There is another way in which we can think of the novel as the creative result of a historian's intellectual and emotional interaction with the medical and psychological expedients of long dead

particular Novel of Prostitution that Rivera Garza has identified as a twin to the historical text, a novelist must also engage with history and include bits of other written historical and fictional texts pertinent to the fictional narration. In an interview, Rivera Garza explains:

Siempre he creído [...] que una novela que realmente es una novela incluye, en mayor o menor medida, de manera más o menos explícita, una teoría de esa novela. Si la novela fuera un vestido, la teoría de la novela iría en la bastilla, dentro de ella, medio escondida pero delatada por el volumen. No es una teoría de La novela, sino una teoría de esa novela: en singular, en específico, sin mirar más allá de sí misma. (*Nuevo Texto* 32)

I consider the blend of history, fiction and personal identity that Rivera Garza creates to be the “theory” that corresponds with this particular novel.

Thus, Rivera Garza, as I have mentioned before, listens for and hears not one but a multiplicity of voices as she engages in her archival work. The voice that begins the narration is the voice that Joaquín Buitrago at first confuses with his own:

Joaquín, desacostumbrado a oír la voz de los sujetos que fotografiaba, pensó que se trataba del murmullo de su propia conciencia. Ahí, frente a él, sentada sobre el banquillo de locos, vistiendo un uniforme azul, la mujer que debería haber estado inmóvil y asustada, con los ojos perdidos y una hilerilla de baba cayendo por la

---

individuals, an experience that often gets lost between the raw data of historical documents and the scholarly work that results in a dissertation or book. Traces of the very subjectivity of the author that is Rivera Garza appear in *Nadie me verá llorar* in the revelation of her imaginative and personal response to ostensibly “factual” data. (145)

However, she does not point to the way the author’s Chicana/Latina sensibility influences her work.

comisura de los labios, se comportaba en cambio con la socarronería y altivez de una señorita de alcurnia posando para su primera tarjeta de visita. Él había hecho tantas después de todo, cientos de ellas. Antes de llegar a las cárceles y después, al manicomio, ya era un profesional de la fotografía. Un hombre de levita y zapatos boleados ante el cual las mujeres más diversas se abrían como puertas.

(*Nadie* 15)

However, in contrast to the other women he has photographed who weaken before him, the reflexive in the “se convierte” of Matilda’s question, asking how one “turns into” a photographer of the insane, implies a lack of agency on Joaquín’s part, the same lack of agency that he felt when she asked him a similar question in their encounter years prior. Instead of responding, Joaquín asks “Mejor dime cómo se convierte uno en una loca” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 17). Matilda responds with a playful wink and a “¿De verdad quiere que le cuente?” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 17). In this dialogue, the answer provided by Joaquín’s actions reveals his deep desire to find out Matilda’s past.

The text establishes the historical time period for the novel’s beginning by mentioning July 26, 1920<sup>40</sup>, thus providing the reader with the exact moment when Joaquín remembers where he met Matilda before, and other exact dates are found throughout the text. As soon as Joaquín remembers this encounter, he locates a photograph of Matilda in his “tesoro más

---

<sup>40</sup> According to Rivera Garza’s *The Masters of the Streets*, Modesta Burgos arrived at La Castañeda on July 26, 1929. As mentioned before, there she was diagnosed with “moral insanity” (324). Burgos refuted this diagnosis saying that she was confined in jail and later transferred to the asylum as a result of refusing to grant a group of soldiers sexual favors while working as an artist at a theatre of the Fábregas Company (325). Based on this date, it should be noted that the date for Burgos’s arrival at La Castañeda as documented in the dissertation is different from the dates presented in the novel, thus adding another layer of fiction to the narrative. Contrary to the dissertation, in the *Discutamos Mexico* interview Rivera Garza mentions Modesta’s arrival to the asylum as 1921 and *La Castañeda* cites Modesta’s entry into the asylum as July, 1921 (138).

preciado: la colección de fotografías estereoscópicas colocadas sobre monturas de cartón [...] Mirando por los dos oculares del visor revisó los retratos uno por uno” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 17). This photo elicits an involuntary physical reaction: “[...] sonrió. Ni siquiera se dio cuenta que lo estaba haciendo” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 18). Just as Rivera Garza mentioned how finding Matilda’s photo had caused her to feel “estupor,” photographs cause an emotional, corporeal response, one of possession and identification:

Volvió a creer en la posibilidad de fijar la singularidad de un cuerpo, un gesto. La posibilidad de detener el tiempo. Ahí estaban una vez más, imperecederas, las poses únicas de las mujeres de las casas de citas. *Mis mujeres*. En el centro de cuartos abigarrados, rodeadas de estatuillas y espejos, vistiendo ropas transparentes del lejano Oriente o completamente desnudas, las mujeres posaban como si estuvieran haciendo un pacto con la eternidad. No recordaba sus nombres ni el de los lugares. Difícilmente puso atención a las fechas. Raras veces tomó notas. Lo único que Joaquín fue capaz de recordar estaba almacenado en reflejos, gradaciones de luz, imágenes. Bajo ese poder todo era real y todo era posible. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 18)

“La placa número diecisiete” (the image of Matilda), brings him back to the moment of his first encounter and conversation with her. In that past meeting the disconcerting question Matilda had asked him was “¿Cómo se llega a ser fotógrafo de putas<sup>41</sup>?” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 19).

---

<sup>41</sup> In the “Notas finales” to *Nadie me verá llorar*, Rivera Garza explains that “El relato de las fotografías de mujeres públicas a que se hace alusión al comienzo del libro está inspirado en la obra de Ava Vargas, *La Casa de Citas* [...]” (253-253). Vargas’s compilation of photographs taken by an unknown photographer in a brothel between the years of 1900 and 1920 (Vargas xv) includes the epigraph: “Todas las mentes enfermas y carentes de buen gusto y arte juzgan el desnudo como inmoral” along with the explanation: “Esta sentencia aparece manuscrita en una etiqueta adherida a la caja de madera que contiene las fotografías estereoscópicas reproducidas en el presente libro.” In another fusion of fiction and reality, after Joaquín takes the Matilda’s photograph, “un niño moreno y adrajoso”

Seemingly as a direct result of the encounter with her voice and with these photographs<sup>42</sup>, Joaquín becomes interested in Matilda's life. His interest in the interned woman is so significant that Rivera Garza creates a parallel between the work of a historian and Joaquín Buitrago, making him Matilda's historian in the novel (Hernandez Mares 92)<sup>43</sup>. In her article, "Archivo, memoria y ficción en *Nadie me verá llorar* de Cristina Rivera Garza," Julia Érika Negrete Sandoval sees Joaquín as personifying the "encarnación de la autora" (95). She also posits that Joaquín Buitrago

Es, asimismo, la representación conjunta del historiar y crear, la puesta en ficción de la figura compleja que conjuga al historiador y al artista, en quién recae la tarea de indagar, desde dos perspectivas, en el pasado para entender el presente; es el encargado de cotejar los recuerdos guardados en su memoria y en la de Matilda

---

gives the photographer a violet envelope and a small card, signed by Burgos, that includes this same phrase (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 21). "El fotógrafo se deshizo de inmediato del sobre pero conservó la tarjeta dentro del bolsillo derecho de su chaleco por varios días" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 21). It should also be noted that some of the photographs in Vargas's work are signed by a "JB" (Vargas xviii).

<sup>42</sup> Joaquín takes these photographs using "bromuro de plata y, con mucho cuidado durante el proceso fotográfico, logró vistosos colores. Después, cubierto por el sudor, el cansancio de varios días sin sueño y el sobresalto que le producían las imágenes, las observó una vez más antes de introducirlas con toda delicadeza en su baúl de latón" (20). These photographs were fragile "fotografías estereoscópicas" (20). In the introduction to *La Casa de Citas*, Vargas explains that

Todas las placas de la colección son estereoscópicas, es decir, imágenes dobles impresas en vidrio, que eran colocadas dentro de un visor y observadas a través de dos oculares, de manera que ambas reproducciones crearan una sola fotografía en tercera dimensión. Aunque a principios del siglo se produjeron muchas fotografías estereoscópicas de vidrio, muy pocas han perdurado a causa de su fragilidad —es mucho más común encontrar impresiones estereoscópicas montadas en cartón. (xv)

It is important to note that Rivera Garza draws a crucial scene in her novel from these rare photographs: "Se trata, sin duda alguna, de desnudos hermosamente observados y compuestos, y en ese sentido son diametralmente distintos de muchos otros trabajos contemporáneos realizados en la misma línea" (Vargas xix). And, through her writing, Rivera Garza makes this marginal photographer and his unknown subjects come alive.

<sup>43</sup> Eliza Cummins Munoz, in her dissertation *Writing the Past: Women's Historical Fiction of Greater Mexico*, sees Buitrago as a caricature of the traditional historian (123). She explains that, "His research is not carried out in the service of truth or any public good, however, but instead so that an aging addict may seduce a lunatic. Here, the parody is not of the means of historical research, but of its ends" (141).

con la prueba documental; es en definitiva, el momento crítico que destaca el trabajo creativo del historiador más allá de su función interpretativa. (106)

In order to further clarify exactly what it signifies for Buitrago to be Matilda's historian, I will explore some key quotes from the final chapter of *La Castañeda*.

In section IV of this chapter, titled "La situación típica," Rivera Garza uses a "no-frills" description to detail what a historian goes through during an interaction with a document:

1) La historiadora, ayudada por un archivero, descubre documentos que había imaginado o intuido pero de cuya existencia verídica o real, según sean las persuasiones filosóficas del caso, sólo hasta ese momento, el momento del encuentro con el documento, puede estar verdaderamente segura.

2) La historiadora lee en un cuarto a menudo frío y, cuando corre con suerte, sistemáticamente organizado.

3) Mientras lee, la historiadora imagina lo que pudo haber acontecido. Y éste es el momento en que se <<escuchan las voces>>.

4) La historiadora hace apuntes, es decir, escribe sobre lo escrito. Re-escribe. Inscribe lo escrito en nuevos contextos de escritura.

5) La historiadora, fuera ya del cuarto frío de la sistematización, traduce esos escritos al lenguaje y estructuras académicas.

6) La historiadora se gradúa (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 255).

