

**EROTIC BODIES/EROTIC POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S WRITING**

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Comparative Literature

May, 2006

Nashville, Tennessee

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To my parents, sister, and brother, because you are always there for me.

Para mis padres, hermana y hermano, porque siempre
podré contar con vosotros.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of the Comparative Literature Program and the Graduate School at Vanderbilt University. I am especially grateful to Dr. Earl E. Fitz, Director of the Comparative Literature Program and Dr. Edward H. Friedman, Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature, who, as dissertation director and co-director respectively, have been supportive of my career goals and worked actively to encourage me to pursue those goals.

I want to thank all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during the last four years. Each of the members of my Dissertation Committee has given me extensive professional guidance. I am extremely thankful to the staff of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. I believe that my education and enrichment as a teacher at Vanderbilt would not have been complete without the assistance and guidance that the Center for Teaching provided. Every graduate student knows that, without a job, summers in Nashville can be very hard. Working with the nice staff at the computer labs made my studying for qualifiers and my dissertation writing a more amenable experience.

I would like to express gratitude to my parents, Francisco and Petri; sister, Fátima; brother, Paco; as well as my extended family (in particular, Grandfather Juan, Aunt Mary and Uncle Santi, Uncle Juan and Aunt María José, Sergio, Virginia, Cristina, Eduardo, Alejandro, and Paula) who have always wondered what sort of research I have been doing here for so many years. Despite the distance, their incessant support has been a significant source of strength. They are very close to my heart. I want to thank all my friends and departmental colleagues because I don't know what I would have done

without the merriment of our gatherings, dinners, parties, movie nights, hiking weekends, Friday coffees, ski trips, and all the other great experiences that we have shared.

And last, but not least, I am sincerely grateful to Hugo. He has been by my side virtually since I began the hardest part of this journey: studying for the qualifying exams and writing this dissertation. No matter what the circumstances were, he always offered a smile and words of encouragement. For almost three years, he bore my ups and downs, my joys and sorrows, my days of stress and triumph... for all this, I am uniquely grateful to him. I love you.

AGRADECIMIENTOS

Esta disertación no hubiera sido posible sin el apoyo financiero del Programa de Literatura Comparada y la Facultad de Estudios Graduados de la Universidad de Vanderbilt. Me siento especialmente agradecida al Doctor Earl E. Fitz, Director del Programa de Literatura Comparada, y al Doctor Edward H. Friedman, Profesor de Español y Literatura Comparada, quienes, en su labor como director y co-director de disertación respectivamente, han creído en todos mis objetivos profesionales y me han animado a luchar para lograrlos.

Quiero dar las gracias a todos aquellos con quienes he tenido el placer de trabajar durante los últimos cuatro años. Agradezco la preparación profesional que cada uno de los miembros de mi comité de disertación me ha dado. Estoy muy agradecida al personal del Centro para la Enseñanza de la Universidad de Vanderbilt. La educación y enriquecimiento como profesora que he recibido en Vanderbilt no estaría completo sin la

ayuda y guía de este centro. Todos los estudiantes graduados saben que los veranos en Nashville pueden ser muy duros sin un trabajo. Trabajar con el personal tan simpático del laboratorio de ordenadores del campus hizo mis veranos mucho más fáciles y me ayudó a que el estudiar para mis exámenes y escribir mi disertación fueran experiencias más amenas.

Me gustaría expresar mi agradecimiento a mis padres, Francisco y Petri; mi hermana, Fátima; mi hermano, Paco; y a toda mi familia extendida (en particular, abuelo Juan, tíos Mary y Santi, tíos Juan y María José, Sergio, Virginia, Cristina, Eduardo, Alejandro y Paula) quienes siempre se han preguntado qué tipo de investigación he estado haciendo aquí durante tantos años. A pesar de la distancia, su inagotable apoyo ha sido una fuente de fortaleza y aliento importantísima. A todos ellos les guardo muy cerca de mi corazón. También quiero dar las gracias a todos mis amigos y colegas del programa porque no sé que hubiera hecho sin la alegría y humor de nuestras tertulias, cenas, fiestas, noches de cine, excursiones de fin de semana, cafés y muchas otras maravillosas experiencias que hemos compartido.

Por último, quiero dar mil gracias a Hugo. Él ha estado a mi lado prácticamente desde que empecé la parte más dura de este viaje: estudiar para los exámenes de doctorado y escribir esta disertación. En cualquier momento, siempre tenía listas una sonrisa y palabras de ánimo para mí. Durante casi tres años, aguantó todas mis alegrías y tristezas, mis días de bajón y de entusiasmo, mis días de nervios y triunfos... por todo esto, le estoy sinceramente agradecida. Te quiero.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Erotic Imagination in Latin American Literature Written by Women

Women's literature in Latin America and the expression of sexuality from the feminine perspective are not unexplored fields in literary criticism. The latter theme, for example, has been represented in the history of Latin American literature since the seventeenth century, beginning with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. There are a substantial number of studies on Sor Juana that touch on this aspect of her work. For example, a major study is *Las trampas de la fe*, by the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz. Although focused on her biography, this study is an informed reading of Sor Juana's importance as a writer and also provides information on colonial Mexican history, culture, social organization, and religious practices and norms. Paz's work calls particular attention to Sor Juana's defense of women as the key feature of her *Respuesta a sor Filotea de la Cruz* (1691; *The Answer*, 1994) because, for him, Sor Juana "se da cuenta de que la atacan sobre todo por ser mujer y de ahí que su defensa se transforme inmediatamente en una defensa de su sexo" "realizes that she is mainly condemned because she is a woman and thus her defense immediately becomes a defense of her sex"¹ (538). Other critics, such as Stephanie Merrim and José Carlos González Boixo, have further emphasized Sor Juana's feminist discourse, one that placed her into the position of the "First Feminist of America."² Merrim, too, asserts the importance of approaching Sor Juana from a feminist perspective when she writes that "women writers are not ...

inside and outside of the male tradition; they are inside two traditions [of the male and female] simultaneously. Baroque and thus syncretic, a woman writer, Sor Juana, epitomizes this cultural model” (30). In addition, González Boixo affirms that Sor Juana’s feminist thinking is based on a feminism founded on intellectual equality among men and women (“Feminismo e intelectualidad en Sor Juana”). When studying the erotic imagination in women’s literature in Latin America one should not fail to notice the significant—and early—thematic contributions made by this Mexican nun to the literary field. For example, her famous redondilla, “Hombres necios que acusáis,” and her comedy *Los empeños de una casa* (1683; *The House of Trials*, 1997) denounce misogynistic stereotypes. Also, by using a female poetic “I,” Sor Juana introduced a new element in the tradition of amor cortés ‘courtly love’ in her romances. Sor Juana is a unique figure in the history of Latin American literature, and, in fact, remains one of the New World’s most remarkable feminist voices. In her biography-oriented *Respuesta* (it was not written as an autobiography but as a self-defense document), Sor Juana managed to challenge the rigidity of the patriarchal norms of the colonial society in which she lived, and to develop her intellectual career at a time when it was virtually impossible for a woman to do so. The importance of Sor Juana’s work as a woman writer is thus based not only on her voicing of the repression that women suffered during the colonial period, and on her fight for women’s right to education, but also on the fact that some of her poems, critics Margarita Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert affirm, could be interpreted as the earliest Latin American examples of the expression of homosexual female desire (see Fernández Olmos, *El placer de la palabra*). I am referring here to her poems dedicated to countess De Paredes, which have been read, by critics Fernández

Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, as proof of a seventeenth-century literary expression of lesbianism.³ In my opinion, the poems have been forced into a lesbian reading and I agree with critics who oppose reading these works as demonstrating clear signs of homosexuality. Octavio Paz, for example, argues that “it was more appropriate for a woman to express her feelings to another woman rather than to a man [because] poetic convention only provided an erotic language for men to address women” (qtd. in Merrim: 18). Nevertheless, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert’s interpretation should not be discarded and not least because of the attempts of the seventeenth-century Catholic Church and the Inquisition to repress sex. Thus, with Sor Juana the representation of sexuality from the female perspective, and especially from the homoerotic perspective, has a rich and influential beginning in Latin American literature written by women.

However, when it comes to female erotic expression, critics Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert agree that a gap seems to exist from the time of Sor Juana’s death to the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, they do not find a woman author as significant and of the same quality as Sor Juana during these intervening centuries. They assert, though, that the growing interest in the study of women’s literature has made it possible for us to discover many hitherto unknown women writers, especially from the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the Cuban poet Mercedes Matamoros (1851-1906) and the Puerto Rican novelist Ana Roque (1853-1933).⁴ Nevertheless, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert see Uruguayan poet Delmira Agustini (1886-1914) and her publication of *Los cálices vacíos* (1913) as the starting point of erotic literature written by Latin American women in the twentieth century. We also need to consider Brazilian female poet Gilka Machado (1893-1980), whose book *Cristais partidos* (1915)

scandalized the literary public and critics because of her overt treatment of female sexuality (Ferreira-Pinto, *Gender, Discourse, and Desire*).

Through the first half of the twentieth century, the female erotic imagination was mainly manifested in a generation of poets: Delmira Agustini, Alfonsina Storni, Gilka Machado, Clementina Suárez, Julia de Burgos, Carilda Oliver Labra, and Rosario Castellanos to name a few. The exceptions are María Luisa Bombal in Chile and Patrícia Galvão in Brazil. In major works such as *La última niebla* (1935), *La amortajada* (1938; *The Shrouded Woman*, 1950) and “El árbol” (1939), Bombal illuminated the relations between the sexes in Chile through female characters who are unable to find self-fulfillment in the male-oriented societies they inhabit. Although Bombal’s fiction has been charged with revealing “the situation of women under patriarchal society without proposing alternatives” (*Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women*, 47), editors Cynthia Margarita Tompkins and David William Foster affirm that “*House of Mist* begins to address some of these issues. Thus, Bombal’s opus is an important antecedent to both Chilean and Spanish American women’s literature ...” (47). In the Brazilian scene of the 30s, Patrícia Galvão is a major figure who was first known for her collaboration and participation in the second phase of movimento de antropofagia ‘anthropophagy movement,’ and for being married to Mário Oswald de Andrade, a leading figure of the Brazilian avant-garde. Galvão sought to connect feminist vindications to the working class movement of the 30s in Brazil, and these ideas were craftily expressed in her 1933 novel, *Parque industrial* (see de Campos, *Pagu, Patrícia Galvão: vida-obra*).

In the decades of 1950s and 1960s, however, the expression of the female erotic imagination came to be written mainly in prose, not poetry. In Spanish America it

experienced a strong resurgence through the 1970s and 1980s, although the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's landmark novel, *Perto do coração selvagem* (1944), already featured the theme of female eroticism at its center. This proliferation of erotic prose fiction written by women was in part due to the international movement for the rights of women. At the same time, we also see a sudden increase in the publications of critical studies about this literature. For example, a high number of poetry and short story collections written by Spanish American and Brazilian women, as well as a high number of biographical studies on women writers, were published in the 1980s and 1990s, *Mujeres de mucha monta: cuentos* (1992; a compilation of short fiction by Uruguayan women authors), and *Erótica: contos eróticos escritos por mulheres* (1994; a collection of short stories by Brazilian women writers) to name two of the most outstanding. Then, the last thirty years of the twentieth century mark an important renaissance in the history and criticism of erotic literature by Latin American women writers. This dissertation attempts to bring together four select Latin American women writers (Lygia Fagundes Telles, Márcia Denser, Diamela Eltit, and Cristina Peri Rossi) who are committed to their societies, who write during the same historical timeframe (the 1970s and 1980s), who feature female sexuality as the common denominator, and who develop a pronounced social and political commentary as well. By doing so, I will provide evidence and argue that the erotic imagination of women and the expression of female sexuality become an essential critical framework with which to appreciate the expansion of Latin American women's literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and that eroticism can work as a space of change and power within the feminist discourse, and the literary discourse in general. I will also strive to recognize the link between eroticism, self-

knowledge, writing, and power, a connection that proves to be a common concern among Latin American women writers and that brings together the two literary traditions.

In addition, this dissertation has the purpose of enlarging the bibliography of these four novelists which is not excessively extended. The only writer who has received the attention she deserves is Cristina Peri Rossi, whose texts have been included in many collections of short stories, for example, Roberto González Echevarría's *The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories*. Also, Peri Rossi continues to be included in many bibliographical and biographical studies on women writers of both Spanish America and Brazil. As for Lygia Fagundes Telles, who now occupies a chair in the Academy of Brazilian Letters, her literary work has been examined and compiled in several collections of Brazilian short stories and bio-bibliographical studies. On the other hand, Diamela Eltit and Márcia Denser are relatively new writers in their respective countries and are only now being discovered in the international literary world. Eltit has been the subject of a number of doctoral theses, and her name is prominent in recent books on the new Chilean narrative and women's writing in Chile and Spanish America, including Mary Beth Tierney-Tello's *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation: Experimental Fiction by Women Writing under Dictatorship* (1996) and Gisela Norat's *Marginalities: Diamela Eltit and the Subversion of Mainstream Literature in Chile* (2002). The work of Márcia Denser has been compiled in some anthologies of Brazilian women writers, some of which have been edited by Denser herself, for example *Muito prazer: contos eróticos femininos* (1984) and *O prazer é todo meu: contos eróticos femininos* (1984). Despite her literary acknowledgement in Brazil and some northern European countries—her writings are well-known in Holland and Switzerland—Denser

has not yet received the attention she deserves from the Spanish American critical establishment.

At the same time, I should explain that it is not my intention to argue that sexual representation is the only mode of literary expression through which it is possible to examine the personal and cultural identity of the Latin American woman. In fact, as critic Sara Castro-Klarén affirms, there have been, and continue to be, various modes of literary articulation throughout the history of women's literature in Latin America. In the introduction to chapter one in *Women's Writing in Latin America. An Anthology*, Castro-Klarén detects and outlines "seven positions between writer and writing ... in the praxis of women's writing in Latin America" (5): (1) the woman writer as a critic of her own work; (2) women as the providers of language; (3) the woman writer exposing the ambiguities embedded in the subversion of society's conventional female roles; (4) the need to secure a place in the literary scene; (5) the obligation to acquire a thinking and writing craft; (6) the woman writer's social commitment; and (7) the construction of women as subjects. Nonetheless, within the Latin American cultural context sexual repression continues to be one of many forms of social inequality between men and women. Therefore, if one wants to understand the resistance that Latin American women writers have endured in transforming the dominant cultural categories, it is necessary to examine the literary representation of sexuality from the perspective of women and to contrast it to that of the dominant male perspective. Female sexuality, the erotic imagination of women, and feminist theory thus merge in providing an essential critical framework with which to understand the development of women's literature in the last three decades of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, the emergence of erotic

literature by women in the last thirty years of the twentieth century has become a cultural and literary phenomenon that Castro-Klarén could, as I will argue, include in her list of positions taken by women in the history of women’s literature in Latin America.

This cultural and literary phenomenon should not be misinterpreted as the advocacy of mere pornography. This dissertation seeks to emphasize the positive value of eroticism in women’s literature and to distance it from being read with pornographic prejudice. It is my intention to distinguish erotic literature from pornographic literature, the latter a type of writing with which some Latin American women authors, such as Cuban novelist Zoé Valdés, have been associated. In her article “La última tentación de Zoé Valdés,” Sonia Lira contends that Zoé Valdés has been categorized as a pornographic woman writer. Lira also writes that Valdés “asegura que la oficialidad de Cuba se ha encargado de difundir que es una ‘pornógrafa’” ‘ensures that Cuba’s bureaucracy has determined to promote the idea that she is a pornographer’ (par. 10). Also, in an interview with the novelist, Jesús Hernández Cuéllar notes that she has been accused of being pornographic by Castro’s regime in Cuba, this being an accusation that I believe originates in the conservative and patriarchal thinking characteristic of dictatorships, which normally attempt to repress any type of liberal expression. To this charge, Valdés answers that “que me acusen de erótica es un honor, Anaïs Nin también lo fue, el New York Times ha dicho que soy la Anaïs Nin y la Madonna de la literatura cubana ... o sea eso me corona de mucha más pasión por lo que hago, y es un reto, a continuar en ese camino” ‘it is an honor to be accused of being erotic, Anaïs Nin was also accused of this, and the New York Times has said that I am the Anaïs Nin and the Madonna of Cuban literature’ (Hernández Cuéllar, par. 11). I find Carlos Roberto

Winckler's and Rosalind Coward's distinction between eroticism and pornography more helpful for this dissertation. For these sociologists, pornography "works on a dialectics of domination versus submission" (qtd. in Ferreira-Pinto: 51) and privileges the masculine. On the other hand, eroticism is not necessarily based on such binary opposition. While the domination of the Other may be the essence of pornography, eroticism strives for liberation and the celebration of the body. As Ferreira-Pinto states, "eroticism, in turn, celebrates the body and works on a notion of consensuality, in addition to showing the aesthetic concern as a distinctive element" (51).

Thus, I understand as a female erotic work the one that is directly or indirectly sexual, that expresses the most intimate sexual, emotional, or spiritual needs of women, and that speaks to all types of sexual orientation. Critics Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert cite the following words by Argentinean writer Luisa Valenzuela when distinguishing between the erotic and the pornographic in Latin American women's literature:

La pornografía es la negación de la literatura porque es la negación de la metáfora y de la sugerencia, de lo ambiguo. Es una reacción material en el lector, una excitación sexual directa; en cambio el erotismo, que puede ser tremendamente procaz y fuerte, pasa por el filtro de la metáfora y por un lenguaje más poético. La pornografía no entra dentro de la disquisición literaria 'Pornography is the denial of literature because it is the denial of metaphor and suggestion, of the ambiguous. It is a material reaction in the reader, a direct sexual excitement; on the other hand, eroticism, which can be tremendously bold and strong, goes through the filter of metaphor and through a more poetic language. Pornography is not included in literary analysis.' (xix)

Nevertheless, as I contend, it could, and perhaps should, be included in literary analysis. When I write about eroticism in works by Latin American women writers, I refer to texts in which the desire to portray women's encounters in the world is at the core of the narration. These experiences go from intellectual realization and self-knowledge to

sexual fulfillment in patriarchal society, and they are voiced through the female body and its experience of sexual satisfaction.

The first chapter is primarily focused on Brazilian writer Márcia Denser and her collection of short stories, published in the form of a novel, *Animal dos motéis* (1981). In this chapter I argue that, utilizing Franconi's term, *Animal dos motéis* is an arena erótica, in which the woman takes the erotic discourse, traditionally a male discourse, and makes it her instrument of control. With it, the middle-class, white Brazilian woman pursues not to triumph over patriarchal structures but to search a new image of self. Denser's heroine, Diana Marini, rejects traditional notions of romantic love and chooses a physical love that offers her the pleasure that she needs to have a better understanding of her identity as an end-of-the-century woman. In contrast to the authors that are studied in chapters two and three, eroticism in *Animal dos motéis* is an eroticism of subversion that inverts the traditional heterosexual relationship. In other words, in the novel's game of seduction, Diana Marini does not conform to the traditional female role but, rather, her transgressive gaze to patriarchal institutions and conventional order transforms men into the woman's object of desire and sexual pleasure.

In chapter two, I examine *Lumpérica* (1983), the first novel written by Chilean novelist Diamela Eltit. I maintain that, like in Denser's novel, Eltit also employs the female body and sexuality to make a sociopolitical statement. Despite this common goal, Eltit has a particular way of utilizing the bodily expression of erotic desire. Similar to the main character of *Animal dos motéis*, the body of L. Iluminada becomes the erotic arena in which to fight against institutions of repression such as Pinochet's. The newness in *Lumpérica* is that Eltit introduces the erotic discourse through the visual and performing

arts and linguistic and narrative experimentation. For example, Eltit takes everyday-life elements, such as a woman, the night, and a public square, and transforms them into metaphors of resistance that simultaneously have undertones of domination. The distinctiveness in *Lumpérica* is that the female character struggles to create a language of resistance. This language of resistance is created through L. Iluminada's bodily performance. Finally, another element that is unique to *Lumpérica*, compared to Denser's and Peri Rossi's novels, is the metaphor of el frote employed by Eltit. Through this metaphor, Eltit emphasizes the resistance of the language L. Iluminada seeks to create (a resistance against the official discourse) and underscores the transforming power of female sexuality.

The third chapter concentrates on Uruguayan novelist and poet Cristina Peri Rossi and her novel *Solitario de amor* (1988). In this chapter I contend that Peri Rossi utilizes certain traditional tropes of romantic love—the man in love with the woman and the woman as the object of desire and pleasure—only to exaggerate them to the extreme and to imbue them with a new value and meaning. Peri Rossi utilizes them to show men's need for women to achieve a complete formation of their own identity. Unlike the other women writers who work with the idea of women's identity, with identity as a subject in general, and with female identity as a sexual function, Peri Rossi concentrates here on men's lack of identity, an incompleteness that depends on the woman. In this way, Peri Rossi celebrates both women's identity and love as forces that create a person's identity. With the image of the woman so depicted, Peri Rossi suggests that women have finally liberated themselves from men. Although men and women allow themselves to be prisoners of each other, in Peri Rossi's world the man is left alone and without identity,

while the woman recovers her real identity, of which she was not fully aware before due to patriarchal constraints.

In the closing chapter, I review the objectives for the writing of this dissertation as well as the theoretical framework that I utilized to approach the topic. Through the analysis of three novels written by Latin American women in the decade of 1980, I will conclude that the practice of erotic writing expands and enriches the various literary expressions of late-twentieth-century Latin American female writers. At the same time, through a comparative study of these women novelists who write from three different sociopolitical contexts (the dictatorships of their native countries, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay), I will conclude that the erotic voice takes different functions and forms in each of their narratives: Denser's eroticism of subversion, Eltit's politicized eroticism, and Peri Rossi's eroticism of self-identity. Each of these manifestations of the female erotic voice enriches the so called new Latin American narrative by women and comes to stand for a radical force that subverts the concepts, assumptions and structures of patriarchal discourse. The fascinating aspect of this study is that, despite the differences in the historical contexts in which these women authors write, they choose eroticism as their mode of expression to assert their presence in the cultural scenes of their countries and cultures.

The Writers and Their Texts

Four Latin American women writers from the last three decades of the twentieth century who can be classified as successful practitioners of erotic literature are Uruguayan novelist and poet Cristina Peri Rossi, Chilean writer Diamela Eltit, and

Brazilian novelists Lygia Fagundes Telles and Márcia Denser. Despite the different sociopolitical and cultural contexts of their countries, they share a more important quality: all four are bound together by a common interest in female sexuality as a vehicle to express a variety of attitudes, from the uneasiness caused by the rigidity of patriarchal norms and the repression of political regimes to the anxiety and anguish of daily life and the difficulty and complexity of human relationships. At the same time, the expression of female sexuality in the texts by these four women writers takes a variety of forms that go from a violent and vulgar sexuality to a sensual and tender sexuality.

With the exception of Fagundes Telles—who is separated by thirty-one years from the youngest writer of the group, Márcia Denser—these authors approximately belong to the same generation. Peri Rossi was born in Montevideo in 1941, Eltit was born in Santiago de Chile in 1949, and Denser was born five years later in São Paulo. By the 1970s—an important decade for the development of the erotic literature in Latin America—these women already possessed an acute knowledge of the grave sociopolitical conditions of their countries. During the 1980s—the years in which three of the works selected for this dissertation were published—these women also developed an aesthetic sophistication and a new maturity in both their artistic sensibilities and in their tasks as intellectual activists committed to progressive politics in their respective countries. Throughout the 1980s, Fagundes Telles,⁵ Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi published novels that were exemplars of the phenomenon of erotic literature that I mentioned above and that stylistically and thematically enriched the tradition of Latin American literature, whether written by women or men. These novels are, respectively, *As meninas* (1973), *Animal dos motéis* (1981), *Lumpérica* (1983), and *Solitario de amor* (1988). The cultural

and literary significance of these novels is particularly important if we bear in mind the tumultuous historical contexts in which they were written, published, and read. During the 1980s Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil were subjected to cruel, oppressive, and often deadly military regimes. In the face of such overwhelming political, economic, social, and cultural repression, these women writers openly fought against their countries' dictatorships, challenged the dominant, traditional norms of women's sexual behavior in their respective patriarchal societies, and managed to publish quite subversive novels.

The first woman writer that I will examine in this dissertation is the Brazilian Lygia Fagundes Telles. Born in 1923, Fagundes Telles belongs to an older generation than the other three women writers to be examined here but her presence in the literary scene during the 80s is still relevant. From an early age, Fagundes Telles, like Clarice Lispector, maintained friendships with important literary figures of her time, people who served her as support figures: the modernists Mário and Oswald de Andrade, the painters Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti, and the composer Heitor Villa Lobos. Her active participation in the rich literary and cultural life of Brazil has been constant throughout her life, and her efforts have been rewarded with numerous prizes, the most recent and important being the much coveted appointment to the sixteenth chair in the Academy of Brazilian Letters. Due to her various jobs in the Brazilian government, and to her intellectual and artistic influence, Fagundes Telles's commitment as a writer has been at all times linked to the political events in her country. For example, she worked for the Agriculture Department of the state of São Paulo and she was married to a federal deputy. In 1973 the publication of her second novel, *As meninas*, which I will examine in this dissertation, was a great success, both critically and commercially. With *As meninas*, a

novel inspired by the political events the country was experiencing, Fagundes Telles received several important literary prizes in Brazil: the “Coelho Neto” prize from the Academy of Brazilian Letters, the “Jabuti” prize from the Brazilian Book Chamber, and the “Fiction” prize from the Paulista Association of Art Critics. By every measure, Fagundes Telles is thus one of the giants of modern Brazilian narrative, which itself enjoys an especially rich and innovative history.

Another Brazilian woman writer who achieved literary recognition in the 1980s is Márcia Denser. In contrast to Eltit and Peri Rossi, Denser’s reputation as a writer was not established through political activism but directly through her literary work. She published her first book when she was twenty-three, a collection of short stories entitled *Tango fantasma* (1976). A year later, she started her career as a journalist with the magazine *Nova*, for which she worked as a literary critic in charge of the column “Nova Lê Livros.” In 1981 she published her first novel, *Animal dos motéis*, a subtle and sensual novel that took a critical gaze at contemporary Brazil and its existence under a repressive dictatorship. The novel, permeated with an erotically poetic tone that recalls that of Clarice Lispector, clearly shows Denser’s stylistic mastery of narrative prose, and through a renovating prose, she makes space for eroticism to work as the female instrument to achieve a critical political and social commentary.

The third woman writer that I will examine in this dissertation is Diamela Eltit whose political activism has been explicit and open. In fact, Eltit’s participation in Chile’s political life is tightly linked to her career as an author because her reputation as a writer was established during the years of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990). From the start, her narrative has been “una narrativa de resistencia a las

estrategias de poder” ‘a narrative of resistance to the strategies of power’ (*Creación y resistencia*, 9) that overtly defied the military regime. Together with the cooperation of other contemporary artists such as Raúl Zurita and Lotty Rosenfeld, Eltit was co-founder of the Colectivo Acciones de Arte ‘Collective of Art Actions,’ also known as CADA, in 1977. The activities of this group were focused on recovering and promoting Chilean culture and artists during Pinochet’s military regime. The actions of CADA were not clandestine but were taken in public spaces and confronted authority openly. *Lumpérica* was the first of Eltit’s novels—also the first of the four novels that she wrote during the dictatorship—to contribute to the artistic agenda of CADA. *Lumpérica* defines the qualities that characterize Eltit’s style; it is highly experimental, subversive, and iconoclastic, and its levels of difficulty have been compared to the darkest poetry of César Vallejo (*Creación y resistencia*, 9). With the novel *Lumpérica*, which contains various types of writing such as poetry, fragments of screenplay, and written performance art, Eltit challenges the traditional conventions of the novel as a genre and, at the same time, attempts to develop a unique and distinct feminine discourse. Indeed, editors Tompkins and Foster affirm that her writings have contributed to “the growing discussion that began in the 1980s concerning the significance of women’s writing in Latin America” (90). This assertion supports my previous statement about the importance that the decade of the 1980s played in the reawakening of literature written by women in Latin America.

Like Eltit, the political activism of Cristina Peri Rossi has been overt. Peri Rossi was a political activist from an early age. Aware that her family would be unhappy with her for not conforming to the traditional female role, she started to write secretly when

she was just a girl. Not only did her family oppose her wanting to be a writer, however, but also her sexual orientation. When she was still a teenager, she was forced to endure therapy designed to “cure” her homosexuality. Even as a child, Peri Rossi was always conscious of the inferior status with which the women around her had to live, and this knowledge became a fundamental aspect of her work (see *Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women*). Her first book, a collection of three short stories entitled *Viviendo* (1963) and published when she was twenty years old, shows Peri Rossi’s acute political understanding and sexual daring. Two of its stories subtly suggest lesbian relationships while the third presents a dark portrait of the oppressed, closed psychosexual world women in general are forced to inhabit. But Peri Rossi’s writings are not only characterized by feminist and lesbian themes. Her next two books, for example, *Los museos abandonados* (1969) and *El libro de mis primos* (1969), dealt with the complexity of human relationships, and she adroitly satirized capitalism, militarism, patriarchal institutions, and bourgeois society generally. Forced to leave her country, exile then became one of Peri Rossi’s most recurrent themes, and her second novel, *La nave de los locos* (1984; *The Ship of Fools*, 1989), was hailed as of her best, becoming, in fact, a text regularly included among the most important exile novels in contemporary Latin American literature. Her life in Uruguay had not been easy; she faced artistic rivalries and suffered serious obstacles due to her leftist ideology, her feminist ideals, and her open lesbianism. When, in 1972, her life was at risk, she was forced to exile herself to Spain where, unexpectedly, she fell victim to xenophobia. Despite the difficulties—Spain was still living under the oppression of Franco’s dictatorship—Peri Rossi received Spanish citizenship and she now lives in Barcelona. From her perspective as an exile,

Peri Rossi became one of the most active and well-known organizers of the opposition movement to dictatorship in Uruguay, in Latin America, and in the world generally. In 1988, with the publication of her fourth novel, *Solitario de amor* (*Solitary of Love*, 2000), Peri Rossi returned to the theme of passionate love, and with this remarkable text, she surprised her readers with a narrative both strongly erotic and finely poetic and in which the protagonist's body becomes both the axis of the novel and of the male narrator's life. Throughout the novel, the male narrator attempts to transform the body of the female protagonist, Aída, into the center of his ontological and sexual identity. However, Aída escapes this incarceration of her body (and her being) through the realization of sexual fulfillment that masturbation provides her. In the novel, masturbation, instead of sexual intercourse, functions as an act of empowerment for the female protagonist, because masturbation, which after all privileges individuality, provides Aída the self-affirmation and sexual satisfaction that the conventional heterosexual relations do not give her.

Finally, I want to clarify that the texts under analysis in this dissertation—*As meninas*, *Animal dos motéis*, *Lumpérica*, and *Solitario de amor*—were not chosen randomly but, rather, because they provide a space where the female body emerges and takes a privileged, and politically charged central position. The novels by Fagundes Telles, Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi provide an exploration of both women's sexuality and its socio-political significance through the articulation of a variety of eroticized voices in the texts. These texts also explore the relationship between the newly eroticized female body and its being in the world, in particular, Fagundes Telles's boarding school, Denser's São Paulo at night, Eltit's public plaza in Santiago also at night, and the subjective world of Peri Rossi's solitary narrator.

Latin America and Its Feminism

When dealing with the term feminism and women's writing generally, it is important to make a distinction between the North American context and the Latin American context. Critics such as Edda Gaviola Artigas and Lissette González Martínez (*Feminismos en América Latina*, 2001) and Castro-Klarén (*Women's Writing in Latin America*, 1991) have highlighted the fallacy of seeking to apply a generalized feminist theory to all women's writing and have shown that the tradition of Latin American women's writing is different from the tradition of Anglo-American women's writing. The undifferentiated use of First-World feminist thought on the Latin American context, for example, can be misleading and even inappropriate because Third-World feminist thought contains qualities that are unique to very different traditions and national milieus. Barbara Loach explains that the history of the conquest, the Catholic heritage, and the perpetuation of the patriarchal system based on the paradigms of machismo and marianismo⁶ are factors specific to the history of women in Latin America, and they necessarily give rise to a feminist mindset—one no less valid, however different from North American and European feminisms.

In Latin America, Loach explains, the feminist movement has always been more focused on the fight for the kind of social reforms that would benefit all citizens, such as the right for everyone (women and children included) to receive a minimum salary, the right to education, and the right to public health for all (49). Also, Latin American women have been denied the right to participate in politics until fairly recently. For example, it was not until 1931, 1932, and 1933 that women were granted the right to vote in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil respectively. At the same time, feminist thought in Latin

America is distinguished by the ambiguity implied in the matriarchal system characteristic of Latin American countries. Loach emphasizes the power that women are granted in the matriarchal system due to the fact that the matriarch stands as a primary domestic authority figure (47). In other words, Latin American women live in societies that exclude them from positions of power in the state's administration but that grant them immense power within domestic spheres. The concept of the matriarch is thus significant as expression of family power, but such power is ultimately diminished by the reigning political structures. Latin American women feel the frustration of their inability to use such power in the public arenas. Therefore, since the matriarchal system is a sociological feature unique to the Latin American culture, and ultimately to Latin American feminist thought, it is hard for a North American feminist to experience the double standard entailed in matriarchy, which Latin American feminists view "as antimale and antifamily" (Stoner, qtd. in Loach: 51). For Loach, "a perpetual power imbalance" (41) is at stake here. Such disproportion can only reach equilibrium "as men and women recognize the benefits of complementary relationships and full participation by both sexes in all social spheres, public and private ..." (Santa Cruz, qtd. in Loach: 41-2), and only as women's "exercises of power" (Loach 48) are validated.

These possible solutions are connected to another distinctive quality of Latin American feminist thought, one which links Loach's arguments with those of Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira. I am referring to the quality of difference. Anglo-American feminists have long made efforts to eliminate gender-biased differences in an attempt to establish an equality of the sexes. In contrast, Latin American feminists have focused—especially during the last thirty years of the twentieth century—more on finding and celebrating

sex-role differentiation as the key to their strength. In other words, Latin American feminists have emphasized the significance of specifically female experiences such as maternity. Within the literary context, the quality of difference refers to the fact that women's writing should be seen as distinct from men's writing in terms of "the experiences communicated in the texts, and also the ways in which readers interact with them" (Loach 58). As Alaide Foppa said it, "Ya no: 'somos iguales, queremos ser iguales,' sino 'somos diferentes y nos gusta ser diferentes'" 'Not anymore: 'we are equal, we want to be equal,' but 'we are different and we like to be different'" (qtd. in Loach: 58). Difference is thus the key issue for the feminists of Brazil and Spanish America.

This unique feature of Latin American feminism also connects with the theme of erotic imagination in this dissertation. This is so because early on Latin American women writers saw the exploration of eroticism from the woman's perspective (including the expression of both female heterosexual and homosexual activity) as a defining feature of Latin American feminist thought. In other words, the erotic is articulated as part of the search and celebration of sex-role differentiation and so it merges easily with the political in the texts under study here. The authors I am examining seek to break away from traditional expectations of women's patterns of sexual behavior and give voice to the différance (as Derrida would say) of women's sexuality in literature. In my opinion, the erotic literature written by Latin American women in the 70s, 80s, and 90s therefore contributes significantly to the new strategy and dynamics of the feminist movement of that time. Through the expression of a woman's sexuality, Latin American women writers are calling attention to all kinds of experiences that are uniquely lived by women; and they are taking pride in these unique experiences. At the same time, eroticism for

Latin American women functions as a paradigm of a new feminine discourse, one that is able to subvert the norms of traditional institutions and patriarchal values that were reinforced during the dictatorships that were inflicted upon much of Latin America in the last thirty years of the twentieth century.