In the case of Joaquín, rather than looking to an actual archivist, he looks to Eduardo Oligochea, a doctor at La Castañeda, as a source for Matilda's file, "el expediente 6353" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 27). This file is not yet a concrete reality for Joaquín, but he believes he can obtain the information through cultivating a friendship with this particular doctor: "El fotógrafo no sabe lo que busca dentro de la cabeza coronada de luz de Matilda Burgos. Debe de haber algo más en el silencio de su vida. Cada vez está más cerca. Está convencido. [...] Su objetivo es llegar a los expedientes y husmear entre los datos de Matilda." (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 28)

Due to his having taken the photograph and also becoming Matilda's historian through his "interview" with the file, Joaquín's personal story becomes a part of Rivera Garza's own interview with the file. Thus, the personal history of the photographer is also shaped by the voices heard by the novelist. In order to present Joaquín's story in the novel, as the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that Joaquín, wishing to investigate Matilda's history, shares parts of his own story with Dr. Oligochea. He does so in order to gain the doctor's confidence and to compel him to share Matilda's file. Joaquín has become a morphine addict because of a failed relationship with a woman, Alberta. Yet even before Alberta there was his first love whom he calls "La primera mujer," Diamantina (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 40), an anarchist pianist. She is the reason he leaves the medical profession and becomes a photographer. One particular photo of her taken while she is playing the piano reappears several times in the novel and serves as a vehicle that connects various characters:

En una de ellas, sin advertírselo, Joaquín trajo su Eastman y, mientras ella se concentraba en la punta de sus dedos, él tomó varias placas. Años después, cuando volvió a encontrar su baúl de latón, la absoluta concentración de Diamantina sobre el teclado lo asombró. Su seriedad le provocó compasión,

piedad. Estaba destinada a vivir toda una vida acompañada sólo de sí misma. Ella lo sabía, y él debería haberlo sabido o, al menos, imaginado. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 45)

Most of the photographs in the novel are encountered by more than one person and scenes in the novel (that later become mental photographs) are witnessed by more than one character. Later in the novel, Diamantina also becomes Matilda's "primera mujer" and, after Matilda assumes she is dead, a male lover both women shared gives Matilda this same photo:

Cástulo sacó de uno de sus bolsillos una fotografía de Diamantina y la puso en sus manos. La imagen era vieja. <<Tengo la cara de pendeja porque estoy pensando en ti, mi chamaquito rojo. Tina>>. Al leer la dedicatoria Matilda sonrió levemente. Diamantina siempre mintió con una facilidad deliciosa. Su rostro en la fotografía estaba concentrado en sus manos sobre el piano, nada más. El resto era negro, incluyendo su amor por Cástulo, el placer de su sexo. En la esquina inferior derecha del retrato estaban, pequeñísimas, las iniciales J.B. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 165)

The fact that four different characters are able to share their drastically different perspectives on this one photograph adds to the novel's palimpsest-like condition. This condition parallels Matilda's actual file, in which documents were touched, altered and interpreted in different ways by more than one person.

When Joaquín successfully obtains the file from Dr. Oligochea, he speaks to Matilda of her life and also, based on the file, continues his research in Mexico City's Biblioteca Nacional. There he looks up her birthplace and family history, and seems to hear the voices of her



childhood in Papantla as he peruses texts in the library. When Matilda tells him that her father was an alcoholic dependent on “aguardiente chuchiquí,” because of the connection that addiction creates, Joaquín hears her father’s voice in response to his own questions regarding the taste of “chuchiquí”: “<< ¿A qué sabe, a qué sabe, Santiago?>> [...] <<Sabe a lo que sabe la muerte cuando la tienes dentro de la boca, Joaquín. Sabe a golpe. Sabe a encontrarla y a dejarla ir. Sabe a la vida cuando se te acaba, hombre. Sabe a ti y a mí, Joaquín>>” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 68). In his interview with Matilda’s file, his familiarity with Papantla also becomes greater as he senses the person taking the photographs and images in different texts that he encounters at the library:

Las imágenes de dibujos y las fotografías hablan con él desde lugares distantes. Siempre hay alguien detrás de todas ellas. Alguien que imagina, estudia el ambiente, manipula la luz y da al final, en el momento menos pensado, el golpe maestro. Una estocada. Su cansancio, su azoro o su vértigo se queda después ahí, plasmado y escondido a la vez, a la espera del segundo golpe, el definitivo. Joaquín nunca ha estado en Papantla, pero se puede mover cada vez con menor dificultad entre sus intrincadas callejuelas bordeadas de caseríos blancos, entre los cerdos y las gallinas que entorpecen el tránsito de la gente. [...] Si pone atención puede reconocer, entre todas las otras, la sombra de Matilda. Su olor. Hay algo innombrable dentro de ella, algo a su alrededor que lo deja todo en silencio. Joaquín está tomando notas. Con el tiempo ha aprendido a desconfiar de su memoria, de sí mismo. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 72)

In one particular imagined remembrance of Matilda’s childhood, Joaquín visualizes Matilda and her family accompanying a French painter to the Totonaca ruins and Matilda reacting with awe when she is before the pyramid. However, as Joaquín creates (or re-creates?) this particular scene

in his mind, he guides Matilda towards what *he* wants her to see. He exists from what Rivera-Garza had called the “como-si” or the approximation through fiction. In fact, she actually uses that phrase in the narration, in the “proceso de creación”: “Joaquín, como si se tratara de los ojos de Matilda, guía su atención hacia los detalles. [...] Cuando ella no sabe qué ver, Joaquín le señala las cornisas, las celdillas, el juego de volúmenes que produce una desconcertante danza de claroscuros en pleno movimiento<sup>44</sup>” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 75). As Matilda explores the pyramid, there is a given moment when she separates from her father and can no longer find her mother; at this time she feels loneliness and vows that “Nadie la vería llorar” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 76). When she is ultimately defeated by tears an imaginative intervention occurs: “*Una sombra baja de lo lejos y le ofrece, a través del tiempo, un pañuelo blanco, immaculado. J.B.*” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 76). As Sara Poot-Herrera explains in her article “El paraíso de Matilda Burgos. Un refugio sin puertas,” “Las dos realidades hacen una tercera que sólo Joaquín registra o inventa en el momento que oye o lee la historia de ella” (106). At this moment, past and present become one as the historian-photographer makes a connection to the past, witnesses an intimate moment in the life of the historical character, and offers comfort by imagining Matilda finding her mother

---

<sup>44</sup> Samuelson points to the problematic nature of this guidance that Joaquín offers as a reflection of the appropriation of Matilda’s story that occurs in this process of creation. Samuelson posits that, influenced by Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Rivera Garza is using Joaquín to remind the reader that she may be “inadvertently carrying out yet another appropriation and silencing of the other through her well-meaning ‘rescue mission.’” (133). Samuelson further explains,

Cristina Rivera Garza’s text insistently reminds us, on several levels, that the young girl who so engages us never existed, not in the way that we are reading her. If we notice the mediated, highly constructed nature of Joaquín’s writing of her story, the parallels between Joaquín’s activity and that of Cristina Rivera Garza make us aware of a sort of warning or self-limiting strategy within the text itself. [...] This praxis of imagining her as real while at the same time exposing the materials and motivations behind multiple narrations of her life restores the idea of the individual subject without insisting upon the veracity of any one representation. In this way, Rivera Garza performs a dual gesture of authorship coupled with a rejection of the storyteller’s traditional roll [sic] of authority. (136-137)

once again.<sup>45</sup> (Albeit the imagined reunion occurs when Matilda's mother is having a brief sexual encounter with the French painter): "Su madre la recibió con los brazos abiertos, la rodeó con ellos. Junto a su oído derecho, el latir pausado de su corazón le devolvió la paz"( Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 76-77).

In her article "Narrativas de locura: *La nave de los locos* de Peri Rossi y *Nadie me verá llorar* de Rivera Garza," Elvira Sánchez-Blake argues that "[...] el lente de Joaquín Buitrago se convierte en el instrumento mediante el cual el lector accede al contexto socio-histórico de la novela y a los eventos históricos ocurridos en México a finales del siglo XIX y comienzos del siglo XX" (68). Joaquín does provide one of the lenses through which Matilda's life is focused, and as I have argued before, he also serves to illustrate the creative process that goes along with being a historian and piecing together information. He takes notes of what he finds and re-writes Matilda's story:

Apenas se despierta, Joaquín estira el brazo bajo su catre para alcanzar la libreta de gruesas cubiertas negras donde noche a noche transcribe algunas sombras de la vida de Matilda. Su afección mental. Su condición. Son apuntes escritos a toda velocidad, garabatos sin puntuación, frases entrecortadas y fragmentos organizados sin método alguno que sólo él será capaz de entender después.

Taquigrafía sentimental. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 122)

---

<sup>45</sup> In her article, which also discusses the merger of fiction and history, Sara Poot-Herrera reads this and other imaginative interventions in the text as challenging traditional narration or storytelling. Poot-Herrera explains:

Ha dicho Cristina Rivera Garza que *Nadie me verá llorar* es una 'reconstrucción libre de la imaginación' (207). Y cuando la ficción se mete a la realidad, cuando el documento es asaltado por la creación, su autora no sólo inventa, sino que pone la poesía –su poesía– al servicio de la realidad y de la ficción. Además –acierto indiscutible de la novela– traslapa tiempos y espacios sin mediación alguna más que el talento de la creación imaginativa. (105)

Yet, his is not the only lens in the story. Instead, there are frames of Matilda's life he may not re-write or even imagine that are left inaccessible to Joaquín and that Matilda will not share.

For instance, Matilda and Joaquín escape La Castañeda together, and as they do so, she entertains her own private thoughts: “Ésta es la historia que Matilda se cuenta a sí misma en silencio mientras los dos dejan el manicomio en el olvido. Hay lugares a los que sólo podrán entrar por puertas distintas, palabras que no compartirán con nadie”( Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 159). Matilda's private thoughts go to the novel *Santa* and she remembers Diamantina Vicario's (“la primera mujer”) jeering reaction to the text and her own feeling of indignation as she read the novel years later while working as a prostitute in Mexico City (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 160). After presenting and then challenging the predominant fictional discourse of the time through Diamantina's laughter and mockery, Rivera Garza introduces the way medicine and the law addressed prostitution at the end of the nineteenth century. During that time,

Los médicos y los licenciados crearon el primer reglamento de prostitución para defenderse de su peligro y establecer las reglas del juego de los cuerpos. Hubo muchos en contra. Otros a favor. Las discusiones se llevaron a cabo en el foro de la revistas médicas, en la muda oscuridad de los memoranda y los pasillos estrechos de los palacios de justicia. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 159-160)

Here it is evident that control over the discourse is dominated by people outside the profession. In the new legislation that governed prostitution in Mexico, designed by doctor Manuel Alfaro,

Así, las prostitutas se convirtieron en públicas si vivían en casa de citas; o aisladas, cuando desarrollaban su trabajo en casas de citas. Después de inscribirse en el registro oficial y pasar por un examen médico, las matronas pagarían a las

autoridades cuotas de ocho, cinco y tres pesos mensuales por cada pupila de primera, segunda y tercera clase, respectivamente. Las aisladas, por su parte, aportarían cuotas de diez, cinco y dos pesos de acuerdo, igualmente, con su clase. Una vez registrada, la pupila recibía su libreta oficial en la cual, además de su nombre, número de identificación y la certificación médica, se incluía su fotografía. Si los médicos de la Inspección de Sanidad descubrían indicios de enfermedad, la pupila era enviada al hospital Morelos antes de liberar su libreta (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 162).