Fagundes Telles, Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi all contribute to the growth in feminist thought during the last decades of the twentieth century. For them it was time for the advocacy of a “feminism of difference” (see *In Praise of Difference*), one that simultaneously distinguishes and praises the sexual, political, social, and literary expression of women. This “feminism of difference” is connected to the fact that Latin American feminism has, as I have explained, always been socially oriented. Feminists from Spanish America and Brazil (which boasts Latin America’s largest, strongest, and most organized feminist movement) have tended to ally themselves with the most oppressed and marginalized members of society and women authors such as Isabel Allende, Diamela Eltit, and Cristina Peri Rossi have spoken against the oppressive governments in their countries. In particular, Diamela Eltit is known for her support and efforts to give voice to the poorest classes of Chilean society, which is evident in her novel *Lumpérica*. Moreover, as feminist thought has evolved in the last three decades of the twentieth century, there also developed a “marked increase of participation of women in ... political organizations ... and that political activism has helped to create a sense of self-conscious awareness of domination and a sense of political solidarity that is being expressed in terms of gender” (Loach 53). As a matter of fact, a common characteristic that links the women authors under analysis here is their active participation in the

politics of their respective countries during years of political instability and oppressive dictatorship.

In her article “Las búsquedas y los nuevos derroteros feministas en su tránsito al nuevo milenio,” Virginia Vargas refers to more than one feminist movement in Latin America. Along with other critics, Vargas affirms that Latin American feminisms have evolved at different speeds since the end of the 1970s. Vargas also distinguishes three trends: (1) a radical feminist trend, (2) an urban feminist trend, (3) and a trend of women related to more formal and traditional settings. Each of these movements is equally valuable because, as Vargas states, Brazilian and Spanish American women have different starting points, different ways of questioning the official norms, and different approaches to the creation of alternatives. Later on, these various feminisms were brought together into a heterogeneous movement that maintained the same subversive standpoint and that had the same goal: to join the fight for the transformation of women’s rights and the fight for the transformation of society and politics. This desire to unite both struggles is explained and intensified by the political situation of Latin American nations during the 1980s. Vargas explains that “en las luchas contra las dictaduras, los feminismos comenzaron a unir la falta de democracia en lo público con su condición en lo privado” ‘in the fights against the dictatorships, the feminisms began combining the lack of democracy in the public sphere with their condition in the private sphere’ (222). Moreover, Vargas affirms that the main concern of the feminisms in the 1980s was “recuperar la diferencia de lo que significa ser mujer en experiencia de opresión” ‘to recover the difference in what it means to be a woman experiencing oppression’ (223). As I have already stated, the authors to be analyzed in this dissertation actively wrote

during the years of dictatorship in their countries. They wanted to unify the causes that Vargas lists because they themselves achieved a critical political and social commentary through the expression of erotic desire from the perspective of the female sexuality. In the novels selected for study here, sexuality and erotic desire are consolidated and presented as subversive acts in which women appropriate power with the purpose of proposing not only new patterns of sexual behavior but also new political and cultural values and models that differ from those belonging to the masculine domain. In the novels by Denser, Peri Rossi, and Telles, for example, the woman is the center of the erotic scenes, and she controls what happens. And in Eltit's novel, the implied insurgence against the military regime originates from the figure of the sexually liberated woman in the public square.

The Integration of the Erotic Imagination into the Feminism of Latin American Women's Literature (1970-2000)

As I will show, the novels by these women writers can be profitably approached through the framework of the theories of Brazilian critic, Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, one of the most important Latin American feminists at work today. In her book *In Praise of Difference. The Emergence of a Global Feminism* (1998), Oliveira examines the social, political and economic circumstances that have forced Latin American women to embark on a double project: the search for a female identity and the multiform expression of this search in literature. In the case of the four authors under study here, this identity search is expressed through an eroticism articulated specifically from the feminine perspective. In this way, the expression of female sexuality becomes a necessary and entirely positive position that I believe must be added to Castro-Klarén's list of positions taken by women

authors in Latin American literature. Oliveira starts her book by referring to the Antigone myth as it is used in Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone*. This myth has long served as a metaphor of the still controversial masculine/feminine dichotomies, including reason/intuition, rational/emotional, and public/private. At the same time, this myth has also functioned as a metaphor of the two types of women that patriarchal societies have tended to create, the submissive and the defiant. In other words, patriarchal societies offer two positions that a woman may adopt in her relationship with her self and her society: either she disobeys the supposedly natural laws and disavows the supposed superiority of men, or she resigns herself to play what she is required to accept as her naturally inferior (but socially acceptable) role as a woman. Oliveira argues that the Antigone myth becomes more complex if we examine the figure of Creon and his relations with Antigone. In Sophocles's play, there is no possibility for negotiation between them because neither wants to yield, and, as a result, they "become prisoners of their own truths" (Oliveira 15). Oliveira's reason for beginning her book with this reference to the Antigone myth is that it "echoes through time, an unceasing voice persistently repeating its message. Born or imagined in human fantasy, it reverberates, as in recurring dream, with fundamental representations of our sexual identity" (16). In other words, this myth echoes "the segregation of women and men into separate physical and psychic territories which are asymmetrical and complementary" (Steiner, qtd. in Oliveira: 16) throughout the history of humanity. Oliveira shows that women have always been in conflict with themselves in different ways depending on the phase of feminist thought then applicable to their time and place. For Oliveira, to revise the Antigone myth in the twentieth century is to revise the history of the Western thought, which is constantly returning to the

impossibility of negotiation (16). Moreover, in the context of Latin America, this myth evokes the uneasiness of generations of women who, by the end of the twentieth century, rebelled against the silence and oppression that controlled them. In contrast to the ancient myth, according to Oliveira, in the 70s and 80s Latin American women's main goal was to achieve reconciliation with the traditional patriarchal norms. A key feature of this understanding was to attain the freedom to express their sexuality, and to do it from the woman's perspective. Thus, women writers, preeminently Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, and Peri Rossi, were trying to create a uniquely feminist discourse, that is to say, an "articulation of a new logic of the feminine which is now much more abrasive and infinitely more subversive" (Oliveira 18).

In her book, Oliveira reexamines the sociological construction of the relations between men and women that have evolved into the formation of such institutions such as politics, the family, and matrimony. In patriarchal societies, she further argues, women have always had a position of otherness. Due to this subaltern position, women have been defined as dangerous antagonists, threats to the male dominated status quo. Moreover, Oliveira contends, women have often been associated with the forces of change, which are typically resisted. Thus, women need to become conscious of their potential power and to take advantage of the openings that the male logic of patriarchal society grants them. In fact, Oliveira criticizes the repeated association of the word power with the meaning of having power over something. She notes that a second meaning of the word power has been neglected, the one which refers to the capacity to do something, a meaning that applies to the role that Latin American women played in their societies during the second half of the twentieth century. In this respect, Oliveira returns to the

traditional dichotomies of female/male and nature/reason to recognize and validate the differences between the sexes, and she affirms that the scientific and technological advances of the twentieth century have virtually obliterated these differences. For example, Oliveira refers to the discovery of contraception which permitted freer sexual activity and women's freedom to choose to take part in it. Thus, the neglected meaning of the word power, the capacity to do something, is brought to the foreground and made to serve as one of her main arguments.

These traditional dichotomies serve Oliveira as a starting point enabling her to follow the development of a new phase in feminist thought, one that began towards the end of the 1960s as part of the international movement against the myriad abuses of Western industrial societies—including racial discrimination, uncontrolled capitalism, environmental deprivation, and colonialism—that achieved full force in the 1970s (see *In Praise of Difference*). In an international context, women writers had already expounded a feminist discourse. For example, British author Mary Wollstonecraft fought to destroy the fallacy of traditional dichotomies and to achieve women's equality in the eighteenth century. A century and a half later, another British author, Virginia Woolf, called our attention to an issue that had been overlooked until then among feminists: “the importance of difference in the debate over equality” (qtd. in Oliveira: 33). Returning us to the beginning of her book (when she refers to the Antigone myth), Oliveira is here reiterating that when women need to choose one of the two models, Antigone or Ismene (and even after choosing the Antigone model), they realize that “access to masculine roles does not necessarily guarantee equality” (36), a situation Oliveira calls “the equality trap” (39). Oliveira also suggests that during the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s

women felt like androgynous beings because they found themselves torn between the traditionally masculine and the traditionally feminine, between the public and the private, and between self and Other. She believes that no social actor's role can be performed without the Other and that, although the roles of women changed, the roles of men did not. In this way, "the relationship between the sexes, which had always been based upon the fallacy of the inferiority of women, now came to be based upon the fallacy of equality" (42). For her, this fallacy caused a crisis of identity for women and the more they asserted themselves intellectually and professionally, the more visible the crisis became. This ontological trap demonstrated that the need to find and achieve true equality became a search for signs of difference throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. The authors examined here, Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles and Peri Rossi, embark on this search through a radically new use of the erotic and through the cultivation of a now uninhibited sexuality expressed from the feminine perspective. As Oliveira makes clear, it is necessary for women to recognize their differences from men and their reasoning in order to attain a better formation and understanding of their identity as women, at both an intellectual and a physical level.

Oliveira further asserts that the process of identifying the differences between men and women is not new. In fact, chauvinism originally came to exist because of prejudices about man's supposed superiority, which only exists as a function of difference. In contrast, Oliveira proposes a new perspective from which to look at these differences. She suggests a new notion of equality not based on similarity but rather on difference without hierarchy. This new concept of equality becomes a major tenet in the feminisms of the last decades of the twentieth century, and is practiced in both literary

and artistic endeavor and in political activism. Oliveira names this new perspective the “feminism of difference” and, according to her, it was in full bloom during the 1980s. At that time, feminists became an “active minority” that broke with “the consensus that involved the definition of the masculine and feminine” (Oliveira 60). Oliveira affirms that “the certainty of difference will remain with the body” and that “the reconstruction of feminine will bring about the reconstruction of the masculine” (62).⁷ This statement links the ideas of Oliveira with the theories of Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous, whose concept of *l’écriture féminine* was based on her reading of Clarice Lispector (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being*). In fact, the authors under study here employ the body and the manifestations of the body—including its sexual and linguistic expressions—to emphasize this “feminism of difference.”

Another critic, Barbara Loach, also notes the shift in the emphasis on gender difference. Loach expands Oliveira’s thinking and advocates the need for women to understand the complexity of their socio-sexual identity. In contrast to Oliveira, however, Loach is particularly concerned with concepts of power as they relate to women when she argues that instead of understanding the concept of power only in terms of control and strength—which is the utopia of the early feminists—women now have to understand the concept of power in terms of agency and the ability to exert influence. For example, women authors such as Elena Poniatowska, Marta Traba, Griselda Gambaro, and Claribel Alegría have intervened in favor of the oppressed classes, while others, such as Isabel Allende and Cristina Peri Rossi, have spoken against repressive governments in Chile and Uruguay respectively (Loach 55).

Power has long been a significant concept in feminist thought. From the beginning, the feminist movement focused on the fight for the acknowledgement of women in society. In fact, society's traditional institutions always recognized the threat to male power that the feminist movement represented, and so regarded women as a potentially disruptive force. Yet according to Loach, "the emphasis has shifted from 'control' and 'domination' to 'agency' and 'capacity'" (16). Thus, in today's feminism there exists a connection between the idea of power and the political ability to do something. This transformation in the ways we perceive the notions of power and female identity parallels the changes undergone in the feminist movement generally—since the initial main goal of the movement was to attain equality between men and women within the existing spheres of power and nation. In the twentieth century, the impetus for this particular change in the concept of power was possible largely thanks to the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, who revolutionized the perception of power relations in societies by reexamining the internal connections between social classes, races, and genders. In other words, instead of studying the institutions that established and exerted power, Foucault analyzed the power relations that created them. His inversion is of the same type as the inversion that took place in earlier feminist thought, which explains why Foucault is one of the most influential philosophers in feminism—as well as for other marginalized groups: "by questioning traditional concepts of power and power structures, Foucault has opened a way for groups normally excluded from power to highlight and countermand so-called "universal" beliefs" (Loach 24). Loach also highlights the importance of the 1980s in the development of the feminist thought as a period when many significant changes in the movement's organizational dynamics and

strategies took place. In the early 1970s, women went through a process of heightening their political consciousness and realizing that they were victims of a male-oriented society and that the solution was to dissent. By the mid-1970s, women had started to think about new possibilities in the relationships that existed between their lives and the institutions of power and societal resistance, and about their capacity to succeed within these structures. Later on, in the early 1980s, the failed utopian visions of the previous decade made women focus on more practical issues and on praise of the differences between the sexes. In fact, this is the same argument that Oliveira had developed in *In Praise of Difference* three years earlier.

In this dissertation I do not intend to argue that women write differently from men, or that women's writing is symptomatic of the biological female. I do assert that women in general have vital experiences different from those of men, and that, within this context, women also have different experiences based on their social class, age, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation, to name a few differentiating factors. Nevertheless, Latin American women are linked by an ability to claim a space and a voice for themselves within a particular patriarchal culture. Some do this through political discourse; others, through a more racial discourse. Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles and Peri Rossi do it literarily, through erotic and body-based discourses (involving, at times, both men and women). Literature written by women in modern Latin America challenges the norms of the patriarchal structure in multiple manners. However, the erotic approach has not been studied with the attention it deserves. Castro-Klarén agrees with this statement and she cites the work of Diane Marting to emphasize the subversive and indirect power that erotic fiction contains: "the sexual rebellion which begun in the 1960s

enabled writers in countries where censorship was extremely repressive, to deploy sexuality as a means to criticize the state or the elites from a position of relative safety, since censors often missed the metaphorical and lateral social commentary in sexual fiction” (qtd. in Castro-Klarén *Narrativa femenina* 28).

Much has been written about the body since Hélène Cixous, reacting to Lispector’s *Água viva*, introduced the concept of *l’écriture féminine* into French feminist thought. Critic Tierney-Tello notes that this concept refers not only to the need to write with one’s body but also to the need to let women be “able to express femininity in a way different from the one imposed upon [them] because otherwise what we have is body masquerading as feminine which reveals itself in relation to masculinity” (qtd. in Castro-Klarén *Narrativa femenina* 34). Erotic literature plays an important role in Tierney-Tello’s understanding of *l’écriture féminine*. Women’s erotic literature in Latin America does not focus on the male gaze but, rather, on the female gaze, a gaze, however, that is addressed to both men and women. Unlike the traditional use of the female body—its function as an object of pleasure for men—this is an eroticism centered on the woman’s body as a subject that gives and receives pleasure in and of itself (which is why the motif of masturbation is so important) and that is an agent of desire for other women as well. By advocating a newly sexualized expression of femininity, Tierney-Tello suggests the need to overcome the limits that had been imposed on the woman’s body. In this way, we come to the same argument that Judith Butler advances: the limits of the body are the limits of the socially hegemonic (106). Therefore, if the limits of the body are violated—in this case through the new modes of female sexuality—the limits of the patriarchal hegemony are violated as well. In the novels by the Spanish American and Brazilian

women authors under study here a violation of the patriarchal hegemony takes place. It is a violation, moreover, made by women through the female body: the female body is overtly exposed, becoming the center of the text and the subject of giving and receiving pleasure. The women in these novels are consciously violating the traditional norms of sexual behavior assigned to women and they are enjoying it. This new expression of sexual pleasure is thus the most subversive feature in these novels. Despite the negative connotation a violation normally implies, however, here it is permitted by the patriarchal system because men, as agents and readers, are unconsciously taking part of it as well. For example, the ontological and sexual identity of the male narrator in *Solitario de amor* depends completely on Aída, the female protagonist. By the end of the novel, the author portrays a woman who has learned to provide herself with sexual satisfaction, while the male narrator is simply left with an image of Aída's masturbation, an image laden with political significance.

Butler also posits that the law creates the same desires that it oppresses. Following the theories of Foucault (who contends that power functions through language), she further argues that “the law that prohibits incestuous and homosexual unions simultaneously invents and invites them in order to establish its own coherence and superiority” (93). In citing this statement I want to refer not only to homosexual relations but also to the invention of eroticism, the science of love that has been present in the history of humanity since Greek antiquity. In the same way, men invented this science in order to dominate and control women within the masculine domain. The question is: What role does women's erotic writing, a space previously dominated by the masculine, play in the development of women's writing in Latin America during the last thirty years

of the twentieth century? In my opinion, it plays a triple role. First, women's writing takes an element of the official, masculine discourse and appropriates it. In other words, women become agents, and not objects, of erotic discourse.⁸ Second, through the appropriation of an erotic discourse, women seize part of the control and authority that are traditionally implied in male-oriented discourse. And, third, in women's hands, this erotic discourse is doubly subversive because (1) women use it to articulate homosexual relationships among women, a type of non-male relationship that has been repressed and marginalized by society, and (2) women's exercises of power within the patriarchal system are validated once more.

In Latin America, the relationship between women and literature is a relationship in flux, in continuous change. Moreover, the shifts in this relationship are shaped by the changes that have marked the feminist movement throughout its history in Latin America, North America, and Europe. Critics agree that, with exceptions such as Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal—who stands, with Brazil's Patrícia Galvão, among the first women writers to give voice to women's sexuality in twentieth-century literature with *La última niebla* (1935; *House of Mist*, 1947) (Marting 24)—and Clarice Lispector—who was achieving the same goals in the 1940s—from the decade of the 1960s on, a new change in the dynamics of the feminist movement and the literature by women was gathering force. Tired of the primarily domestic literature⁹ then associated with women, the writers of this generation use sexuality as a mechanism of personal liberation and social critique. In fact, a common characteristic that Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, and Peri Rossi (along with many other writers from their generation), share is their capacity to connect the theme of female sexuality with social activism and commitment. Critic

Diane Marting affirms that the theme of female sexuality was a dangerous one until the 1960s (4). Women were always at risk in both the domestic and the social realms. Marting mentions, for example, the infamous case of the Uruguayan poet, Delmira Agustini, who was murdered by her ex-husband at the beginning of the twentieth century. Explaining the circumstances of her death, Ángel Rama wrote:

That is what happened with Delmira Agustini: women's arts are beginning to exist in Uruguay due to her. She died when two disparate functions, both imposed by the new society of the 1900s, entered into conflict inside her: the mystification of the conventional bourgeois woman and her independence as a being of amorous sensuality. (qtd. in Marting: 4)

It is not surprising that the nature of the repressive political regimes of the Latin American nations coincide with a deliberate attempt to control the lives of Latin American women. This correlation explains why in the second half of the twentieth century—a period of great political change and the revitalization of the movement for the rights of women—we see the most opportune moment for women authors to write more openly about female sexuality and such is the case of the four authors under discussion here. Nevertheless, I do not want to imply that the oppression of women in Latin America is a non-existent issue today, for that is not the case.¹⁰

In this introduction I have discussed Oliveira's argument about the need to find and accentuate the differences between men and women. In my opinion, this argument is an accurate articulation of the status of Latin American feminism today. In 2005, Latin American feminism is evolving into a new age, one that is greatly dependent on the development of erotic literature, of a literature that features female sexuality at its center. In 1980, regarding this phenomenon, the Puerto Rican novelist, poet and essayist Rosario

Ferré, spoke of women writing about female sexuality as a necessary stance for women to take in contemporary literature. As she stated:

women writers today know that if they want to become good writers, they will have to be women before anything else, because in part, authenticity is everything. They will have to learn to become acquainted with the most intimate secrets of their body and to speak without euphemisms about it. They will have to learn to examine their own eroticism and to derive from their sexuality a whole vitality that is latent and exploited on few occasions. (qtd. in Marting: 5)

Previously Latin American women had been unable to do this due to the more radical claims from previous phases of the international feminist movement, claims that, to certain extent, denied the most feminine aspects of women and made them obstacles to the achievement of equality between the sexes. Ferré continues: “[la] pasión es la naturaleza definitoria de la mujer, pero esa pasión suele ser al mismo tiempo, su mayor fuerza y su mayor flaqueza” ‘passion is the defining nature of woman, but that passion tends to be, at the same time, her greatest strength and her greatest weakness’ (qtd. in Marting: 5).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, women intellectuals in Brazil and Spanish America began to understand that writing about female sexuality did not mean disrespect for the efforts of the earlier Latin American feminist movements, but, rather, was a call for a new and liberating type of vindication. A noteworthy feature of this new phase of Latin American feminism, and, ultimately, of its women’s literature, is that in the process of identity formation, the pressure to select between the two types of female social roles (the submissive or the subversive) continued being a concern for the Latin American woman writer. As in the first stages of feminism, when women felt the consequences of the double standard implied in the fact that a woman was forced to choose between a professional or intellectual life and domestic life, there also existed a

double bind at the beginning of this phenomenon, one that I call “the erotic literature renaissance.” As Debra Castillo notes, “[if] a woman wrote on female sexuality, she was castigated for her audacity; if she did not, she was criticized for not being “feminine”” (qtd. in Marting: 5). In fact, when dealing with the theme of female sexuality, women writers have been described as “excesivamente viril” ‘too virile’ (Marting 7).¹¹ In the year 2005, it is rare to find comments like this. Nevertheless, many Spanish American and Brazilian women writers, Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, Lispector, and Peri Rossi among them, managed to overcome the social and political risks that the task of writing about female sexuality contains.

As Lispector showed as early as 1944, the use of the theme of female heterosexual and homosexual activity has several implications, one of which is that it serves as a symbolic first step toward the exercise of the desire to have freedom of expression in other arenas (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being*). In other words, women writers realize what a strong political weapon sex is, particularly (as Denser shows) sex between women. In fact, Marting posits that the theme of female sexuality is a feature that distinguishes North American and European feminisms from Latin American feminism: “Within Latin American literary context, women’s erotic literature displayed a *revolutionary* agenda, in contrast to the norms of the United States and England, where a determined antipolitical stance prevailed in most sexual fiction” (11). Why is the theme of female sexuality suitable to accomplish a literary exploration of society’s norms? If we associate female sexuality with freedom, as David William Foster does (Marting, *The Sexual Woman*), then women’s writing on this theme has a double significance. Marting thus concludes that “writing about female sexuality was part and parcel of a broader

disobedience to master narratives ... on the part of these female novelists; if they write about breaking the rules, it would be a *mise en abîme* of their own actions” (8). Marting also makes use of Butler’s theories to answer the question above. She agrees with Butler’s statement that sex and sexuality are gendered and that women and men experience sex in different ways. Marting also uses the ideas of Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott to affirm that sexuality is socially located, and that we experience our sexuality according to different social determinants such as race and social class (13). Jackson and Scott then add that “what counts as erotic is itself socially constructed in terms of relations of dominance, to the extent that it is difficult even to think of sex outside of the patriarchal language and culture which shape our thoughts, desires and fantasies” (qtd. in Marting: 14). Butler’s theory of performative acts completes this position, the social construction of the erotic serving as yet another example of what Butler calls “regulatory fictions” (qtd. in Marting: 14). In other words, Butler suggests that the erotic is not necessarily a construct based essentially on the male figure and patriarchal discourse. In these terms, the erotic—which had previously been understood only within the male domain—can also be constructed within the feminine domain, though when it is, it causes a change in the relations of dominance. In the context of Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, and Peri Rossi, we will see in the chapters that follow that these women authors are establishing a new theoretical frame with which to work the erotic, one focusing on women and their positive responses to both pleasure and power.

Since sexuality is social and cultural, female sexuality has immediate importance in the process of reinterpreting and reevaluating the official discourses of power. This is relevant for the study of these particular Latin American women authors whose artistic

and intellectual frames of reference were overtly political. Marting, too, confirms that the theme of politicized sexuality became particularly popular in Latin American literature beginning in the 1960s. This is so, she believes, because:

in countries where censorship was strong or the risk to an author was great if a critique took direct aim at a dictatorship or entrenched interests, as was frequently the case with the repressive regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s, sexuality allowed writers to criticize the state or the elites from a position of relative safety, since censors often missed the metaphorical and lateral social commentary in sexual fiction. (Marting 20)

Unlike previous decades, when the theme of female sexuality presented either a profligate woman or one who was frigid or neurotic (i.e. unresponsive to a male), in the 1980s this theme transcended its traditional limitations and aimed at a more complete understanding of female being. This more complex understanding recalls Cixous's concept of *l'écriture féminine*, and, of course, underscores the importance of Clarice Lispector as a pioneering force in this field. Marting also notices that many women writers preferred to see female sexuality not only as a theme but also as a type of discourse that would articulate other possible forms of liberation in the 1980s.

As Oliveira came to be years later, Cixous was aware of the importance of sexual differences because they constitute the possibilities for alternative modes of being and different Weltanschauungs. Following Lispector, she found writing both the site and the medium for reform. Thus, for this dissertation I want to use the concept of *l'écriture féminine* to discuss the distinctive quality of the sexual fiction written by Latin American women. By sexual fiction I refer to works that contain an emphasis on female sexuality expressed from the woman's perspective. Moreover, in order to approach the texts by Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, and Peri Rossi, *l'écriture féminine* needs to be understood as a characteristic of sexual fiction written by women. When I write that these novels are

labeled under the category of erotic literature, I specify that it is not a necessarily physical eroticism but an eroticism that considers the woman as the center of the discourse and as both the subject and object of desire. While I believe that writing is androgynous (that there is not female writing as opposed to male writing), when I use the term *l'écriture féminine* in this dissertation I do not assume a biological essence that distinguishes the feminine from the masculine. In contrast, I envision a writing that distinguishes itself by different world views and experiences necessarily influenced by the female body (because women and men definitively have different bodies). For Cixous, this type of writing, which has been mostly, but not exclusively, practiced by women, has the potential to avoid and reshape existing structures while being tolerant of the other's differences, and, as we see in Lispector's work in 1940s Brazil, it is capable of initiating changes in the social and political domains that challenge the patriarchal mindset. Finally, *l'écriture féminine* or feminine writing is

a place ... which is not economically or politically indebted to all vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds (Cixous, qtd. in Sellers: xxix).

For Cixous, the best example of pure *l'écriture féminine* comes from Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector whose great accomplishment is that her writings "portray opposition and ... delineate responses which do not depend on subjugation" (qtd. in Sellers: xxxi). Cixous's writings thus suggest the need to construct the feminine subject in a position of mastery without eliminating or diminishing the Other, in this case the male subject. This type of writing, initiated by Lispector in 1944 with the publication of *Perto do coração selvagem*, has served as a model for women writers throughout the

twentieth century, and up to the present moment. And yet, as I will show, Lispector's work has also shown the need for a more overt and politicized female sexuality, one which emerges in the final decades of the twentieth century. Cixous's theories are significant in the study of Denser, Eltit, Fagundes Telles, and Peri Rossi because their texts are examples of *l'écriture féminine* in the sense that in these novels women manage to place themselves in a position of power (neither superior nor inferior but alternative) parallel to or simply different from that of men. In these novels a new relationship between woman and power is articulated in the form of a sexual metaphor (the sexual act) at the same time that the metaphor extends into the political and social spheres. Moreover, the foundation of this newly eroticized writing is the female body/mind unification. Through new forms of the expression of sexuality from the woman's perspective, these women have sought to give voice to their most fundamental and hitherto unexplored "I," or "I's," to vindicate their long repressed sexuality and to radicalize the notion of what "being a woman" means.

¹ All translations are mine.

² In an endnote to her article, Merrim explains that Sor Juana was awarded this title in Mexico in 1974. The title was "anticipated in an early article by Dorothy Schons (as well as by others), "The First Feminist in the New World," *Equal Rights*, October 31, 1925, pp.11-12" (31).

³ In the edition of Alfonso Méndez Plancarte's *Obras completas*, the poems dedicated to countess De Paredes are 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 31, 33, 34, and 35.

⁴ Despite the norms of their time, these women writers assumed an active and provocative voice in defense of feminine sexuality.

⁵ Although published in the early 1970s, *As meninas* is particularly relevant because it was one of the most important of Fagundes Telles's novels to be published under the dictatorship in Brazil. I chose this text because I want to work with novels published before the regime in Brazil came to an end in 1985.

⁶ This term refers to "the glorification of the female's self-abnegation, sexual purity and motherhood as imaged by the Virgin Mary" (Loach 41).

⁷ This is exactly what I will underscore in the chapter on Peri Rossi's novel.

⁸ Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was the first to do so in Latin America.

⁹ By domestic literature I mean writings about women's experiences at home, playing roles such as spouses, mothers, and housewives.

¹⁰ Nowadays, a study of domestic violence cases would give surprising results.

¹¹ For example, the editors of *Prostibulario*, one of the first collections of sexual fiction to be published during the decade of the 1960s, reprimanded the only woman author in this collection for "being too strong in her writings as a woman" (Marting 7).

CHAPTER II

MÁRCIA DENSER AND THE FEMALE VOICE IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL IN BRAZIL

Feminism in the Context of Women's Literature in Brazil in the Twentieth Century

In the early twentieth century, the French writer and socialist Simone de Beauvoir claimed that the emancipation of women was not an issue of happiness but of freedom (qtd. in Colling: 39). By this, she meant that the emancipation of women was not going to be easy, peaceful, and painless. In contrast, women's emancipation meant conflict, uneasiness, and pain because it challenged the established order. The type of woman who stands up publicly and resists the establishment has been a fairly recent development in Brazil, as opposed to the United States and other developed countries in Europe, where a feminist mindset was already present in the mid-1800s. In fact, critic Ana María Colling states, this situation has only in the past few decades emerged in Brazil (40). In Brazil, the formation of the feminist movement as an ideological group that fights against gender discrimination coincided with the establishment of the dictatorship in the mid-1960s. For this reason, the feminist movement was first manifested along with other leftist movements that supported the working class and the democratic cause. An even earlier example of an intellectual who explored the connection between feminist thought and the proletariat movement is modernist writer, Patrícia Galvão, who, as early as the 1930s, tried to establish a coalition between feminist goals and those of the working class.

In spite of Galvão's efforts, however, the debate on women's sexuality continued being a taboo topic in most conservative spheres allied with the dictatorship and in some leftist groups. In fact, Colling states that some leftwing militants thought that "a luta pela causa específica da mulher era considerada inoportuna, inconveniente e divisionista" 'the fight for women's cause specifically was considered inopportune, inconvenient, and divisive' (41). During the next decades the debate on female sexuality gradually became more explicit and candid, at first through changing norms of behavior (for example, miniskirts and bikinis appeared) and later through the challenging of long established patriarchal social institutions—for instance, Brazilians began to accept divorce after it was legalized in 1977 and to accept premarital sexual relationships when, in the 1980s, soap-operas introduced them as a common theme (Colling 41-42). The 1970s and 1980s, therefore, marked the beginning of an unguarded discussion about women's sexuality in Brazil. Colling further explains that women's magazines, which had long dealt with traditional matters such as sewing, cooking, and décor, started to bring in other issues including marriage, family, body, and sex (42). In fact, Carmen Silva, from *Claudia*, a pioneer magazine in feminist circles, affirms that "o sexo se converteu em tema de palestra, em diálogo social, em bate-papo em mesa de bar" 'sex became a topic of debate, a social dialogue, a chit-chat at a bar table' (qtd. in Colling: 42).

While the feminist movement achieved its greatest splendor after the 1960s in popular culture, the situation in the literary domain was very different. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto maintains, for example, that feminist thought existed prior to the twentieth century and that it can be traced back to colonial times. Nevertheless, it was not until the twentieth century that feminist thought and a coherent feminist movement in Brazil came

together in a single homogeneous corpus, effectively organized and with common themes. And it was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that female sexuality was granted special attention in the feminist debate. Parallel to the revitalization of the feminist movement and to the literature written by women in the decades of 1970s and 1980s is the proliferation of feminist criticism by women, a production that has continued until today. Two prominent women critics are Rose Marie Muraro¹ and Heloneida Studart, who, together with journalist Cidinha Campos, authored a very controversial theatrical performance entitled *Homem não entra*² in 1975. The decade of the 1970s is, then, the first generation of the growing feminist movement in Brazil, which is now regarded as the strongest in all of Latin America. Women's political action manifested itself in two ways during the dictatorship: the fight against military oppression and the fight against the inequalities between the sexes. In the literary sphere, writers like Dinah Silveira de Queiroz, Raquel de Queiroz, Clarice Lispector, Nélide Piñon, and Lygia Fagundes Telles were writing at the same time, and were known for the examination of feminist themes in their narratives, such as women's incommunicability and female self-awareness in patriarchal societies. Therefore, I maintain that there exists a clear connection between the feminist movement, the cultural revolution, and the renaissance of women's literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century in Brazil.

The publication of Clarice Lispector's novel *Perto do coração selvagem* in 1944 marked the beginning of a flourishing era in the literature produced by women in Brazil. Between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s, Lispector was one of the dominant figures in the Brazilian literary scene, together with João Guimarães Rosa. In her writings, Lispector mainly focused on urban settings and concentrated on women characters that

doubted and revised their female roles in the domestic space of their homes. But it was not until the decade of the 1960s that women writers really broke into mainstream Brazilian literature (see Payne and Fitz, *Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America: a Comparative Assessment*), and that prose written by women began to have an impact in the publishing market. Some women authors who became prominent during the 1960s, in addition to Lispector, are Rachel de Queiroz, Fagundes Telles, Nélide Piñon, and Ana Maria Machado. Most of these latter writers' fiction was "a follow-up to the enigmatic and metaphoric prose of Lispector's, and situate[d] women in the confines of the house, from a subjective, self-centered writing of the self" (*Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, 147). In fact, in an article entitled "Prosa de ficção feminina pós 64 no Brasil,"³ critic Marcia Cavendish Wanderley points in particular to 1964 as a chronological reference for this boom in literary production by women in the Brazilian letters. Wanderley argues that the beginning of the military dictatorship in Brazil in 1964 brought about the participation of women novelists who were politically committed to the anti-dictatorship fight and who employed fiction to denounce the regime. Wanderley affirms that:

Mais precisamente, no nebuloso período pós 64, quando os véus negros da repressão e da censura desceram sobre a população brasileira sufocando-a nos seus mais variados impulsos criativos, uma vereda, a princípio tímida e mais tarde caudalosa foi aberta pela mulher no campo literário. Seja no romance conto ou novela, a prosa de ficção feminina abriu seu caminho no mercado editorial brasileiro tornando-se uma vertente com recepção garantida e cada vez mais ampla neste mesmo mercado 'In the nebulous period after 1964, when the black veils of repression and censorship descended over the Brazilian population, suffocating it in the most varied creative impulses, women opened a path, timid at first and torrential later, in the literary field. Whether romance, short story, or novel, prose fiction by women opened its path in the Brazilian editorial market and became a kind of writing with guaranteed reception.' (par. 2)

Thus, it is necessary to remember that the development of narrative written by women in Brazil took place at a time of political repression and censorship in the literary world. Nevertheless, political censorship and self-censorship were not exclusive to women authors in Brazil; the former affected the work written by men as well.