According to the novel, the police were in charge of enforcing this new legislation, which was a failure, and this catastrophe led to the creation of alternate legislation in 1871 and later in 1889.<sup>46</sup> The reasons for the failure were the so-called *insometidas* who worked without being registered and in unlicensed brothels where police were bribed to keep their distance (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 162). According to the text's narrative voice, dominated by Matilda's thoughts "A finales de 1907, cuando Matilda hizo de la prostitución su oficio, sólo las muy atolondradas o francamente estúpidas, como Santa, acudían al registro y pasaban por la humillación del examen médico" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 162). Interestingly, because she worked as an *insometida* there would normally be no physical photograph documenting Matilda's participation in the profession, and she would fall outside of this method of social control. However, Rivera Garza takes her own

---

<sup>46</sup> In her article "The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body: Prostitutes, Health Crimes, and Society in Mexico City, 1867-1930," Rivera Garza explains that the first *Reglamento de Prostitución en México* was issued in 1867. She does not include this date in the novel and, according to the article, a new regulation was created in 1871. This regulation was, in turn, modified in 1898, 1913, 1914, and again in 1926 when *zonas de tolerancia* were legalized (Rivera Garza, "The Criminalization" 150). However, in 1935, prostitution was officially declared illegal (Rivera Garza, "The Criminalization" 151). The date of 1898 differs from the date provided in the novel, which could indicate the privileging of fiction over history in *Nadie me verá llorar* or may simply be the result of a typographical error.

photograph of Matilda through Joaquín, giving her a presence that an *insometida* would not necessarily have.<sup>47</sup>

Matilda holds this position as an unregistered prostitute because she enters the profession out of necessity. When she is fired from the cigarette factory where she works and is left to care for the children of another woman, she does what she has to do to survive. Santa's story of entering the profession over being jilted by a lover becomes a believable lie that Matilda, and other women tell others to justify their entry into the profession:

Todas habían relatado la misma historia desde que Santa la hiciera famosa y todas habían comprobado su eficacia. A los hombres que les pagaban por sus servicios se les ablandaba el corazón y la cartera. La historia, además los dejaba convencidos de que fornicar había sido en realidad una obra de caridad. Así tanto los hombres como sus ramerías salvaban, por partes iguales, la moral. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 170)

Showing the influence that literature can have over life, this tale serves to alleviate any guilt that patrons may feel upon hiring a woman for her services. It also continues to mock the absurdity of *Santa* by Rivera Garza, since women cleverly find a way to financially benefit from the story.

Rivera Garza continues her challenge to the 1903 novel as well as the heteronormativity of the time by using this portion of the novel to create the exact counterpoint to Santa in Matilda

---

<sup>47</sup> Rivera Garza explains that photography became a method of social control under the government of Antonio López de Santa Ana. Photographs were used in the *Reglamento para asegurar la identidad de los reos cuyas causas se sigan en la ciudad de México* (*The Masters* 304). "Fixing their identity not only facilitated the task of the police, but also helped to demarcate the visual and representational limits of the criminal element in society at large" (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 304)

(significantly becoming known as “La Diablesa<sup>48</sup>” because of “sus modos cortantes con los clientes y sus generosos malabarismos eróticos”) and she also experiences her second great love with another woman, Ligia Morales, also known as “La Diamantina” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 171). In Gamboa’s novel, Santa reacts to La Gaditana’s lesbian advances with a lack of comprehension and later disgust:

[...] Santa sólo fue capaz de comprender las insinuaciones nada sutiles de la Gaditana a través de las explicaciones que le dio, entre todos los hombres, un pianista ciego. Así, gracias a la atinada intervención masculina, Santa llegó a descifrar el contenido erótico de los vientres juntos durante las lecciones de baile y los besos que <<La Gaditana>> dejaba en su ropa todavía tibia. Entonces, naturalmente, Santa reaccionó con asco. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 172-173)

Also, Santa’s experience is translated for her by a male interlocutor. On the other hand, in Rivera Garza’s novel *Matilda* experiences, interprets and contributes to her romance with a woman directly *sans* interlocutor. She also interprets La Gaditana’s actions while reading the novel with Diamantina, and laughs at Gamboa’s lack of imagination. Furthermore, using both their bodies, Diamantina and Matilda physically mark an alternate romance on the pages of the novel when “[...] hicieron el amor sobre las páginas del libro” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 174).

---

<sup>48</sup> The nickname chosen for Matilda seems to be inspired by the story of Ana Alvarez that Rivera Garza details in *The Masters of the Streets*. Alvarez was a registered prostitute who left the profession for a man only to realize that her life as a prostitute had been better. When she went to the Morelos hospital to seek treatment for a venereal disease and was denied medical assistance because she no longer worked as a prostitute, she wrote a letter to the *Inspección de Sanidad* saying she would continue her old way of life and asked to be reintegrated into the registry. She signed the letter that “disclosed will and choice” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 131) and explained her situation with her name along with her nickname, “La Diablesa” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 130). Rivera Garza goes on to explain that “The alternatives for a poor single woman in the city were indeed scarce [...] but La Diablesa nonetheless selected a profession that assured her financial independence and a certain level of freedom” (*The Masters* 131). In her dissertation, *Lineas de fuga*, Samuelson reads Matilda as a fusion of Modesta Burgos and Ana Alvarez (100).

The two women continue their re-writing of Gamboa by parodying the work in theatrical performances that gain such popularity that they are able to move to a more sophisticated brothel named “La Modernidad.”<sup>49</sup> I will further explain the significance of this socioeconomic shift later in the chapter. In these performances, Diamantina “[...] se hizo cargo de transformar a la provinciana estúpida en una dama con alas de dragón, Matilda se convirtió en un hombre de frac cuya inocencia e ignorancia del bajo mundo le ganaron el apelativo de <<el Menso>> (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 178). Cheyla Samuelson posits that

The enjoyment of Matilda and Diamantina’s production by patrons of the upscale house of prostitution where they work, and the cynical adoption of the *Santa* ‘narrative’ by many prostitutes to appeal to their customers’ desires works to describe an atmosphere considerably more complicated than Gamboa’s description of one-dimensional stereotypes. The possibility that both the prostitutes and their customers viewed *Santa* as an amusing fantasy to be exploited or mocked permits us to envision even the most underprivileged and marginalized subjects of the era as possessing more self-awareness and agency than the deterministic novel of the era suggests. (61)

With time, these new characters that Ligia and Matilda have created, begin to influence their reality:

Matilda, a quien el frac con que representaba a <<el Menso>> le quedaba bien, decidió cortarse el cabello para parecerse más a su personaje. De pantalones oscuros siempre y sin joya o perfume alguno sobre el cuerpo, <<la Diablesa>>

---

<sup>49</sup> The work of Claudia Parodi (2010) provides further analysis of how Rivera Garza uses satire in *Nadie me verá llorar* to criticize other nineteenth-century literature.



empezó a tener fama de andrógina. Ligia, por su parte, combinó su amor por los brillantes con túnicas de estilo prehispánico para crearse una personalidad exótica y vanguardista a la vez. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 180-81)

Later in the novel, Matilda would repeat this performance with Joaquín.<sup>50</sup> This particular frame of the novel will be discussed later in the chapter.

As with the aforementioned historical documents that are faithfully reproduced in the novel, Rivera Garza sees some truth in Gamboa's text and includes a quote from *Santa* that foreshadows the ending of Matilda's story with Licia: "¡La eterna y cruel historia de los sexos en su alternativo e inevitable acercamiento y alejamiento, que se aproximan con el beso, la caricia y la promesa, para separarse poco a poco con la ingratitud, el despecho y el llanto!..." (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 182). There are still marked differences between *Nadie me verá llorar* and Gamboa's novel since in the former work "los sexos" are two women separating. In the end, Ligia leaves Matilda for a man that Matilda immediately equates with "el Jarameño," the male love interest from *Santa*, to which Diamantina responds:

–Pues es el sueño de toda puta, ¿no? Tú deberías hacer lo mismo. La Modernidad no va a durar toda la vida.

–El cuento sigue siendo tan efectivo como siempre, Ligia, pero acuérdate del final. <<El Jarameño>> termina despreciando a Santa y la pobre mujer acaba en

---

<sup>50</sup> In his article "Asignaciones de género y tareas de identidad en la narrativa de Cristina Rivera Garza," Oswaldo Estrada analyzes how Rivera Garza "desordena los papeles genéricos que asigna toda sociedad a sus integrantes" in several of her works including *Nadie me verá llorar* (181).

una sala de operaciones acompañada de un pianista ciego –le contestó. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 185)

When she finishes this story, Matilda does not cry. Instead she plays the piano, as she had learned from the first Diamantina, choosing to play the Mexican national anthem. She does this, signaling her defeat, and paralleling the defeat of people like her, *las prostitutas* and *los locos*, in the nation: “Los acordes del Himno Nacional sonaban tan tristes que parecía que el país entero estaba perdido. La guerra había terminado y Matilda se encontraba, como siempre, en el campo de los vencidos” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 186).

Precisely after the loss of this second Diamantina, Matilda asks Joaquín the question that begins the entire narration. She finds in Joaquín a person with whom she may identify:

La pregunta surgió precisamente de la nada, de la diversión y el atrevimiento que acompañan siempre a la nada. En los ojos asustados del hombre, Matilda vio por primera vez el reflejo del dolor, el de él, el suyo propio, el de todos. Era un alfiler enmohecido, una cama cubierta por un pabellón amarillo, un lugar cuya única razón de ser era no compartirlo. Las pupilas de Joaquín Buitrago se empequeñecieron y cerraron sus puertas. De eso se trataba todo: ver sin ser visto. A eso se le llamaba soledad. Matilda, a quien nada había conmovido después de la partida de la segunda Diamantina, se conmovió. Bastaba ver su cuerpo para saber que había pasado por un cataclismo. El hombre era un perdedor y, como ella, un miembro más de la legión de los derrotados. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 186-187)

Upon escaping from La Castañeda, Joaquín and Matilda begin a new chapter of their lives together, wandering the streets of Mexico City and assigning their own meaning to places. They

share stories of what different parts of the city mean to them, and certain places become inscribed and marked by memories: “En el mapa de su ciudad sentimental los monumentos son transparentes y la escala desigual. A Matilda y Joaquín no les gusta llorar” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 213). The narrator signals that “se han perdido todas las grandes ocasiones históricas” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 211) and that instead, like the map of the city, this novel has created their own, alternative history. With the “escala desigual,” less importance is given to the master narrative and more importance placed on the histories of downtrodden individuals, “la legión de los derrotados.” As Sánchez-Blake explains in her article,

Más que presentar los hechos de la macro historia que caracterizó el cambio de siglo en México, la novela examina los eventos de la micro historia, la de los individuos marginados de la sociedad y su función en una época que marcó el inicio de la modernidad en la Ciudad de México. La historia del Hospital Psiquiátrico General de la Castañeda, recreado en la novela como uno de los temas centrales acentúa el uso del asilo como estrategia de segregación para proteger a la sociedad de la influencia o contagio de los vicios y las perturbaciones mentales. Pero, siguiendo los postulados de Foucault, sin una línea definida para distinguir entre locura y cordura, dicha segregación fue utilizada como un mecanismo de control efectivo que permitía el aislamiento de cualquiera que fuera considerado como un peligro potencial de tipo ideológico a la sociedad.