The participation of women writers in the Brazilian literary scene is still active during the 1970s. Along with recognized female writers such as Lispector, Sônia Coutinho, Rachel Jardim, and Marina Colasanti, Fagundes Telles emerges as one of the most important literary figures of this decade.⁴ In her short stories and novels prior to *As meninas* (1973; *The Girl in the Photograph*, 1982), Fagundes Telles maintains the tradition of women authors such as Lispector in Brazil and María Luisa Bombal in Spanish America. As in the prose of the latter writers, expressions of intimacy and psychological analysis of the human condition are characteristics of Fagundes Telles's prose, in which women and the corruption of their family relationships are two recurrent themes. Her female characters live in an environment of frustration, solitude, desperation, and incommunicability, and they are trapped in modern societies limited by rigidly patriarchal codes of behavior (see Stern, *Dictionary of Brazilian Literature*). Another characteristic of Lispector's, Bombal's, and Fagundes Telles's prose is the bourgeois world that their female protagonists inhabit. Their women characters suffer the consequences of the dissolution of a corrupted bourgeoisie, and the implications these have for their entrance into a new modern society. In contrast, the next generation of women observes a more urban and cosmopolitan world that offers the woman more access to the job market and to the political sphere.

Critics such as Verity Smith, Maria Manuel Lisboa, and Irwin Stern identify the publication of *As meninas* as a turning point in the prose production by women in Brazil. The novel invokes the pessimism of Brazil's greatest writer, Joaquim Machado de Assis (Smith 782), for in the mid-1970s Brazil was a country "torn by political dissent and unstable regimes, which eliminate[d] the possibility of radical change" (Smith, *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*). *As meninas* nevertheless suggests that there is hope for a change that signifies the destruction of the patriarchal and conservative standards instituted by the oppressive military regime in 1964. The fragmented narrative structure that characterizes the novel allows us to trace Fagundes Telles's intellectual heritage back to such narrative innovators as Machado de Assis. The bourgeois family is not at the novel's center; rather, characters, mostly female characters, from all the social classes participate in a cacophony of voices that substitutes for a center. The novel explores the theme of female sexuality, and openly depicts the homosexuality of some of its female characters, an act which daringly flouts the censorship and repression suffered in Brazil during the dictatorship.

As meninas is structured in a series of chapters that are narrated by different female voices that correspond to the three teenage protagonists in the novel: Lorena, Lia, and Ana Clara. The three girls are roommates in a boarding school run by nuns, and live different lives that lead to nothing. The girls and other female characters in the novel form a microcosm, inhabited by women, within the great cosmos of patriarchy. These women live lives of disenchantment and boredom; they do not know themselves and, when they do, they do not feel happy and complete with their identities. However, they do not fight for a change in their existence. They can recognize the others' flaws but they

are blind regarding theirs. At the end of the novel, the reader feels powerless because the women have accomplished nothing that they intended to do. The novel ends with the same emptiness with which it begins. Lorena represents the bourgeois class in decadence, and is the daughter of a widow who spends her husband's inheritance little by little. Her mother fears solitude and looks for lovers to marry in order to prevent loneliness. However, they only desire her money. Lorena spends most of the time in her bedroom at the boarding school, listening to music and taking bubble baths. She lives eternally waiting for her lover's phone call, a call that will never happen because, although he has decided to end the affair and go back to his family, Lorena still believes that he will call some day and tell her that he has left his wife. Lia is a social activist and frustrated writer. Throughout the novel, she expresses several times that she wants to write again but she fears her male friends' commentaries and, above all, her boyfriend's. Lia needs to leave the country due to safety matters but, when it is time to leave, difficulties come up and the reader never learns whether she left the country. Ana Clara is a drug addict who cannot escape her addiction; she represents the lower social class of Brazil and lives in a world of fairy tales and dreams, waiting for her well-off fiancée to marry her. Everything around this man is ambiguous and the reader never knows for sure whether he is part of the hallucinations she has when she is high, or whether, in reality, she has a satisfactory relationship with him. Nevertheless, everything is most probably part of her hallucinations. The end of Ana Clara is the most tragic and foreshadows that her two friends will not have a much happier ending. Ana Clara dies as a consequence of an overdose and due to the beatings of some man who raped her while she was unconscious. Ana Clara dies on Lorena's bed in the boarding school, and, scared that they may be

punished, Lorena and Lia take the cadaver to the closest park and leave it there so that the police think Ana Clara is just one more prostitute raped and killed in the streets. At the end of the novel, when Lorena and Lia say goodbye, Lorena shows an attitude of hope and says to Lia: “Temos milhares de coisas que falar, Lião. Milhares!” ‘We have thousands of things to talk about, Lião. Thousands!’ (265). However, the novel ends with the same feeling that permeates the entire text, that is, that nothing is happening in the lives of these women and that they will continue with the same type of existence.

Despite the pessimistic ending of the novel, Fagundes Telles takes a stand in portraying the existential dilemmas of women from a female perspective, writing a controversial novel that overtly deals with taboo topics such as women’s sexuality, sexual relations before marriage, politically active women, women taking drugs, women having affairs with married men, and women having multiple love affairs. Fagundes Telles claims that fiction written by women has unique characteristics: it is more intimate and more confessional because women seek to reveal, to uncover themselves, and to define themselves (“A mulher escritora e o feminismo no Brasil,” 57). Her argument thus approximates Oliveira’s argument about differences between the sexes and the need to celebrate those differences. She further affirms that “feminismo é ter uma finalidade, um objetivo ... é exatamente o trabalho que a mulher deve realizar” ‘feminism is to have a purpose, an objective ... [and that] is exactly the work a woman should do’ (“A mulher escritora e o feminismo no Brasil,” 63). Fagundes Telles and Cixous both say that this is what women need to do in writing, but they do not impose a concrete technique that may be identified as the essence of women’s writing. The different techniques adopted, and the attitudes taken by women in their writing, are identified by Castro-Klarén in her

article “Women, Self, and Writing” (1991) that I have previously mentioned. Another critic, Nelly Novaes Coelho, takes a slight turn from Fagundes Telles’s and Cixous’s ideas and affirms that the difference between a literature written by men and a literature written by women should not be based in relation to psychoanalytical and discourse (linguistic) terms, but in relation to the “cultura em que ela está imersa” ‘the culture in which it [the literature] is immersed’ (15). In my opinion, the three critics share a common foundation in their theories because they project their ideas from the realizations about the patriarchal structure of society. I agree with Novaes Coelho on the importance of the cultural context because the sexist and protectionist ideology characteristic of patriarchy is still present in Brazil. In the past, feminist thought was expressed through the analysis of the identity formation of women—who had been rendered invisible by the patriarchal codes and who needed to establish themselves first as social subjects. Once they are recognized as subjects, women need to find their identity, and they do this in part through their female sexuality, which had long been oppressed. It is then that love, sex, and eroticism become forces that initiate the search for a complete identity.

Ferreira-Pinto states that Fagundes Telles played a significant role in the development of a feminist conscience in Brazil, and she did it by creating in her novels small female communities, families, for example, centered on the female figures and on the relationships among them. The novelist dealt with the decadence of the bourgeois family and the dissolution of the traditional family, and although she was not the only writer dealing with these topics (Dalton Trevisan, Jorge Amado, and Nelson Rodriguez also were), the originality of her prose is that she broke with the traditional pattern of the family, a pattern that was based on the male figure (“Consciência feminista/Identidade

feminina,” 71). As early as 1976, Cixous claimed there was a need for a feminist attitude and mindset. And that “woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (“The Laugh of the Medusa,” 875). Yet three years before Cixous’s declaration, Fagundes Telles had suggested in her novel, *As meninas*, that it was time for women to say for themselves what women are. Thus, her work marks the beginning of a new prose written by women in Brazil, a new prose that continues on today with the publications of a group of writers that includes Márcia Denser, Bettin Milan, and Luiza Lobo to name a few.

Commenting on Denser’s *Animal dos motéis: novela em episódios* (1981), critic Wanderley affirms, in her article “Prosa de ficção feminina pós 64 no Brasil,” that the novel “é um verdadeiro refrigerio para nossos ouvidos cansados de escutar as lamúrias que predominaram nos anos 70 e de conviver com a indecisão existencial das mulheres que viveram com um pé na liberdade da estrada e outro no laço ideológico do paternalismo ameaçador” ‘the novel is a real rest for our ears, tired of listening to the complaints that predominated in the 1970s, and tired of living with the existential indecisions of women who lived with a foot on the road to freedom and another on the ideological bond of menacing patriarchy’ (par. 32). In fact, these women adopted a new way of writing, one that was essentially feminine. The secret of this new way of writing was the female body and sexuality. Some book titles illustrate this, for example Betty Milan’s *O sexophuro: novella-novelo* (1981) and Luiza Lobo’s *Sexameron: novelas sobre casamentos* (1997).

The use of the female body as a characteristic motif of Brazilian women authors was not new. Already in 1944, Clarice Lispector had transformed the female body into a

literary motif by making it a basic ground in her landmark novel *Perto do coração selvagem*. For Lispector, the female body functioned as a literary motif for the process of women's self-realization (including sexual pleasure) and autonomy from men. What is new in writers such as Nélida Piñon, with the publication of *A casa da paixão* in 1972, and Márcia Denser, with the publication of two collections of erotic fiction by women, *Muito prazer: contos eróticos femininos* in 1980 and *O prazer é todo meu* in 1984, is the discovery in the erotic of an anti-ideological technique against a predominantly patriarchal society such as Brazil's (Ferreira-Pinto, "O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas," par. 4).⁵ The expression of the erotic—an option for women that had remained underdeveloped until the last years of the 1970s and early 1980s—became explicit and actualized the notion of what being a woman meant. In fact, in her article, critic Ferreira-Pinto affirms that, as Brazilian women gained more space in the socio-political realm, and as a higher number of women writers achieved recognition by the literary critics and with the reading public, eroticism gradually became an integrating element of women's literature in Brazil ("O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas," par. 4). Therefore, I argue that eroticism is a component added to the characteristics of the new narrative written by women in Brazil (which originated with Lispector and her novel *Perto do coração selvagem*), and that Márcia Denser's erotic novel *Animal dos motéis* (1981) epitomizes the development of the so-called nova narrativa de mulheres 'new narrative by women' in Brazil.

Since the decade of 1960s, Brazilians, and in particular Brazilian women writers, "lived through the impact of the Cultural Revolution that brought new lifestyles, drug experimentation, the contraception pill, and the sexual revolution to Brazil" (Ferreira-

Pinto, *Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 2). A critical decade in the history of women's accomplishments in Brazil therefore followed the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Between 1975 and 1985 Brazilian women saw the creation of key organizations, such as the Movimento Feminino pela Anistia 'women's movement for amnesty,' founded in 1975, and Grupo Lésbico Feminista 'feminist lesbian group,' founded in 1980. At the same time, new positions in politics, government, and culture opened for women. For instance, Rachel de Queiroz was the first woman to gain a seat in the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1977; the first woman senator took her seat in 1979; the first woman Minister was appointed to the Ministry of Education in 1982; and the National Council on Women's Rights was established, together with other state and local councils, in 1985. Finally, with political amnesty in 1979, Brazilian exiles started to return to the country (Ferreira-Pinto, *Gender, Discourse, and Desire*). The process of abertura 'opening' that took place during the last years of the dictatorship in Brazil, and that preceded the return of democracy, explains this reemergence of counter-ideological discourses of culture and politics. I use the word reemergence because these discourses had existed before, though severely repressed by the dominant discourse. Thus, I believe that the renaissance of literature written by women in Latin America, and in particular in Brazil, is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather, that it has overt political and cultural causes that one should not overlook in the study of women's literary production during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Even though this renaissance reached its maturity in the aftermath of the military regime, I believe it was not a direct consequence of the fall of the dictatorship in Brazil, but rather, that it had been gestating since the mid-1940s⁶ and the appearance of Clarice Lispector.

The lack of recognition afforded the majority of Brazil's female literary production before the late nineteenth century does not prevent critics such as Diane Marting, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, and Nelly Novaes Coelho from affirming the existence of a tradition of women's literature in the country. With regard to the history of literary production by women in the twentieth century, Ferreira-Pinto draws attention to the first pioneering group of female writers, which includes Rachel de Queiroz, Clarice Lispector, and Lygia Fagundes Telles and, like the other critics, she emphasizes the importance of the last thirty years of the twentieth century because, as she contends, the "female literary lineage has started to be recovered" (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 1). In her book *Gender, Discourse, and Desire* (2004), which addresses issues of female sexuality, eroticism, and erotic discourse in the literary production by Brazilian women, mainly during the twentieth century, Ferreira-Pinto takes as a point of departure the poetry of Gilka Machado (1893-1960). With the publication of *Cristais partidos* in 1915, Machado caused a scandal because of her overt treatment of problems regarding women's social role, identity, and sexuality. Machado was not the only female author dealing with female sexuality at that time, as evidenced by the work of Patrícia Galvão, a leading figure in the Modernist movement of the 1920s in Brazil. Nevertheless, Ferreira-Pinto argues, Machado distinguished herself from other women writers in that, like Galvão, she hinted at lesbian desire and female self-eroticism in her poetry (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 4-5). Thus, while female discourse had a deeply-rooted but not recognized tradition in the history of Brazilian letters by women, the erotic discourse that Machado offered in her poetry was something new. After recognizing Machado's contributions to twentieth-century women's letters in Brazil, Ferreira-Pinto concludes that it is not until the 1970s

and 1980s that we see the literary expression of female eroticism that Gilka Machado initiated fully developed and manifested in Brazilian women's writing (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 49).

After Gilka Machado, Clarice Lispector and Lygia Fagundes Telles represent a second generation of women writers focusing on themes related to female sexuality such as adultery, masturbation, and lesbian desire. These themes are presented through the characters' search for identity and self-realization, proving the connection between the female subject's individuality and her sexuality (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 53). Ferreira-Pinto concludes that for this generation of writers, "eroticism plays a part in a larger process of self-development and self-affirmation" (53). This is to say, from the 1960s onward, once female sexuality was accepted as an intrinsic part of women's lives, their identity, and their self-realization, and once female sexuality became a crucial part of the feminist discourses, a new importance was added to the role of eroticism in women's writings. At that point, women writers began to understand erotic narrative as a mechanism of control that they could utilize in order to destabilize the male power structure implied in the dominant patriarchal ideology. Borrowing Rodolfo Franconi's concept of the "arena erótica" 'erotic arena' (71), I conclude that eroticism became a ground for female empowerment, change, and creativity. Then, authors such as Denser recognized the link between eroticism, self-knowledge, and power.

In her book on global feminism, Brazilian critic Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira claims that contemporary feminist thinking represents a new period in which individuality and difference are core principles. In this context, Oliveira understands individuality and difference as the celebration and valorization of women and their sexuality. Oliveira's

argument coincides with Denser's assertion in the prefaces of the collections *Muito prazer: contos eróticos femininos* (1980) and *O prazer é todo meu* (1984). In other words, because every woman feels her sexuality differently, Denser highlights the individuality and differences among women writers' treatment of eroticism in their fiction. Thus, in the following section I will examine Denser's use of female eroticism and sexuality that, in the context of Brazil's long-rooted patriarchy, become crucial elements of a discourse of power that attempts to destabilize the dominant male-oriented system. At the same time, I will differentiate it from the use of erotic discourse in works by authors such as Diamela Eltit and Cristina Peri Rossi, by contending that different narrative styles and perspectives toward female sexuality reveal the heterogeneity of the erotic discourse in the prose of Latin American women writers.

The Erotic Impulse in Women's Literature in Brazil

In his work *Erotismo e poder na ficção brasileira contemporânea* (1997), Rodolfo Franconi explains that the new generation of Brazilian authors (both men and women) that emerged in the 1970s shared a common concern: “flagrar as convenções anquilosadas e maniqueístas, encobertas pela fachada da tolerância, por isso mesmo perniciosa” ‘to photograph the old-fashioned and Manichaeian conventions, covered by the façade of tolerance, and for that reason pernicious’ (15) of the dictatorship. In the 1980s, Franconi continues, Brazilian literature exhibited a clear intention, to underscore the problems that Brazilian society faced after the long period of political and cultural repression experienced during the dictatorship (15). In this context of a socially and politically committed literature, Franconi recognizes recurring themes and discourses,

especially eroticism and power, in works written by Brazilian men and women. In addition, Franconi argues that eroticism and power are inevitably connected in Brazilian literature, and he offers two arguments to support his thesis. On the one hand, he notes that fiction thematically centered on eroticism has significantly increased since the mid-1970s in Brazil. On the other hand, he explains, due to a long period of oppression—political censorship above all—literary texts that fictionalized the history of the dictatorship tended to present power as a constant theme (16). Men and women writing at that time proved to be particularly interested in eroticism and power. Therefore, the twenty years of military regime definitely created two distinctive themes in Brazilian literature of the last decades of the twentieth century.

Two questions that Franconi's arguments give rise to here are the following: Why do eroticism and, thus, the theme of love—eroticism comes from the Greek word eros, which means 'love'—attract writers in general? And, why do they attract women writers in particular? I maintain that this is a fundamental issue in Latin American literature in general because, if we ponder its history, the theme of love has been tightly linked to political ideologies, as, for example, in nineteenth-century narrative production. At a time when national literatures were originating in Latin America, the romance—understood as a formulaic love story—became the literary prototype chosen to express the nationalistic ideals that were shaping the political and social organization of each new-born nation. Novels such as José Mármol's *Amalia* (1851) in Argentina, José Martiniano de Alencar's *Iracema* (1865) in Brazil, and Jorge Isaacs's *María* (1867) in Colombia illustrate my argument. Franconi writes that eroticism is “um ‘inventor’ de caminhos” ‘an inventor of paths’ (18), that is, eroticism confers the sexual act a purpose other than human

reproduction. In fact, the human being is the only animal that uses sex for purposes different from reproduction and that “utiliza o sexo como fonte inesgotável de prazer e persegue os mais ousados meios para atingi-lo” ‘the human being uses sex as a inexhaustible source of pleasure and follows the most daring means to achieve it’ (18). Thus, eroticism goes beyond what is conventional. This quality of transgression implied in sex and eroticism is doubly advantageous for the woman writer because eroticism functions as a discourse of transgression with an enormous potential to achieve other caminhos, not only within the range of sexual relations and sexual pleasure, but also within the limits of traditionally patriarchal relations with men.

Franconi utilizes the theories of French scholar Georges Bataille to explain the transgressive quality of eroticism. According to Bataille, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence and violation in the sense that “toda a concretização erótica tem por principio uma destruição da estrutura do ser fechado” ‘the destruction of the structure of the intimate being is the first principle of every erotic concretization’ (qtd. in Franconi: 19). By destroying the structure of the intimate being, Bataille explains, an opening occurs, which is manifested through nakedness and, then, total communication between the two individuals involved in the sexual relationship is achieved (qtd. in Franconi: 19). Further, Franconi quotes another scholar, Alberoni Francesco, to maintain that eroticism is not the total loss of identity but a dialectic process between man and woman that creates the possibility of growth (20). In other words, these authors argue that eroticism implicitly affects the identity of the persons involved in the relationship because both physical and spiritual nakedness occurs in the presence of the other. I need to stress that this is a physical and spiritual exposure because, in the search for pleasure, each subject

gives in to the other. At the same time, the state of undress and the search for pleasure facilitate a new level of communication between the two subjects because they need each other in order to attain pleasure. Thus, eroticism entails a relationship of integration and reciprocity, not isolation and selfishness.

Yet despite the individuals' pursuit of pleasure, eroticism is still a function of power because one person captivates and possesses the other. In the same way as the "controlling units" require the "responsive units" (Franconi 25) in relations of power in general, the supplier of pleasure—Franconi's emissor 'emitter' (28)—requires a receiver of pleasure—Franconi's receptor 'receiver' (28)—in sexually erotic relations. In contrast to traditional power relations, which are articulated in a binary opposition and which are one-sided (that is, the controlling units govern totally over the responsive units), this imbalanced binary opposition is not necessarily present in the erotic act and the relationship between the two elements is not necessarily one-sided, since an individual is both a supplier and a recipient of pleasure at the same time. According to Franconi, it is necessary to analyze erotic discourse as a "portador de imensa gama de sutilezas, onde as posições de dominador e dominado tendem a alterar-se constantemente" 'carrier of an immense range of subtleties, where the positions of controller and dominated tend to change constantly' (29). Furthermore, the receiver may respond to the sender's message not only to accept it, but also to invert the roles and, ultimately, to become the sender. Beyond this, I maintain that women's erotic discourse—which is already socially transgressive by its very nature—turns into a more politically charged discourse than erotic fiction written by men. I insist that, when studying the literature written by Latin American women at the end of the twentieth century, this aspect should not to be ignored

because eroticism provides the critic with an important new framework with which to approach feminist discourse in Latin America. Moreover, the increased number of narratives that concentrate on eroticism proves that this subject is a recurrent element in the praxis of Latin American women's writing.

In his work, Franconi establishes the connection between action and eroticism. For him, passivity in the sexual act produces submission, and he adds that “o “outro,” ao anular-se, reduzindo-se apenas a objeto de mera satisfação do apetite sexual, situação característica da prostituição, esvazia a relação de todo erotismo” ‘the “other,” by canceling him or herself, reducing him or herself to an object of mere satisfaction to sexual appetite, a situation characteristic of prostitution, empties the relationship of eroticism’ (42). This means that for Franconi the ideal erotic relationship is when two subjects maintain an equal amount of power in the relationship. However, authoritative, Western patriarchal societies have guaranteed men a superior position in both political and erotic relationships, and thus have assured men the role of seducer while women are the seduced. Franconi affirms that “a mulher somente tem sido R porque essa vem sendo a posição que lhe coube no jogo amoroso” ‘women have only been R (responsive units) because that is the position that pertains to them in the game of love’ (71).

The protagonist-narrator Diana Marini in *Animal dos motéis* exemplifies this hierarchy. She does not find the sexual pleasure she seeks because the men she encounters concern only about their pleasure and simply treat her as an object of desire. Her male partners eliminate the erotic dimension because they do not act to fulfill Diana's sexual appetite (as well as their own); rather, their only desire is to attain sexual satisfaction through the object, the woman. Diana's lack of sexual fulfillment motivates

her to hunt men and, for a time, to act out the role that men have played for centuries. Franconi argues that “se ela tomou a posição “passiva” foi por imposição histórica. Se hoje, contudo, invertendo as posições, ela vai ao encontro do homen, não parece que o faz para “assumer” seu lugar, e sim para mostrar-lhe a ineficiência dessa “transação”” ‘if she [Diana Marini] played the passive role, it was due to historical obligation. If today, however, inverting the positions, she seeks men, she does not do so with the intention of taking over men’s place, but with the intention of showing men the inefficiency of that transaction’ (71). In other words, as Oliveira would say, through the character of Diana Marini, Denser suggests that women do not necessarily want to be the controllers of the erotic relationships—after all, one of the elements of the binary opposition is always in a privilege position—but, rather, women desire to make visible the error and ineffectiveness of the long-established authoritative role men play in the sexual act.

A key concept that explains Franconi’s argument is the “arena erótica” ‘erotic arena’ (71). For him, the arena erótica is a sort of microcosm in which the relations of power are overtly manifested. Franconi’s concept thus connects with the main argument of this dissertation since it tries to establish erotic discourse as a ground-breaking critical framework in order to analyze the literature written by Latin American women at the end of the twentieth century. The arena erótica is a new position from which women writers take action and make their voices heard. The following is a long but lucid excerpt that explains how power relations are articulated in the arena erótica:

O erotismo dirige-se para a liberação, enquanto o poder, para a dominação. O erotismo é uma ameaça ao poder: a estrutura da sociedade (entendida como “autoritária, patriarcal e machista”) está baseada na repressão que o poder implica. O erotismo é a liberdade que deve ser coartada, liberdade que subverte a ordem; de onde erotismo e poder serem forças antagônicas. A sociedade, para garantir a posse do controle, cria leis e dogmas em nome do Amor e reduz a

liberdade de escolha da expressão sexual, salientando a “indiscutível” importância da Família ‘Eroticism aims at liberation, while power aims at domination. Eroticism is a threat to power: the structure of society (understood as authoritative, patriarchal, and chauvinistic) is based on the repression that power implies. Eroticism is the liberty that has to be restricted, the liberty that destabilizes the order; thus, eroticism and power are antagonistic forces. To guarantee the possession of control, society creates laws and systems of belief in the name of love, and reduces the freedom to choose sexual expression, accentuating the “indisputable” importance of the family.’ (Franconi 71)

In *Animal dos motéis*, the sexual activity functions as an erotic act at first because it serves as a caminho to achieve full self-realization through sexual pleasure. Yet, despite Diana’s use of the sexual activity to find her identity, she avoids spiritual exposure during the sexual act, and thus the latter becomes an instrument of power toward men.

Another Brazilian scholar who has thoroughly studied the presence of women in contemporary Brazilian literature, and, in particular, the work of Márcia Denser, is Novaes Coelho. Like Ferreira-Pinto, Novaes Coelho has noted that among the most significant phenomena of the last quarter of the twentieth century is the growing interest in women’s literature from the 1970s on. Novaes Coelho’s study is based on her premise that literature written by men and literature written by women should not be distinguished in relation to psychoanalytic or linguistic issues, but, rather, by the distinction these literatures make with respect to the culture in which they are immersed (15). This is particularly relevant for women’s literature written in Brazil because Brazilian culture has historically been constructed on patriarchal and male-oriented codes in the social and political spheres. Thus, the Brazilian woman goes from submission to transgression in an effort, not to triumph over the male power structure that still permeates contemporary Brazil, but to search a new image of self. The erotic fiction found in the 1970s and 1980s

is not a sudden impulse of Brazilian female authors but is intrinsically bound to ontological problems of being in this world, of searching for one's identity, and of using language as a creative agent. Then, eroticism is a dynamic force that guides and facilitates a quest for identity.

Cixous's feminist writings are known for her advocacy of a feminist mindset and for arguing that "woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 875). Three years before the publication of her article, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Fagundes Telles stated in *As meninas* that it was time for women to say for themselves what they were ("A mulher escritora e o feminismo no Brasil," 57). In her essay, Cixous also establishes the connection between women's writing and women's sexuality and affirms that, since women have been driven away from history and consigned to oblivion through the neglect of their tradition, it is only through the writing of their selves that women will be able to return their bodies (and sexuality) and voices to history. In other words, women must write from and for their sexuality. Thus, writing by women urges the liberation of female sexual expression. Moreover, Cixous's call for such a writing is not limited to women; she also encourages man to write man because men have written themselves from a female passivity/male activity duality that has had the effect of isolating them and of upholding the power structure that forces upon them an obligatory duty to colonize women ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 877).

Cixous affirms that when women write themselves they have to do so at two levels: (1) at a level of individuality, and (2) at a level of what she calls "seizure" (880). First, Cixous's advocacy of individuality is important in the context of Brazilian

women's writing because, as she states, "every woman has a body that must know" (880), and by extension, every woman must know that her life experiences are influenced by the particular cultural and historical circumstances of her time. In other words, a Brazilian middle class woman cannot write her body the same way as a middle class woman living in the United States because they write under different circumstances. Second, Cixous writes that women need to seize "the occasion to speak" and become "the taker and initiator" (880). Thus, in the paradigm of sexual exchange, the woman becomes the agent, the regulator in the game of love and seduction. In the act of writing, the woman seizes the pen and becomes the author of a voice that had been previously silenced. In fact, if the woman has functioned within the discourse of men, Cixous affirms, it is time for the woman to seize this discourse and make it hers (887), or, as Fagundes Telles has said, it is time for women to say for themselves what they are. This need to speak in their own voice is the same as the gestation drive (to give birth), and, ultimately, the drive to write, all of which was exemplified in the work of Clarice Lispector beginning with *Perto do coração selvagem* in 1944. Women need to give life from themselves ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 891).

Bisexuality is the special sexual condition that Cixous believes is necessary for women to bring themselves into writing. Cixous's understanding of bisexuality goes beyond the clinical meaning, and it is easier to understand if we think of Adrienne Rich's idea of the "double-life" (654) of women.⁷ Rich believes that the double-life of women has been a characteristic of female sexuality, that is, a woman may have a heterosexual marriage but the woman's survival relationships are with women (654). In other words, a woman will often find her allies, mentors, and comforters in other women. In *As meninas*,

for example, Fagundes Telles creates a microcosm of women (the boarding school run by nuns) where they find comfort and refuge among themselves despite their idiosyncratic life experiences. Whatever their sexual orientation, Cixous applauds those women who are not afraid of being women. These women do not hate men, they do not try to annihilate men, and neither do they replace men or deny men. These women observe, approach, and see the other in order to “make love better, to invent” (“The Laugh of the Medusa,” 892-93), and do not want to fall into the narcissism in which men have lived, and still live.

The Erotic Voice and the Erotic Arena in *Animal dos motéis*

Márcia Denser sets her novel, *Animal dos motéis* (1981), during the time of the dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1979), a strict military regime characterized by the suppression of human rights and by official censorship. The pressure of censorship affects our reading of the novel because it causes the erotic contents to take on a strongly subversive meaning. Not only is censorship a product of politics, but a product as well of social conventions, which are sometimes the grounds for self-censorship. During the years of the dictatorship, self-censorship controlled both literature written by women and literature dealing with human sexual relationships (written by both men and women). In response to this, the proliferation of discourses about sexuality (written by both men and women) and the rise of eroticism in the literature written by women in Brazil, function as “a source of power, change, and creativity” (Ferreira-Pinto, “O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas,” par. 4). Denser’s *Animal dos motéis* deals with the existential question that arises when the Brazilian woman revises her female identity

in order to rediscover herself and free herself from the patriarchal tradition. Denser's shifting narrative style articulates her critique of the political and ideological systems of her country and voices her concerns about women's existence there.

Denser's writing style is particularly characterized through the use of narrative structure and language. *Animal dos motéis* includes stories of daring lives woven into the fabric of daily routine. As the subtitle indicates, it is a novel written in episodes and not divided into chapters. With the exception of the last section, the episodes narrate different moments of the life of the protagonist-narrator, a young journalist and writer called Diana Marini. By dividing her novel into episodes, Denser breaks with traditional generic conventions. Each episode has its own independence and each fulfills the author's intention: to record diverse moments of daily reality. Of her technique, Denser states: "O que escrevo não são exatamente contos, são exercícios de captação de fragmentos da realidade" 'What I write are not exactly short stories, they are exercises in capturing fragments of reality' (93).⁸ In this way, the novel is read as a series of fragments of Diana Marini's reality. The textual succession of these fragments does not follow a chronological timeline, and each of these episodes takes place at different times during Diana's life. Denser is not interested in temporal progression but in capturing the realism of each episode and its impact on Diana's life. These episodes are captured almost photographically, and, in fact, the author describes this technique as the following:

uma câmera fotográfica na mão de uma criança. A apreensão, em primeiro plano, de detalhes insignificantes, como un dente cariado, pedaços de seios desnudos, o rendilhado rápido de um peignoir. Uma inocência ternamente perversa a fotografar o caos e, sem querer, revelar verdades inconfessáveis 'a photographic camera in the hands of a child. The seizure, in the foreground, of insignificant details, such as a decayed tooth, pieces of naked breasts, the sudden swish of a nightgown. A gently perverse innocence that photographs the chaos and, accidentally, reveals unconfessed truths.' (93)

To continue with the metaphor of the camera, the narrative of *Animal dos motéis* reads like one sees through the lens of a camera. However, this camera is not as innocent as the child's is. The recorded images have a clear intention: to reflect the existential crisis of a middle-class white Brazilian woman, Diana Marini. In addition, this is not a silent camera, for it speaks Marini's voice. This linguistic aspect of the camera is essential because, as Nélida Piñon states with respect to women's writing in Latin America, "silence will give way to expression, and as women act, their works will contaminate and impregnate the world in unforeseen ways" (qtd. in Castro-Klarén: 15).

In *Animal dos motéis*, Denser employs features of the new Brazilian narrative initiated by Machado de Assis late in the nineteenth century. These characteristics include fragmented narrative plot, self-conscious protagonist-narrators, and non-chronological timeline. However, Denser uses this literary tradition to articulate the specific existential condition of Brazilian women at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The author deals with the Brazilian woman's need to evaluate her self in order to understand her identity as a woman. This self-evaluation and self-realization can only be achieved following principles different from the traditional ones imposed by patriarchy. The Brazilian woman will then be able to understand that the norms that the paternalistic tradition offered her are not absolute. In the prologue to the novel, critic Novaes Coelho writes that:

a atitude de anti-heroína de M. Denser simboliza a consciência já assumida por um grande número de mulheres—a de que vivem um momento decisivo na crise de re-conhecimento da mulher-em-si, da imagem que ela deve ter dela própria, em substituição à que a Tradição lhe oferece como única e absoluta 'Márcia Denser's anti-heroine attitude symbolizes a notion that a great number of women have already understood—that they are living in a decisive moment in the crisis of the woman's self-recognition, of the self-image the woman must have, substituting the one that the Tradition offers her as unique and absolute.' (5)

For Denser, female sexuality is an essential part of this self-realization da mulher-em-si ‘of the woman herself,’ and, in fact, the protagonist-narrator of *Animal dos motéis* manifests her power and control through her sexuality. In addition, the novel embodies the enrichment of the tradition of erotic writing by women in Brazil.

Diana Marini, the protagonist-narrator of the novel, is a middle-class white woman in her thirties who makes a living as a journalist in São Paulo, the city where the action is set, and who is going through a mid-life identity crisis. The sprawling city, a metaphor of Brazil, is a direct witness to the situation that Diana experiences in the same way as she suffers the crisis that the city is experiencing. That is, the city changes at the same time the political situation of the country changes due to the process of democratization; for example, the city grows in population and expands its limits but, as a consequence, more crime and poverty appear. Therefore, the two protagonists, Diana and the city, are mirrors of each other’s crisis. The chronological setting of the novel is probably the late 1970s or early 1980s. Brazil approaches the last years of the dictatorship and the Brazilian people are beginning to live the abertura. The novel thus depicts a time of change in the economic, political, and social structures of the country and Brazilians like Diana Marini and the other characters in the novel are disoriented. At a time when people question the political and social identity of the country (Brazil is heading to democracy once again), the protagonist also wonders about her identity as a citizen and, ultimately and most importantly, about her identity as a woman in Brazil. However, Diana is not the only person like this in the novel. In fact, the first episode opens with a question by one of the other characters, Roberto Carlos: “por que me arrasto a teus pés?” ‘why do I crawl to your feet?’ (9). The reader understands the meaning of

this question when he or she learns more about the context. Roberto Carlos is one of Diana's victims, one of those that she hunts around the city, and he is just a one-night adventure in any hotel. He thinks he plays the traditional male role in this type of love affair, and it is even possible that he enjoyed the game of seduction minutes before the reader looked inside this hotel room. However, the episode starts the moment he realizes that he does not dominate the situation any longer, but rather, crawls to Diana's feet.

In the search for a definition of her identity as a Brazilian woman, Diana dares to experiment with experiences different from the norm and to break with conventional heterosexual behavior conventions in order to find and to know her self better. She rejects notions of traditional romantic love,⁹ the only type of love to which women have commonly had access, and opts for a physical love that provides her the pleasure that she needs in order to have a better understanding of herself as a woman. Thus, the novel narrates Diana's sexual adventures at night in São Paulo, though at the same time her identity crisis causes an identity crisis in the man, one caused by the subversion of roles that Diana undertakes in her sexual relations with men and by a defamiliarization of the man's role and his conventional sexual power. The male character is not able to answer his question about who he now is. It has to be Diana who answers it and, by replying to his question, Diana realizes the lie (she utilizes the word chimera) implicit in the conventional heterosexual relationship. She realizes this when she looks around the room and understands that her sexual encounter with Roberto Carlos is as superficial and clichéd as the objects and furniture in that hotel room. For this reason, Diana needs to break with the conventionality that surrounds her.