(68)

With Rivera Garza, these alternative histories are resuscitated.<sup>51</sup> Just as Matilda and Ligia's entry from the brothel of San Andrés to La Modernidad comes about thanks to their re-writing of *Santa*, through a re-writing of history, Rivera Garza makes it possible for Joaquín and Matilda's history, amongst others, to become part of the larger narrative from which they had been excluded.

The two live in the house of Santa María la Ribera, a place that Joaquín will inherit from his parents under the condition that he be cured of his morphine addiction and have a doctor document this fact. They clean the house and also burn most of the furniture as firewood. In this way they create a microcosm of their previously described alternative city of memories, laughing at the official memories and history that surround them such as “un cuadro con el rostro blanquecino de Porfirio Díaz” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 214).

Photography helps complete the rest of Joaquín's story as well as adds to the characters' alternate history. As a photographer in his youth Joaquín, had been part of Agustín Casasola's circle of friends. Casasola could be seen as the Mexican photographer of official history of the time period, since, during his lifetime he worked for *El Imparcial*, a newspaper that represented the interests of the Díaz<sup>52</sup> dictatorship, and later become the photographer for the presidencies of

---

<sup>51</sup> Other authors have also addressed Rivera Garza's merging of history and fiction with the purpose of questioning or presenting alternatives to official history, including Julia Érika Negrete Sandoval (2013), Oswaldo Estrada (2010), Brian L. Price (2010) and Elena Alicia Magaña Franco (2004).

<sup>52</sup> According to Olivier Debroise in *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in Mexico*, “Although he did not actually bear the title as such, Casasola was, in fact, the official photographer of Porfirio Díaz until 1911 when the *Ypiranga* sailed for Europe, carrying the former dictator into exile” (184). He also founded the Agencia Fotográfica Mexicana, the first news photo agency in Mexico (Debroise 184). Other photographers that worked with him were Eduardo Melhado, José María Lupercio and his younger brother Abraham, Samuel Tinoco, Gerónimo Hernández, Víctor León, Luis Santamaría, Manuel Ramos, and Hugo Brehme (Debroise 185). After Casasola founded his news photo agency, he became “more than a photographer, a compiler of images. From the headquarters of the agency, he directed his associates, sometimes purchasing photographs from foreign reporters, even amateurs, and redistributing these to newspapers” (Debroise 185). It should be noted that Abraham Lupercio, Jerónimo Hernández, Luis Santamarina and Víctor León are mentioned in *Nadie me verá llorar* as “miembros del gremio de fotógrafos” (22).

Obregón and Calles (Magaña Franco 117). In sharp contrast, Joaquín's box of photographs instead includes pictures of prostitutes, pornography and Diamantina.<sup>53</sup> As Matilda goes through Joaquín's prized box of photographs, his story merges with that of Matilda, as she finds a photograph of this "primera mujer" and asks him to share the woman's story (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 222). Through Matilda's contact with this same box, Joaquín's story of his "segunda mujer" emerges along with the final set of photographs that will complete the novel. As Matilda looks through the photos, Rivera Garza describes her actions like that of shuffling a set of *lotería* cards. Alberta is another photographer in the novel, whose photographs also merge words and images, like the text and paralleling *lotería* cards themselves. Thus Joaquín becomes "El valiente que se atreve a seguirla por las calles de Roma sin volver la vista atrás. Su figura, detrás de la cámara, nunca aparece. Joaquín, quien se divierte colocando piedrecillas imaginarias sobre un tablero infinito, no puede ganar. Corre y se va. Se fue" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 223). This scene highlights photographs as a driving force in the narrative, since they elicit emotions, merging past and present. Also the story of Alberta emerges as the elusive figure that has driven Joaquín to use morphine, who has become the woman he cannot keep up with, and who will have continued her game with or without him.

Joaquín's story with Alberta begins with an ending. After he leaves Alberta in Rome, she begins to send him photographs. The first photo that arrives (along with a telegram announcing her death) is the image of a scar on her palm with her handwriting underneath reading "Esta

---

However, Joaquín separates from this group and Rivera Garza signals him as clearly different in technique and purpose. For instance, Jerónimo Hernández judges Buitrago's work as "muy menor" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 22). Also, when Abraham Lupercio asks Joaquín: "¿Cómo ves, flaco Buitrago? ¿Somos fotógrafos o periodistas gráficos?" the latter "no pudo esconder su disgusto al escuchar el segundo término" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 22).

<sup>53</sup> In *Nadie me verá llorar*, the headlines of *El Imparcial*, were for Diamantina and her father, an object of ridicule. She instead wrote articles for *Vésper* or *El Hijo del Ahuizote* which opposed the dictatorship (*Nadie* 51, Magaña Franco 64).

quemadura te la debo a ti”<sup>54</sup> (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 226). Together photo and text are meant to elicit a memory of the moment when Joaquín told Alberta that he would be leaving Rome. At that moment she lit a match under her palm and cursed him:

Maldigo el día en que te conocí, Joaquín Buitrago. Maldigo a tu padre y a tu madre, a los hijos que no tendrás, a las mujeres que tengan la mala suerte de dormir a tu lado. Maldigo tu casa, las calles por las que camines de noche y de día, los cielos que te nublen la cabeza. Tú nunca triunfarás. Maldigo tus ojos que no saben ver. Esta quemadura te la debo a ti, Joaquín. Esta quemadura te va a doler el resto de tus días. (224)

This news causes him to partially equate her death with his actions, and he begins his addiction. However, his obsession with her deepens as her death turns out to be a manipulative lie and she begins sending him pornography that inserts him in intimate moments of her life. Once again he becomes a historian, but this time he pieces together a more contemporary history of Alberta:

Dos meses después llega la segunda carta. Otra fotografía. La cara de Alberta aparece entre los pliegues de una almohada y, sobre ella, cortando la nariz, el horizonte de un hombre cubre todo el resto de la imagen. Los ojos de la mujer están entreabiertos, a su alrededor gestos de dolor o de placer. <<Me estás echando de menos ya?>> Son de placer. Joaquín no tiene tiempo de pensar. Se

---

<sup>54</sup> Alberta’s photo can also be read as a brief re-writing of Mexican “ex-votos.” With this small literary portrait, Rivera Garza emulates those created by Sandra Cisneros in “Little Miracles, Kept Promises.” Yet, with Rivera Garza, this tradition is turned on its head. Instead of capturing a moment when a miracle was granted, or a heavenly intervention occurred, Rivera Garza describes Alberta’s modern “ex-voto” through which she becomes a *retablista* that cynically thanks Joaquín not for healing, but for hurting.

lleva la mano a la bragueta y, con la mano cerrada, trata de reproducir la vagina húmeda de Alberta. Al semen cae sobre sus cabellos cortos, la frente, la boca, a espalda del hombre que, ensordecido por los gemidos de la mujer, moviéndose a un ritmo enfebrecido sobre ella, no se da cuenta del momento en que el botón de la cámara se suelta. Sin notar la respiración agitada del fotógrafo que se esconde detrás de las cortinas, el hombre continúa. Tres hombres han alcanzado el placer a tiempos distintos, en lugares distintos, pero sobre la misma piel. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 227- 228)

Just as Diamantina and Matilda had marked Gamboa's book with their bodies and implicitly their bodily fluids, Joaquín also marks and alters Alberta's photograph. Alberta continues to send him photographs for months that elicit the same physical reaction, his same participation and the same marking of the photos. Simultaneously participating in these acts through viewing photography, Joaquín falls in love with what he calls "la crueldad de su inteligencia," since the woman seduces him through photographs rather than through easily forgettable love letters: "[...] lo que ella me mandaba desde Roma eran mis propios ojos. Mis ojos viéndola, espiando sus rincones luminosos. Mis ojos mirando la técnica impecable de su triunfo, la planicie inmensa de mi derrota" (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 228). Thus these photos become a part of his story and his lived experience.

Once Joaquín and Matilda have deconstructed and created their own microcosm made up of spoken memories, they create a physical representation of their histories with what I would argue, is a physical representation of the text itself, *Nadie me verá llorar*. The collage of photographs and text that make up the novel becomes a wall covered by photographs in Matilda and Joaquín's house of Santa María la Ribera:

A diferencia de los días secos de la primavera en que se entretenían destruyendo cosas, deshaciéndose de ellas, ahora se divertían creando un mundo a su gusto, un lugar en el que pueden entrar como una mano entra en un guante a la medida. Todas las fotografías de Joaquín están prendidas a las paredes con tachuelas. Mujeres y ausencias se reparten de manera desigual en la sala y la biblioteca, la cocina y el baño. Las imágenes de Diamantina engrandecen el piano. La pornografía de Alberta decora la entrada de la casa. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 230)

Their first guest in the house is Dr. Eduardo Oligochea, who arrives to provide a certificate that states that Joaquín is cured of his addiction, in exchange for half of the wealth that Joaquín will acquire with this statement. In completion of the re-creation of *Nadie me verá llorar* that the space of the house represents, Matilda decides to perform her parody of *Santa*, robed in a suit, hiding her hair under a felt hat and wearing a white shirt “cubriendo sus senos flácidos,” she no longer possesses the body of her youth (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 230). This time Joaquín plays the role of Santa, wearing only a sheer, silk tunic and pulling the doctor into a vulgar and grotesque performance.