The title of the first episode, which is the same as the title of the novel, explicitly reflects the erotic quality that characterizes the novel and the concept of anti-romantic love that is enunciated in it. The word animal refers to the sexual basic instincts that humans have, and it reminds the reader of our bodily desires that seek sexual pleasure. For the author these desires are natural, and she affirms that “[h]á uma parte em nós que jamais abandona o ordinário, o vulgar do sexo” ‘there is a side in the human being that never abandons the ordinary, the vulgarity of sex’ (93). The word motéis has specific connotations in Brazilian culture, and is associated with hotels, probably outside the city limits, where prostitutes meet with their clients, or where couples meet to have casual sex. The linguistic violence that this type of unromantically sexualized relationships reflects characterizes Denser’s style throughout her novel. For example, the sexual scenes in the novel are described very physically and lack the spirituality characteristic of human sexual relations. When the characters have sexual intercourse, the narrator describes it as if they were animals instead of human beings.

The episode starts with the dialogue between a man, Roberto Carlos, which is not his real name, and the protagonist-narrator in a hotel room. Later in the novel, the reader learns that the protagonist-narrator calls all men by the same name and that Roberto Carlos is just “a voz dos motéis” ‘the voice of motels’ (9). By giving this man the same name as the others, the narrator elaborates a linguistic abstraction that eliminates his individuality as a person. This first step subverts the value of conventional love relationships and parodies romantic love: the possibility of commitment between man and woman does not exist because it is an impersonal relationship with no feelings involved. Unlike the characteristic erotic act described by Franconi—an act in which

there is a physical and spiritual exposure—Denser undermines the conventional romantic relationship and the conventional erotic act because the sexual relationship between Diana and Roberto Carlos lacks mutual understanding and spiritual exposure. Another aspect of this subversion is the fact that, in the process of abstraction, the woman becomes the subject and the man the object. Unlike the traditional social-sexual hierarchy that privileges men's power, Denser's female protagonist-narrator controls the scene. The man, accustomed to controlling the sexual act, here feels useless, even impotent. For example, Roberto Carlos' first words are "por que me arrasto a teus pés?" 'why do I crawl to your feet?' (9) and the protagonist-narrator answers: "Porque sexo é isso mesmo. Essa gana de rastejar com Roberto, no coito dos motéis" 'Because sex is exactly that: the willingness to scramble with Roberto in the coitus of the motels' (9). Sex lacks emotion for her and is the simple fulfillment of bodily desires and pleasure. Ferreira-Pinto states that "[a]o assumir o papel ativo no jogo de sedução, [the protagonist] desestabiliza as relações de gênero sem, entretanto, chegar a rompê-las" 'by assuming the active role in the game of seduction, the protagonist destabilizes the gender relations, but does not break them' ("O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas," par. 21). Moreover, Denser poses a problem in the concept of romantic love through the protagonist's voice when she expresses her skepticism in this type of love: "todos os motéis é sempre o mesmo motel, o animal mitológico, a quimera que se arrasta interminavelmente na madrugada ao som de Roberto Carlos" 'motels are all the same, the mythological animal, the chimera that ceaselessly crawls at night to the sound of Roberto Carlos' (9).

The protagonist-narrator draws a self-portrait through these thoughts, and we see her as a single woman in her early thirties who is not involved in any stable love relationship and who does not plan to be. She is a lonely woman living through a crisis in her love life. For a moment, she looks at Roberto Carlos and thinks about the possibility of starting a relationship with him to stop those “noites de leitura e insônia e cigarros” ‘nights of reading and insomnia and cigarettes’ (10). But immediately, she rejects this idea when Roberto Carlos begins to sexually excite Diana in an erotic scene described through the image of the bull as a metaphor for man. This scene, in which Diana gives herself entirely to the pleasure Roberto Carlos offers her, reveals a new expression of female sexuality. The scene is built around a change in the traditional roles and the orgasmic pleasure is expressed only in terms of the woman. Here the man is the object that gives pleasure while the woman is the subject that receives it, and Denser affirms that women can and do find pleasure in the sexual act. At the same time, Denser shows that men are not always necessary for women’s sexual pleasure, and, in fact, advocates the idea of female masturbation.

For the author, female masturbation is the ultimate act of rejection of the male, and a celebration of women’s autonomy and sexual independence. However, the protagonist also questions the idea of male and female masturbation by pointing out the loneliness that it implies. For the protagonist, the masturbation act is “duplamente solitário” ‘doubly solitary’ (11), and it means isolation from other human beings. By questioning the ontological context of masturbation, the narrator adds a more universal tone to the issue of human relations, and so masturbation as a solitary act is contrasted with the sexual act in the following pages. This time, however, the sexual encounter is

described with a poetic language long associated with the nova narrativa de mulheres in Brazil. The author utilizes poetic language, which is commonly used to describe conventional romantic love, to express violent body images of coitus that are in sharp contrast to those associated with tender and romantic love. The animal metaphor appears again to express the transformation that men and women experience in the sexual act; that is, during these minutes of carnal pleasure, the man and the woman bring to the surface the animal they have inside. After the coitus, they return to their previous stage and their “ego logrado retorna, monstro rugidor e oceânico, às cavernas interiores, lá se aferrolhando” ‘the fulfilled ego returns, the roaring and oceanic monster, to the interior caverns, and it locks up itself’ (13). After this erotic scene, another example of defamiliarization occurs when the reader is again astonished by Diana’s unemotional behavior after the sexual act. She continues meditating about the meaning and value of her life, and whether she is really enjoying her life to the most because, as she says, she has never been “na Espanha, ou México” ‘in Spain or Mexico’ (11). Roberto Carlos is bothered by the indifference with which Diana responds to his caresses and he reproaches her for not being reciprocal. In other words, while he gave her pleasure, she neglected to play the traditional pleasure-provider role of women. Roberto Carlos concludes that Diana needs a man to solve her problems.

Denser presents a Roberto Carlos with a typically male mentality in a patriarchal society such as Brazil’s. As Adrienne Rich affirms in her article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Western history has decreed that women need men economically, spiritually, and psychologically. Roberto Carlos reflects this ideology when he tells Diana that what she needs is a man, to which Diana replies, “Já

pensei nisso. Alias, não faço outra coisa” ‘I already thought about that. In fact, I don’t do anything else’ (11). Diana’s answer reflects a woman’s dilemma: should she let herself be carried by social pressure and follow the model of man-dependent woman, or not? Then, Diana complains about man’s egotism and his misinterpretation of the pleasure that women receive in the sexual act. Diana speaks for all women when she expresses the solitude that she feels when she has sexual relationships with men. For Diana, the woman feels lonely because, first, the man does not recognize that the woman also feels pleasure, and, second, the man believes that the woman instinctively acts to provide pleasure, not receive it. Diana says “sinto-os pulsar aqui dentro, cegos, surdos, solitariamente, me tocando até à loucura, me penetrando até à loucura. Certo, o prazer também é meu, mas duplamente solitário, uma tarefa que cumprimos tão distraidamente” ‘I feel them beat inside, blind, voiceless, touching me to the point of insanity, penetrating me to the point of insanity. True, the pleasure is also mine, but doubly solitary, a task that we accomplish so absent-mindedly’ (11). In this way, Diana justifies the necessity of female masturbation and recognizes its importance for women. In fact, the last quotation is ambiguous—ambiguity being a characteristic of Denser’s prose—because the pronoun os in sinto-os can refer to the fingers of both men and women when they are masturbating. This linguistic ambiguity reflects the ambiguity of Diana’s relationships with men. In other words, does she maintain the power and possess the man in the relationship? Or does Diana let the man possess her first in order to gain access to power more easily? Although Diana’s strategy is the second one, she does not find either a solution to her crisis or a way out of it.

The episode ends with no hopes for Diana, who returns to the only thing that allows her ego to exit the cavernas interiores, that is, Diana and Roberto Carlos have sex one more time. Moreover, the episode concludes with the rejection of a conventional relationship. After having sex for several times, Diana asks Roberto Carlos to dress and leave. He wants to stay and chat for a while but she refuses because she has no interest in knowing any more about Roberto Carlos; she simply wanted to use him to bring her “ego logrado” ‘deceived self’ (13) to the surface. This refusal shows the change in power relations between Diana and Roberto Carlos, and so Diana’s final words, “[f]ica pra outra vez, já veste a camisa” ‘maybe another time, but for now put your shirt on’ (14), symbolize her final rejection of conventional love. This Roberto Carlos has ended the same as the night has. Tomorrow, the protagonist will hunt down another Roberto Carlos and will take him to another motel room, where both will be animais dos motéis again, the man becoming once again the woman’s object and her tool for sexual pleasure. Interestingly, however, this episode also suggests that women are still trapped in their interior selves because, once the sexual act finishes, the ego returns to the cavernas interiores. In addition, and the same as in the conventional heterosexual relationship, a defamiliarization occurs in the narrative style since the characters’ voices alternate without notice, which makes the dialogue confusing for the reader to follow. It is a dialogue that reminds one of Hemingway’s style, a writer with whom Diana identifies in relation to her identity crisis. Denser’s narrative style thus disorients the reader the same as Diana disorients her male prey guiding him and the reader along the path she wants them to follow.

According to Ferreira-Pinto, the second episode, entitled “Tigresa,” exemplifies the narrative style characteristic of Denser, a style that is “fragmentada, rápida, caótica, com diálogos suspensos e o encadeamento dos pensamentos da protagonista, empenhada em sua avaliação apressada e sempre crítica do outro” ‘fragmented, fast, chaotic, with suspended dialogues and the linking of the protagonist’s thoughts, committed to her hurried opinion, and always critical of the other’ (“O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas,” par. 22). In this episode the reader learns more about the protagonist-narrator: her name is Diana Marini and she describes herself as “uma jovem escritora em ascensão” ‘a rising young woman writer’ (16). In this episode, an admirer of Diana’s work invites her to a party. The admirer is Lila, a twenty-year-old married white woman. The invitation initiates a game of seduction that will continue at the party in the apartment of Lila’s bourgeois parents. Before she meets Lila, Diana expresses her dislike for this type of women. For example, when Lila pronounces her last name, Diana thinks “[o] sobrenome soou fofo como um tropeção numa poça de merda” ‘the last name sounded like a soft piece of shit falling into a well of shit’ (16). Later in the text, there is a cold and sarcastic physical description of Lila. According to Diana, Lila is “o paradigma da burguesinha contestadora para uso externo, olhada com condescendência e secreto orgulho pelos mais velhos” ‘the paradigm of the challenging bourgeois woman for external use, looked at with condescendence and secret pride by the elders’ (19). These commentaries, made at the beginning of Lila and Diana’s relationship, show Diana’s attitude of superiority toward Lila in terms of social and cultural status.

Called “tigresa” ‘tigress’ and “mulher incrível” ‘incredible woman’ (17) by Lila, Diana takes the role of the artist as a superior being. As in “O animal dos motéis,” the

narrator uses animal metaphors to characterize people in the episodes. The word tigris in reference to a woman connotes the idea of a strong, independent, aggressive woman, which is the opposite model of femininity imposed by the patriarchal system in Brazil during the dictatorship. In contrast, Diana likes this identity and decides to play the role of a tigresa for the rest of the night. The language of the narrative changes with the new identity of Diana as well. For example, the narrator says: “Felinamente, fui me espalhando pelas ruas ...” ‘I feliney sprawled through the streets’ (17). Empowered by this feline image and attitude, Diana arrives at Lila’s party.

At the party, Diana observes with a cynical look Lila’s parents’ apartment finding it to be the same type of living room as “qualquer salão de apartamento da alta burguesia paulistana” ‘any living room in any apartment of the upper middle class of São Paulo’ (20) decorated by the same “invisível decorador” ‘invisible decorator’ (20). Also, the people at the party correspond to the same uniform mass:

Uma uniforme gentileza tranqüila no tom baixo e cordial de frases amenas, a atmosfera de falsa calma de quem se acomoda sobre volumosos saldos bancários, rendimentos, letras de câmbio, ações em alta, investimentos imobiliários, cargos de diretores gerais e superintendentes, alheios a tanto ranço debaixo da bunda (seria só levantar a tampa), mas está tudo ótimo, perfeito, às mil maravilhas ... ‘A uniform quiet kindness in the low and cordial tone of pleasant sentences, an environment of false lull characteristic of those who accommodate in the bulky bank payments, interests, bills of exchange, shares, real state investments, general director positions and managers, unaware of so much rank smell underneath (they would only have to open the lid), but everything is fine, perfect, wonderful.’ (20)

Diana recognizes three generations at the party: Lila’s parents’ generation, her generation, and Lila’s generation. At this moment in the narrative, the narrator starts an interior monologue that manifests the existential crisis that Diana is experiencing. Diana feels isolated between these two “gerações paulistanas sem história” ‘generations of São

Paulo people with no history' (21). The narrator indirectly refers to the years of dictatorship in Brazil by calling it "a geração perdida" 'lost generation' (21). This interior monologue proves that Denser's prose is more than a commentary on the existential crisis of Brazilian women since it also contributes to the critical perspective of a woman who recognizes problems in the social-political and cultural structure of her country. With it the author demonstrates the revision of artistic expression that the dictatorship had repressed through years of censorship. As Nélide Piñon states, voices will come after silence (qtd. in Castro-Klarén: 15). After this interior monologue, Diana, who is already drunk, makes a speech full of insults addressed to the bourgeois values that the people at the party represent. Ironically, none of them understands Diana's critical message. With the cynicism characteristic of Denser, Diana, playing the role of a tigresa, continues insulting them until somebody gets angry and tries to attack her not only verbally but also physically. This is the reaction Diana desires because she understands the power of language as a force to drive others to action.

By this time, Lila's attraction to Diana has intensified, and she begins to seduce and engage Diana in a homosexual encounter. Diana feels uncomfortable and thinks that "aquele olhar untuoso e apaixonado de odalisca me incomodava em alguma parte" 'that unctuous and passionate look annoyed me in some part of my being' (25). Unexpectedly, Diana loses her role of tigresa and Lila assumes it. In her new role, however, Lila only pretends to break with the bourgeois values she personifies, and needs a "desafio romântico" 'romantic challenge' (26) before she goes back again to her life as a bourgeois, married white woman. Lila is attracted by the opposite norms of behavior that patriarchy has imposed on her from childhood, and so, Ferreira-Pinto contends, "o

comportamento homossexual de Lila não é tanto a expressão do seu desejo por Diana e pela outra mulher, como é, na verdade, resultado de vontade de ‘épater les bourgeois’” ‘Lila’s homosexual behavior is not so much the expression of her desire for Diana and for another woman, as it is, in reality, the result of her urge to ‘shock the bourgeoisie’.’ (“O desejo lesbiano no conto de escritoras brasileiras contemporâneas,” par. 22). Thus, inviting Diana to the party had the function of marking the difference between Lila and her family and friends.

At the end of the party, however, there is a shift in the roles again: Diana is now not the seduced object but the seducing subject. As Diana leaves the party, she decides to play Lila’s game in the parking lot: “Lila segurou-me pelos ombros e debaixo do sono e cansaço percebi outra vez o olhar gorduroso do desejo. Está bem, pensei, eu me rendo, doce Lila, mas costumo terminar o que começo. Vamos ver até onde você vai” ‘Lila grabbed me by my shoulders and I again perceived her look of full desire in my drowsiness and tiredness. This time, I thought, I surrender, sweet Lila, but I usually finish what I initiate. Let’s see how far you can go’ (29). Diana tries the same techniques as Lila to achieve the same result that Lila sought, that is, to escape the bourgeois, and in doing so she tries to mark the difference between her own space and the space of this bourgeois, married white woman. Diana tells her: “tira a roupa ... Tira tudo. Se você quer é pra valer, meu bem” ‘take off your clothes ... Take off everything. If you want it, it will cost you, my dear’ (29). However, the weight of the prejudice implicitly imposed by the patriarchal tradition prevents Lila from having a homosexual relationship with Diana, and so she is hurt and humiliated by the experience. In the end, Diana establishes her difference, her space—her loneliness—within the global space of the Brazilian bourgeois

society.

Denser also develops an element characteristic of the literature written by women in Latin America. This element, one of the seven positions that Castro-Klarén outlines in her article “Women, Self, and Writing” (1991), involves the idea of “the writer posing as a critic of her own” (6). The protagonist-narrator of “Tigresa” addresses her artistic creation with cynicism at the same time that she identifies herself (again, ironically) with the figure of the artist as a superior being. For example, Diana comments on her creation with irony in the following passage: “Para ser sincera, aos 24 anos eu havia escrito um livro de histórias eróticas num estilo meio sobre o debochado, um punhado de observações sobre o óbvio da vida dos homens, que acalentava com o maior fervor, dizendo ser uma obra de importância sociológica, senão estatística” ‘To be sincere, by the time I was twenty-four I had written a book of erotic short stories in a mediocre style on the libertine man, a handful of observations about the blatancy of men’s lives, which I praised with the greatest enthusiasm by saying that it was a work of sociological importance, except statistics’ (18). The use of the figure of the artist as a superior being and the writer’s role as critic of her or his own writing had already started in Brazil with Machado de Assis. However, Denser adds an erotic tone to the relation between writer, text, and reader, the latter desiring the writer because the reader has previously desired the writer’s text. This is another line of interpretation for “Tigresa.” During the party, Lila takes Diana’s hands and starts kissing them. In parallel fashion, the reader, who has physical contact with the text, is led to desire physical contact with the creator of the text. Lila wants to touch Diana’s hands, which created the text. Then, to extend Castro-Klarén’s thesis, I propose that the erotic constitutes one more position between writer and

writing in the literature written by women in Latin America.

In the next episode, “Hell’s angel,” Diana accidentally meets Robi, a nineteen-year-old motorcyclist, on the same day she turns thirty. Ironically, Diana was driving to her psychoanalyst when they met. She is somewhat depressed when thinking about her age and “transitoriedade” ‘transitional nature’ (31) in this world and she yearns for those teenage years that the same sky and twilight of today witnessed fifteen years ago. Diana introduces Robi in an ambiguous way. On the one hand, because of his young age, Diana sees him as a “rapazinho que perturbava meus pensamentos, minha solidão, minha maturidade, espiando, sem mais nem menos, para dentro do carro, com a mesma sem cerimônia que um bebê, escondido debaixo da mesa, espiaria as calcinhas das senhoras” ‘a little boy who interrupted her thoughts, her solitude, her maturity, simply peering inside my car, with the same lack of ceremony as a baby, hiding below the table, would peer at the ladies’ underwear’ (32). In other words, Diana describes him as a naïve and innocent young man. On the other hand, she also describes him as a self-conscious, audacious man, and, several times throughout the episode, she uses a beautiful poetic metonymy to refer to Robi as a vampire. For example, when Diana sees Robi for the first time, she says, “daí Robi, o motoqueiro, aparecer na minha janela, caninos pingando sangue” ‘from there on Robi, the motorcyclist, appears at my window, canines dropping blood’ (31). Then, Diana characterizes Robi as a “caçador nato” ‘hunter by birth’ (33) and as a conqueror searching for mature women and as breaking into Diana’s “própria cidadela” ‘own fortress’ (33).

In this episode, the narrator describes the game of seduction as a hunting party in which Diana is the prey and Robi is the hunter. At first, Diana feels uncomfortable and

nervous about Robi's advances, but she then realizes the sharp contrast between what each of them represents in society. While she is part of the bureaucratic structure, Robi is "aquele garoto de jeans, blusão de couro e botas de montaria, sentado displicentemente numa das poltronas da sala de espera" 'that boy wearing jeans, leather jacket and climbing boots, carelessly seated on one of the armchairs in the waiting room' (33) who "transformara-se no meu inquisidor , meu juiz de alçada, meu anjo vermelho, Lúcifer, o decaído, piscando de sua torre flamejante, reduzindo a cinzas e ao ridículo aquele santuário da burocracia" 'who became my inquisitor, my judge, my red angel, Lucifer, the fallen one, blinking from his flaming tower, reducing to ashes and ridicule that sanctuary of bureaucracy' (33). Diana thus feels a double attraction: she is attracted to him by this opposition, and by Robi's ignorance of it. Diana says that "as oposições são tão tentadoras, tão novella das oito, que [ela] já andava ansiando por uma paixão lamacenta. Na verdade, [ela] estava [se] atirando dentro dela" 'oppositions are so tempting, so eight-o'clock soap-opera-like, that she was already desiring a muddy passion. In fact, she was throwing herself inside it' (33). In other words, this is the moment when the shift of roles takes place. By letting Robi seduce her, Diana becomes the hunter and the actor in the game of seduction. An inversion in the traditional object of desire also occurs, that is the woman, and by extension her body, is no longer looked at as the object of desire; rather, the man, and by extension his body, becomes the desired object. Thus, Diana looks at the beauty of Robi and he lets himself be observed. For example, while there are no physical descriptions of Diana in this episode, Robi's beauty and body are erotically described through the perspective of Diana: "olhos irriquetos, inseguros, lábios naturalmente úmidos, cabelos emaranhados e elétricos como filamentos

de cobre molhado e, Deus meu, que beleza!” ‘irritated, timid eyes, naturally humid lips, messy and electric hair like sloppy copper filaments and, my God, what a beauty!’ (32).

From the moment Diana becomes the hunter and Robi her prey, she does not feel intimidated by him anymore, and, with the cynicism characteristic of her, she enters into the game with “ócio e nenhuma emoção. Puro divertimento” ‘idle and emotionless. Pure entertainment’ (33). Diana examines Robi with indifference and a cold heart. He represents the upper middle class of São Paulo, with a father, a mother, and a housekeeper, and, as any male between the ages of 13 and 22, he only thinks about sex. In fact, Diana makes fun of nineteen-year-old Robis who think so much about sex that they become “psicologicamente impotentes” ‘psychologically impotent’ (34). Diana is entertained by this thought because she is aware that neither of them is looking for an intellectual relationship, but, rather, a purely sexual one. However, in this game of seduction, Diana does not play the role of the naïve woman who is abused by the man. Although Robi is interested in Diana for what she can offer him—money and sex—Diana, who is completely conscious of Robi’s intentions, accepts being manipulated by him, which ultimately allows her to manipulate and control Robi as well. In this manner, Denser suggests a shift in the relations of power between Diana and all that Robi represents: the upper middle class and the moral values that govern it. This is best expressed in the sex scene that concludes the episode, which is also a ritual of initiation of Robi’s sexual life. Robi and Diana end up having sexual relations in a motel room. Diana describes the experience with cynicism and no emotion, an experience from which she only expects to receive momentary physical pleasure. Diana describes the sexual act with indifference and boredom:

estava deitada, fumando, quando sua massa rija desabou sobre mim...Abraçava-me com palmas e dedos gelados, comprimindo minhas costelas, machucando-as, em vez de acariciá-las. A coisa funciona só da cintura para baixo, como um vibrador elétrico, mas é bom, pensei, deixando-me penetrar rijamente pelas costas, usando, por assim dizer, só uma parte do meu corpo...O prazer é bom, pensei, costuma ser forte, mesmo assim 'I was laying, smoking, when a firm mass entered me...He hugged me with frozen palms and fingers, pressing my ribs, bruising them, instead of caressing them. The thing only functions from waist down, like an electric vibrator, but it is good, I thought, letting him penetrate me rigidly through the back, using, so to speak, just one part of my body...The pleasure is good, I thought, yet it is usually strong.' (38)

After the sexual act, Diana follows the same routine as with Roberto Carlos in the first episode: she leaves the room and Robi. At the end of the episode, she learns that she has not gained anything out of this relationship, and that she is as lonely as she was before she met him.

The episode entitled "Gladiador" is another example of the female gaze addressed to the male body. Diana sees an athlete man, she is immediately attracted to him, or rather, to his body, and she is determined to go to bed with him. The male body becomes the object of Diana's look and to emphasize his masculinity and beauty, she compares him with a horse and a Roman statue from the ancient times. As a simple object of desire, he is not given a name and the reader has to wait until Diana decides to name him Marco. Diana employs the same strategy of seduction: she lets the man think that he is conquering her, while, in fact, Marco is doing everything she desires. Diana and Marco go to a hotel room, which could be the same hotel room to which she took Roberto Carlos and Robi, and do the same: they smoke, drink, and have sex. Alcohol makes the situation more agreeable for Diana because she does not find any gratification in the conversation she has with Marco. In fact, Diana says to herself: "apesar do enlevo, aquilo já estava me chateando imensamente. O pilequinho da tarde evaporava-se" 'despite the absorption, the

situation started to bore me immensely. The excitement of the afternoon began to vanish' (45). Unlike the previous episodes, Diana and Marco do not have sexual relations. Despite Marco's body being praised to the status of a god, he has difficulty getting an erection. Thus, the irony of the episode's title, "Gladiador" 'Gladiator,' is revealed in the last scene when Denser ridicules the idea of physical perfection by introducing a physical specimen like Marco unable to have an erection.

In the episode "Ladies first," Denser comments on the role of the artist in the Brazilian society and again underscores her approach to writing through the narrative voice. The episode begins with Diana waiting for Maria das Graças in a bar. Das Graças is a fellow writer but the type of writer that Denser rejects. Das Graças is a committed writer,

dessas que usam a caneta como uma metralhadora, fazendo dela seu instrumento de guerrilha. Ao matraquear de sua máquina iam tombando milhares de milicos verdinhos—o tipo de posição meio fora de moda e ineficiente a meu ver, mas eu não passo de uma burguesa cínica e bem alimentada, donde que minha opinião não vale grande coisa 'those who use the pen like a machine gun, making it her guerrilla instrument. With the bicker of the machine gun thousands were thrown down—the sort of position that is nearly old-fashioned and inefficient in my opinion, but I am nothing more than a cynic and well-fed bourgeois, so my opinion is not worth it.' (49)

Through Diana's voice, Denser ridicules the writer who is socially and politically committed, and suggests that this type of writing is old-fashioned and ineffective. Her claim is that new times need a new type of committed writing, a writing that is subtler and more insinuating. Denser believes that any artist's work of art is not static, but, rather, that it develops as the artist himself or herself grows as a person, and she rejects those artists that imprison themselves by letting their work be categorized under one literary genre and ideology. These ideas are voiced by the narrator when she states: "nos

travestimos antecipadamente com uma postura, um gênero, uma máscara, através da qual (e só através dela, diga-se) esperamos ser reconhecidos como artistas” ‘we dress up in advance with a standpoint, a genre, a mask, through which (and, let’s say, only through which) we expect to be recognized as artists’ (50). I find particularly interesting the fact that Denser chooses the verb nos travestimos, which reminds one of the word transvestite, to denote the action that is implied in the act of writing. Denser compares the identity of a transvestite to that of a writer’s. In other words, the writer lives various identities, the same as the transvestite does, and only one of these identities is projected to the public in the form of an artwork. Then, the work of art is for the writer what make-up and clothes are for the transvestite.

In this episode, Diana shows the bourgeois side of herself and the patriarchal preconceptions that she has inherited. When she meets the woman writer, Diana realizes that she is having an affair with the woman that accompanies her, Zilda. At that moment, Diana finds herself prejudging das Graças’ lesbianism. But at the same time, das Graças attacks Diana because she is not as independent as she pretends to be, and das Graças reminds her of a painful thought that she pretends to ignore: although Diana lives with her parents, they do not care about her writing, they “não se importam, não [le] incentivam, ignoram aquilo que [Diana] tem de mais essencial” ‘they do not care, do not encourage her, they ignore what fulfills Diana’ (52). In front of das Graças, Diana pretends to be free from patriarchal family ties and affirms, “sou livre, insisti, entro, saio, não dou satisfações” ‘I am free, I insisted, I go in and out, I do not give gratifications’ (52) but, in fact, she confesses to herself (and the reader) that she is trapped by the patriarchal structures: “essas mentiras descaradas me consomem a alma. Fosse eu dar um

peido sem avisar e os velhos me punham no gelo semanas” ‘those barefaced lies consume my soul. Should I fart without warning, my parents will be mad at me for weeks’ (52).

Das Graças is editing a new book that compiles writings by women in the 1970s, in particular writings on feminine homosexuality, and she asks Diana whether she has had experiences with women. Diana lies and answers “Sim, claro. Toda experiência é válida. Eu gosto de emoções, você sabe. Havia tudo na minha cara, exceto um pingo de sinceridade ou convicção. Senti-me uma perfeita idiota. Era eu mesma que dizia aquelas incoerências?” ‘Yes, sure. Every experience is valid. I like emotions, you know. My face showed everything, except a drop of sincerity or conviction. I felt like a perfect idiot. Was it I who was saying that incoherence?’ (54). Then, when das Graças touches Diana’s thighs, she feels the same discomfort as when Lila tried to make sexual advances to her, and she feels “o desconforto de estar no lugar errado com as pessoas erradas, a mesma sensação que se tem quando se engana de porta e entra no banheiro dos homens” ‘the discomfort of being at the wrong place with the wrong people, the same sensation one has when one enters the men’s bathroom by mistake’ (55). This situation makes Diana wonder about what she wants. She yearns for a more conservative company and “um restaurante elegante e um namorado rico, gordo e bem careta” ‘an elegant restaurant and a rich, fat boyfriend with a wide grin’ (56), but she also remembers that, “em certa fase da [sua] vida, quando freqüentava restaurantes elegantes com namorados ricos, gordos e caretas” ‘for a period in [her] life, when she used to go to elegant restaurants with rich, fat boyfriends with wide grins’ (56), she wanted to mix with “atores de teatro, bichas, escritoras, poetas, negros, prostitutas, etc.” ‘theater actors, queers, women writers, women poets, blacks, prostitutes, etc.’ (56). Das Graças and Zilda take Diana to a

nightclub frequented by homosexuals and transvestites, where the environment causes Diana to question her sexual identity and she thinks to herself: “Eu, por exemplo, era uma mulher, não restava a menor dúvida. Ou restava? ‘I, for example, was a woman, there was no doubt. Or was there?’ (58), and feels she is in the middle of a crisis of identities or, like she says, “identificações” ‘identifications’ (58). Das Graças then invites Diana to dance. Although Diana accepts, when she feels das Graças’s body touching hers, when she feels “uma língua molhada e morna lambendo [seu] pescoço” ‘a wet and lukewarm tongue licking [her] neck’ (59), she wishes das Graças were a man. In fact, at that moment Diana desires a man, “um homem, qualquer um, um cordeiro com seu falo ereto, macio e silencioso que lavasse todos os pecados desse maldito mundo” ‘a man, any man, a lamb with its erect phallus, soft and silent that would clean this cursed world of all sins’ (59). Diana is after all a product of her patriarchal society; she rejects any type of carnal relation with another woman and believes that the heterosexual relation is the natural one for women. However, when Diana realizes her misconceptions, she is embarrassed by them, and only hopes that das Graças will forgive her some day.

In “Relatório final,” Diana attempts to tell the events of the night of December 30, 1977. She is looking for the less painful way to retell these events but she cannot find it. She realizes the difficulties of communication and the hardships of expressing feelings and emotions with words. She also tries to define literature which, for her, is a mechanism for the exposition of one’s self. For example, she affirms:

E tudo isso quer dizer literatura: a requintada crueldade de poder observar as próprias vísceras expostas refletidas no espelho e imaginando não ser as nossas, como se este refletisse toda humanidade agora—a desumanidade estará dentro de nós—como o olho cego da câmera fotográfica, as lâminas frias da cortina que fecha e abre a objetiva, o vidro da lente, inopinadamente a sangrar, a sangrar, amigos, a sangrar, o fluxo maldito chamado literature, a sangrar... ‘And all that

means literature: the required cruelty of being able to observe one's own exposed guts reflected on the mirror and imagining that they are not ours, like if it reflected the entire humanity now—the dehumanization will be inside us—like the blind eye of the photographic camera, the cold blades of the curtain that closes and opens the objective, the glass of the lens, it abruptly bleeds, it bleeds, friends, it bleeds, the cursed fluid called literature, it bleeds...' (74)

The events of the night of December 30, 1977, refer to Diana's meeting a man in a bar. Diana does not give a name to this man, nor does he even have a face, and she calls him "àquele que não tem rosto e não tem nome" 'the one that has no face or name' (74) during the entire episode. The next thing she remembers is being naked on a bed next to the man without a face and name. Diana thinks of a possible sequence of events, for example, that he suggested to her that they go to a hotel, or that after having the last drink, he suggested going to a place where they could wait until she felt better. However, Diana says, it did not occur like that. Earlier that day, Diana went to a party at her office. By four in the afternoon she was considerable drunk and "resolvida, por perversos propósitos, caçar alguma coisa ou alguém, porque ainda estava sedenta de mais bebida e amores proibidos" 'determined, due to perverse purposes, to hunt something or someone, because she was still thirsty for more drinks and prohibited loves' (77). Once again, Diana presents the same situation: the man thinks he is seducing Diana but she is letting herself be seduced and, ultimately, she is inverting the roles in the game of seduction between a man and a woman. In fact, Diana proves to have the power because she can stop the sexual act at any moment she wants. For instance, in the motel, Diana describes sexual intercourse in the following manner: "e a coisa tentando, minhas coxas morenas e grossas, e daí apaguei de novo e a coisa foi socando como um pilão e eu gemendo, socando e eu hum, socando e eu hum, hum, e então fingi que acabei e a coisa parou e me deixou em paz em paz em paz" 'and the thing tempting, my brown fat thighs, and from

there I effaced again and the thing began to cram like a pestle and I moaning, cramming and I MMM, cramming and I MMM, MMM, and then I faked that I finished and the thing stopped and it let me alone, alone, alone' (78). Moreover, the man follows Diana wherever she wants to go that night. After leaving the hotel room, he follows her to a public square where she incites him to an act of sodomy. Diana describes the scene in the following manner: "estava de bruços com a saia levantada apoiando as mãos no capim fedendo merda velha e ele por trás mole e mole e com nojo de ver aquilo tudo sem dizer nada dizendo estar machucado" 'I was on my knees with my skirt lifted, my hands touching the grass, smelling green shit and him, squashy and squashy behind me and disgusted at seeing all that without saying a word, saying that he was bruised' (79). The man, who seemed brave and commanding when he introduced himself to Diana in the bar, is now embarrassed of having transgressive sexual intercourse in a public space, and he begs Diana to stop. The roles in the heterosexual relationship have again been inverted; Diana has the power and plays the role of the controller because "queria que aquela coisa entrasse duro e rijo e forte e explodisse aqui dentro e [la] deixasse mais louca" 'she wanted that thing to penetrate hard and rigid and strong, and to burst out here inside and to leave [her] crazier' (79), and she insults him by calling him "frouxo" 'flabby' (79). The man excuses himself by saying that he is tired; however, Diana knows that it is social convention that stops him from having anal sex in the public square, and that, after all, he was just "um cara cheio de preconceitos e coisas assim na cabeça, negócio de mãe e pai lá no interior e noiva e tudo isso que eu já falei" 'a lad full of prejudices and things of that sort in his head, mother and father's business there in the province and girlfriend and all that I already said' (79).