Sadly, in the end, the official history becomes overwhelmingly triumphant and the desire to create an alternate reality is toppled in Rivera Garza’s commentary of documents that serve as “facts” and that ultimately triumph over any alternative re-writing of history. Eduardo presents the two characters with a photo of the first Diamantina, specifically, a photo of her dead body in the morgue. This photo is significant because when both characters had believed that she died in the Huelga de Río Blanco in 1907, she had in fact died in December of 1906, never having left the city. The official document, a photograph taken at the morgue, destroys a fantasy the two character’s had created concerning Diamantina’s death, “La fiesta de disfraces se ha convertido



en un funeral” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 233). However, despite this failure to topple the official history, there is a certain triumph in the fact that Dr. Oligochea, has been forced to participate in this parody, taking the unofficial history and the alternate representation of *Santa* with him.

This scene serves to prepare the reader for the novel’s ending. Joaquín has obtained the documents to legally possess his parents’ house and a financially secure future for him and Matilda. He hopes to become what he has called “el esposo de la vainilla,” referring to a vanilla plant’s need to tangle itself on a tree in order to be supported and to avoid death (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 67). Matilda is unwilling to become anybody’s wife. Instead, she uses her time with him to painstakingly narrate all of the events of her life: “Las palabras salen a borbotones durante sus días exaltados [...] Hablar, sin embargo, la ayuda a limpiarse, a borrar sus trazas de gris en la pizarra verde del mundo” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 238). The words she utters are lost from the historical record and exist in the space of the “como-si.” As Matilda explains to Joaquín:

–Yo vine a tu casa para saber si me había equivocado; para saber si las cosas hubieran podido ser distintas –le dice mirándolo a los ojos.

Un experimento, el último.

–Déjame descansar. Quiero descansar. Nada más. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 241)

In this final re-writing of *Santa*, that began with the failed ceremonious play performed before Dr. Eduardo Oligochea, it is the male who represents Santa that is left behind. In this way, Joaquín’s work as a historian also ends. After Matilda leaves,

Joaquín Buitrago manda traer muebles y se deshace de las cortinas. <<Ser feliz.>> Quiere luz y aire, las imágenes de una vida normal. Quiere otra

oportunidad, encontrar otro lugar en el mundo. Una nueva era. Al observar la red informe que cubre su techo, Joaquín sabe que sobrevivirá. En ese momento un cosquilleo repentino recorre su columna vertebral y lo obliga a incorporarse. Es la prisa. El reconocimiento lo hace sonreír. Todavía no hay nada que pueda hacer con la alegría. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 241-42)

In the final step of the “situación típica” that the historian faces and which Rivera Garza delineates, it is through hearing Matilda’s story, the sound of her voice, and her abundant utterances before her departure that he is allowed to complete his work as a historian. He now graduates and re-incorporates himself into his world. It is 1921.

With Matilda’s return to the Manicomio General, Rivera Garza also completes her work with this text. Rivera Garza begins the last chapter of *Nadie me verá llorar*, “Vivir en la vida real del mundo” with the story of Altagracia Flores de Elizalde: “[Ella] cree que una pistola cuesta treinta mil pesos y una hacienda sólo cincuenta. <<Imaginación excéntrica>>. Ama de casa en Aguascalientes” (243). This brief description of Altagracia’s beliefs quotes the official discourse. However, it is significant that this chapter begins with this particular woman. In *Masters of the Streets*, Rivera Garza analyzes Flores de Elizalde’s story carefully and highlights how the doctors are “shocked” and “amazed” at the woman’s “delirium” (317). In her dissertation, Rivera Garza, writing from a place of marginality, posits an alternative reading of Altagracia’s story. She signals the fact that Altagracia’s understanding of value was not so different from that of others of the time. Altagracia entered the asylum in 1920, and during the time of political strife and violence of the Mexican Revolution:

Altagracia, nonetheless, was by no means the only person making these kind [sic] of assertions [that the value of a pistol was greater than the value of an *hacienda*].

Corridos of the Mexican Revolution, the ballads and narrative folk songs of the popular armies deeply rooted in a peasant background, frequently described and stressed the positive social value of rifles and pistols. As in the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, heroic corridos especially evoked a man, pistol in hand, defending his personal and his political rights. [...]

The corrido spread important information through the community [...] Orally created and transmitted, the overwhelming positive associations of weapons as empowering tools of peasants and other subordinate groups of society thus reached large popular audiences, leaving deep marks in the social consciousness of the poor and dispossessed. (Rivera Garza *The Masters* 322-23)

Drawing on Chicano scholarship to prove her point, Rivera Garza offers this alternate analysis to demonstrate that “some irrational tales of La Castañeda touch upon some crucial traits of an emerging rational and modernized society, especially when taken out of the walls of the asylum” (*The Masters* 324). Rivera Garza’s choice to begin the final chapter of her work in this manner, indicates that Matilda’s story should also be understood outside the controlling “walls of the asylum.”

In this final chapter, Rivera Garza also inserts Modesta’s “Despachos Presidenciales.” This way, at the end of the novel, the reader is allowed to glimpse and interpret the original file. Matilda’s writings also include very lucid critiques of the time period. “Although her *Cuerpos Diplomáticos* lacked the style and content of a political banner, her words nonetheless disclosed a person critically reviewing the changing social environment of this era. Terms such as corruption, thievery, abuse of power and plain violence steadfastly, and effortlessly, surfaced in her texts (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 326). Furthermore, in one of the texts Burgos refers to

“[...] estos médicos - los malos y estafadores - perniciosos - que maltratan gente - y que andan de perversos - con todas las cosas en general” (Rivara Garza, *Nadie* 249). Through this statement, she labels doctors, rather than herself as perverse and she uses their equally perverse interest in “todas las cosas en general” (and in her) to gain permission to write. As Rivera Garza explains in *La Castañeda*: “A pesar de los diagnósticos, o tal vez gracias a ellos, estas mujeres lucharon, con éxito en algunas ocasiones, por narrar sus historias personales, con lo cual abrieron una puerta invaluable hacia la autointerpretación de las mujeres de México a principios del siglo XX” (142).

Finally, with Rivera Garza’s decision to end her creative work with Matilda’s texts written after her return to *La Castañeda*, she indicates that there is part of the novel that escapes her, and that is beyond her (a historian) hearing voices. Although there are indications in the novel that Rivera Garza may have wanted to create an alternative story for Matilda, she only escapes *La Castañeda* temporarily in fiction. Such an escape may be something that may have been possible, due to the notoriously lax security at *La Castañeda* (Rivera Garza, *La Castañeda* 256). As Cheyla Samuelson opines, “Rivera Garza’s narrative is never naïve about the effects of mental illness on its sufferers, even as it explores the subversive side of madness. For this reason, her narrative can be called ‘self-aware,’ in that she actively works against a natural empathetic desire to rescue her protagonist from her sad fate” (107). In the end, as a historian Rivera Garza must adhere to the historical facts found in the novel and have her character return to the hospital yet as a creative writer she will not do this without allowing Matilda to tell her story and then demand peace. The phrase, “Nadie me verá llorar” holds great significance to the end of the novel. Earlier in the novel, the narrator states: “Más que el dolor mismo, Matilda temía la compasión ajena. Desde tiempo antes y sin saber, había decidido vivir todas su pérdidas a solas,

sin la intromisión de nadie, a veces ni de sí misma” ( Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 165). In the end, the character adheres to this phrase that the narrator often ties to her throughout the text. With Matilda’s final utterance, spoken in the imperative <<Déjenme descansar en paz>> this “proceso de creación” has come to an end (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 250).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Conclusion: Mexican Feminism from the Streets**

*“Por mi culpa, por mi culpa, por mi grandísima culpa, empecé a ser feminista.”*

- Sara Sefchovich, *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* (21)

In “Thinking Feminism from Mexico,” Jean Franco’s introduction to Marta Lamas’ *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions*, the critic details some of the key moments in the history of the women’s movement in Mexico. According to Franco, women’s movements in Mexico first emerged from a demand for suffrage that finally succeeded in 1954 (3). In 1975, the first United Nations International Women’s Conference was held in Mexico City. This meeting

[...] had extraordinary repercussions in Latin America principally because it exposed both the class and racial biases within feminism, and the absurdity of the classless discourse of US and European feminists. During the conference, there were vigorous protests by working-class and indigenous women, notably by the Bolivian miner’s wife, Domitila Chungara, who vociferously objected to the middle-class leadership and exclusivity. (Franco 5)

Franco goes on to explain that in Mexico, the previously invisible underclass was made visible when the 1985 Mexico City earthquake simultaneously crumbled and revealed the existence of exploitative illegal sweatshops, where eight hundred garment workers were killed in the clandestine buildings the earthquake decimated (Franco 4-5). This destruction led neighbors to organize rescue efforts well before the government began its inadequate and slow rescue

attempts; The Nineteenth of September Garment Workers' Union, started mostly by women, emerged as a result of this earthquake (Franco 6). The 1994 uprising of Zapatistas in Chiapas also had important repercussions for the underclass and for feminism. In 2001 Ester, a Tzotzil woman and Zapatista commander, drew national attention when she spoke for indigenous women in front of the Mexican Congress, making legislative leaders aware of the Zapatista women's bill of rights (Franco 6). "Both the Garment Worker's Union formed after the earthquake, and the Zapatista bill of rights instructed Mexicans that feminism was not a middle-class luxury, and that poor and indigenous women could speak for themselves and engage in dialogue in the public sphere" (Franco 6). Yet, even before and concurrent with these significant events in Mexican feminism<sup>55</sup> and Latin American feminism in general, alternative forms of protest in the everyday, quotidian gestures of resistance have existed as exemplified by works such as Antonia Mora's urban testimonial *Del oficio*. Although she does not explicitly posit herself as a feminist in her texts, in them there is indeed a sensibility of protest akin to that of fellow *testimonio* writers, Domitila Chungara and Rigoberta Menchú.

In an analysis of Rigoberta Menchu's *testimonio* in *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains that "Menchú's mother, whose name she chooses to keep 'secret,' lived her feminism — lived [...] a feminism born of revolutionary struggle. Unlike most academic Western feminisms, this Quiché woman's feminism creates no dichotomy between theory and praxis" (165). Similarly, Mora's feminism is also born of struggle and, quite simply, is *lived*. The feminism that Mora lives and then narrates in *Del oficio* takes place in the 1930s to the 1950s in the streets of Mexico City; as Castillo posits, Mora employs a "[...] direct approach to women's concerns, and her critique of male-

---

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed history of Mexican Feminism see the work of Marta Lamas (2011).

defined social customs and sexual practices is entirely transparent” (177). According to Castillo, Mora critiques male-defined social customs and sexual practices, for instance, when she questions a specific man’s failure to give his wife sexual pleasure and his faulty belief that his wife’s arousal will turn her into a prostitute, and pervert her (177). As detailed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Mora also critiques abusive pimps and clients, along with corrupt and violent police. Even as she criticizes men’s behavior, Mora also signals a lack of solidarity amongst women: when Antonia is young, her mother suffers from pneumonia and is unable to pay for food or rent; her roommates take her clothes and blankets and kick her out while the *vecinas* laugh at her: “—Lo que es de esta pulmonía no se salva. ¡Merecido lo tiene por puta! El otro día pasó mi marido frente a ella, la muy descarada le dio carita” (A. Mora 12). Antonia’s mother in turn also physically and psychologically abuses her child. A woman who sees Antonia abducted, assumes she’s been raped and shakes her head in disdain, and *madrotas* take advantage of the women under their charge.