In the last episode of the novel, “Gatinha no topo do mundo,” Diana tells the story of Célia, a twenty-three-year-old sociologist who is invited to a party. Célia is excited about the party because it will give her the opportunity to flirt and seduce Dias, the “jovem assessor, tão belo quanto ambicioso, tão vaidoso quanto pateta” ‘the young assessor, as handsome as ambitious, as arrogant as he was brainless’ (81). The tone of the episode is established from the beginning, and the reader understands that the woman, Célia, will play the role of the hunter, while the man will be the naïve prey. Célia is a self-confident and assertive woman who believes in her power of seduction. Such is the case that her “coração [fica] batendo” ‘heart is beating’ and her “calcinha [fica] molhada” ‘panties are wet’ (81) when she thinks of Dias. The frail character of the assistant is emphasized when Diana compares him to a butterfly: “Quando [Célia] chegou o assessor já flanava entre os grupos de convidados: uma borboleta em tropical brilhante, saltitante, eufórica, quase servil, distribuindo elogios à direita e à esquerda com a prodigalidade desse produto gratuito e mentiroso” ‘When Célia arrived the assessor was hopping around the groups of guests: a butterfly in tropical spark, skipping, euphoric, almost servile, distributing compliments to the right and left with the prodigality of that free and untruthful product’ (81). Although Dias bores Célia, she insists on seducing him because of his physical beauty, and because it pleases her to know that she has the power to do so.

In addition, the game of seduction becomes a challenge when another woman, Helena, appears on the scene and tries to seduce Dias as well. Helena arrives like a “falção” ‘hawk’ (82) and a rivalry among the two women begins. Helena is an “executiva full-time, loura, duma magreza ressequida e dissoluta, em cujos olhos espreita, no centro do sorvedouro de rugas, um fixo demônio azul. Como um predador marinho, sugeria

possuir presas de turbarão no lugar dos lábios vaginais” ‘full-time executive, blond, of a resounding and dissolute slenderness, in whose eyes, at the center of a gulf of wrinkles, a fixed blue devil peeks. Like a sea predator, she gave the impression of possessing turbines instead of vaginal lips’ (82), and although she is fifty, she has more experience in the “terrorismo burocrático-sexual” ‘bureaucratic-sexual terrorism’ (82). Célia observes with fury how Helena monopolizes the men in the party. Célia thinks she has lost the battle when the group, formed by Helena, Célia, Dias and Telmo, a homosexual friend, decide to go to “Capricórnio, bar que se resumia num obscuro corredor, desmantelado e febril, suposto ponto de encontro de poetas marginais, irreconhecíveis manecas de cara lavada, famosos atores coadjuvantes, negros fantasiados de negros, travestís politizados, etc.” ‘Capricórnio, a bar that was nothing more than a dark aisle, messy and febrile, apparently a meeting point for marginal poets, unrecognizable fools with well washed faces, famous supporting actors, blacks dressed up like blacks, politicized transvestites, etc.’ (85). At the bar, Célia attacks once more and attracts Dias to herself again with “o outro pé descalço subindo, trepando, buliçoso filhote, pela perna de Dias, refocilando mornamente entre as coxas e se aninhando, atormentando, futucando o membro rígido debaixo da mesa” ‘the other barefooted foot going up, climbing, bulimic calf, Dias’s leg, indifferently keeping busy between the thighs and cuddling, tormenting, playing with the rigid member underneath the table’ (86). However, the rivalry between Helena and Célia goes on and, after a while, Helena invites the group to her place, where they continue drinking. By now, Célia feels quite drunk and distraught, and in the confusion of the situation, she enters in the room where Helena and Dias are having sex. Helena then invites her in to bed with them, “sim, meu bem, um adorável pateta, minha

gatinha, mas vá tirando a roupa, faz calor, vê como estamos à vontade, descubra-se seu tonto, estamos entre amigos, então, venha gatinha, isso, assim, olhe só, rapaz, que beleza, ela não é uma beleza?” ‘yes, my dear, an adorable goofy, my little female cat, but start undressing, it’s hot, see how we are at ease, uncover yourself, silly, we are among friends, then, come little female cat, that’s it, like that, but look, boy, what a beauty, isn’t she a beauty?’ (90). Helena lures Célia in to bed and the three of them, Dias, Helena, and Célia, have sexual relations with Helena’s maintaining control the entire time. Not only has she been able to seduce Dias, but also she has seduced Célia. Unlike Helena and Dias, however, Célia does not enjoy the experience. In fact, the scene is described in terms of sadism and violence, and Helena is described as a sort of animal that subjugates her innocent prey. When Célia leaves the room, she notices that Dias is trying to follow her but Helena stops him. The narrator says that “a perna magra e branca [Helena’s] subjugou-o entre as espumas e ele submergiu pesadamente” ‘the skinny white leg [Helena’s] subdued him inside the foam and he weightily submerged’ (91), the narrator is referring to Helena as an enormous body mass.

Lesbian desire is an important dimension of female sexuality and has existed in Brazil since colonial times (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 114), though it has not been widely recognized nor has it received the attention it deserves by the literary public and critics. Ferreira-Pinto explains that there have been two assumptions about lesbian writing that has helped to keep it out of mainstream literary discourse: (1) that the authors of lesbian writing may be labeled lesbian themselves, and (2) that lesbian writing may be “labeled pornographic and confined to the literary ghetto of “subliterature”” (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 113). These assumptions and social taboos have given rise to self-

ensorship (in case the writer is actually lesbian). Since the lesbian subject does not conform to any of the traditional cultural patterns, it is reduced to a state of nonexistence. In order to uncover the palimpsest of these texts, critics such as Ferreira-Pinto and Gloria Anzaldúa suggest the need for what Anzaldúa calls “the lesbian sensibility” (qtd. in Ferreira-Pinto: 114), which is different from a lesbian reader or a lesbian aesthetic. The “lesbian sensibility” is achieved by an ideologically open-minded reader who is able and willing to read the different layers of signification of a text, including the lesbian signification. Anzaldúa claims that in order to have a “lesbian sensibility,” we need readers who are “queers and cultural Others” (qtd. in Ferreira-Pinto: 114). My claim is, however, that this is not a necessary condition, and I disagree with Anzaldúa in this respect. Although a “lesbian sensibility” is necessary to identify the representation of lesbian desire in poems and works by writers such as Gilka Machado, Nogueira Cobra, Rachel de Queiroz, and Lispector (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 117), one does not have to be lesbian or queer to appreciate the literary value and feminist discourse of these texts (see Fitz, *Sexuality and Being*); otherwise, we would be falling into the trap of assumptions that have kept lesbian writing in the shadow.

Ferreira-Pinto proposes that “there is a commonality between lesbian desire and a queer stance toward one’s self-identity and toward the social group: both afford the female subject the rejection of fixed categories of gender” (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 143). In other words, to assume a “queer stance” is to “reject fixed categories of identity and the ideology of dominance that is part of patriarchal heterosexuality” (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 144). Thus, if we follow Ferreira-Pinto’s statement, the writers under discussion here take a “queer stance” in their novels because they present

women characters who do not conform to the conventional patterns of sexual behavior that patriarchal societies has structured for them. Nevertheless, these women do not repress their heterosexual desire and they find new ways to achieve sexual satisfaction, for example, masturbation. An example of “queer stance,” understood in terms of Ferreira-Pinto’s claim, is the protagonist-narrator of *Animal dos motéis*, Diana Marini. She “hunts down her male partners and engages in heterosexual acts. Diana not only takes the initiative in the game of seduction and sex, but also is only interested in her sexual pleasure ...” (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 144). This is, in fact, Denser’s strategy for subverting the dominant, patriarchal gender system and exposing the arbitrariness of such a system. In other words, through the character of Diana, Denser proves that women have the same capacity to subjugate as men have had in heterosexual relationships.

According to Adrienne Rich, many feminist scholars neglect to recognize that lesbian existence is a reality and that it is “a source of knowledge and power available to women” (633). What surprises Rich is that in many books dealing with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, heterosexuality is presumed to be a “sexual preference of most women” (633).¹⁰ Thus, Rich implies that the existence of lesbianism should first be recognized in the feminist criticism community in order to be able to inspire a change in this man-made institution which is “compulsory heterosexuality” (637). In other words, for Rich, throughout history women’s heterosexuality has not been a preference but an imposition that has been naturally imposed upon them. To Rich, one of the consequences of compulsory heterosexuality is the “male-identification” (646), that is, women have defined themselves based on their

relationship with men. Then, the full and truthful discovery of female sexuality means a discovery and re-affirmation of what can be called female-identification based on the woman's body and on experiences, both real and imagined. This discovery of the full range of female sexuality requires a change in the issues feminists need to address. In 1980, when Rich published her article, she stated that feminists need to address not only "gender inequality" but also the "enforcement of heterosexuality" (647). However, bearing in mind the ideas of Oliveira and the development of feminist thinking in the last years of the twentieth century in mind, I want to amplify Rich's statement and add that feminists must address gender difference, rather than gender inequality. Moreover, if heterosexuality is an institution, as Rich affirms, it also needs to be questioned and revised, together with other social and political structures of patriarchy, when studying the literary expression of female sexuality in the last decades of the twentieth century.

To Rich, the "lesbian continuum" (648) is more than the simple fact that a woman may desire genital sexual experience with another woman; it includes a wide range of "woman-identified experience" (648) meaning any type of homoerotic experiences—including sexual self-satisfaction experiences—and any type of relationships among women such as "the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, etc" (649). Thus, Rich conceives of the possibility that all women historically exist on the lesbian continuum, which could be considered a synonym of Lispector's and Cixous's understanding of bisexuality, regardless of whether a woman considers herself a lesbian or not. For Rich, the lesbian experience has long existed but "was laid out of reach because of the limited, mostly clinical, definitions of lesbianism" (649). The same as the gestation drive, writing is a genuinely feminine experience for Lispector and Cixous,

much as the lesbian existence is, according to Rich, a profoundly female experience. The “lesbian continuum” thus pertains directly to women’s writing in Latin America in that it allows women to use different forms of individual female identity and different forms of resistance to challenge patriarchal structures. For Rich, it achieves this by depicting communal living among women, by refusing to necessarily bear children, by resisting marriage and conventional restrictions, and by accepting the physical passion of woman to woman (651).

To conclude, I want to emphasize that, as described throughout this chapter, Denser and Oliveira coincide in affirming that every woman feels her sexuality differently and individually. These differences are also manifested in her writing, that is, every woman writer projects her writing from her most inner self. In the literary work of Denser, female eroticism becomes a synonym for power, a sort of power that challenges the patriarchal norms that have until now defined the sexuality of the Brazilian woman in both heterosexual and homosexual terms. The new expression of eroticism that one sees in Denser’s work and that brings the woman’s role to the foreground entails a relationship of integration and reciprocity between the woman and the man in the heterosexual relationship; at the same time, this new expression of eroticism contrasts with the traditional phallogocentric erotic relationship which has been one of selfishness, that is, a male-oriented erotic relationship that objectifies women. This understanding of eroticism is particularly important for the analysis of the erotic expression in women’s writing in the last quarter of the twentieth century because the latter becomes an attempt to break with fixed relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, and it identifies the woman as both supplier and receiver of pleasure. Throughout this chapter, I have argued that

Denser's *Animal dos motéis* is an erotic arena where the female narrator utilizes the erotic discourse, traditionally a male discourse, only to make it her instrument of control. With it, the (middle-class, white) Brazilian woman pursues not to triumph over patriarchal structures but to search a new image of her self. Denser's heroine, Diana Marini, rejects traditional notions of romantic love and chooses a physical love that offers her the pleasure that she needs to have a better understanding of her identity as an end-of-the-century woman. In *Animal dos motéis*, one finds an eroticism that is woman-oriented which, I argue, inverts the roles in the traditional heterosexual relationship. In other words, Diana does not conform to the traditional female role but, rather, her transgressive gaze to patriarchal institutions and conventional order transforms men into the woman's object of desire and sexual pleasure. Denser's eroticism addresses primarily the sexual only to search for the validation of sexual patterns different from the patriarchal accepted ones. In the next chapter I will explore how, like Denser, Eltit also employs eroticism as a tool of power. Nevertheless, the Chilean author explores eroticism as a tool of power in relation to the political, social, and historical context of Pinochet's dictatorship. Through the main character's bodily performance, Eltit aims to depict as well as challenge the numerous oppressions of both patriarchy and military regime in Chilean society.

¹ The dictatorship censored two of her books: *A mulher na construção do mundo futuro* (1966) and *Libertação sexual da mulher* (1970) because they were considered pornographic.

² Colling explains that "O enredo tratava de problemas femininos, e a platéia, só de mulheres, era convidada a se manifestar. A peça foi um sucesso e as mulheres falaram muito mais do que esperavam as promotoras. Os homens protestaram, afinal, o seu objeto de dominação falava livremente num lugar onde sua presença era barrada" "The plot dealt with female problems, and the audience, only women, was invited to protest. The piece was a success and women talked about it more than the promoters had expected. Men protested in the end, their object of domination spoke freely in a place where their presence was barred" (43).

³ "Prose fiction by women after 1964 in Brazil," my translation.

⁴ Verity Smith, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (1997), maintains that a boom in the production of short stories and novels characterizes the decades of the 1970s and 1980s respectively. For instance, the 1970s witnessed the publication of short story collections such as Sônia Coutinho's *Nascimento de uma mulher: contos* (1970) and Rachel Jardim's *Cheiros e ruídos: estórias* (1975). In the

1980s, Lya Fett Luft, Helena Parente Cunha, and Patrícia Bins published their novels *O quarto fechado* (1984), *Mulher no espelho* (1985), and *Pele nua do espelho: romance* (1989) respectively.

⁵ “The lesbian desire in the short story by contemporary Brazilian women writers,” my translation.

⁶ In fact, abertura is a common occurrence that has taken place in other countries that have lived under dictatorship for a long period of time. For example, in Spain, the destape ‘opening’ started around the beginning of the 1970s and followed Francisco Franco’s death in 1975.

⁷ Rich used the term “double-life” because she refused to use the term bisexuality.

⁸ The self-portrait at the end of *Animal dos motéis* functions as a sort of epilogue.

⁹ This type of love is symbolized in that the name, Roberto Carlos, is also that of a popular Brazilian singer, one specifically associated with romantic ballads. Denser employs Brazilian pop culture elements and parodies their value with the purpose of undermining their implied patriarchal ideology.

¹⁰ For example, Rich mentions Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English’s *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* and Dorothy Dinnerstein’s *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise*.

CHAPTER III

DIAMELA ELTIT AND THE POLITICS OF EROTIC TRANSGRESSION

Diamela Eltit within the Context of Chilean Women's Literature

In the introduction and in the chapter on Márcia Denser I remarked that the Latin American woman writer was present in the national literary scene since as early as the colonial times, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in Mexico, and Felipa de Souza¹ in Brazil, being two prime examples. In this regard, Chile does not differ from Mexico and Brazil, and, in fact, texts by Chilean nuns have long circulated in literary circles thanks to the research of scholars such as María Jesús Orozco Vera, who includes the works of Sor Úrsula Suárez, Sor Tadea García de la Huerta, and Mercedes Marín de Solar in her study of women's narrative in Chile.² Writing was not an easy task for women in Chile due to a number of factors that women in other countries in Latin America also experienced during the colonial times. For example, women had no access to education,³ and those who had access to books were daughters of rich parents and could only pursue an education in convents or at home. Another feature of colonial literature that made women's writing difficult to flourish, and that also affected the writings of male authors, was the fact that the printing press did not arrive in Chile until 1813. Despite the difficulties that Chilean women artists faced at first, they found ways to continue engaging in an active participation in the literary circles of their country. Moreover, their participation was not limited to literary circles: it also encompassed other areas of society such as politics. In fact, I will argue in this chapter that Chilean women intellectuals and

their art correlate to the social movements that developed throughout the years, including the human rights movement, the women's movement, and the democratic movement among others. Rosario Orrego (critics such as Orozco Vera consider her as the first Chilean woman novelist) personifies an example of this indissoluble relationship. As a conventional woman writer of the colonial times, she received her initial education in the private space of her home, attending school only later. Dissatisfied with her formal education, she expanded her knowledge by reading renowned Chilean and foreign authors. Years later, and conscious of her privileged education, her concern for the right to educate women began, a concern that she manifested in her poetry. She began to publish her first writings and contributed in literary magazines⁴ such as *La semana*, *La revista del Pacífico*, and *Sud-América*. In 1860, she published the novel that would consecrate her as the first woman novelist in Chile, *Alberto, el jugador* (Orozco Vera 51).

In relation to this link between Chilean women's literature and social commitment, Orozco Vera maintains that the naturalist literary movement motivated the beginnings of the Chilean novel written by women (65). The essence of this literary trend, which sought to examine human beings objectively and "scientifically" and to represent life as it really is, was suitable for women because it allowed them to scrutinize and express their reality as it was and as they experienced it. Previously, literature had been written from the perspectives of male writers only. Among Chile's many naturalist writers, two women who wrote during the last decades of the nineteenth century deserve to be mentioned: Mariana Cox de Stüven (1871-1914) and Inés Echeverría de Larraín (1868-1949). Despite the modest artistic value of their writings, Orozco Vera affirms, one should not fail to notice these intellectual women because their writings confirm

women's constant participation in the history of Chilean literature (52). It was not until the first half of the twentieth century, Orozco Vera explains, that two generations of women writers emerged who would shape the establishment of the contemporary novel written by women, the generations of 1927 and 1942 (52). I want to add to Orozco Vera's statement that this classification and time division correspond to the generations of Patrícia Galvão and Clarice Lispector in Brazil, which suggests a parallel development in women's literature in the Spanish American and Brazilian traditions. From these two generations, Orozco Vera lists such outstanding women authors such as Marta Brunet (1897-1967), Marta Vergara (1898-?), María Flora Yáñez (1898-1982), Magdalena Petit (1900-1968), Carmen de Alonso (1909-?), Dinka Villarroel (1909-?), María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980), María Carolina Geel (1913-1996), Marta Elba Miranda (1911), and Maïté Allamaud (1911-?). Although the texts written by some of these writers still contained some of the conventions of the late nineteenth-century narrative, they signified a break from the old-fashioned themes and patterns of the autochthonous criollista 'Creole' narrative (52). At the same time, these women writers began to explore the inner world of the characters with an existentialist tone and a subtle exhortation to women to question their situation in patriarchy. The most significant example of this type of narrative is Marta Brunet's *Montaña adentro*, published in 1923 (67), which is an original and beautiful novel that combines the ingredients of the criollista novel and early feminist thought (Morales, par. 1).⁵

The novels of the generation of 1942 continued with the artistic renovations and innovative spirit characteristic of the avant-garde movement that developed in Spanish America during the first decades of the twentieth century. In addition, these narratives

contained a more explicit vindication and depiction of women's lives in Spanish American patriarchies. The greatest novel of this time is *La última niebla* (1935; *House of Mist*, 1947) by María Luisa Bombal, a text that represents, according to Orozco Vera and other critics, the authentic re-emergence of modern women's narrative, not only in Chilean literature but in Latin American literature generally (60). Moreover, Bombal's work allowed Chilean literature in general to be placed in the global panorama of the contemporary novel, while also arguing for recognition of the Chilean woman writer (see Orozco Vera, *La narrativa femenina chilena*). Indeed, Orozco Vera affirms that the early twentieth-century avant-garde movement played a significant role in the growth of women's literature in Chile because the avant-garde aestheticism gave the woman writer "el cauce apropiado para orientar el proceso deconstructivo frente al discurso patriarcal" 'the appropriate conduit to direct the deconstructive process vis-à-vis patriarchal discourse' (70). Orozco Vera explains the connection between the avant-garde movement and the development of Chilean women's literature by maintaining that many of the aesthetic characteristics and narrative techniques that the avant-garde movement utilized were used with a feminist purpose; these included the visual and polysemic elements that fragmented the timeline and space line, the use of silence, the close relationship between fantasy and reality, and the emphasis on the existential dilemmas of human beings and their subconscious (70). Nevertheless, I contend that the innovative spirit of the avant-garde did not vanish by the end of the 1940s, and that the early writings of Diamela Eltit actually resort to its original components in order to create a new narrative style that reminds one of automatic writing, especially its creation of a dreamlike world, its use of

the interior monologue, and the inclusion of plastic arts elements, all characteristic of the avant-garde movement.

Taken together, the generations of 1927 and 1942 then meant both a renovation of narrative techniques and a thematic revolution because the novels written during those years questioned the place of the woman in the world and the nature of her existence. Orozco Vera's critique, though, stresses that those narratives did not pose alternatives for a future social change, and she adds that Rosario Ferré explained the reasons in her essay "La cocina de la escritura," affirming that "de nada vale escribir proponiéndose de antemano construir relaciones exteriores, tratar sobre temas universales y objetivos, si uno no construye primero su realidad interior; de nada vale intentar escribir en un estilo neutro, armonioso, distante, si uno no tiene primero el valor de destruir su realidad interior" 'it is pointless to write intending beforehand to build exterior relationships, to deal with universal themes and objectives, if one does not build first his/her interior reality; it is pointless to try to write in a neutral, harmonious, distant style if one does not first have the courage to destroy his/her interior reality' (qtd. in Orozco Vera: 70). Key authors such as Marta Brunet and María Luisa Bombal opened the road for future generations of women writers in Chile, Diamela Eltit for example, and in Latin America in general. In fact, I maintain that, when dealing with literature written by women in Latin America, one cannot overlook the crucial role that Chilean literature by women plays in its development.

If the novels of the generations of 1927 and 1942 dealt with the marginalized situation of women, from 1950 onwards, Chilean women intellectuals revised the condition of women within a more general social context and through a more direct

language (Orozco Vera 71). This revision responded to the general interest in exploring the narrative aesthetics and helped increase the participation of women in the historical development of the country. For example, Orozco Vera states that the so-called generation of 1957 oriented the themes in women's narratives toward an overt condemnation of "la estructura económica social y la posición denigrante de los grupos marginados, entre los que se sitúa la mujer" 'the socioeconomic structure and the humiliating position of the marginal groups, women among them' (72). In other words, in Chile women began to get involved progressively in the civil and human rights' movements that advocated an improvement in the legal and social conditions of men and women,⁶ and they also contributed to cultural events and to the creation of new institutions that specifically supported women, such as the Comisión Jurídica de la Mujer 'Legal Commission for the Woman' (Lamperein 109). At the same time, Chilean women intellectuals' social commitment was recognized both inside and outside their country. For example, Gabriela Mistral, one of the most salient figures of Chilean literature, received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1945 and the National Literature Prize in 1951—although this prize was created nine years earlier (Lamperein 110). For these reasons, critic Lina Vera Lamperein calls the years between 1940 and 1970 a period of eclosión (109), a concept that refers to the action of opening the bud of a flower, because, according to her, the development of women's literature in Chile was essentially the same phenomenon.

One of the cultural events in which women began to engage was the taller de literatura or literary workshop. Literary workshops originally began in the form of tertulias literarias, or literary gatherings, in cafes throughout the city of Santiago during

the 1950s. The literary workshop has a significant tradition in Chile and it plays a major role in the history of literature in this country, particularly after Pinochet's military coup d'état. The oldest literary workshop, called "El Taller de los Diez," originated in the University of Concepción in the years 1959 and 1960, and was directed by the renowned literary critic, Fernando Alegría (Lamperein 163). Other important workshops were "Taller de la Universidad Católica" (1969-1973) and "El Joven Laurel" in Saint George School (Lamperein 163). In her study on women's presence in Chilean literature, Lamperein draws attention to "SOFFIA," the first literary workshop founded by a woman in 1977 (163). Founded by author Pía Barros, the "SOFFIA" workshop incorporated some innovations—writers wrote at the work place itself and, then, they critiqued each other's work—with the intention of encouraging self-criticism and promoting group camaraderie in order to avoid destructive competition (163). The activity of these workshops has been solid and continuous until the present time though, during the 1980s and 1990s, alternative forms of cultural groups appeared, such as the casas de la cultura, or houses of culture, in the provinces.

Since the beginning of her career as a writer, Diamela Eltit has contributed to the continuation of literary workshops both during and after the Pinochet military regime, and, of particular importance, she co-founded a well-known cultural group named CADA. The 1980s witnessed a significant proliferation in the number of literary workshops directed by women writers, with Pía Barros, Ana María del Río, Ana María Guiraldes, Ágata Gligo, and Mercedes Valdivieso figuring among the most well-known workshop directors. This important growth in the number of literary workshops was accompanied with an evident rise in female participation in them during the worst years

of repression (del Río 215). During those years, Ana María del Río observes, women authors wrote not only about “big dictators” but also “against small dictators inside their homes, dictators at the dining table that governed families and lives” (218). A distinctive feature of the narratives by women and men in this period was that women presented the dictatorship at the center of the narrative as opposed to male authors who tended to present the figure of the dictator at the center of the narrative (218).

The military takeover by Pinochet in 1973 marked a period of silence that began in that same year (Lamperein 187). Nevertheless, some literary production escaped censorship thanks to the performance of Chilean artists in literary workshops, which explains my previous statement about the importance of literary workshops in the history of Chilean literature. The emergence of a new concept of culture is another factor that prevented the total silencing of literature during Pinochet’s political regime (Lamperein 188). To explain this new concept of culture, Lamperein cites Mexican writer and scholar Alfonso Reyes, who states that intellectuals began to understand culture and the artistic creation as “un posible camino, como una continuidad victoriosa de la conciencia humana sobre el caos reinante” ‘one possible road, as a victorious continuity of the human conscience over the prevailing chaos’ (qtd. in Lamperein: 188). At the same time, cultural and artistic development started to be associated with economic expansion; in other words, the higher the cultural level, the higher the social and institutional levels (Lamperein 189). For example, at a global level, UNESCO guaranteed the defense of the cultural patrimony with the creation of a Fondo Internacional para la Promoción de la Cultura ‘International Forum for the Promotion of Culture’ in 1976 (Lamperein 189) and, at a national level, artists and writers, including Diamela Eltit, made an effort to promote

the artistic expression through visual, narrative, and performance cultural events in Chile in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Despite the new understanding of culture and the crucial role of literary workshops, critics such as del Río affirm that contemporary Chilean literature is organized around the coup d'état of 1973 and that at least three main groups or generations can be identified. The writers classified under these groups are distinguished by their evolving relationship with the dictatorship and by the manner in which these writers' narratives were launched to the public. For example, the authors of the 1950s and 1960s published their writings primarily in the form of books, while the authors of the 1970s and 1980s did so in literary magazines first (del Río 208). If one considers the year Diamela Eltit began to publish, I agree with del Río's including her under the category of the generation of the 1980s, although I dispute this classification because of Eltit's distinctive aesthetics and narrative style. It is a fact that each group of authors shared certain topic interests and stylistic features—after all, these were the marks that united them as a generation. I argue, though, that Diamela Eltit's writings, at least her early publications, differ from the rest of her narrative in that it includes characteristics of the literature written before the 1980s and that of her generation. Eltit selected certain stylistic techniques as they pleased her or as they fitted into the articulation of her narrative's message.

The authors of the generation of 1950, which includes José Donoso, Jorge Edwards, Enrique Lafourcade, Marta Blanco, and Mercedes Valdivieso, rejected social realism and favored illusion, appearance, fantasy, and skepticism as possible sources of knowledge. This style, del Río states, is close to the so-called neobarroco, or new

baroque, which is mainly characterized by dark humor, irony, multiple narrative situations, and different levels of language. The authors from the following generation, also called the generación novísima, or the newest generation, which includes Antonio Skármeta, Ariel Dorfman, and Fernando Jerez among others, were very experimental formally speaking, and presented their novels as deconstructions of the novelistic genre. Their purpose was, then, to challenge the status quo of the genre and, ultimately, of society (del Río, “Literatura chilena”). As for Eltit, she continues the efforts of these previous generations and this is clearly observed in her first novel *Lumpérica* (1983), a novel that defies any sort of traditional representation of reality—its characters move around in a world of uncertainty (Santiago during the dictatorship), a space caught between reality and illusion—as well as the conventional structures of the traditional novel. In addition, Eltit shares novelistic elements with other writers from her generation, that of the 1980s: the preference for urban settings and for the dark, closed, and suffocating presence of fallen characters, and the re-creation of the actual reality through ambiguity and dislocation (del Río 211-14). According to del Río, the military takeover suddenly stopped the use of witty narrative voices and the critique of traditional narrative, and so with Eltit a new voice was established, one that tried to verbalize the true state of things in dictatorial Chile while at the same time eluding censorship. This is the voice that one can hear in the novel *Lumpérica*, a voice that moves between reality and illusion and that tries to explain the complex, dangerous nature of life in Santiago.

The lack of a sense of traditional reality in the novels written during the dictatorship in Chile, including *Lumpérica*, is a phenomenon that del Río calls metaforización (216), that is, “un desplazamiento metafórico de los sucesos ocurridos a

los sucesos de sus narraciones, de los mundos reales a los mundos narrados. Se alude al horror por medio de diversas construcciones metafóricas, imaginativas y simbólicas” ‘a metaphorical movement arising from the events that really took place to the events in the narratives, from the real worlds to the narrated worlds. Authors allude to horror through diverse symbolical, imaginative, and metaphorical constructions’ (216). A recurrent theme that complements metaforización is the idea that lineage has vanished, and that aristocratic lineage in particular is now in a state of decadence (del Río 216). Del Río observes that, in the early 1980s, the metaforización de la denuncia, that is the metaphorization of denouncement, was overtly present in novels such as *El museo de cera* (Jorge Edwards, 1981), *El obsesivo mundo de Benjamín* (Antonio Ostornol, 1982), *Lumpérica* (Diamela Eltit, 1983), *La última condena* (Juan Mihovilovich, 1983), *Trapananda* (Enrique Valdés, 1983), and *Óxido de Carmen* (Ana María del Río, 1986). She maintains that these novels contain “los acabamientos de estirpe decadentes, los poderes tiránicos de caciques antiguos, la alegoría de personajes alusivos, la memoria colectiva de una crisis, los protagonistas héroes en contra de una dictadura familiar” ‘the end of decadent lineages, the despotic powers of ancient tyrants, the allegory of allusive characters, the collective memory of a crisis, the protagonist heroes against a family dictatorship’ (217). She further argues that the case of Eltit is unique because she is more of an avant-garde and experimentalist who primarily focuses on the marginal world, from where she expresses the daily struggles of Chile (217).

Nevertheless, del Río fails to mention a key element of Eltit’s narrative, that is, the presence of the woman and her body, which, I maintain, marks the most significant originality of this novel, and through this female component Eltit filters the marginal

world that del Río emphasizes above. The female narrative voice that the reader hears in *Lumpérica* is thus the narrative voice of the woman who, in an act of rebelliousness, wanders around the streets and squares of Santiago during curfew time at night. With this newly iconoclastic female voice, Eltit rehearses and experiments with new narrative patterns which she feels are needed in order to express the hitherto undiscussed reality of the dictatorship. In other words, as Alice Nelson affirms, Eltit and her contemporaries “distrusted discourses of Truth and of History” (119) and searched for a language “capable of telling stories that examined the contaminated relationships and local struggles of daily life, to reveal what Foucault has described as the dynamic of power and resistance at work in every social exchange” (119). In *Lumpérica*, however, the female body is instrumental in the creation of this dynamic of power and resistance.

The Body of the Writing/The Writing of the Body in *Lumpérica*

In an interview with Erna Pfeiffer, when asked whether there is a difference between masculine and feminine writing, Eltit answered that:

La escritura es un instrumento social, no es sexuada, lo que torna masculina o femenina una escritura es su relación con el poder (sintáctico, temático, social). ... lo femenino de mis temas creo que radica en su forma de escritura. ... creo que hay una diferencia [entre lenguaje femenino y masculino], pero en la utilización de los códigos, en el juego entre lo dominante y lo periférico ‘Writing is a social instrument, it is not gendered, and what makes it masculine or feminine is its relationship with power (syntactic, thematic, social). ... I believe the feminine quality of my themes lies in their type of writing. ... I think there is a difference [between feminine and masculine language] but it’s in the use of codes, in the game between the dominant and the peripheral.’ (qtd. in Pfeiffer: 68)

According to Eltit, literature written by women is also characterized by the intimate relationship that the author establishes with language, and her statement demonstrates the major role language plays in her writings. For her, literature, language,

and power are inextricably intertwined because “jamás olvida que la literatura es lenguaje y que como tal implica un poder. En consecuencia el que toma el lenguaje toma el poder” ‘She never forgets that literature is language and, as such, it implies power. Therefore, whoever takes language takes power as well’ (qtd. in Lamperein: 220).

The women and men writers of this generation (the generation of 1973) embarked on a search for a voice that would participate in history by reporting the harsh reality of the dictatorship. But to avoid generalizations, I must add that both men and women unsurprisingly adopted different methods to achieve their goals, and it is precisely this tendency to assume distinct methods what Eltit identifies as the distinguishing quality between literature written by women and that written by men. Chilean women authors, such as Eltit and Pía Barros, tend to articulate their quest through the female body and sexuality, which situates them in the wider context of Latin American women intellectuals writing in the 1980s. But it also situates Eltit with Márcia Denser and Cristina Peri Rossi because this is a period, I argue, in which the literary expression of female sexuality and eroticism reemerges as a transformative sociopolitical force. In fact, Pía Barros was thinking of this when she declared that “the claim to narrate, to participate in history (particularly as a woman) must begin with the bodily expression of erotic desire” (qtd. in Nelson: 117). For Barros, Nelson explains, “the sexual act becomes a metaphor for creating a collective future. If women are to participate in that future, they must first claim the ability to name and narrate within the sexual realm” (117). For Chilean women then, the body, which had previously been relegated to the margin, becomes both the battle ground and the weapon used to fight against institutions of repression, in particular Pinochet’s military regime, and this explains the political

implications that the erotic voice contains in the writings of Chilean authors such as Diamela Eltit. In fact, regarding the correlation between politics and the erotic, Eltit affirms that “el cuerpo y la biología son zonas estratégicas” ‘the body and biology are strategic zones’ (qtd. in Pfeiffer: 71), and writer Mercedes Valdivieso maintains that “en términos de escritura, la incorporación del cuerpo femenino ha sido una de las grandes conquistas realizadas por las escritoras” ‘in terms of writing, the integration of the female body has been one of the biggest conquests gained by women writers’ (qtd. in Pfeiffer: 71). Indeed, since the last quarter of the twentieth century, to talk and write about the female body through themes such as masturbation, orgasm, and abortion means an act of subversion against falocracia (Pfeiffer 71), that is, the phallogocentric political and cultural institutions of society.

In the introduction to her study of Latin American women’s literature, Liliana Trevizán maintains that writing is an act of rebelliousness for women, an act of survival that attempts to influence the establishment of democracy in Latin America (see Trevizán, *Política/Sexualidad: nudo en la escritura de mujeres latinoamericanas*). Trevizán’s comment particularly defines the political scene of the last two decades of the twentieth century, a period during which Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, went through the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The scholars Trevizán and Jane Jaquette, for example, observe the significant synchronization and communication that feminism and the women’s movement maintained during this period in South America (see Jaquette, *The Women’s Movement in Latin America*). Trevizán explains this correlation by affirming that the 1980s were the years of the “doble militancia” ‘double militancy’ (49) because women fought against dictatorship as much

as they fought against chauvinism. I maintain that a key concept that links these two movements (feminism and the women's movement) is women's literary expression, Cixous's *l'écriture féminine*, and that it is found in the texts that I analyze in this dissertation. *L'écriture féminine* is a literary expression that connotes difference, that is, it suggests diversity of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation and, at the same time, it is a fragmented, polyvocal, and open-ended type of writing. *L'écriture féminine* is written from the periphery, from marginalized bodies, and, ultimately, from difference, and for this reason it contains the same value as official discourse, which history has made a man-oriented discourse. In *Lumpérica*, Eltit proves that the official and dominant discourse can be destabilized through the creation of characters that belong to differing groups of marginalized bodies (women, beggars, and political prisoners). In addition, I argue, Eltit chooses to narrate from the margins because, as Sidonie Smith states, "while margins have their limitations, they also have their advantages of vision. They are polyvocal..." (qtd. in Trevizán: 2). The key word here is "polyvocal" because it is a quality that distinguishes *Lumpérica*, a text in which Eltit creates various narrative voices and perspectives that reflect the marginalized collective with which the author sympathizes.

Erotic discourse is also polyvocal because it can be expressed directly (for example, the novel by Márcia Denser, *Animal dos motéis*) or indirectly (for example, Eltit's *Lumpérica*). At first, the reader of *Lumpérica* may think that the novel does not contain erotic discourse, but a more careful reading will uncover the erotic subtext that the novel has, that is, the bodily and textual desire that characterizes Eltit's first novel. In addition, I contend that, in her writings Eltit resorts to what Josefina Ludmer calls "las

tretas del débil” ‘the ruses of the weak’ (qtd. in Trevizán: 26), or as Trevizán prefers, “las estrategias de sobrevivencia” ‘the strategies of survival’ (26). Trevizán explains that María Luisa Bombal hid the erotic element in her works through the discourse of dreams (26). Although the erotic element became more explicit in women’s writings throughout the years, Chilean women returned to the tretas del débil after the establishment of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Thus, I claim, Eltit suggests the erotic through the elements of the visual and performing arts that *Lumpérica* contains. In other words, Eltit artistically brings the visual and performing arts and linguistic and narrative experimentation together in her first novel. This combination generates difference and speaks from difference, which causes the reader to feel pleasure in reading the text while the text itself attacks the dominant structures of the dictatorship. The combination of styles and artistic expressions that Eltit realizes in her novel is the type of symbiosis that Trevizán proposes. For Trevizán, women’s writings in Latin America offer metaphors that are not founded in the limit but in the “desdibujamiento de las fronteras” ‘blurring of borders’ (24), that is, women’s writings do not oppose man-oriented discourses as much as they search for a balance or integration with them. In *Lumpérica*, Eltit then achieves a unification of visual and performing arts, *l’écriture féminine*, and the subversively erotic power of the female body.

As we have seen, Eltit began her artistic career in literary workshops; in particular, she participated in the nueva escena de arte, a neo-avant-garde association that experimented with visual and dramatic representation in order to contest the official discourse of the dictatorship. Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo (visual artists), Raúl Castillo (poet), Fernando Balcells (sociologist), and Diamela Eltit (writer) composed this

neo-avant-garde association, one they named CADA (Collective for Art Actions). At the beginning of her career, then, Eltit was more oriented toward different art mediums rather than literary narration, and that gave a quality of vividness to her work that distinguishes it from her contemporaries. Alice Nelson states that this interest in art mediums allowed Eltit to explore “the politics of literature and artistic institutions themselves as symbolic of the public exclusionary power most explicitly embodied by the regime” (153). During the first half of the 1980s,⁷ for example, Eltit worked on reportage-like videos together with Lotty Rosenfeld, such as “Maipu” (1980) and “Con frío, con lluvia, con calor” (1986), that are set in the marginal neighborhoods of Santiago de Chile (Nelson 155). In fact, “Maipu” can be interpreted as a shorter video version of the first part of *Lumpérica*. Eltit’s contributions to CADA were a crucial influence on her approach to literary narration because her early prose works shared aesthetic principles similar to those of CADA. For CADA, the city and the body were the spaces where the drama of the dictatorship could be played out, and CADA’s primary goal was “to show how the human body itself both demonstrated and resisted the hegemony of the dominant discourses (military, sexual and religious)” (Nelson 153). Finally, CADA emphasized the need for artists to redefine art as a response to the starving social body under Pinochet. Thus, CADA showed, defied, and facilitated the inevitable connections and/or “oppositions between political commitment and aesthetics” (Nelson 155).

Unlike her colleagues in CADA, though, I argue that Eltit individualized her prose through the integration of the female body, which is the common factor that links Eltit to the literary corpus of women dealing with female sexuality during the 1980s. Her concern with language also makes Eltit’s work unique since she connects language and

the female body through *l'écriture féminine*, which describes a writing process that is fragmented and polyvocal. Through this connection, Eltit desires to break with institutionalized and male-oriented language and to propose new ways of writing fiction from the margins, and she does this with an extremely experimental and new-baroque style.

The title of the novel is the first example of Eltit's linguistic experimentation that characterizes this novel and her writing in general. The word, lumpérica, is an invention, a combination of the word lumpen, suggesting a group of marginalized people, and the suffix, “-érica,” which is more ambiguous and offers various interpretations. Alice Nelson, for example, understands the word lumpérica as a combination of the words lumpen and América (152). Nelson's interpretation of the word lumpérica thus complements her global reading of the novel as a text that speaks about the regional marginalized people in Chile and the general marginalization of Latin America by the capitalist United States (152). While I concur with Nelson's idea, I believe that the title is still more complex, as is the novel itself, in that the title suggests the process of symbiosis that I have previously discussed. In other words, during the second half of the twentieth century, Latin American women writers reinforced their desire to find a language of their own with which they would be able to narrate their experiences. *Lumpérica* reflects Eltit's struggle to find a unique language, and its synthetic title is the epitome of this search. To me, the title is the result of Eltit's efforts to find the feminine form of the word lumpen⁸ in order to develop the female protagonist of the novel, a woman called L. Iluminada.

With such title, the reader is not surprised when he or she faces this text, which could be considered an anti-novel because it does not fall into the category of the traditional plotted novel and which does not contain traditional chapter divisions. If Denser's novel is innovative because of its non-chronological and episodic structure, Eltit's novel is even more avant-garde because the ten parts into which the text is divided include prose poems, stage directions for a movie or performance, transcriptions of a military interrogatory, and narrative fragments with no plot. In order to have a better understanding of this novel, it is necessary to consider the artistic expressions that Eltit realized during her years in CADA. In fact, I maintain that the novel itself could be interpreted as a textual articulation of an "art action."

The novel opens with the presentation of the female protagonist, L. Iluminada, who defies the military curfew and remains in the prohibited public square of the capital, Santiago de Chile, at night. At the beginning of the novel, Eltit establishes a dichotomy that will guide the narrative development: on the one hand, there are the marginalized characters (the female protagonist L. Iluminada, the beggars of Santiago de Chile, and the person—most probably a male political prisoner—who is the victim of a police interrogation); on the other hand, there is the neon light, which symbolizes the garish officiousness of Pinochet's dictatorship and the person who interrogates the political prisoner. At the same time, Eltit presents the locale and time setting for her characters: the public square after curfew time at night. She takes significant narrative elements, such as the female character, the night, and the public square, and transforms them into metaphors of resistance that simultaneously contain undertones of domination. This is an

example of the phenomenon that del Río calls metaphorization that characterizes the literature written during the dictatorship in Chile.

By presenting a female protagonist in the open space of the public plaza, Eltit subverts traditional norms that stipulate that the woman pertains only to the closed space of the house. The time of day also furthers the subversive tone of the opening scene because human beings tend to set their inner passions free at night and become less repressive toward themselves. In addition, Eltit does not focus on the conventional public spheres, but, rather, she emphasizes the social margins and their subjects because:

For Eltit, the margins represent not only what the dominant society does not want to see, but also what it cannot afford to see, if its basic structures are to remain intact. Hence, for Eltit, community-based history could only be “reborn” in the postcoup context from the excluded margins, from people acting locally and sometimes perversely within the contaminated and incestuous confines of the social periphery. (Nelson 150)

Together with the subversive tone that the first pages of the novel communicate, it is possible to observe an ambiance of oppression that reflects the supremacy of the military regime. This oppressive feeling surrounds the figure of the female protagonist whose real name the reader never knows. The reader is aware only that, for the purposes of that night, her name is L. Iluminada. In my opinion, this name is symbolic of the woman’s lack of identity because the narrative voice addresses the female protagonist simply by means of a letter of the alphabet, a letter that has been illuminated by the electric light that dominates the plaza. The woman is then given an identity through an unconnected element of herself, the electric light serving as an element that controls both her and the entire public space and that symbolizes the dominant official discourse of the dictatorship. L. Iluminada is thus created in an artificial manner, that is, not through natural light but through the electric light of the neon sign that dominates the plaza. It is,

ironically, only through this electric light that L. Iluminada achieves identity as an individual and as a citizen. The narrative voice asserts that “la luz eléctrica la maquilla fraccionando sus ángulos” ‘the electric light makes her face up dividing her angles’ (7), and that the neon light in the square “se encenderá y se apagará, rítmico y ritual, en el proceso que en definitiva les dará la vida: su identificación ciudadana” ‘it will turn on and off, rhythmical and ritual, in the process that will definitely give them life: their civic identity’ (7). This given-identity, though, does not complete L. Iluminada’s true identity and she will challenge the neon light, the official discourse, throughout the narrative and will ultimately attempt to create her identity by herself.

But L. Iluminada is not the only one who depends on the electric light. Other characters in the novel also depend on it, such as “los desarrapados de Santiago, pálidos y malolientes” ‘the slovenly ones of Santiago, pale and foul-smelling’ (7), when they enter into the square to look at L. Iluminada. They are part of the lumpen, as L. Iluminada is, and the electric light that falls upon their bodies in the plaza defines them and grants them a citizen’s identity as well. Then, “a bodily inscription by the dominant discourse takes place” (Nelson 159) when the narrative voice declares that “Las palabras se escriben sobre los cuerpos” ‘the words are written on the bodies’ (9). Moreover, Nelson adds, the light of the authoritarian figure establishes the market value of each of these bodies (159) because the pale ones are “mercancías de valor incierto” ‘merchandise of uncertain value’ (8). The narrative voice speaks to these characters using the generic term of “los pálidos” ‘the pale ones,’ a name that has a double symbolism. On the one hand, these people lack individuality because they do not have a proper name. The adjective pale connotes a lack of something, in this case, a lack of color that suggests the need for personal identity in

these subjects. On the other hand, the adjective pale describes a possible state of poverty and neglected health in these people. Thus, from the beginning of the novel, Eltit presents the reader with a female protagonist who is exposed to la mirada ‘the gaze’ of the domineering class (represented by the light) and the marginal class (represented by los pálidos). Despite being the observed subject, L. Iluminada controls the scene at the plaza and has power over her self and others because she wants to be there; there is eroticism in the text because she desires to be observed, and she controls what she wants others to see. In equating power and eroticism, Eltit uses a similar strategy to that of Denser’s in her novel *Animal dos motéis* where the protagonist Diana lets the man seduce her first. Then, the relationship between man and woman inverts, and the seduced woman becomes the seducer herself. Thus, an inversion of the values and concepts of male-dominated discourse takes place. At the same time, because L. Iluminada is the focal point of both the pale ones and the official discourse, she serves as a linking element between the two levels. Therefore Eltit suggests that the woman puts the collective interests of marginal people into dialogue with the authoritarian figure of the “luminoso” ‘neon light’ (7).

In the first part of the novel, the pale ones arrive at the square to witness L. Iluminada’s baptism. This is not a typical, religious baptism because L. Iluminada is baptized by the electric light and, at that moment, she is created and named by the authoritarian and official figure of the neon light, which equates to the dominant discourse of the dictatorship in Chile. The religious allusions of this scene, though, show how Eltit takes patriarchal institutions that govern Chilean society, such as Catholicism, and utilizes them in a sacrilegious and disrespectful manner in order to express her resistance to having the official discourse impose an identity on her. She also utilizes a

recurrent metaphor in literature, the metaphor of the crazy woman, or “frenética” (8), as a resource for her resistance. When illuminated by the neon light, L. Iluminada goes crazy and hits her body violently, which implies that, although L. Iluminada cannot speak against the electric light, she is at least able to act against it by inflicting physical violence against herself. L. Iluminada is unable to articulate a comprehensive language of resistance and, instead, she simply emits noises, howls, and screams, which communicate the frustration that the protagonist feels because she has not yet found the language she needs to express herself (this goes back to the idea that Eltit’s main concern is language and the need to find a language that expresses the realities of the dictatorship and those of women and other marginalized groups that suffer from it). Then, she struggles to create this language through her performance. The narrative voice indicates that the task of L. Iluminada is to construct a new discourse that has the pale ones as the chief object: “Ha vaciado su mente de toda memoria y ahora construye y planifica sólo con los pálidos como referente: plasmados en su futuro” ‘she has emptied her mind of all memories and now she only constructs and plans with the pale ones as referent: captured in their/her future’ (11).⁹ In fact, the narrative voice communicates to the reader that L. Iluminada has acquired a new identity through her acts.

Performance thus plays a crucial role in this novel and links it to the characteristics of the erotic text and the theories of Judith Butler. The dominant figure of the dictatorship, the neon light, seeks to define L. Iluminada by shedding light on her body. L. Iluminada’s immediate reaction is to look at her body, and to touch and caress herself. L. Iluminada’s hands “se acarician en profundidad” ‘caress each other in depth’ (10), she “Se observa a sí misma” ‘observes herself’ (10), and “Se toca la piel” ‘touches

her skin' (10). L. Iluminada is doing this, I maintain, in an act of self-recognition and self-identification—that is simultaneously political and erotic—as opposed to the light that tries to establish her identity. At the same time, I find a sexual invitation to masturbation in the act of touching her body, and an erotic invitation to those who are watching her, the pale ones and the authoritarian figure of the neon light to free themselves from both dictatorial and sexual repression.

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler exposes her theory of performativity and argues that the idea of the subject and gender are not facts but actions. In other words, Butler maintains that we create the subject and gender through actions that require a repeated performance. In her later book, *Undoing Gender* (2004), in which Butler revises her idea of performativity, she further argues that if gender is a sort of a “doing” (1), that is, a continuous “activity performed” (1), it does not mean that this activity is automatic or mechanical. To a certain extent, we are aware of this activity because, as she puts it, “it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (1). In the same way, L. Iluminada “does” herself as both a subject and woman through her performance. And in the same manner, *Lumpérica* can be interpreted as an improvising practice rather than a novel, because it looks like the script of a movie to be filmed (it is possible to note this, for example, in fragments entitled “Comentarios a la primera escena” ‘Commentaries to the first scene,’ “Indicaciones para la primera escena” ‘Indications for the first scene,’ and “Errores de la primera escena” ‘Errors of the first scene’ (12-14)). In other words, the novel reads like an improvisation or rehearsal of one of the art actions that Eltit realized during the years she collaborated with CADA.

Unlike Denser's novel, however, where the protagonist performs her identity and gender through her relationships with men, L. Iluminada performs her identity and gender mainly through acts of violence and self-destruction. L. Iluminada is "frenética, mueve las caderas bajo la luz: sus muslos se levantan del suelo y su cabeza colgante se golpea por tantas sacudidas contra el pavimento" 'frantic, moving her hips under the light: her thighs rise from the ground and her hanging head is hit by many shakes against the paving' (8). L. Iluminada "estrella su cabeza contra el árbol una y otra vez hasta que la sangre rebasa su piel, le baña la sangre su cara, se limpia con las manos, mira sus manos, las lame" 'crashes her head against the tree once and again until the blood goes beyond her skin, the blood flooding her face, she cleans it with her hands, looks at them, licks them' (15). Pain gives pleasure to L. Iluminada and drives her to a state of ecstasy. Every time the neon light tries to define L. Iluminada, she becomes frantic and returns to the "algarabía" 'chaos' (8). In other words, L. Iluminada rejects the order established by the rigid and repressive dictatorship and embraces disorder, thus suggesting the challenge that the performance of a woman, as a marginal subject, implies in the patriarchal society.

In her explanation of the concept of performance, Butler adds that repetition legitimates a performance (see Butler, *Gender Trouble*), which is possible to observe in *Lumpérica*. As I stated, the novel has no plot but, rather, it is a group of prose segments that describe scenes that seem to be photographs taken from a film, or scenes that could have been painted, or scenes that could have been performed theatrically. These scenes are very similar and depict L. Iluminada in the public square doing different movements. The reader sees how the constant repetition of postures legitimizes L. Iluminada's performance and continuously reaffirms her identity. In the same manner, the scenes of

self-violence are repeated throughout the text. As the novel proceeds, L. Iluminada hits her head, burns herself in a bonfire that the pale ones start in the plaza, and cuts her arm. Each of these acts is a statement that dramatically reinforces L. Iluminada's new identity.

When Butler explains the concept of performativity, she also refers to the idea that performance occurs within a particular social context (*Undoing Gender*, 1). In other words, one does not do gender in isolation. The activity of gender-doing is always social in the sense that "the terms that make up one's own gender are ... outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author" (*Undoing Gender*, 1). In this sense, I argue that Eltit does gender at a specific place, the public square, and in a particular historical context, Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, and that this influences the female protagonist's performance because L. Iluminada joins the marginal social classes in her attempt to create her personal identity. L. Iluminada sympathizes with the lumpen and pale ones of Santiago and through this act of solidarity Eltit emphasizes the importance of the marginal classes, whose history has been repressed by the dishonest official history imposed by the dictatorship. In this manner, not only does Eltit do gender in the public space but she also creates a new literature that opposes the fiction of the official discourse.

L. Iluminada's acts of self-violence also contain new meanings for the terms insanity and power. On the one hand, these acts suggest insanity because the protagonist flagellates herself until the blood covers her entire body. The second section of the novel, which transcribes a police interrogation (symbolic of the many that were practiced during Pinochet's dictatorship), accentuates this atmosphere of insanity. This section also shows the absurdity and arbitrariness of this type of questioning during which the interrogator

asks a man about the use of the public square. The interrogated man comments on the presence of indigent people in the plaza, who are also named pale ones in the novel. This group of indigent people contains a contradiction because, despite being marginalized by society in general, society—and institutions of power such as the government—fears them and considers them “presencias amenazantes” ‘threatening presences’ (43). This social fear explains the second meaning of L. Iluminada’s self-violence, that is, her acts of violence suggest the implied power and control of the body that society wields. In order to resist the authority that seeks to control her through the electric light, L. Iluminada hurts herself to prove that she is the one who really has control over her body. At the same time, the blood that runs through her body also symbolizes menstruation, which is a key moment for the formation of every woman’s identity, the moment when she abandons the innocence of a girl to become the woman who controls her body. Before the appearance of this blood, L. Iluminada, the girl, is controlled by the patriarchal security but, after the bleeding and the scream, L. Iluminada gains dominion over her body and thus gains the capacity to give birth.

The scream in this scene is also symbolic. After hitting her head and bleeding, L. Iluminada “Se sentará en el suelo con la cabeza entre las piernas y así permanecerá por unos instantes,” ‘will sit on the ground with her head between her legs and will remain like that for some time’ (18); then she “se levantará y cuando sea tocada por el luminoso de su boca estallará el grito” ‘will stand up and when the neon sign sheds light on her the scream will come out of her mouth’ (18). In the “Comentario a la segunda escena” ‘Commentary to the second scene,’ the narrative voice explains that “para herirse era preciso el grito” ‘the scream was necessary to hurt herself’ (19). The scream is part of L.

Illuminada's performance for it is part of the process of her identity formation and of her new existence as well. Like a baby who affirms his or her existence outside the womb of the mother by crying, L. Illuminada announces her existence through a scream that stems from her injuries. As the narrative voice says, "todo lo demás [la flagelación] es un pretexto" 'the rest is a pretext' (19), that is, L. Illuminada beats herself in order to gain the attention of the pale ones, the authorities (represented by the neon light), and, ultimately, the reader so that, once she is the center of everyone's gaze, she will make them hear her voice. L. Illuminada, who had remained in silence at the center of the plaza during the first section, gives way to oral expression through her performance in the second section.

Parallel to the power and control suggested in the act of self-violence is the text's erotic tone because L. Illuminada feels masochistic pleasure when she hurts herself and when she knows that she is the focus of the gaze. In fact, the narrative voice states that "su estado [de dolor] conduce al éxtasis" 'her state (of pain) drives her to ecstasy' (15). This sexual independence, in which the woman does not need the man to receive pleasure, reflects Eltit's resistance against the system of patriarchal and traditional values that the dictatorship incarnates. Thus, I argue that in her novel, Eltit utilizes elements of a new erotic discourse—one building on desire, the gaze, the woman's body, and the violence—in an innovative manner. The innovation is that the erotic is not explicit but, rather, subjective and ambiguous. Butler believes that desire is inherent in gender and that it is not easy to separate the life of gender from the life of desire (*Undoing Gender*, 2). In order to affirm this, she starts from the Hegelian understanding of desire, in which desire is linked with recognition, an experience that constitutes us as social beings. Thus, she concludes that if desire is to gain recognition, then gender, which is constituted by

desire, also wants recognition, a recognition that needs to be social (*Undoing Gender*, 2). But, since a person's gender is not always socially recognized, Butler states that "recognition becomes a site of power" (*Undoing Gender*, 2). Butler then concludes that if one's self is constituted by norms and depends on them, there is one thing that we can do which is "to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them [the norms]" (3). The key word here is "critical" because Butler offers the following analogy: if I cannot live without recognition, and if the terms by which I am recognized make my life unlivable, then we need to do a critique and question these terms so that there are a number of different ways of living. In this case, Butler states that she is not celebrating difference but establishing "more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life" (*Undoing Gender*, 4). However, why not celebrate difference? After all, difference makes us richer as individuals.

Butler's theory applies to Eltit's novel in which L. Iluminada desires to be recognized, first by herself, second by the light (the official discourse), and third by the group of pale ones. Only after she has been recognized will she be able to exert her power and control as an individual and woman. Thus, I argue that since desire is a key factor in erotic discourse, the latter becomes the key factor in the literature written by Latin American women in the 1980s (and in particular the women authors that I study in this dissertation) because only this new discourse offers women authors the most eloquent site of power and resistance. Eltit further develops this idea when she finds in the public square the site of power and resistance per excellence because "el deseo se tiende en la plaza" 'desire lies on the plaza' (42). These are the words that the interrogated man articulates when the interrogator asks him about the type of people that haunt the square:

lovers, beggars, and the insane all arrive at the square to be socially recognized. For example, lovers make their love public and, the more crowded the plaza is, the more they desire to do so because they know that the repressive social norms of the dictatorship prohibit the demonstration of their affection. The indigent people go to the square to be socially recognized, although other people at the square fear them. This is the reason why L. Iluminada acts as she does in the public square; she demands to be identified as an individual. Eltit then enriches the erotic discourse because, unlike Márcia Denser and Cristina Peri Rossi, she develops it with marginalized bodies other than women, such as indigents. The decisive innovation of Eltit's narrative is that resistance against the official discourse begins in the daily and the marginal, in the beggars, insane people, mothers and children, and lovers who go to the public square.

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler provides examples of how gender is performed and states that drag performance is one of them. She adds that by performing gender, bonds of community are created where recognition becomes possible (216). In *Lumpérica*, Eltit does a double performance: L. Iluminada's performance as a woman and L. Iluminada's performance as an individual who is part of the lumpen. In other words, Eltit does gender performance and both political and social performance. L. Iluminada creates bonds of community with the lumpen at the public square, and together she and they ask for recognition, an act that is also a statement of existence and political recognition. One realizes that "contemporary notions of reality can be questioned, and new modes of reality instituted" (*Undoing Gender*, 217). The notion of being called real is particularly significant for Butler because to be called unreal is even worse than being oppressed

since to be oppressed means that you at least exist as a subject (*Undoing Gender*, 217-18).

Although Butler defines the subject's identity in terms of his or her gender performance, there are other forms to define our identity and, for that, Butler resorts to the theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, who posits that "in order to have social transformation one must get beyond a 'unitary subject'" (qtd. in Butler, *Undoing Gender*: 227). Anzaldúa does not regard herself as a unitary subject because she refuses to fit into one of the categories defined by the binary opposition. Butler explains that Anzaldúa defines herself by her capacity to cross borders as a Chicana (*Undoing Gender*, 227). In addition, when dealing with social transformation, Butler comments that:

Anzaldúa asks us to consider that the source of our capacity for social transformation is to be found precisely in our capacity to mediate between worlds, to engage in cultural translation, and to undergo, through the experience of language and community, the diverse set of cultural connections that make us who we are. (*Undoing Gender* 228)

But for Butler, Anzaldúa is asking us to do something even more radical: "to put our own epistemological certainties into question" (*Undoing Gender*, 228), to open ourselves to other possible ways of understanding and organizing the world. I argue then that just as Anzaldúa defines herself by her ability to cross identity borders as a Chicana, L. Iluminada also defines herself by her capacity to cross identity borders as an individual woman and as a member of the lumpen. Through her performance and mobility between borders, L. Iluminada questions official discourse and makes a statement about her existence as a sujeto lumpérico¹⁰ or marginal subject. In other words, L. Iluminada situates herself at the center of the public square in order to assure her focal position and to challenge the power of the neon light, or official discourse.¹¹

In the second occurrence of self-violence against L. Iluminada's body, the pale ones have built a fire to keep themselves warm in the coldness of the night. L. Iluminada abandons her position at the center of the square to move toward the bonfire that the pale ones surround. L. Iluminada then goes near the fire and burns her hand on purpose. At that moment, the narrative voice states, "se ha abierto un nuevo circuito en la literatura" 'a new track has been opened in literature' (29). When Eltit uses the word literature in this statement, she refers to dominant discourse, that is, she refers to the official history of Chile. Eltit deconstructs this official discourse by opening a nuevo circuito through the female protagonist's violence and participation. Then, L. Iluminada creates herself through her self-destruction. First, she deconstructs herself—by beating her head against the ground, by burning her hand, and by cutting her arm—in order to be reborn with a different body that her scars mark. Each scar is a "nueva cicatriz que le forjará el cuerpo a su voluntad" 'a new scar that will forge her body in her own way' (30). Moreover, this new identity is also a distinct version of the regime's official literature, as the narrative voice states in "se ha abierto un nuevo circuito en la literatura" (29). At this moment, Eltit combines the female body, female identity, and *l'écriture féminine* in a scene of violence and seduction. I argue that this scene is also one of sacrifice because L. Iluminada sacrifices her body for the lumpen. In addition, L. Iluminada writes her body and identity through her scars because her blood is her ink. This time, L. Iluminada does not yell, but she says "tengo sed" 'I'm thirsty' (30), and then she "deconstruye la frase" 'deconstructs the sentence' (30) in that she "desorganiza el lenguaje" 'disorganizes language' (30). Therefore, the process of constructing of a new identity goes together with the process of disorganizing language, a language that has been historically dominated by men. This

new, or different, language that L. Iluminada creates is the language that, distinct from the official one, women need in order to articulate their new female existences and the new reality following the military coup d'état of 1973.

In part eight of the novel Eltit returns to the image of self-violence when L. Iluminada makes cuts on her skin. Nelson explains that, in the novel, Eltit shows that “the possibilities for producing textual and corporeal counter narratives emerge through self-destruction, or more often, pain, the scarring of one’s own body in the desperate need to sacrifice self for the community” (160). In my opinion, Eltit compares literature written by women with a cut on the skin because it symbolizes a break with the traditional literature written by men, a break that offers a new and more complex route or direction for generations to come. For Eltit, this cut on the skin is the work of women writers whose representation functions in terms of their performance (Nelson 149). The cut, that is, the literature written by women, also serves as a space because a cut on the skin produces an opening in which women are able to defend themselves from the literary canon that men have dominated for centuries.

Language is a fundamental element in Eltit’s work; in fact, Eltit was particularly interested in linguistic experimentation in an attempt to question and break away from the language institutionalized by the dictatorship. For this reason, Hélène Cixous’s ideas of *l’écriture féminine* are relevant in Eltit’s work because she writes and experiments with language through the female body. In *Lumpérica*, Eltit presents fragmented subjects in fragmented scenes with a fragmented language. This fragmented language can be observed above all from the second section of the novel onward. The more the reader responds to the novel, the farther the narrative voice gets from traditional narrative, and

the smaller the sections into which the novel is subdivided are. In short, the novel contains fragmented subjects and narrative fragments that the reader must assemble while reading its pages. This narrative style responds to Eltit's use of the avant-garde and neo-baroque techniques, and in fact, in part three of the novel, the narrative contains mini-fragments that look like poems in prose.

The language in part three is also very metaphorical. When L. Iluminada tries to speak at the public square, for example, her voice is identified with the sounds of animals, in particular with those of a cow and/or mare when it is restless and does not stop mooing and/or neighing in the stable. The metaphor of the cow suggests both the milk of the mother that feeds the baby and the kind of life-affirming texts that, according to Cixous, women should write. On the other hand, the metaphor of the mare suggests the natural, inner instincts inside the individual, that is, the sexual instincts. In this way, Eltit's prose evokes a positive image, that of the *élan vital*, that the milk and the inner passions of the individual represent. In addition, Eltit articulates this vital force in terms of the woman (who up to this point has been depicted as a marginal subject in Chilean society) and in terms of erotic discourse, which here functions as a life-affirming force of resistance.

Nevertheless, the narrative voice also realizes that “ni sus mugidos, ni la fuerza experta del relinchar han logrado diluir la fuerte marca de ese luminoso que le ha robado su única presencia ante los pálidos escudados tras sus letras” ‘neither her mooing, nor the expert force of neighing have succeeded in diluting the strong mark of that neon light that has stolen her only presence before the pale ones who hide behind her letters’ (60). In other words, Eltit suggests that women's attempts to overcome the restrictions imposed

by patriarchy are a difficult task even today. Moreover, in these images the animal-woman cannot produce any type of human sounds but only animal sounds. With this, Eltit refers to Chilean women's inability to find an effective language as well as the lack of communication between herself and the marginal collective. If a common language does not exist, the marginal social groups will not be able to unite in their struggle against the official discourse. Also, Eltit establishes a comparison between men's dominance of the female body and their control over animals in general when the narrative voice states: "la engorda el pasto todo se dispone ¿qué peso? ¿qué grasa? más se deforma el animal: la marcan de nuevo y es su intento de soltar las patas/la esquilan en sus procedimientos, ruge la bestia" 'the grass fattens her, everything is ready, what weight? what fat? the animal gets more deformed: she is marked again and it is her attempt to free the legs/she is sheared in her methods, the beast roars' (64). Then, if the animal is marginalized by men in general, the "animal lumpérico" 'the marginal animal' (65), is even more marginalized. In fact, as the narrative voice affirms, the animal lumpérico "no corni ni embate, este animal de cegatona estirpe se rinde a la marca a fuego, a las estacas" 'it does not gore nor attack, this animal of blinded stock surrenders to the mark by fire, to the stake' (65).

If parts one, two, and three of the novel move away from the traditional novel, part four is even more distant because it is a sort of literary rehearsal that tries to explain what literature is. In fact, it is subtitled "Para la formulación de una imagen en la literatura" 'For the formulation of an image in literature.' Part four is composed of various sub-sections that display images combining both sexual and political connotations and that articulate a variety of experiences that women have in

contemporary society. The first sub-section, also entitled “Para la formulación de una imagen en la literatura,” is written as a poem, which shows Eltit’s subversion of literary genres as she takes traditional forms of literature and reduces them to triviality. In my opinion, the first prose poem serves as an example of Eltit’s combination of language, eroticism, and political content in order to give a subversive meaning. Eltit utilizes the rhetoric of “el frote” ‘rubbing’ (Nelson 157) in her use of subversive language and traditional, canonical literary forms. According to Nelson, Eltit “fractures the centers of institutionalized language by irreverently “rubbing” them against various forms of marginal expression ... thereby generating a vast range of hybrid linguistic permutations” (157). The novel is constructed on the notion of the rubbing because it contains not only a multiplicity of languages and voices but also various perspectives on the story¹² itself. In other words, Eltit first utilizes a variety of registers and points of view and then integrates them, just as a society is an integrated whole. For Nelson, the rubbing in Eltit’s novel is the irreverent juxtaposition of slang, grammatical incorrectness, Renaissance Spanish, and the strategies of police interrogation (158). At the same time, the idea of “rubbing together” is quite erotic if one thinks of it in terms of sexuality. A woman simultaneously rubs herself (as if to orgasm) and against the male-dominated canon. By so doing, she puts herself in a position of power because she is now the subject that produces pleasure for her self and, if she chooses, for her male counterpart. Nelson explains that the technique of el frote has two main purposes in Eltit’s text: (1) to create frictions and resistances, and thus multivocality, and (2) to eroticize the power of women who dare narrate together with male authors (162). The verb frotar has a sexual aspect that suggests arousal, including masturbation. For example, in the first sub-section of part four, L.

Illuminada “se frota las antenas” ‘rubs her antennae’ (69) when she reads or thinks about any of the master figures of Western and Spanish American literatures: Lezama, James Joyce, Pablo Neruda, Juan Rulfo, Ezra Pound, and Alain Robbe Grillet. The reading of this fragment suggests that L. Iluminada masturbates when she thinks about and reads these writers. Her irreverent reaction to these supposedly master authors is an act of subversion that the woman realizes through the sexual satisfaction she takes for herself. In this way, Eltit achieves the two goals that Nelson lists in her work, and Eltit refers, indirectly but overtly, to the transforming power of female sexuality.

The first such image of el frote appears in part one when the narrative voice describes the pale ones “en el centro [de la plaza] frotándose contra el cemento” ‘at the center of the public square rubbing themselves against the cement’ (11). The pale ones celebrate “la salvación de la bautizada” ‘the salvation of the baptized’ (11), that is, L. Iluminada. The sexual image of el frote now embraces a religious dimension that allows the narrative voice to portray L. Iluminada as the center and salvation of the pale ones, of the individual and his or her necessary relationship with the collective. In this scene, therefore, “Se celebran [los pálidos] en sus identidades. Son sus propios padrinos [los de L. Iluminada] que se reciben y ella, ella es la que se rebautiza en cada uno. Es una fiesta” ‘The pale ones celebrate their identities. It is her [L. Iluminada’s] godfathers who are baptized and she, she is baptized again with each of them. It is a celebration’ (11). If we consider the importance of religious celebrations in the Hispanic culture, then the idea of Eltit’s celebration functions as a dialectical space that integrates all social groups and discourses.

In part four, Eltit continues denouncing the various forms in which patriarchal institutions have defined female identity. According to Eltit, “[a la mujer] la han observado desde sus mejores ángulos infundiéndole letra a letra, palabra a palabra, guiones y representaciones, hasta que con la lengua rota e hinchada pudo decir los más claros parlamentos reduciéndolos a memorias, su mente como archivo” ‘woman has been observed from her best angles, instilling her letter by letter, word by word, scripts and representations, until, with a broken and swollen tongue, she was able to pronounce the clearest statements reducing them to memories, her mind like an archive’ (70). The woman is compared to a person in vegetative state in a hospital, or to a madwoman imprisoned in a mental institution. Thus, Eltit analyzes the way patriarchy manipulates the female body through disease, and she shows how the diseased female body becomes an object over which patriarchy easily exerts power.