Mora’s text also serves as evidence that amongst women, there is judgment and mistrust from both sides of the social divide. As a teenager Antonia seeks out temporary friendships with young girls skipping school:

—¿A qué escuela vas? ¿Qué estudias? —me preguntaban.

Les respondía con mentiras. Sentía una horrible vergüenza de que adivinaran algo. Cambiaba de plática. Tenía tanta importancia para mí que se les antojaran cosas: una torta, una leche malteada. Cuando se las obsequiaba y las veía comer sentía como si hubiera cumplido con un deber. Luego las citaba para llevarlas a ver dibujos animados. Muchas de esas películas ya las había visto como diez



veces. Después cortaba su amistad, pues me imaginaba que nunca iban a aceptarme como era. (A. Mora 82)

Antonia feels she needs to purchase these girls' company and lies rather than reveal her profession, for fear of being judged. In *Del oficio*, there is also the fear that *madrotas* will not pay for work done, as shown in the following exchange that Antonia details. Here with her friend Artemisa, Antonia refuses to work for a "joven tan importante" if she is not paid first: "—Las dos nuevas vengan. Se van con él a la recámara. Después les pago yo. / —No, señora. Así no. / —¿Por qué no? Si yo les digo que pago./ —No, porque luego se le olvida" (A. Mora 80).

Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, sometimes this lack of trust confirms the abuse perpetuated by women towards women. In the case related in the above quote, when Antonia and Artemisa refuse to work without being paid first, the *patrona* attempts to physically injure them with a glass and tells security that they must stay all night regardless of whether they are working or not. In protest, Antonia remarks "Mira [...] que chingona. Quiere que le demos cachucha al zángano ese. Mejor se la doy a un bolero, pero porque yo quiera... no para complacerla a ella" (A. Mora 80). Antonia will not be taken advantage of by another woman; instead she will decide what to do with her body and ultimately she will jump over the fence with Artemisa in order to flee from the situation and leave the *madrota* behind.

This simple act of the two women escaping an abusive situation together signals that despite these moments of abuse there is also female solidarity, there is love and there is feminism. In *Del oficio* women form friendships as they struggle against a system of oppression: Cecilia takes in Antonia's mother and takes her to a doctor, and Elena struggles to teach Antonia that her profession is "tan noble como cualquier otra" (A. Mora 59) and to show her that she can steal from men so as to not let herself be taken advantage of by them, but rather to "quitarles algo [a

los hombres]” that “te trabajan a ti” (A. Mora 61). In prison, Antonia is finally treated by a female doctor that touches her so tenderly that it brings her to tears, and while at a dance at the female prison in Mexico City, the *directora* means for the women to “divertirse sanamente” and she pushes them to dance: “Primero tímidas, luego nerviosas y sonrientes, al poco rato todas bailaban. Habían bailado media docena de piezas. Ya no bailaban separadas; juntaban sus cuerpos y su jadeo iba en aumento. Subía, subía. Tres parejas salieron. No las volví a ver. Al terminar el baile todas tenían el uniforme empapado de sudor” (A. Mora 128). In this final example, the women have subverted the director’s meaning and made the dance and the space their own.

Sara Sefchovich also uses her work to reflect on problems she sees in Mexican women’s relationships with each other. As discussed in Chapter Three, in *Demasiado amor*, Sefchovich points to an obvious lack of solidarity amongst women, such as when Beatriz’s sister takes advantage of her by using the money that Beatriz sends from working as a prostitute but also judges her for the way she obtains it. And, in a similar vein as Mora’s work, she seeks to destroy the dichotomy between so-called “gente decente” and the “others.” Furthermore, through her protagonists in *Demasiado amor* and *Vivir la vida* Sefchovich posits that women must fight through the everyday, *la costumbre*. She writes *Demasiado amor* in particular to combat escapist fantasies and she completes her message in *Vivir la vida* when she shows that writing illuminates reality or, “*Las palabras hacen visibles verdades evidentes*” (Sefchovich 11). Thus, in these two works, there is an overall sense that relationships between women and the situation of women must be fought for and improved in quotidian, everyday life. However, as with Mora, in both Sefchovich’s novels, solidarity amongst women is also present throughout her writing as advice is passed from one woman to another. Also, writing is posited as a means by which one can learn

from mistakes made or articulated in the past. As noted in Chapter Three, on a broader level, Sefchovich also uses *Vivir la vida* to reflect on struggles in the women's movement, such as the ongoing fight for abortion rights. Thus, it should be noted that since the publication of the first edition of *Vivir la vida* (2000), in 2008 the Supreme Court in the State of Mexico voted to decriminalize abortion in the Federal District (Franco 8).

Cristina Rivera Garza's novel also demonstrates solidarity amongst women, in this case it is the solidarity of a writer who, through her marginality as a *fronteriza* writer with a Chicana/Latina sensibility, seeks to understand marginalized women from the past. In her analysis of *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (1983), Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains that the contributing writers "shatter the tradition of silence imposed on them by pressures of a culture that works against the viability of an oral tradition" (47). As women of color living in the capitalist United States of the eighties, Latinas now had the obligation to "write what was once spoken" (Saldívar-Hull 47). And although they recognize themselves as a part of a diverse group, as Latinas in the U.S. the authors—one Nuyorican (Alma Gómez), another Chicana (Cherríe Moraga), and another Chilean (Mariana Romo-Carmona)—must unite with other people of color in this shared experience (Saldívar-Hull 46, 48). Similarly, albeit for different reasons—death, constraints of time, space—Rivera Garza cannot privilege oral communication and communicate directly with women/people, "others" of the past. Instead because of her shared marginality with these women, she must bring experiences to light indirectly, through writing. "The written word, then, becomes essential when face-to-face contact is not possible" (Gómez, Moraga, Romo-Carmona vii). And, in what Rivera Garza writes, one can see that the women of the past are not so different from those of Mora's day, from Sefchovich's fictional character (an educated woman using prostitution to make money for her family), or from the women of today.

In her dissertation *Masters of the Streets*, Rivera Garza explains that in 1872, Dr. Manuel Alfaro, the physician who wrote the first *Reglamento de Prostitución en México*, analyzed the files of 500 registered prostitutes from the time period of 1868-1872 (161). According to Rivera Garza, “The findings and interpretations of Dr. Alfaro uncovered a wide array of sordid realities that de-glamorized the popular image of prostitutes as *daughters of joy, princesses of pleasure* and turned them instead into common members of the urban proletariat of nineteenth-century Mexico” (161). The women in the document were

[...] mostly young, single women lacking family support. The ages of prostitutes varied from 12 to 49 years old. 358 claimed to be orphans, 104 had one or both parents but did not report if they were alive or not, and no information was provided in the remaining 35 cases. 457 prostitutes were single women, 408 were childless and 48 had children. 36 were widows, 19 without offspring and 17 with it. The records revealed one married woman with two children. No information was recorded in the 5 remaining cases. As Dr. Alfaro himself noted, some prostitutes had indeed an ulterior justification for their activities, that is the maintenance of their own children and even elder parents in some cases (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 161-62).

In Dr. Alfaro’s report, a great many of these women had been wage laborers with limited options in the job market and low salaries rarely over 25 cents a day, and they were often paid half of what men earned for the same job (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 163-64). With limited options for survival, “becoming a prostitute thus seemed to be a rational decision of survival rather than a moral defect” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 164-65). In terms of education, “Taking into consideration the manners, the speech patterns and clothing of the 134 prostitutes he personally

interviewed, he considered that 77 women had no education, 37 had regular education and only 20 showed the traits of a good education” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 165). According to Dr. Alfaro’s study, when women were asked the circumstances under which they became prostitutes, they “alluded to poverty and family dislocation as the main antecedents that brought about their decision to become prostitutes. Yet [...] a great number of women also replied that they had ‘proclivity,’ that is an ingrained natural tendency for the profession” (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 166). In *Nadie me verá llorar*, Rivera Garza reproduces many of these facts and Matilda is portrayed as having worked for a cigarette manufacturer (one of the few industries that Rivera Garza lists along with cotton mills that employed women) (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 164). When Esther (the woman with whom Matilda lives) dies, leaving her with extra mouths to feed, she finds work as an unregistered prostitute, or an *insometida*:

Trabajaba por la noche, y al amanecer regresaba a la vecindad de Balderas, después de quitarse el maquillaje y cambiar de ropas. Los hijos de Esther se abstuvieron de hacerle preguntas y los vecinos, al tanto de sus obvias correrías, la miraban con tristeza y comprensión. Desempleada y con dos hijos ajenos que mantener, Matilda había tomado la única decisión posible. (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 171)

According to *Nadie me verá llorar* and *The Masters*, in Mexico City at the turn of the century, “el doce por ciento de las mujeres entre quince y treinta años de edad eran o habían sido prostitutas alguna vez en su vida” (Rivera Garza, *Nadie* 169-70). And, in her novel Rivera Garza features a character who is one of these women. Additionally, using a feminist sensibility, Rivera Garza writes a character actively defiant of the government, an *insometida*, a character who is

drawn from a multiplicity of historically documented women that contributed to the failure of the government's regulatory system.

In Mexico City today, there are also sex workers who say they work in *centros nocturnos* “por gusto o por necesidad” (Reveles), for the same reasons listed by women in the nineteenth century. On February 25, 2014, approximately 200 night club workers gathered around the Monumento a la Revolución in their own show of rebellion to demonstrate against what they considered abuse by the authorities. The women particularly objected to the “operativos” (police crack-downs) that began in May of 2013 in order to eliminate the “trata” or “traffic” of persons which is illegal in Mexico (Reveles). The “inconformes” state that in the places where they work, in *centros nocturnos* such as the Cadillac, Azteca, Savoy, Tentación, and Calígula, there is no trafficking of persons, yet these *operativos* have led to the imprisonment of five dancers in Santa Martha Acatitla<sup>56</sup> who refused to formally accuse the establishment owners (Reveles). One worker at the Cadillac, Nuria, is quoted as saying: “Nos han golpeado, nos han manoseado, y nos han amenazado con nuestros hijos” (“Fotos”). Such phrases indicate the existence of women who use sex work as a means of financial support for their families and they also signal authority figures (rather than prostitutes) as abusive, sexually perverted and a threat to families. These *operativos* are conducted by the *Fiscalía Especializada en la Atención al Delito de Trata de Personas de la Procuraduría General de Justicia del Distrito Federal* (PGJDF) (Ruíz-Palacios). The attorney general of Mexico City has stated that “la PGJDF no está en contra de que se ejerza

---

<sup>56</sup> In 2013 in “Lo que sea de cada quien: *Del oficio* de Antonia Mora,” Vicente Leñero states that Antonia Mora was held in this same prison. According to his article, Margaret Shedd (founder of the Centro Mexicano de Escritores) showed great enthusiasm over Mora’s work and put her in contact with Leñero so that he would “ayudarla a trabajar ese libro.” This arrangement concluded when Mora’s husband put an end to their collaboration.

la prostitución como forma de trabajo,<sup>57</sup> pero no se permitirá que esa actividad se realice por la fuerza y haya Trata [sic] de personas en los establecimientos, por lo que no cesaran los dispositivos” (Ruíz-Palacios). However, with sex workers being detained and held against their will, it is the authorities that are acting “por la fuerza” and oppressing these women.