In her book, Eltit examines issues of language and sexuality in terms of women’s struggles to narrate their bodies. In fact, L. Iluminada’s body is thoroughly textualized in *Lumpérica*, as when, for example, she flagellates herself, when she cuts herself, and when she shaves her head. In regard to this textualization, Nelson affirms that:

The textual body of the woman who transgresses generic (gender and genre) boundaries is marked, “la cabeza rapada” [her razed skull]. Through this writing, she becomes double: she is body, but she is also text; she is herself and her story; she is at once real and an imposter. In short, she performs—or embodies—her fiction. (162)

But L. Iluminada is not the only character that performs her fiction; Eltit also performs her fiction in the video “Maipu,” produced by CADA, which contains scenes that are later narrated in *Lumpérica*. In addition, referentiality between L. Iluminada and Eltit becomes evident when, in the fourth part, the narrative voice compares and

identifies the author with L. Iluminada through a detailed description of L. Iluminada's body, one that goes from the visible nails to the unseen soul. Thus, a complex, multi-faceted image of the female body is created, one that allows Eltit to identify herself with the marginal woman, and through her, with marginal groups in general. Eltit moves from a meticulous physical picture to a description of the conceptual relationship between the body and society. For example, the waist of both women is inexistence, abandonment, penitentiary, marginalization (Eltit 80). Then, Eltit elaborates a metonymy where the female body reflects the marginal subject.

In part five, the narrative voice affirms that L. Iluminada is in a “situación ahora no fílmica sino narrativa, ambigua, errada” ‘she is now in a narrative, ambiguous, mistaken situation, not in a film situation’ (91), a statement that emphasizes the ambiguous nature of language. L. Iluminada is no longer the object of the gaze but, rather, she is now read, and L. Iluminada “Está sola y por eso su actuación es nada más que para el que la lee, que participa de su misma soledad” ‘is alone and for that reason her performance is only for whoever reads her, for whoever has a share of her solitude’ (92). Due to this readable status, L. Iluminada becomes word—she is not an image any more—and “mediante trucos técnicos acude a torcer el lenguaje, montándolo sentimentalmente. Rehace, corrige las matrices listas ya para la reproducción” ‘through technical tricks she turns to twisting language, setting it up sentimentally. She redoes it, corrects the matrixes that are already prepared for reproduction’ (93). L. Iluminada will print herself as a text but she will do it “con erratas conscientes” ‘with conscious misprints’ (93). Nelson states that “the aesthetic of the “frote,” in which the woman confronts both “el luminoso” and literary tradition, has been replaced by the “refrote,” a

second rubbing: the historical conditions placed by “los pálidos” on her possibility of writing, or of intervening, in this context” (166). L. Iluminada and the pale ones attempt to create a “narración transitoria” ‘temporary narration’ (96) that is opposed to the literature of the official discourse. In fact, L. Iluminada turns her back on official literature, thus suggesting that each individual, each community or social group (both higher and lower social classes), constitutes a narration in historical process, a transient narration, even during dictatorship in Chile. Eltit resorts to the postmodern idea of Lyotard who affirms that the great narrative discourses, such as the novel, have disappeared, and that only small narratives, such as those of L. Iluminada and the pale ones, are left. L. Iluminada and the pale ones have “deseos de ficción” ‘they crave fiction’ (96), in other words, they want to narrate by themselves because, as Eltit states, they have not hitherto been portrayed by any sort of fiction; there is not even a “literatura que los haya retratado en todo su inconmesurabilidad” ‘literature that has portrayed them in their entire incommensurability’ (97). Thus, “Mirada y texto, cuerpo y mente se refrotan. Se abre así la novela, surgen los personajes, se los lee bajo la iluminación de la plaza” ‘Gaze and text, body and mind rub together. The novel opens and characters appear, they are read under the lighting of the square’ (97). If L. Iluminada could write texts, she would clarify history and write in different languages, in particular, marginal languages: Aymará, Mapuche and Quechua, and her text would not fall under the category of a specific standard literary genre, but rather, “traspasaría géneros caballería/ pastoril/ picaresca/ folletín/juglaría/...” ‘would go beyond genres chivalry/ pastoral/ picaresque/ serial story/ minstrelsy’ (100-01).

In part five, L. Iluminada writes on the ground of the public square the question “¿Dónde vas?” ‘Where are you going?’ (163-64) with a piece of chalk. This question, in my opinion, refers to the larger dilemma of women writers concerning their place in the dominant discourse. At the same time, this action has another signification because the pale ones erase these words in order to rewrite them later with the help of L. Iluminada. This is an action of solidarity and union, I maintain, that shows that the marginal group does not want to be written by another marginal body, preferring, instead, to write itself. Eltit seems to concur with Spivak’s theory about the subaltern subject (see *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: toward a History of the Vanishing Present*). In the novel, L. Iluminada does not want to fall into the trap of patronizing and colonizing the pale ones and she lets them write on the ground of the public square as well.

The last part of the novel is the only section that looks more like traditional narrative. The narrative voice describes everything that the eyes of L. Iluminada see from the public square: people, buildings, and lights. L. Iluminada looks at the electric neon light and realizes that it has been created to subdue her; she then asks herself about her identity and wonders whether the neon light has also created her: “Ella en el medio del artificio tal vez tampoco era real” ‘In the middle of the artifice maybe she was not real either’ (191) and she asks herself “A ella, ¿quién la contemplaba?” ‘Who was contemplating her?’ (191). L. Iluminada thinks she is “lo que el espacio había construido a partir de su permanencia, lo que el luminoso le había donado al meterle ideas en la cabeza de tanta letra que le había tirado sobre los ojos” ‘what space had built from her permanence, what the neon light had donated her by getting ideas into her head because of so many letters that the neon light had thrown over her eyes’ (191). No matter the

direction or position that L. Iluminada may take at the public square, the neon light will always shed light on her. Then, she takes a mirror, looks at herself in it, seizes a pair of scissors, and cuts her hair. Then I conclude that, although the neon light continues shedding light on L. Iluminada, she subverts the dominant system by manipulating her body in a public space, and not in the closed space of the home, to which she has been consigned. Yet she knows that, as Castro-Klarén has said, “aislarse no [resuelve] el problema” ‘to isolate oneself does not solve the problem’ (197). Eltit concurs with Castro-Klarén’s statement because the protagonist of *Lumpérica* does the opposite, that is, she goes outside to the public square and challenges the official discourse. Unlike previous women writers, such as María Luisa Bombal,¹³ Eltit searches for the clarification of the subject’s condition, the female subject in particular, and its relations with the social environment (198).

With *Lumpérica*, Diamela Eltit enriches Chilean narrative by women and Latin American women’s narrative in general. Eltit writes about fragmented bodies in a fragmented text with a fragmented language, thus breaking away from the traditional novelistic genre. In order to distance herself from canonical models, Eltit introduces visual and performative arts (an influence that comes from her contribution to CADA during the first years of Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile) following the tenets of neo-baroque aesthetics. In addition, the visual and performative arts are permeated with an eroticism that celebrates the female body. The presence of the protagonist at the public square, together with her repeated acts of self-violence and self-destruction, legitimate her performance and, ultimately, reaffirm her identity as a marginalized woman. Through this performance, the protagonist also comes to question the validity of patriarchal

institutions and the legitimacy of Pinochet's dictatorship. Parallel to the female protagonist's performance in the public square is the symbiotic integration of performance and language in an attempt to create a new fiction or discourse that is distinct from the official one established by the political regime. In this symbiosis, Eltit takes institutionalized elements, such as religion and traditional literary forms, and presents them in a subversive manner. Eltit utilizes the aesthetics of el frote that rubs together the official and the non-official, the canonical and the marginal. In addition, as we have seen, the metaphor of el frote also contains a sexual dimension, one that empowers women. Eltit takes elements of erotic discourse—such as sexual desire, the gaze, the body, and bodily violence—and utilizes them in an innovative, politically charged way. Her primary innovation consists of showing that the erotic is not external to us but deeply subjective and ambiguous, and it is open to many possible interpretations. In her novel, Eltit creates a circular movement that includes the marginal, that is, she presents a collective subject that repeatedly destroys itself (through self-inflicted violence) in order to recreate itself later. Eltit's female subject in *Lumpérica* includes the marginalized collective in itself and so, is able to cross the borders between the different marginalized groups (women and lumpen) and thus produce an effect that is both personally and politically liberating.

Diamela Eltit, like Denser, employs the female body and sexuality to make a sociopolitical statement. Despite this common goal, Eltit has a particular way of utilizing the bodily expression of erotic desire. Like in the protagonist of *Animal dos motéis*, the body of L. Iluminada becomes the erotic arena in which to fight against institutions of repression such as Pinochet's. The newness in *Lumpérica* is that she introduces the erotic

discourse through the visual and performing arts and linguistic and narrative experimentation. For example, one observes how Eltit takes everyday-life elements, such as a woman, the night, and the public square, and transforms them into metaphors of resistance that simultaneously have undertones of domination. To bring this chapter to a close, I want to highlight that in *Lumpérica* the female character's bodily performance (such as her self-destruction) signifies that L. Iluminada is re-constructing the identity she wants to have, as opposed to the identity others want her to have. However, the formation of a new identity necessarily implies a new language to define it. For this reason, L. Iluminada struggles to create a new language, which is a language of resistance. In other words, this new and different language is the language that, distinct from the official one, Chilean women—and the marginal groups of Chilean society—need in order to verbalize the new reality that followed Pinochet's military takeover in 1973. I also need to emphasize another element that is unique to *Lumpérica*: the metaphor of el frote employed by Eltit. Through this metaphor, Eltit emphasizes the resistance of the language L. Iluminada seeks to create (a resistance against the official discourse) and underscores the transforming power of female sexuality. At the same time, this metaphor extends to the candid political content of the novel and for this reason I have argued throughout this chapter that eroticism in *Lumpérica* is intentionally related to politics. In her novel, Eltit explores the subtle connection between the subject's carnal desires and political expression only to reveal that by validating women's erotic desires, women legitimize their participation in the ideological and political world. Like the authors studied in chapters one and two, Cristina Peri Rossi similarly utilizes the erotic discourse in *Solitario de amor* as a way of achieving the individual's self-fulfillment and recognition

within new formulations of social bodies. In the next chapter I will examine how by connecting the act of writing, eroticism, and imagination, Peri Rossi seeks both society and the individual's recognition of his or her social and thus sexual identities.

¹ Felipa de Souza was a sixteenth-century woman who wrote to her female lover and caused her arrest by the Inquisition (*Gender, Discourse, and Desire*, 1).

² The titles that Orozco Vera includes are *Relación de las singulares misericordias que el Señor ha usado con una religiosa indigna esposa suya* (1708), by Sor Úrsula Suárez, *Relación de la inundación que hizo el río Mapocho en la ciudad de Santiago* (1783), by Sor Tadea García de la Huerta, and *El canto fúnebre a la muerte de don Diego Portales* (1837), by Mercedes Marín de Solar.

³ It was not until the 1880s that the first female lawyers and physicians graduated from the University of Chile.

⁴ Literary magazines play a crucial role in the development of women's literature in Chile and I will discuss this topic later in this chapter.

⁵ Berta López Morales describes these ingredients in the following manner: "un villorrio perdido en la montaña, una muchacha campesina burlada por un don Juan rural, la dureza de la vida del campo sometida a la crueldad y omnipotencia del latifundista y sus esbirros y, finalmente, los esfuerzos inútiles de la protagonista, por construirse una vida digna, ahogados por las pasiones primarias de una sociedad patriarcal, machista y desigual" 'a village lost in the mountain, a peasant girl tricked by a rural don Juan, the hardness of rural life subjected to the cruelty and omnipotence of the owner and his bailiffs and, finally, the protagonist's useless efforts for building a dignified life, drowned by the instinct passions of a unequal, chauvinist, patriarchal society' ("Presentación de su obra," par. 1).

⁶ For instance, women were granted the right to vote and be elected in 1949 in Chile.

⁷ CADA had a short life from 1979 to 1985.

⁸ Lumpen is a masculine gendered word, that is, we say el lumpen, but not la lumpen.

⁹ I write "their/her future" in my translation because the original su futuro is ambiguous. The possessive article su may refer to the pale ones or to L. Iluminada.

¹⁰ These are my words.

¹¹ However, L. Iluminada sometimes walks to the periphery of the public square where the pale ones loiter; for example, she goes near the pale ones when they build a fire to warm themselves during the cold night of Santiago.

¹² When I say various perspectives, I refer to the fact that the interrogated person gives his perspective about L. Iluminada's being at the center of the public square, while the interrogator also offers his viewpoint.

¹³ Castro-Klarén observes that Josefina Ludmer's study of both las tretas del débil and disguise technique of Sor Juana and María Luisa Bombal respectively is a fundamental piece of critique regarding women's literature in Latin America.

CHAPTER IV

THE EROTIC IMAGINATION IN *SOLITARIO DE AMOR*

Cristina Peri Rossi and Women in Uruguay

Women's struggle to gain recognition in the traditional literary canon is a recurrent topic in the cultural history of most Latin American countries, and when we turn our eyes to women's literature in Uruguay, we see that there are both similarities and differences with respect to the situations in Brazil and Chile. In Uruguayan literary history women's writing has tended to be relegated to the margins. There are only a few women writers whose works have been recognized both inside and outside the national borders. A characteristic feature of the development of women's literature in Uruguay, however, is explained by Renée Scott, who maintains that historical facts such as the democratic tradition and the middle class's continuous promotion of literary production, contributed to the early emergence and development of a female literary tradition (5). In addition, the fact that women's writing has been studied by well-known Uruguayan male critics such as Alberto Zum Felde and Ángel Rama has helped Uruguayan women writers to be recognized in the international Hispanic literary canon.

Such is the case of Delmira Agustini, whose literary production is regularly included in anthologies of Spanish American literature, together with her contemporary, Argentine writer Alfonsina Storni. Therefore, Scott concludes, "la situación de las mujeres uruguayas no ha sido demasiado diferente a las del resto en el mundo hispano" 'Uruguayan women's situation has not been too much different from the rest in the

Hispanic world' (5). Scott explains that in Uruguay women endured a slow process of acceptance and recognition in the field of cultural and artistic labor and that they struggled not only to gain access to publishing houses but also to enter into artistic communities that are sometimes as essential to the enrichment of the artist as publishing houses are. Despite attaining access to publishers, women authors such as Delmira Agustini and Eugenia Vaz Ferreira were excluded from "cenáculos literarios," or literary coteries, and were denied entrance into the literary gatherings of the influential Polo Bamba café (Scott 6). According to Scott, the problem was that these women were not treated as writers but as women writers, that is, they were first women and then writers (5-6).

Nevertheless, Uruguayan women authors enjoyed a relatively favorable intellectual and artistic environment. The most salient authors consecrated by the Uruguayan literary canon are poets Delmira Agustini and Juana de Ibarbourou, and prose writers Armonía Somers and Cristina Peri Rossi. Despite writing at different times and representing different literary trends and genres, a common interest in female sexuality links these authors together because, I argue, art, imagination, and eroticism are closely linked. The following quote by Peri Rossi justifies this idea:

En la imaginación... un cuerpo se transforma en objeto de deseo, destacándose, sobresaliendo entre los demás, como imantado, como iluminado por las luces y las sombras de la pasión (manía). Lo imaginario, que se constituye como fabulación y representación, es decir, como símbolo metáfora, intenta nombrar lo innombrable (el cuerpo del deseo) y transferir sus emociones al lenguaje, al poema, al cuadro, al cine 'In the imagination... a body becomes an object of desire, standing out, excelling among the others, as if magnetized, as if illuminated by the lights and shadows of passion (mania). The imagined, which is constituted as fable and representation, that is, as symbol metaphor, tries to name what cannot be named (the body of desire) and to transfer its emotions to the language, to the poem, to the picture, to the film.' (*Fantasías eróticas*, 46)

In other words, Peri Rossi argues that the erotic is intrinsically attached to the writing of fiction and that it is another manifestation of our inner desires, both physical and spiritual, to attain self-awareness and recognition of ourselves as individuals in society.

In general, these authors inscribe a powerful politically suggestive sexual imagery in order to name a woman's sexuality, which had been denied by restrictive societal constructs of their times. One should not fail to notice that sexual taboos numbered among other political and social limitations inflicted upon women in Uruguay. Critics such as Scott point to the fact that literary production in Uruguay (by both men and women), which had been unceasingly rich and diverse during the first half of the twentieth century, experienced a series of changes from 1955 onwards, when the nationwide sociopolitical crisis worsened. Then, Uruguayan literature went from "una producción literaria singularizada por sus múltiples temas, así como por sus estilos diversos ... a una literatura de denuncia" 'a literary production characterized by its multiple themes, as well as by its diverse styles ... to a literature of denouncement' (Scott 7), a sort of literature to which scholar Ángel Rama refers with the term "Generación de la Acción" 'Generation of Action' (7). Women also participated in this type of literature with writers Peri Rossi and Teresa Porzencanski figuring prominently among them and who "testimonian la situación de la patria" 'give testimony of the situation of the country' (Scott 7) through diverse styles and perspectives. However, the military coup d'état of 1973 stopped this type of literature since the regime repressed and censored any sort of dissident artistic manifestation. Scott explains that according to Jorge Ruffinelli, "durante este período no apareció en el país ningún texto que se refiriera a la realidad

política y que muchos autores e intelectuales optaron por no escribir sobre la situación ni tampoco colaborar con el régimen” ‘during this period no text appeared that referred to the political reality in the country and many authors and intellectuals opted for not writing about the situation or collaborating with the regime’ (qtd. in Scott: 8). Uruguayan literature, characterized by its variety and richness, underwent a period of recession which was a direct cause of the censorship and restrictions of a dictatorship that was initiated by Juan María Bordaberry in 1973. The twelve years that the dictatorship lasted were marked by a gruesome repression by the military government of any type of political expression, in particular the manifestation of leftist ideas. Many intellectuals were obliged to leave the country and condemned the regime and its leaders from abroad.

The case of Peri Rossi, who was among those intellectuals, was unique though because she was a lesbian writer and activist who sympathized with dissenting political ideas. Despite the difficulties of exile, Uruguayan intellectuals who went to live in countries with more liberal governments benefited, literarily, “con un enriquecimiento de referentes, temas y espacios” ‘with an enrichment of referents, themes, and spaces’ (Scott 8). In 1985, when democracy was established again, the process of “desexilio”¹ (Scott 8) began, a concept that writer Mario Benedetti coined, with the creation of a new national literature as the main goal, a national literature that would reflect and testify to the new sociopolitical context. According to Scott, this meant the beginning of a new age in the production of women’s literature; the domestic spaces assigned to women were reconsidered (for example, *La casa de enfrente* by Alicia Migdal and *Casa vacía* by Mercedes Rein), traditional male roles were subverted, and new roles that expressed women’s experiences were suggested (for example, *Novela erótica* by Teresa

Porzecanski), and a new approach was applied to traditional children's tales—narratives that have traditionally perpetuated conventional gender-based social roles (for example, *Y no fueron felices* by Andrea Blanqué) (8).

The emergence of literary production by women in the eighties also meant the continuation of a sort of literature that had been somewhat stagnant because of the historical circumstances created by both the sociopolitical crisis previous to the dictatorship and the eventual establishment of the military regime. I am referring to erotic literature in Uruguay which, according to Graciela Mántaras Loedel, is scarce (30). Loedel explains that the reason for this shortage is the fact that Uruguay has always been a country of “una sociedad mesocrática, pequeño-burguesa, conservadora y estancada” ‘a mesocratic, bourgeois, conservative, and stagnant society’ (31). Nevertheless, Loedel affirms the existence of an erotic literature tradition with Delmira Agustini as the most salient representative. The cultural development of the country experienced a period of stagnation beginning in 1920 that was also reflected in the production of erotic literature (Loedel 32). According to Loedel, there occurred a change of direction in erotic aesthetics and poet Juana de Ibarbourou exemplifies best this change (32). Loedel argues that Ibarbourou's eroticism is linked to “naturaleza, a la sensualidad gozosa, a la dicha asequible y cotidiana” ‘nature, to joyful sensuality, to accessible and daily happiness’ (32). Loedel explains that this eroticism does not transgress but, rather, simply celebrates women's sexuality; in other words, the woman does not change her role in the heterosexual relationship that tradition has assigned to her, and she is still men's object of desire. Years earlier, though, her contemporary Delmira Agustini had made men the

object of erotic desire in her poems (Loedel 32). It will not be until a few decades later, during the seventies and eighties, that erotic literature will see itself revitalized.

That new erotic expression, of which Cristina Peri Rossi is one of its representatives, was subversive and liberating (Loedel 33), and aimed to examine the personal dilemmas of women living in a new era. In fact, I argue that the erotic is an essential component of the cultural life of a nation and that it evolves side by side with the mores of conventional life. To support my argument, I will use Loedel's ideas on eroticism and culture because they complement those of Peri Rossi. Loedel argues that "El Erotismo es humano y cultural" 'eroticism is human and cultural' (35), and that it brings a series of factors together which are "la dotación instintiva del animal zoológico, el aprendizaje de la cultura a que pertenece y que lo ha hecho humanizado, y la posibilidad ejercida de la libertad del individuo" 'the instinctive endowment of the zoological animal, the learning of culture to which it belongs and that has made humanized it, and the exerted possibility of the individual's liberty' (35). Thus, for Loedel, the erotic experience makes human beings "Sentirse-vivirse-saberse animal, humano y persona a la vez" 'feel, live, recognize themselves as animal, human and person at the same time' (35). This spiritual aspect that Loedel emphasizes in her definition of eroticism is what differentiates it from pornography because, according to her, the latter is only based on the biological functions of the human body (34). In addition, Peri Rossi argues that eroticism contains an aesthetics that differentiates it from the "acts of cruelty, humiliation, and degradation" (Geisdorfer Feal 217) that pornography entails.

In her book *Fantasías eróticas* (1991), Peri Rossi also associates eroticism to the idea of culture and, ultimately, to the idea of art. If one understands the concept of culture as the process of elaboration and transformation of the instinct then, Peri Rossi affirms, eroticism is “el triunfo de la cultura sobre el instinto” ‘the triumph of culture over instinct’ (39). In other words, Peri Rossi connects eroticism with the spirit’s imagination and creation as opposed to “puro instinto, brutal, indeterminado y generalmente torpe” ‘pure instinct, brutal, indeterminate and generally clumsy’ (40). Thus, she concludes that “El erotismo es ... una actividad cultural, la satisfacción elaborada de una necesidad instintiva” ‘eroticism is a cultural activity, the elaborated satisfaction of an instinctive necessity’ (41), and that eroticism, like art, transforms the monotony of reality. For this reason, the author affirms that “en el arte hay que buscar el erotismo” ‘one should look for eroticism in art’ (44) because art transforms the coldness of reality. In my opinion, Peri Rossi is connecting the imagination, and thus the writing of fiction, with eroticism and she is complementing Cixous’s theory of *l’écriture féminine* where the latter emphasized the need to incorporate sexuality and the body into the act of writing in both women and men.

In order to argue that sex becomes culture, Peri Rossi utilizes the ideas of French scholar Georges Bataille: “La actividad sexual es común a los hombres y a los animales, pero sólo aquellos hicieron de la sexualidad una actividad erótica, es decir, una investigación o búsqueda psicológica independiente del fin natural de la reproducción” ‘sexual activity is common to men and animals, but only the former transformed sexuality into an erotic activity, that is, a psychological investigation or search independent from the natural goal of procreation’ (49-50). Therefore, one concludes that,

for Peri Rossi, eroticism and art (or any sort of artistic manifestation) have the same goals: the search for an object of desire that expresses one's self. The writer, for example, may find it in the book she or he writes; the painter, in the painting she or he sketches; and the common person, in her or his sexual fantasies. Eroticism, then, functions as part of our most inner self and manifests itself differently in every person. Because eroticism is intensely subjective, Peri Rossi affirms, "tiene un lugar preferente en el arte y en la literatura, que son los espacios de configuración de los sueños, de los deseos reprimidos, de las fantasías irracionales ... Difícilmente puede haber arte sin una manifestación particular de erotismo" 'it has a preferred place in art and literature, which are spaces of configuration of dreams, of repressed desires, of irrational fantasies ... It is difficult to have art without a particular manifestation of eroticism' (52-53). The novel *Solitario de amor* exemplifies the type of writing that Peri Rossi vindicates, that is, a writing that connects representation, imagination, and eroticism, and through this connection, the writing seeks both society's and the individual's recognition of his or her social, and thus sexual, identities.

Eroticism, Imagination, and Writing in Cristina Peri Rossi's *Solitary of Love*

The first thing that catches the reader's attention is the non-traditional narrative structure of *Solitario de amor*. At first, the novel seems to lack organization but, when the reader advances into it, she or he may realize that the text is carefully organized into a number of fragments of memories in the male narrator-protagonist's mind. Each section of the novel narrates a recalled moment in the narrator's life, and these moments belong to a particular period of his life, the months during which his love relationship with a

woman named Aída (who is the female protagonist in the novel) lasted. As we read the various sections, we follow the narrator's stream of consciousness and it seems that there is no logical connection among the fragments of narrative—each one tells us about a specific aspect of Aída, such as her daily habits, her language, and her body. After reading carefully, however, we notice that everything in the novel is united through objects, words, and occurrences that collectively comprise his relationship with Aída. Only the male protagonist understands these associations since he is the solitary narrator of his lonely love story.

The novel begins with a feeling of estrangement because of the sudden introduction of one of the main characters. The first word we read is “Aída” (7) which indicates that she will be the focus of the novel. In fact, Aída holds a position of superiority in the novel compared to those of the other two male characters, the narrator and Raúl, the psychiatrist. The narrative voice is that of a man who is in love with Aída, and whose feelings for her go beyond the sentiment of love, that is, he is absolutely obsessed with her. The narrator, whose name is never revealed—thus insinuating the identity crisis he suffers—talks about the phone calls Aída receives from an unknown person and compares his obsession for Aída with that of the unknown caller. He admits that he could be the same anonymous man who calls Aída on the phone, for he could also “marcar su número, tembloroso, y esperar con ansiedad el sonido de su voz” ‘dial her number, trembling, and wait with anxiety for the sound of her voice’ (7). Aída rejects the unknown caller, calls him a coward for not being able to speak, and concludes that those calls are probably not romantic: “Seguramente no es nada lírico lo que me propone” ‘surely what he proposes to me is not lyrical’ (8). According to the narrator, who thinks

those phone calls are romantic, Aída does not believe in anybody's lyricism, not even his. We notice that the narrator is depicting an Aída who is cold-blooded and unable to love, although she may not really be like that. The reason is that the narrative is written from the perspective of a man who loves but whose love is not reciprocated. It seems that we have in front of us another traditional narrative in which a male narrator writes about a woman from his viewpoint alone. Nevertheless, Peri Rossi quickly goes beyond this sort of narrative and we will see how in the following pages.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator confesses the type of love to which he is condemned, that is, his love for Aída is a solitary one because she does not love him any more. He explains that Aída “no puede creer en el lirismo de nadie. Ni en el mío. De modo que estoy condenado a vivirlo en soledad” ‘cannot believe in anybody's lyricism. Neither in mine. And so I am condemned to live it in solitude’ (8). This is the first of many references to solitude in the novel because that is the nature of the narrator's situation as well as of his relationship and love for Aída. Thus, the rest of the novel will tell the story of a solitary love and a solitary man, the story of “un loco, un lírico solitario” ‘a mad person, a lyrical, solitary man’ (8). The solitary nature of the narrator's love is due to Aída's lack of love for him and the lack of communication between them. Communication is a crucial element for the foundation of a love relationship between two human beings. It is fundamental that the two people know each other's needs, feelings, desires, and aversions. Because there is not enough intimacy and trust, communication does not figure in the relationship between Aída and the narrator. For example, the narrator affirms that he would be embarrassed to tell Aída his most intimate fantasies: “Tendría vergüenza, no de haberlas concebido, sino de habértelas confesado” ‘I would be

embarrassed not of having conceived them [the fantasies] but of having confessed them to you' (9).

The lack of communication and understanding between Aída and the narrator is also present in their daily conversations. Aída hears the narrator speak but she does not listen to him; they both are so immersed in their selves and their thoughts that they do not really pay attention to each other, or rather, the narrator portrays an Aída who is totally self-centered and who does not care for him. Some of the conversations they maintain are incoherent because they simply say the last thought they have in mind. In one occasion, the narrator says: “No me gustan las águilas” ‘I don’t like eagles’ (9), and Aída answers: “Tengo que poner la ropa en la máquina, preparar el desayuno del niño y hacer las compras” ‘I have to load the washer, fix the child’s breakfast, and do the grocery shopping’ (9). This incoherence in their conversations suggests that both are in totally different and distant spaces which, to a certain extent, is true because, as the narrator declares, “el amor me traslada, me transporta, me separa de las cosas. Vago, viajero perdido. No podría decir cuándo ha comenzado el placer ni cuándo ha terminado” ‘love transfers me, transports me, separates me from things. I wander, a lost traveler. I would not be able to say when pleasure has begun nor when it has ended’ (10). This uncertainty is transferred to the reader who cannot discern the time of the narration, and so the reader asks him or herself: is the protagonist narrating the text at the same time of his relationship with Aída, or is he narrating what he remembers about their relationship? As I mentioned earlier, the narrator is recalling moments of his past life with Aída, who has already broken up with him, and in doing this he is retelling what his life was like when they were together. We notice that throughout the novel the narrator asks rhetorical

questions about their relationship. Aída answers those questions although they are not directly addressed to her because communication between the two does not exist and because they are not together anymore. In reality Aída's answers are remembrances, pieces of conversations with Aída that the narrator remembers, or simply the narrator's imagining the replies Aída would have given to those questions.

The narrator's obsession for Aída also extends to an obsession for her body. In this novel, Peri Rossi utilizes the love imagery characteristic of traditionally male-oriented discourse in order to subvert it. In her novel, Peri Rossi makes this traditional love discourse be part of the male narrative voice as well, but it now focuses on the woman's body in a more biological manner so that the woman's body is idealized not only as an object of desire and beauty, but also as a subject and as a sentient human being. The woman is now a person with limbs, internal organs, and physiological needs. Peri Rossi utilizes the technique of defamiliarization in order to parody and subvert the traditional and patriarchal erotic discourse that centers on the male figure. At first, the description of Aída's body by the narrator follows the traditional pattern, though later it turns into a biological, laboratory-like study. In this way, Peri Rossi ironically eliminates any residues of the male narrative tradition. In other words, the woman's body, which had been idealized by the male imagination to a state of absolute perfection and purity, becomes now a human subject, with blood, viscera, and a need for sexual satisfaction. The following passage describes the change of tone in the narrator's description of Aída's body. At the beginning, the description evinces a Renaissance painting of a woman at the moment of putting her sandals on:

Aída en el acto de calzarse una sandalia, levemente inclinada hacia abajo, dándome la espalda, los muslos gemelos apenas separados por una breve línea

(más oscura), la columna vertebral arqueada con suavidad, la línea casi recta de los hombros, la cavidad a ambos lados del cuello... Aída no tiene cintura, y eso da a su cuerpo una extraordinaria armonía: no hay cortes abruptos, no hay entradas y salidas, sólo una leve inclinación del vientre ‘Aída, in the act of putting on a sandal, inclined slightly downward, with her back towards me, the twin thighs hardly separated by a short line (darker), the spinal column smoothly bowed, the almost straight line of the shoulders, the cavity on both sides of the neck ... Aída does not have a waist, and that gives her body an extraordinary harmony: there are no abrupt cuts, there are no entrances and exits, only a slight hilt to the belly.’ (10-11)

Then, the narrator gets closer and literally enters into the interior of her body:

pego mi oreja contra su superficie y procuro escuchar el rumor de sus vísceras: el lento bullir del hígado, las imperceptibles contracciones del píloro, las vibraciones del colon, clepsidra invisible, el lento ronroneo de la vesícula—tortuga hundida en el aljibe—, las maquinaciones del estómago y el bostezo de los intestinos ‘I place my ear on its surface (the belly) and try to hear the rumor of its viscera: the slow boiling of the liver, the indiscernible contractions of the pylorus, the vibrations of the colon, invisible clepsydra, the slow purring of the vesicle—a tortoise sunken in the water tank—, the machinations of the stomach and the yawning of the bowels.’ (11)

The narrator is in love with the physical entity of Aída and he loves her not only in terms of the traditional female ideal (as an object of beauty and pleasure) but also in terms of her body. His love for her body is an obsession and his eyes inevitably follow it; the narrator describes his gaze, in fact, as a hypnotized gaze, a “perruna, hambrienta, pasiva y paciente” ‘canine, hungry, passive and patient’ (12) gaze. Aída is not conscious of his love and obsession, and neither is she aware of the spell she has cast on him. For this reason, the narrator insists, he is obliged to live this passion in “angustiosa soledad” ‘agonizing solitude’ (12).

The narrator’s solitude affects all the coordinates of his life, in particular the notion of time. Time does not exist for this man in love and neither does he for time, that is, the protagonist feels he moves around the world in a different orbit because his time is measured in terms of Aída. The narrator’s denial of his temporal dimension produces a

loss of identity because human beings exist in a particular time. Only space exists for him; space is his only dimension because their bodies, his and Aída's, occupy a space and from there the narrator devotes himself to “contemplación estática” ‘static contemplation’ (12). The narrator contemplates Aída not only with his eyes but also with every single part of his body. For example, the narrator states that: “Los poros te miran, te miran las venas, las arterias y las cavidades” ‘the pores look at you, the veins look at you, the arteries and the cavities (look at you)’ (12). His entire body is dedicated to the contemplation of another body, Aída's.

In *Solitario de amor*, space is the only measurement for the narrator. It is, moreover, quite a particular space—one involving Aída's physical and spiritual presence. The physical space is Aída's apartment and the spiritual space is Aída's love (when she loved him). Every time the narrator exits Aída's house, he feels extraneous in the exterior world because he only feels secure, protected, and aware within the space that belongs to Aída. When he goes out to the streets, everything becomes unknown and he does not recognize even familiar objects such as cars and excavators. Instead, the narrator describes these objects in the following manner (like if he lacked vocabulary): “Crujientes ortópteros con ruedas y bocinas atraviesan, enloquecidos, las largas avenidas. Trepidantes jeringas perforan espasmódicamente el suelo, cavan fosos” ‘crunchy caterpillars with wheels and horns cross, crazed, the long avenues. Vibrating syringes perforate the ground spasmodically, they dig ditches’ (13). Fajardo Valenzuela argues that “el desprendimiento de la cotidianidad que experimenta el “yo” ocasiona y se manifiesta a través de una defamiliarización del lenguaje” ‘the disjunction of the “self” causes and manifests itself through a defamiliarization with language’ (193). Indeed, the

narrator cannot call the objects by their names but, rather, can only describe them. Therefore, the author associates the space of the woman with language. When he is with Aída, he knows language but, by himself, he loses his linguistic independence and his capacity to survive in a world where names show the essence and identity of objects and subjects.