The president of the non-profit organization *Brigada Callejera de Apoyo a la Mujer “Elisa Martínez”*<sup>58</sup> Elvira Madrid Romero, appeared on the program *Justicia en Pleno* and explained the difference between “trata” and “trabajo sexual” as follows: “Lo que es trata de personas es cuando alguien está forzada, que es menor de edad y está en contra de su voluntad [...] Lo que es trabajo sexual ya es la gente adulta que decide por ella misma hacerlo, ganarse la vida. La mayoría son mujeres que son madres solteras y nadie las fuerza [...] Están porque tienen que cubrir unas necesidades [...]” (*Justicia en Pleno*). Madrid Romero goes on to say that, due to the law against the trafficking of persons<sup>59</sup> this difference is not respected and women who work in the sex industry are classified as either “victims” or “criminals.” *Operativos* such as the one described above classify women as victims who are exploited and sometimes make them sign accusations that they are not allowed to read (*Justicia en Pleno*).

---

<sup>57</sup> According to Patty Kelly, “In contemporary Mexico, legal and regulated prostitution exists in thirteen of the nation’s thirty-one states” (8).

<sup>58</sup> *Brigada Callejera* is explained on their website as

[...] una organización civil sin fines de lucro, apartidista y laica, integrada por trabajadoras sexuales y otras mujeres solidarias. Se ha especializado en la defensa de los derechos humanos, civiles y laborales de las trabajadoras sexuales, así como en la prevención del VIH/SIDA e Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual, a través del mercadeo social de condones dirigido a grupos específicos de la población (“Qué hace”)

While on *Justicia en Pleno*, Madrid Romero says the organization has been in the area of La Merced, in Mexico City, for 23 years.

<sup>59</sup> According to *Justicia en Pleno* the “ley contra la trata” was approved in 2012.

Madrid Romero was invited on the program to discuss what Alejandro Madrazo calls “[...] un fallo histórico en el que por primera vez se reconoce como trabajo el trabajo sexual. Esto quiere decir que tiene ya tutela constitucional y que pueden, entre otras cosas, las mujeres organizarse” (*Justicia en Pleno*). This historic verdict was passed as a result of an *operativo* in La Merced that occurred some two years and a half before the transmission of the *Justicia en Pleno* episode on March 24, 2014 (*Justicia en Pleno*). According to Madrid Romero, during this *operativo* about 97 adult *compañeras* were taken to the Attorney General’s Office (la Procuraduría) for three days. There they were not allowed to make phone calls, and they were robbed of their cell phones and money. The authorities even declared one of these women underage. With the help of *Brigada Callejera* these women went to attorney Barbara Zamora who helped them with their case (*Justicia en Pleno*). According to the newspaper *La Jornada*, on February 11, 2014 federal judge Paula María García Villegas, “amparó a un grupo de sexoservidoras y servidores a efecto de que se les considere trabajadores no asalariados y se les acredite como tales” (Aranda “Sexoservidores”). García Villegas also

[...] ordenó a las autoridades laborales capitalinas emitir las credenciales solicitadas por los quejosos y quejosas como trabajadores no asalariados; que le expliquen que tienen derecho a la educación, salud, alimentación, vivienda digna y a sus derechos laborales (como sería a formar sindicatos), y les ofrezcan gratuitamente cursos y talleres para que puedan tener una alternativa laboral y estén en condiciones de elegir, si es su deseo, dedicarse a la prostitución o a otra actividad. (Aranda “Sexoservidores”)



The repercussions from this verdict still remain to be seen, but according to Madrid Romero, as workers, these women will be able to unionize. She also highlights the importance of the judge's demanding that the basic human rights of these women be respected (*Justicia en Pleno*).

To conclude, I would like to return to Rivera Garza's work one last time. In *Nadie me verá llorar* there is a particular event (one of many) in the novel that is inspired by a historical occurrence documented in *The Masters* to which I would like to call attention:

On May 14, 1873, the police agent, Gregorio Uribe found the *insometida* Josefa Bustamante, *la trezuda* (the long-braided one), in the bordellos of Eulalia Garibay. According to the agent's report, as he prepared to take her to the Sanitary Inspection, Josefa burst into insults and threats. Unsure of his rights and fearing potential dismissal for serious error, he simply reported the event and promptly left the place.

Nonetheless, in the legal suit Eulalia Garibay filed before the government of the Federal District, she asserted that the agent arrested Josefa Bustamante without a cause and had used excessive force against her. She subsumed a medical certification as proof of her accusation. Bravo y Alegre [the head of the sanitary police] in turn alleged that the document was utterly false and that the whole suit formed part of an organized calumny, a very common strategy used by prostitutes to denigrate the police agents and the sanitary police as a whole. After examination, the authorities decided not to prosecute the agent, yet they also let Josefa Bustamante go free without punishment. (Rivera Garza, *The Masters* 155)

Uribe had felt unsure of his rights as an officer because, as Rivera Garza explains, reforms to the regulatory system “[...] had hindered the role of the Inspección Sanitaria to such an extreme that prostitutes displayed increasing arrogance, haughtiness and irreverence. When facing the police agents, they not only resorted to crass language and aggression, but also cited the reform laws to threaten the representatives of the law” (*The Masters* 155). In the novel, Rivera Garza portrays Matilda as having vehemently defended the fictionalized *trenzuda* (*La Diamantina*) by facing off against an armed police officer while “las otras [prostitutas] mientras tanto se armaron de botellas,” thus earning her the nickname *La Diabla* (173). These women, like the women today, were so clever that they were able to use official discourse against the officers themselves. Then, in the novel, like the *inconformes* protesting around the Monumento a la Revolución the two *insometidas* were present and participating in the city “<<La Diabla>> y <<La Diamantina>> se acostumbraron a recorrer la ciudad en su tiempo libre, bajo la luz del sol [...] A Matilda le gustaba tener una compinche, pero más le gustaba su nueva libertad [...] las calles se convirtieron en su única casa y el cielo azul de la ciudad de México en su único techo. Así descubrió su verdadera patria” (175).

## Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. *London: The Biography*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2000. Print.
- Agustín, José. "La vida." Foreword. *Del oficio*. Antonia Mora. México: Planeta, 2000. 7-9. Print.
- Aranda, Jesús. "Sexoservidores obtienen un amparo para que se les considere trabajadores no asalariados." *La Jornada* 11 Feb. 2014: n.p. La Jornada. Web. 27 Apr. 2014
- Black, Jeremy. *London: A History*. Lancaster [England]: Carnegie, 2009. Print.
- Calderón, Héctor. *Narratives of Greater Mexico: Essays on Chicano Literary History, Genre, and Borders*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. Print.
- Castellanos, Rosario. *Poesía no eres tú; Obra poética: 1948-1971*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972. Print.
- Castillo, Debra A. *Easy Women: Sex and Gender in Modern Mexican Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Print.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991. Print.
- . *Woman Hollering Creek*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991.
- Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Selected Stories*. Ed. Alfred Kazin. New York: Signet Classics, 2006.
- Cummins Muñoz, Elizabeth. *Writing the Past: Women's Historical Fiction of Greater Mexico*. Diss. University of Houston, 2007. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.
- Debroise, Olivier. *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in México*. Trans. Stella de Sá Rego. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001. Print.
- De la Mora, Sergio. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

- Del Campo, Alicia. “Reterritorializando lo mexicano desde lo femenino en el contexto neoliberal: *Demasiado amor* de Sara Sefchovich.” *New Novel Review* 2.2 (1995): 61-75. Print.
- Díaz del Castillo, Bernal. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Buenos Aires: Colección Austral, 1955. Print.
- Durán, Javier. “Narrar la nación: (des)construyendo el imaginario nacional en *Demasiado amor* de Sara Sefchovich. *La seducción de la escritura: Los discursos de hoy, 1996*. Ed. Rosaura Hernández Monroy and Manuel F. Medina. México: Universidad Autónoma- Azcapotzalco, 1997. Print.
- Enamorada*. Dir. Emilio Fernández. Perf. Pedro Armendáriz, María Félix. Cozumel, 2003. DVD.
- Esquivel, Laura. *Como agua para chocolate: novela de entregas mensuales con recetas*. New York: Anchor Books, 1989. Print.
- Estrada, Oswaldo. “Asignaciones de género y tareas de identidad en la narrativa de Cristina Rivera Garza.” *Cristina Rivera Garza: Ningún crítico cuenta esto...* Ed. Oswaldo Estrada. México: Ediciones Eón, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill y UC-Mexicanistas, 2010. 179-201. Print.
- . “De putas y locas... o de la historia y ficción en la obra transgénica de Cristina Rivera Garza.” *Monographic Review/ Revista Monográfica* 26 (2010): 149–164. Print.
- Estrada, Oswaldo, ed. *Cristina Rivera Garza: Ningún crítico cuenta esto...* México: Ediciones Eón, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill y UC-Mexicanistas, 2010. Print.
- Fahey, Felicia. *The Will to Heal: Psychological Recovery in the Novels of Latina Writers*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Print.
- . ““(Un)Romancing Mexico: New Sexual Landscapes in Sara Sefchovich’s *Demasiado Amor*.”

- Inti: Revista De Literatura Hispánica* 54 (2001): 99-120. Print.
- Fernández, Pura. *Mujer pública y vida privada: del arte eunuco a la novela lupanaria*. Woodbridge: Tamesis Books, 2008. Print.
- Finnegan, Nuala. *Ambivalence, Modernity, Power: Women and Writing in Mexico since 1980*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.
- Finnegan, Nuala and Jane E. Lavery, eds. *The Boom Femenino in Mexico: Reading Contemporary Women's Writing*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. Print.
- “Fotos Trabajadoras de centros nocturnos protestan contra operativos.” *El Universal* 25 Feb. 2014: n.p. El Universal.mx. Web. 27 Apr. 2014
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Franco, Jean. “Thinking Feminism from Mexico.” Introduction. *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions*. By Marta Lamas. Trans. John Pluecker. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 1-11. Print.
- Fuentes Peris, Teresa. *Visions of Filth: Deviancy and Social Control in the Novels of Galdós*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003. Print.
- Gamboa, Federico. *Santa y El Delirio de Santa*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2007. Print.
- Gobierno de la República. “*Discutamos México, XVII Mujeres 117.- Mujeres en la historia de México*.” Online video. *YouTube*, YouTube 19 Nov. 2010. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.
- González, María R. *Imagen de la prostituta en la novela mexicana contemporánea*. Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 1996. Print.

Hernández Mares, Filiberto. *Carlos Fuentes, Cristina Rivera Garza and Recent Rewritings of the Mexican Revolution: Memory and Resistance*. Diss. University of California, Riverside, 2010. ProQuest. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.

Hind, Emily. *Entrevistas con quince autoras mexicanas*. Madrid; Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana : Vervuert, 2003. Print.

“Historia.” *Vips*. n.p., n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2014.

Holcombe, William Daniel. “Estrategias feministas mexicanas en el siglo XXI: entrevista a Sara Sefchovich.” *Mester*. 42.1 (2013): 105-115. eScholarship. Web. 8 May 2014.

Hong, Jung-Euy, and Claudia Macías Rodríguez. “Desde México para Corea. Entrevista a Cristina Rivera Garza.” *Espéculo: Revista de Estudios Literarios* 35 (2007): n. pag. Print.

Horne, Alistair. *Seven Ages of Paris*. London: Macmillan, 2002. Print.

Hussey, Andrew. *Paris: The Secret History*. London: Viking, 2006. Print.

Hutchinson, Carolyn G. *Body, Voice, Memory: Modern Latin American Women’s Testimonios*. Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010. ProQuest. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.

Inés de la Cruz, Sor Juana. “Redondillas.” *Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. 147-159. Print.

Inwood, Stephen. *A History of London*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1999. Print.

Jenner, Stephen R. “Maquiladoras: una mirada crítica desde la frontera.” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*. 53.3 (1991): 221-233. JSTOR. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

*Justicia en pleno*. Proyecto 40, 24 Mar. 2014, Videoteca: Justicia en pleno. Web. 22 Apr. 2014

Kandell, Jonathan. *La Capital: The Biography of Mexico City*. New York: Random House, 1988.

Print.

Kelly, Patty. *Lydia's Open Door: Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print.

Kevane, Bridget. *The Autobiographical Voice and the Making of the Self in Bernardo Vega, Sandra Cisneros, Rigoberta Menchú and El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega*. Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1996. *ProQuest*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.

Lamas, Marta. *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions*. Trans. John Pluecker. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

---. "Las putas honestas, ayer y hoy." *Miradas feministas sobre las mexicanas del siglo XX*. Ed. Marta Lamas. México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica : Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2007. 312-346. Print.

*La mujer del puerto*. Dir. Arcady Boytler. Perf. Andrea Palma. Vina Distributor, 2007. DVD.

Leñero, Vicente. "Lo que es de cada quien: *Del oficio de María Antonia Mora*." *Revista de la Universidad de México*. 113 (2013): n. pag. Web. 28 Apr. 2014

López, Irma M. "'The Will to Be': Mexican Women Novelists from the Late 1960s to the 1990s." *The Boom Femenino in Mexico: Reading Contemporary Women's Writing*. Eds. Nuala Finnegan and Jane E. Lavery. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 26-47. Print.

Magaña Franco, Elena Alicia. "Diálogos subversivos: ficción e historia en *Nadie me verá llorar*." M.A. Thesis. Universidad de Colima. 2004. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

Marshik, Celia. *High Art and Low Ladies: Prostitution, Censorship and British Modernism*. Diss. Northwestern University, 1999. *ProQuest*. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.

- Mendoza, María Luisa. "Prólogo." Foreword. *Del oficio*. Antonia Mora. México: Editorial Samo, 1972. 9-12. Print.
- Mora, Antonia. *Del oficio*. Mexico: Planeta, 2000. Print.
- . *Los cuarenta chatos*. México: Editorial Extemporáneos, 1976. Print.
- MX sin Mercenarios. "Periodistas Mercionarios y Vendidos de México." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 13 Nov. 2012. Web. 6 May 2014
- Negrete Sandoval, Julia Érika. "Archivo, memoria y ficción en *Nadie me verá llorar* de Cristina Rivera Garza. (Spanish)." *Literatura Mexicana* 24.1 (2013): 91–110. Print.
- Nelson, Brian. "Zola and the Nineteenth Century." *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*. Ed. Brian Nelson. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 1-18. Print.
- Nuevo Texto Crítico*. "Cristina Rivera Garza: Matamoros, México, 1964." *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 21.41 (2008): 21–32. Print.
- Olea Franco, Rafael. "La construcción de un clásico: Cien años del mito de *Santa*." *Santa, Santa nuestra*. Ed. Rafael Olea Franco. México, D.F.: Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios, Cátedra Jaime Torres Bodet, 2005. 13-36. Print.
- Paredes, Américo. "*With His Pistol in His Hand*": *A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Print.
- Paz, Octavio. "Los hijos de la Malinche." *El laberinto de la soledad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997. 72-97. Print.
- . *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*. México D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. Print.



Parodi, Claudia. "Cristina Rivera Garza, ensayista y novelista: El recurso del método." *Cristina Rivera Garza: Ningún crítico cuenta esto...* Ed. Oswaldo Estrada. México: Ediciones Eón, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill y UC-Mexicanistas, 2010. 73-84. Print.

Poniatowska, Elena. *La noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral*. México D.F.: Biblioteca Era, 2001. Print.

Poot-Herrera, Sara. "El paraíso de Matilda Burgos. Un refugio sin puertas." *Cristina Rivera Garza: Ningún crítico cuenta esto...* Ed. Oswaldo Estrada. México: Ediciones Eón, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill y UC-Mexicanistas, 2010. 85-109. Print.

Porter, Roy. *London: A Social History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.

Price, Brian L. "Cristina Rivera Garza: En las orillas de la historia." *Cristina Rivera Garza: Ningún crítico cuenta esto...* Ed. Oswaldo Estrada. México: Ediciones Eón, U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill y UC-Mexicanistas, 2010. 111-133. Print.

"Qué hace la Brigada Callejera." *Brigada Callejera de Apoyo a la Mujer "Elisa Martínez," A.C. La esquina es de quién la trabaja*. Drupal.org, n.d. Web. 22 Apr. 2014

Reveles, César. "Bailarinas y meseros de clubes nocturnos hacen mitin." *El Universal* 25 Feb. 2014: n.p. El Universal.mx. Web. 27 Apr. 2014

Rivera Garza, Cristina. *La Castañeda: narrativas dolientes desde el Manicomio General. México, 1910-1930*. México, D.F.: Tusquets, 2010. Print.

---. *Nadie Me Verá Llorar*. México: Tusquets, 2000.

---. "The Criminalization of the Syphilitic Body: Prostitutes, Health Crimes, and Society in Mexico City, 1867-1930." *Crime and Punishment in Latin America: Law and Society Since*

- Late Colonial Times*. Eds. Ricardo D. Salvatore, Carlos Aguirre and Gilbert M. Joseph. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001. 147-180. Print.
- . *The Masters of the Streets. Bodies, Power and Modernity in Mexico, 1867-1930*. Diss. University of Houston, 1995. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.
- Rubí, Martha Lorena. *Politically Writing Women in Hispanic Literature: The Feminist Tradition in Contemporary Latin American and U.S. Latina Writers*. Bloomington [I.N.]: Xlibris Corporation, 2011. Print.
- Ruíz-Palacios, Fanny. "Centros nocturnos suspenden servicio por operativos." *El Universal* 27 Feb. 2014: n.p. El Universal.mx. Web. 27 Apr. 2014
- Rulfo, Juan. *Pedro Páramo*. Ed. José Carlos González Boixo. Ediciones Cátedra: Madrid, 2003. Print.
- Sadlier, Darlene J. *Latin American Melodrama: Passion, Pathos, and Entertainment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Print.
- Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Samuelson, Cheyla. "Líneas de fuga: The Character of Writing in the Novels of Cristina Rivera Garza." Diss. University of California, Santa Barbara, 2011. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.
- Sánchez-Blake, Elvira. "Mujer y patria: La inscripción del cuerpo femenino en *Demasiado amor* de Sara Sefchovich." *Confluencia* 13.2 (1998): 105–113. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 Apr. 2013.
- . "Narrativas de locura: *La nave de los locos* de Peri Rossi y *Nadie me verá llorar* de Rivera Garza." *Hispanic Journal*. 32.1. (2011 Spring): 61-74. Print.

*Santa*. Dir. Antonio Moreno. Perf. Lupita Tovar. Televisa, 2009. DVD.

“Sara Sefchovich, una escritora con demasiado amor.” *El diario de la vida judía en México y el mundo*. Diarijudío.com, 2 Dec. 2013. Web. 10 May 2014.

Sefchovich, Sara. *Demasiado amor*. México: Punto de Lectura, 2007. Print.

---. *México: País de ideas, país de novelas*. México: Grijalbo, 1989. Print.

---. *¿Son mejores las mujeres?* México: Paidós, 2011. Print.

---. *Vivir la vida*. México: Alfaguara, 2010. Print.

Stavans, Ilan. “Introduction.” Introduction. *Poems, Protest, and a Dream: Selected Writings*. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden. New York: Penguin Books, 1997. xi-xliii. Print.

Stewart, Jules. *Madrid: The History*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Sweeney, Gerard M. “The Syphilitic World of Stephen Crane’s ‘Maggie’.” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 24.1 (1991): 79–85. Print.

Thompson, Hannah. “Questions of Sexuality and Gender.” *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*. Ed. Brian Nelson. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 53-66. Print.

Tuñón-Pablos, Julia. *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*. Trans. Alan Hynds. Austin: University of Texas Press, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1999. Print.

Vantine, Peter. “*La Fille Élisa* (review).” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 40.1 (2011): 186–188. *Project MUSE*. Web. 17 Mar. 2014.

Vargas, Ava. *La Casa de Citas: En el Barrio Galante*. México, D.F.: Grijalbo and Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1991. Print.

Vega, Norma. *Re-Inscribing the Nation Under the Global: Mexican Narrative Perspectives After 1968*. Diss. The University of California, Los Angeles 1999. *ProQuest*. Web. 30 September 2011.