At the same time, Peri Rossi compares the narrator's going outside to the streets with the birth of a child (in this case, the narrator's birth) because when we are born, we do not yet know language. In addition, it is not a peaceful birth but a violent and vibrant one, and the narrator describes the "birth" in this fashion:

Nazco violentamente al sol y al ruido. Nazco entre residuos y ronquidos. La vida bulle, grasienta, maloliente, sonora... Nazco y de inmediato soy expulsado a una isla de hormigón y de cemento, rugiente, hormiguero bárbaro. Destetado desamiado pronto, soy el huérfano de Aída en un mundo que no conozco y que me hiere con su luz violenta, con su precipitación y su ruido 'I am born violently into the sun and noise. I am born among residues and snores. Life boils, greasy, smelly, noisy ... I am born and I am immediately expelled to an island of concrete and cement, a roaring, barbarous anthill. Weaned too soon, I am Aída's orphan in a world that I do not know and that hurts me with its violent light, with its suddenness and its noise.' (13)

In my opinion, there is probably a hidden Christian image between the lines in this passage. I maintain that Peri Rossi is playing with the Christian belief about Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise and offering a new twist to the interpretation of this myth. For her, the man is expelled from paradise which is, ultimately, Aída's body. Therefore, Peri Rossi suggests that men are born from women in more extended terms than the biological ones (since all human beings are born from women). Outside Aída's bodily Eden, the narrator wanders with no course; he is a "viajero extraviado en una tierra colonizada por otros" 'lost traveler in a land colonized by others' (13). At this moment, he arrives at the core of his problems and declares: "he perdido la identidad" 'I have lost

my identity' (13). By asserting this loss of identity, Peri Rossi suggests that man's identity cannot be complete without woman.

Right after the narrator identifies the core of his crisis, a new character, Raúl, is introduced into the novel. He is the psychiatrist who is treating the narrator out of the depression that Aída's abandonment has caused him. According to Fajardo Valenzuela, Raúl functions as a sort of alter ego, or even as a mirror, and is always reinforcing the narrator's viewpoint (192). Raúl tells him that in order to forget Aída, he needs to start a new daily routine because "Si se consigue ordenar los actos, día a día, posiblemente se organice la estructura interior" 'if one can organize the acts, day by day, one can probably organize the interior structure' (13). However, any attempt to forget Aída is futile because the simplest daily activity, such as taking a shower in the morning, reminds him of her. The act of taking a shower, in fact, reminds him of the times he used to see Aída getting out of the shower naked. The image of Aída's naked body thus provides the narrator with the language he needs to narrate; his words, in a sense, are born from Aída's body. In other words, the rebirth of the narrator is accompanied by the rebirth of language, a language that has always existed but that is revitalized only now. The male narrator of the novel does the type of writing Cixous declares that women must do, that is, the writing of the body (Cixous, however, also affirms that this type of writing is not unique to women and that it can also be done by male writers and narrators). At the same time, I maintain that Peri Rossi actually extends Cixous's argument in that, while Cixous states that women should write with their bodies, the female protagonist of *Solitario de amor* gives birth to the words with which the male narrator will write her body. The

words that emerge from naked Aída when she gets out of the shower have the same quality as her body:

Entonces las palabras, las viejas palabras de toda la vida, aparecen, súbitamente ellas también desnudas, frescas, resplandecientes, crudas, con toda su potencia, con todo su peso, desprendidas del uso, en toda su pureza, como si se hubieran bañado en una fuente primigenia. Como si Aída las hubiera parido entre los dientes, y una vez rota la tela de los labios—bolsa prenatal—estallaran, rojas, imberbes, iguales a sí mismas” ‘then the words, the same old lifelong words, suddenly appear, also naked, fresh, shining, raw, with all their power, with all their weight, detached from the use, in all their purity, as if they had bathed in a primitive fountain. As if Aída had given birth to them between her teeth, and once the lips’ fabric is broken—prenatal bag—they exploded, red, fresh, equal to them.’ (14-15)

This revitalization of language also means a renewal of the narrator and his use and understanding of language, since he explains that now he has “una lucidez repentina acerca del lenguaje” ‘a sudden lucidity of language’ (15). For him, the words are now like diamonds that need to be polished because they had been covered by euphemisms for centuries. In fact, the narrator states “Nazco y me despojo de eufemismos” ‘I am born and I discard myself of euphemisms’ (15). In other words, through the male narrator Peri Rossi gives a name to everything that others were afraid to name because patriarchy had judged woman’s body and sexuality to be impure and corrupted. Thus, an inversion in traditional love discourse takes place because the latter tended to describe women from the euphemistic, chaste views of men. With this inversion, however, the narrator loves the woman in a new way, which is described in the following paragraph:

No amo sus olores, amo sus secreciones: el sudor escaso y salado que asoma entre ambos senos; la saliva densa que se instala en sus comisuras, como un pozo de espuma; la sinuosa bilis que vomita cuando está cansada; la oxidada sangre menstrual, con la que dibujo signos cretenses sobre su espalda; el humor transparente de su nariz; la espléndida y sonora orina de caballo que cae como cascada de sus largas y anchas piernas abiertas ‘I do not love her fragrance, I love her secretion: the scarce and salty sweat that pours between both breasts; the dense saliva that sits on her corners, like a well of foam; the sinuous bile that she vomits when she is tired; the rusty blood of her period, with which I draw Cretan

signs on her back; the transparent humor of her nose; the splendid and loud horse-like urine that falls like a water fall from her long and wide opened legs.’ (15)

With this new language, the narrator describes a female body that traditional constraints and taboos had hidden for decades. In other words, the narrator specifies that he does not love Aída’s body in the traditional way but, rather, he loves “su hígado membranoso” ‘her membranous liver,’ “la blanca esclerótica de sus ojos” ‘the white sclerotic of her eyes,’ “el endometrio sangrante” ‘the bloody endometrium,’ “el lóbulo agujereado” ‘the pierced ear lobe,’ “las estrías de las uñas” ‘the groove of the nails,’ the “apéndice intestinal” ‘intestinal appendix,’ “las amígdalas rojas” ‘the red tonsils,’ “el paladar” ‘the palate,’ “las raíces de los dientes” ‘the teeth’s roots,’ “el lunar marrón” ‘the brown mole,’ “los pulmones envenenados por el humo” ‘the lungs poisoned by smoke,’ and “el pequeño clítoris engarzado en la vulva como un faro” ‘the little clitoris encased in the vulva like a lighthouse’ (15-16). At the same time, the narrator affirms that he observes Aída with two types of mirada ‘gaze’: one is the gaze of a common man, a gaze that is “aparente que recorre la superficie” ‘apparent that travels over the surface’ (17) and that is the gaze of the tradition, the gaze that does not see beyond the woman’s external forms. The other type of gaze is “la mirada del ciego, que remite lo mirado a la memoria de la especie” ‘the gaze of the blind man, which remits what is looked to the memory of the species’ (17).

At this moment, the narrator remembers one of their love encounters. With a poetic language, the narrator subtly describes how he excites Aída to orgasm. This orgasmic scene is equated with the moment of Aída’s self-realization as a woman, and it creates a new identity for the woman, who, as a subject, receives sexual pleasure. This is a woman who does not fit into the patriarchal female ideal because she does not offer

sexual pleasure to the man but, in another inversion, receives it openly. For this reason, the narrator describes how he has helped create this new female identity. The following passage describes how the narrator excites Aída to the orgasm:

Entonces, con la delicadeza y la sabiduría del manipulador de violines, mis dedos, de lejos, comienzan la operación de acercarse, mis dedos, que antes he limpiado y frotado con crema, descienden, y oprimiendo tus pezones los torneo, los ajusto, los ciño a la arandela de los pechos. Soy el torneador de senos, el violinista que ajusta las clavijas antes de escuchar, anheloso, de tu boca entreabierta, de tu boca húmeda con lagunas de saliva, el primer sonido, la nota arrancada de tu garganta, ulular de ballena en alta mar, el son inaudito, el grito cósmico 'then, with the delicacy and knowledge of the violin manipulator, my fingers, from afar, begin the act of approaching, my fingers, which I have first cleaned and rubbed with lotion, descend, and pressing your nipples I turn them, I adjust them, I gird them to the socket of the breasts. I am the turner of breasts, the violinist who adjusts the dowels before listening, eagerly, from your half-open mouth, from your humid mouth with lagoons of saliva, the first sound, the note torn off from your throat, the ululating of a whale in the open sea, the extraordinary sound, the cosmic scream.' (19-20)

When the narrator mentions the scream, he inscribes the climatic moment of Aída's orgasm. This scream confirms that Aída has a new sexual identity, and, unlike the repressed woman who was formerly seen as a mere object of beauty and provider of sexual pleasure for men, Aída is now a woman free to enjoy for herself the fruits of a more equitable sexual relationship. While narratives written by men tend to portray the patriarchal ideal of the submissive woman, in this novel the man is the provider of pleasure and the woman is the receiver of it. The solitude that exists in every love relationship—in *Perto do coração selvagem*, Clarice Lispector dealt with the idea that love is a solitary experience—is transferred from the woman to the man because now the man remains in solitude while the woman receives pleasure.

In connection to Cixous's arguments, the narrator identifies Aída through her body, for the new female identity that Aída now displays can only be articulated by

means of her naked body. The female body is here presented as an entity that needs freedom and the narrator utilizes a beautiful metaphor which identifies Aída's breasts with two women searching for freedom: "Digo que tu camisa es un balcón y que los pezones, curiosos como mujeres, se asoman para mirar hacia afuera, no soportan mucho tiempo la vida de clausura. Tus pezones, dos mujeres encerradas que buscan la luz, el afuera, lo diverso. Y cuando te vistes, es como si las volvieras a encerrar" 'I say that your blouse is a balcony and that the nipples, curious like women, peer to look outside, they do not bear a life of confinement for too long. Your nipples, two locked women who look for the light, the outside, the diverse. And when you wear clothes, it is as if you would lock them up again' (21). For the narrator, the clothes symbolize the repressive Christian chastity that hides the real essence of the woman, her body. Peri Rossi suggests that women should know their bodies, should know their nakedness, and should be proud of them, and she criticizes those women who do not want to recognize their bodies and who are blind to themselves. Therefore, for Peri Rossi, as for Cixous and Lispector, a woman's body is the language with which she communicates with the rest of the world because, as the narrator states, "La plenitud de Aída es su desnudez" 'Aída's plenitude is her nakedness' and "El vestido es la interdicción" 'the dress is the interdiction' (22). This dress, which symbolizes patriarchal discourse, hinders women's diction or discourse; in other words, the dress functions as a damper on women's discourse. Peri Rossi utilizes a male narrator, ironically the type of narrator that traditional patriarchal discourse would expect, in order to affirm women's voice because, as the narrator affirms, men and women love in different languages, though they do so together.

The narrator thus establishes a crucial connection between his identity and his gaze of Aída. As I mentioned above, the narrator recognizes that he is hypnotized by his contemplation of Aída, and that he does not belong to a particular time or space but, rather, he belongs to a specific person, Aída. He compares his situation to that of a man in a museum, a space where different times and spaces live together anachronically. Like the narrator who wishes he had stopped time when he was with Aída, the museum image demonstrates how human beings try to “fijar la transitoriedad de las cosas” ‘to fix the temporary nature of things’ (27). But his main concern is “fijar la mirada” ‘to fix the gaze’ (27), his contemplation of Aída.

I maintain, however, that Peri Rossi is utilizing a feature characteristic of the male imaginary. Traditionally, men have been the subjects who contemplate women and so women become the observed objects. In texts written by women, though, there is a tendency to invert the roles and men have become the objects that women contemplate (for example, the young men that Diana Marini seduces in *Animal dos motéis* are compared, in her mind, to Greek statues). Here, however, the narrator desires to maintain the contemplation of Aída forever but he rejects photographs of her and refuses to evoke her “en los textos clásicos y modernos” ‘in classical and modern texts’ (28). The reason for this is that only by contemplating her will he be able to control her because he will then see in her what he wants. This is the problem in men’s imaginary: men have seen in women only what they want to see, and, in traditional discourse, women have seen themselves through the eyes of men instead of seeing themselves through their own eyes. Although Peri Rossi utilizes the traditional motif of la mirada, she goes further to claim that the man’s identity depends on that contemplation and, ultimately, on an identification

with the woman. The narrator's identity derives from Aída and she makes him realize that he does not love her but rather, he loves his contemplation of her. Aída tells him: "No me amas a mí, amas tu mirada" 'you don't love me, you love your gaze' (28). We sense that the narrator loves his self; he loves the woman he sees in Aída but not the true Aída. The Aída he sees is the culmination of his desires, obsessions, and fantasies, and so is created in terms of his own vision, which then completes him as a man. The narrator slowly becomes aware of the significance of Aída's statement and he concludes the section with a rhetorical question: "¿Hay alguien que haya amado alguna vez otra cosa que no sea su mirada?" 'Is there anybody who has ever loved something that is not his/her gaze?' (28). The answer to this question would be "no" because, when we love somebody, we try to metamorphose the person in accordance with our desires and, ultimately, we try to make the other person similar to us. Love thus becomes a circular process that only leads back to solitude, a problem Clarice Lispector had taken up in 1944.

In the evaluation of his relationship with Aída, the narrator examines her sexual organ and identifies it as "una cerradura" 'a lock' (35). A new wave of images then begins to take the narrator into the primitive state of a child and to place Aída into the role of the mother. Aída's sexual member becomes the lock of a house where the narrator desires to enter, not to satisfy himself sexually but to complete his identity as a man. He finds himself incomplete and lost because his sexual member is just a key and, in another inversion, he feels handicapped at recognizing the physical differences between them two. Everything that is related to Aída's sexual member connotes protection, security, and stability, while everything related to the man's sexual member connotes insecurity,

lack of stability, and loss. When the narrator's sexual member enters into Aída's sex, it becomes an umbilical cord, one that links Aída to the exterior world. Again, Peri Rossi utilizes traditional metaphors in order to invert their meanings. On the one hand, the narrator emphasizes the fact that his key (an object with phallic symbolism) is the only connection between the woman and the exterior world; the narrator, moreover, suggests that the man, when opening the house's door, liberates the woman (that is, a passive woman becomes liberated by the man). However, Peri Rossi actually subverts the signification of this metaphor because the umbilical cord is not permanent. In fact, it is the first thing that should be cut after giving birth. Then, when the woman cuts the umbilical cord, she becomes active and liberates herself. The woman is taking action and control and, for this reason, the narrator affirms that men are "condenados a este solo ligamen" 'condemned to this single ligament' (39), men are condemned to not have control since only women will cut the umbilical cord. In this way, the narrator emphasizes once again men's dependence on women. Peri Rossi sets up a characteristically patriarchal image of the woman when the narrator affirms that women never stop being mothers, a role that, together with the role of wife, has traditionally been imposed on women, but then she undercuts it. At the same time, however, Peri Rossi gives another twist to the signification of this traditional female role; in fact, I maintain that Peri Rossi expands Cixous's theory when the narrator speaks of the need to feed from the mother's milk. Cixous proposes that women should write with their bodies, with the white ink of their bodies, that is, with their milk. For Peri Rossi, the milk also has the function of nourishing men, and thus, the milk—symbolizing woman's body in general—becomes essential in the formation of men's identity.

Repetition is a technique that Peri Rossi also utilizes in this novel in order to emphasize the narrator's crisis of identity. Throughout the text, the narrator continuously insists on remaining oblivious to the passing of time. He cannot distinguish the seasons because he has lost his ability to sense changes in the weather because these sensations are weighted in terms of his relationship with Aída, who is, for him, "la dispensadora del frío o del calor" 'the dispenser of cold and heat' (55). The narrator's isolation is spatial, temporal, and even linguistic because, when he is without Aída, he has problems with communicating with others. He cannot understand people and he needs to "hacer un esfuerzo para recordar su sentido" 'make an effort to remember its meaning [of language]' (56).

The narrator also manifests the egotism characteristic of lovers: he concentrates so intently on himself, and on his obsession, that "La subjetividad [le] ha dejado sin espacio, sin tiempo, sin contemporáneos, sin testigos, sin señas de identidad" 'subjectivity has left him without a space, without time, without contemporaries, without witnesses, without signs of identity' (57). Indeed, he describes all the symptoms of this "disease" (because, for him, being in love is a disease) which, according to the narrator, is worse than death because to love is to suffer in isolation and in agony. Peri Rossi describes a love relationship so radical that it subverts the very concept of a patriarchal heterosexual relationship for it is not the woman who has lost her existence; it is the man who has disappeared, the one who had no memory until he met the woman. Indeed, the narrator tells us that his past has disappeared: "no guardo memoria. No me encuentro en el que fui antes de Aída" 'I keep no memory. I do not find myself in the one who was before Aída' (58).

The narrator's obsession for Aída transforms itself into egotism when he yearns for the possession of both Aída's spiritual and the physical essences. Egotism is part of love because the lover wants to control the loved one and wants the loved one to depend on him or her—although the lover does not realize of his/her dependence on the loved one. For example, the narrator complains that Aída only recognizes “el amor del otro en la sumisión absoluta a [su] voluntad” ‘the other's love in the absolute submission to her will’ (67) but he is not conscious that he demands exactly the same from her. The narrator becomes aware that he is totally submissive to Aída and that Aída controls him to the extent that he needs to be nourished by her. Like a newborn baby nourished by its mother, the narrator wants and needs Aída's milk and, ultimately, the rest of her body. For he sustains himself only by “sus jugos, de su carne, de sus secreciones, de su voz, de sus emanaciones” ‘her juices, her meat, her secretions, her voice, her emanations’ (59). In my opinion, this metaphor of cannibalism originates in the narrator's inferiority complex. The narrator feels inferior to Aída and needs to feed off her body in order for her essence to become part of him. With this metaphor of cannibalism, I argue, Peri Rossi makes a quite subversive statement: that man needs to nourish himself through the woman in order to complete his lost identity. Aída's body therefore provides the narrator with both sexual pleasure and psychological enrichment, and the narrator refuses to “ingerir, introducir en mi cuerpo sustancias ajenas a Aída” ‘ingest, introduce in my body substances that are extraneous to Aída’ (59).

One of the narrator's memories is a conversation with Aída about the experience of being a mother. The narrator asks Aída whether she feels happy for having a son with her ex-husband, and she replies with anger: “¿Hijo de él? ¡Los hijos son de las madres!

¿Qué te piensas? ... Ningún hombre puede saber lo que es tener un hijo. Sólo las madres lo saben” ‘a son with him? Children only belong to the mothers! What do you think? ... No man can know what having a child is like. Only mothers know it’ (69). After hearing Aída, the narrator feels sad for the unfinished quality of his body, and that he, as a man, cannot bear children and cannot experience motherhood. The only thing left to him is to love Aída’s motherhood and, ultimately, to desire it. The narrator can only find comfort in the act of writing, describing, and evoking what he thinks motherhood is, and then, in a long, revealing paragraph, he writes the following:

he amado tus piernas abiertas, las contracciones metódicas de tu vagina, el peso en los riñones, el dolor de tu espalda, la beatitud de tu espíritu al sentirte henchida, la dulce serenidad de tu rostro de mujer encinta, la luminosidad de tus ojos dobles ... he amado la incisión del médico en tu vagina, he amado el orgasmo brutal del parto—dolor y placer mezclados—, la languidez de tus piernas, la debilidad de tu voz, el terrible vacío puerperal, la tristeza de haber estado llena y ahora estar vacía, el desencanto del vientre que ha cumplido su función, y luego, he amado otra vez tus senos, el momento solemne y religioso en que por primera vez, sola en tu habitación, descubriste tus pechos hinchados, rojizos, plenos y doloridos, lentamente acercaste la boca ansiosa y ciega al húmedo pezón y lo sentiste manar ‘I have loved your open legs, your vagina’s methodical contractions, the weight on the kidneys, your back pain, your spirit’s beatitude when you felt filled, the sweet serenity of your pregnant-woman-face, the luminosity of your noble eyes ... I have loved the doctor’s incision in your vagina, I have loved the delivery’s brutal orgasm—pain and pleasure blended—, your legs’ lassitude, your voice weakness, the terrible puerperal emptiness, the sadness of having been filled and now being empty, the disillusion of the belly that has accomplished its function, and then I have loved your breasts again, the solemn and religious moment when for the first time, alone in your bedroom, you discovered your swollen breasts, reddish, full and aching, you slowly brought the blind and anxious mouth near your humid nipple and you felt it flow.’ (69-70)

He can only evoke and write about the idea of giving birth and nursing a child, and yet even this act of evocation and writing remains a solitary one for him.

The narrator identifies a duality in his existence: on the one hand, there is his social being, which “corresponde a los hábitos sociales o culturales, a las buenas

costumbres, a las leyes, es decir: al aprendizaje” ‘is in harmony with social or cultural habits, with good customs, with laws, that is, with learning’ (78-79). And on the other hand, there is his inner being, which is his loving being, which is, “asocial, enamorada, es decir: salvaje, fuera de la ley, fuera de los usos, fuera del mundo” ‘asocial, in love, that is: wild, outcast, outside customs, outside the world’ (79). He rejoices for this duality because he thinks it makes him richer. For him, only a person who is in love is complete, while the person who does not love is incomplete because he or she does not have “otro mundo, interior, solitario, lleno de claves y de signos para interpretar y que corresponden a mi lectura del amor por Aída” ‘another world, interior, solitary, full of keys and signs to interpret and that are in harmony with my reading of the love I feel for Aída’ (80). In addition, this foreign world that the narrator inhabits contains another language, a language that is primitive and not yet developed (he describes it as a guttural language, like “el balbuceo babélico del expatriado, la jerga del recluso, la germanía del delincuente, el lunfardo del arrabalero” ‘the expatriate’s Babelic babbling, the recluse’s slang, the delinquent’s jargon, the suburbanite’s lingo’ (82) but which must be developed by women. The narrator wastes his energy “en amar a Aída, en imaginar a Aída, en esperar a Aída” ‘loving Aída, imagining Aída, waiting for Aída’ (82). To imagine women is a task that patriarchal societies have relegated to men for centuries; however the narrator’s attempts to imagine Aída are in vain because, as a woman capable of independence, she has left him.

At the mid point of the novel, the narrator describes an exquisite and poetically erotic scene, perhaps one the most beautiful erotic episodes of the three novels discussed in this dissertation. The scene focuses on Aída’s body and establishes her as the center of

the novel in both its structure and theme. Although this erotic scene could be any reader's sexual fantasy, it is best read here as one of the narrator's erotic fantasies concerning Aída because, by the time of its writing, Aída has already abandoned him. The narrator writes Aída's body at the same time that he excites her in order to bring her to the climactic moment of the orgasm. The narrator begins with the top part of Aída's body and he slowly moves downward without missing a single part of her body. All human senses come into play in this scene, which begins with "Lamo tu ropa" 'I lick your clothes' (87) and then follows with "Sorbo, chupo, bebo, beso, babeo, hurgo, estrujo, saboreo, absorbo, relamo, paladeo, huelo" 'I sip, lick, drink, kiss, drivel, poke, squeeze, taste, absorb, lick my lips, palate, smell' (88). In this scene the narrator returns to the image of the child and thus he portrays himself as a man depending on a woman, a man who "babe[a] como un niño de pecho" 'drivels like a newborn baby' (88). In addition, the narrator utilizes Aída's body to create his identity and, at the same time that the narrator describes the sexual relationship, he also writes his identity, which more than ever centers on her body. For example, the narrator anchors himself to Aída's pelvis like "un naufrago perdido" 'a lost castaway' (89). Then, he continues: "Me agarro a tus costados y gimo. Soy el perdido, el recién nacido, el paria. Tú te balanceas suavemente y me meces. Ahora soy el navegante a la deriva impulsado por las olas y la brisa. Ancorado a ti como un coral. Como el mejillón a la roca. Como el musgo a la piedra" 'I hold to your flanks and moan. I am the lost one, the newborn baby, the pariah. You smoothly rock your self and cradle me. I'm now the sailor adrift driven by the waves and the breeze. Anchored to you like a coral. Like a mussel to the rock. Like moss to the stone' (89).

The narrator begins to describe Aída's breasts and compares them to two suns around which the earth turns. With this subversively eroticized scene, Peri Rossi challenges the traditional imaginary of the heterosexual relationship that patriarchal societies have perpetuated for decades. The author locates woman's sexual pleasure at the center of her heterosexual relationship, and it is always described by the male narrator. In contrast to the tradition, the narrator's erotic fantasy is not that Aída excites him until orgasm but, rather, that he is the one who excites Aída and provides her with absolute sexual pleasure. The narrator calls Aída's name during the process of sexual arousal, an act of naming that is crucial for the recognition of the woman's identity as an individual, and so he pronounces Aída's name "para que te reconozcas" 'so that you recognize yourself' (93). Therefore, language becomes as important as is the display of the woman's body in order for her to be recognized by men and by herself. By naming the woman, and by calling upon her to speak, that which had been repressed and had been rendered taboo by patriarchal conventions and societies suddenly emerges: "Aída—repites tú ahora con la cabeza hacia arriba y los ojos cerrados. Aída—vuelves a decir, reconcentrada en ti misma, como una ostra en su concha, como una esfera que se come su borde" 'Aída—you repeat now with your head up and your eyes closed. Aída—you say again, concentrated on your self, like an oyster in its shell, like a sphere that eats its edge' (93). The woman, as Cixous argues, should first know her body, should recognize and accept her sexuality in order to fight for man's recognition as well. Through this male narrative voice, Peri Rossi argues that it is only through a satisfactory sexual experience—when the woman does not simply have sex to satisfy a man but, rather, when she also enjoys sexual intercourse—that the woman is able to recognize herself and

identify herself as a woman. The narrator expresses this idea in the following sentence: “Cuando las abro, como si fueran una pantalla, tú despiertas de tu concentración, lentamente vuelves a tu viaje al fondo de ti misma y abres los ojos” ‘when I open them [her legs], as if they were a screen, you wake up from your concentration, you slowly return to your travel to the bottom of yourself and open your eyes’ (94).

Next the narrator concentrates on the bottom part of Aída’s body, that is, her sexual organ, and it is poetically described as something hidden and extremely delicate that should be treated with great care. Her sexual organ is “diminuto, oculto en el bosque. Encerrado entre hojas oscuras y musgos mullidos” ‘tiny, hidden in the cluster of trees. Locked among dark leaves and soft mosses’ (94-95) and it is compared to a baby— “El pequeño sexo, rosado, reposa como un recién nacido en su cuna” ‘the little sex, pinkish, rests like a newborn baby in its cradle’ (95)—who wakes up with the movement of the narrator’s tongue: “Le hago cosquillas en las axilas. Lo topo con mi lengua, llena de saliva. Lo mezo de izquierda a derecha, de derecha a izquierda. Lentamente, el recién nacido despierta” ‘I tickle his underarms. I find him with my tongue, full of saliva. I rock it left to right, right to left. Slowly, the newborn baby wakes up’ (95). Aída’s sexual enjoyment is not passive but entirely active, and it is she who guides the narrator so that she achieves the most intense sexual pleasure possible. Unlike the traditionally depicted sexual relationship, where the woman effects the man’s orgasm, Aída is totally focused on herself, even to the point of neglecting the narrator’s sexual satisfaction: “Entonces, tú, bruscamente, y sin mirarme, coges mi cabeza con tus manos, asiéndome por los cabellos, y colocas con precisión mi boca en la pequeña cuna, cápsula donde guardas tu clítoris celosamente” ‘then, you, abruptly, and without looking at me, take my head with

your hands, you grab my hair, and with precision you place my mouth over the little cradle, the capsule where you jealously guard your clitoris' (95). Thus described, the sexual act completes the identity of both the woman and the man, and the woman's body becomes part of the narrator's identity when he affirms that "Ahora el vello de tu pubis es mi bigote" 'now, your pubic hair is my moustache' (95) and an assimilation of both bodies takes place. In addition, the woman's sexual organ becomes a vital force for both her and the man. With this intense oral stimulation, the newborn baby wakes up, "crece, se inflama, se hincha" 'grows, inflames, swells up' (96), with the result that this climactic moment symbolizes not only the rebirth of the woman's sexuality (which had remained "asleep" for decades) but her voice (her newly born language) as well, her identity. The sexual organ (like the tongue, the language organ) also becomes a source of life that provides sustenance for the narrator because, as he says, "Ahora tu sexo es una fuente de aguas termales. Si paso el dedo, mi yema se calienta, como una fragua. Pero tú no permites que mi boca se separe de él. Allí bebo, allí vivo, allí nazco y muero, allí respiro, sufro, grito, aúllo, allí combato" 'now your sex is a spring of hot waters. If I put my finger in it, my fingertip heats, like a forge. But you don't allow my mouth to separate from it. There I drink, there I live, there I am born and die, there I breathe, I suffer, I yell, I howl, there I struggle' (96).

At the moment of highest arousal, the narrator needs to penetrate Aída sexually and, with a play on words, he refers to the sexual penetration as if he were entering into space. The narrator faces the same problem as he stressed earlier, which is that "Penetrar no siempre es fácil" 'to penetrate is not always easy' (96) because penetration depends on the woman. Although the act of penetration implies a passive reception, in reality the

woman decides whether, to use the same metaphor as the narrator utilizes, she will or will not open the “door to her home,” because, as the narrator says, “tú eres la dueña de tus aposentos, la que abres la puerta o la cierras” ‘you are the owner of your chambers, the one who opens or closes the door’ (96). To his detriment, the narrator depends on Aída’s willingness, which once again demonstrates Peri Rossi’s inversion of the relations of power in the traditional roles of the conventional heterosexual couple. Unlike the novels of Denser and Eltit, where this inversion is articulated through narrative female voices, the inversion in *Solitario de amor* is expressed by a male narrator. To corroborate Cixous’s theory, who stated that *l’écriture féminine* could be practiced by both men and women, in Peri Rossi’s novel a male narrator is both exemplifying this type of writing and, at the same time, challenging phallogocentrism, the reigning mode of representation. Patriarchal tradition has tended to emphasize the male perspective and the written word over the spoken word and women’s discourse, even as the latter, has striven to validate another type of word, the body’s word, as Cixous’s *l’écriture féminine* implies. The narrator acknowledges and accepts the difference between man and woman, and he understands this difference as an obstacle to penetrate Aída’s “home.” He states:

Tú hablas por tu clítoris, yo hablo por mi voz. Mi lengua y la tuya son lenguas diferentes, díscolas. Mi sexo no es palabra, mi sexo es oído. Si te he escuchado bien, podré penetrar quizás hasta el patio, quizás hasta la recámara. El acceso, la clave para entrar, tú sola la posees, la das o la quitas, la concedes o la niegas. Yo sólo puedo entrar: soy la llave, no una casa. Tú, que eres la dueña de la casa, el ama, puedes quedarte sola, puedes abrir o cerrar las habitaciones, puedes dejar entrar a este o a otro viajero ‘you speak with your clitoris, I speak with my voice. My tongue and yours are different, ungovernable languages. My sex is not word, my sex is hearing. If I have listened to you well, I will be able to penetrate maybe to the patio, maybe to the bedroom. The access, the password to enter, only you possess it, you give it or take it away, you grant it or deny it. I can only enter: I am the key, not the house. You, who are the owner of the house, the housekeeper, can stay alone, you can open or close the bedrooms, you can let this or another traveler enter.’ (96-97)

Again, the narrator focuses on Aída's power and complexity, and his lack of the same, and he expresses what it is like not having a maternal womb: "Es cierto que puedo salir o entrar: pero no puedo, en cambio, alojar a nadie" 'it is true that I can go in and out: but I cannot, on the other hand, lodge anybody' (97). For the narrator, Aída fulfills herself independently while he depends on her to achieve totality. This dependence of him on her is a radical transformation in the male imaginary of the patriarchal tradition since this had always focused on the phallus (a tendency also known as phallogentrism), which, symbolized in the pen, was considered the primary sexual member through which men achieve the wholeness and voice that women lack. In other words, for the male-oriented tradition, women are voiceless and incomplete because they do not possess a phallus. In Peri Rossi's text, however, the woman's sexual organ becomes the instrument that provides voice, power, and totality and it is the men who lack, who are "incomplete." Peri Rossi inverts the logic of patriarchal discourse and suggests that readers instead turn their eyes to the force and vitality of the woman's sexual organ.

The climax of this subversively erotic scene occurs with the narrator's penetration into Aída's "home," at which point he is whole, freed from his anxiety (he does not feel lonely any longer because now he is inside her) because he is:

acunado por tus mucosas, abrigado por tus tejidos húmedos, calentado por tu ardor, abrazado por las paredes de tu sexo, recibido en tu recámara, agarrado a tus costados, mecido por tus músculos vaginales, adherido a tus tegumentos, absorbido por la fuerza de tu vientre, atrapado entre lianas y musgos, soy el tronco hundido en la matriz, soy el árbol terciario nacido en la caverna, soy el arado que abre la tierra, soy el mástil en la barca que se mece y se mece, portándonos, arrastrándonos corriente arriba, corriente abajo, hasta la muerte 'cradled by your mucus, covered by your humid tissues, heated by your ardor, hugged by your sex's walls, received in your bedroom, clenched to your flanks, rocked by your vaginal muscles, adhered to your teguments, absorbed by the strength of your belly, trapped between the lianas and the mosses, I am the trunk sunk in the matrix, I am the tertiary tree born in the cavern, I am the plow that opens the

earth, I am the mast on the ship that swings and swings, carrying us, dragging us upstream and downstream, until death.’ (98)

In one of the other sections of the novel, the narrator remembers one of the many nights when he could not sleep and went out to the streets. He remembers the night he ran into Aída’s ex-husband in a cafeteria and chatted for a while with him (the latter ignoring the fact that the other man was Aída’s lover). The conversation reminds the narrator of a dialogue he once had with Aída during which she firmly told him that she would never marry again. The narrator, however, wanted to marry her because marriage would mean having total control of Aída, that is, marriage would be a way of trapping Aída and owning her: “Me he vuelto un hombre convencional, por amor a Aída: me gustaría casarme con ella. Cualquier cosa que me asegurara su visión, su presencia, su contacto, su lugar y mi lugar, juntos” ‘I have become a conventional man, for Aída’s love: I would like to marry her. Anything that assures me her vision, her presence, her contact, her place and my place, together’ (103). In other words, marriage becomes the expression of egotism per excellence because the man gets to possess and mold the woman as he desires. But the woman in the novel rejects this role and chooses not to marry, a choice that inverts the ideal patriarchal model of the woman whose dream is to marry and to take care of her family, husband, and house. When the narrator asks the ex-husband about his married life, the latter shows he also suffers the same identity crisis as the narrator. The ex-husband says: “He tenido un hijo con ella. Si se puede decir que un hombre tiene un hijo. Si se puede decir que alguna vez fue mi mujer... Y el hijo es de ella. El hijo siempre es de las madres. A lo mejor yo tampoco puedo ser padre, sólo puedo ser hijo de mi madre. Creo que sólo amamos a las madres” ‘I have had a child with her. If one can say that a man has a child. I can say that she was my wife at some point ... And the child is

hers. The child is always the mother's. Maybe I cannot really be a father, maybe I can only be my mother's child. I think we only love mothers' (104). Like the narrator, Aída's ex-husband feels incomplete because he knows he will never experience the feeling of having a maternal womb.

In relation to the experience of giving birth, the narrator writes about the pain implicit in Aída and, ultimately, in all women. In my opinion, the narrator refers to the pain that has accompanied women for many centuries due to the tyranny that men have imposed on them. The narrator is not aware of this pain because, as a consequence of it, women's supposed inferiority has been taken for granted. Indeed, the narrator reveals that: "Nada sé de ese dolor, salvo su intuición profunda. Dolores que se arrastran día a día, año a año. Dolores que no se agotan, que no cesan, que se destilan con la menstruación, con el endometrio irritado, con la vulva inflamada. Dolores oscuros, viejos remordimientos, pesares que no pasan" 'I know nothing about this pain, except its deep intuition. Pains drag by, day by day, year by year. Pains that do not exhaust themselves, that do not stop, that are distilled with menstruation, with the irritated endometrium, with the swollen vulva. Dark pains, old remorse, sorrows that are not forgotten' (106-07). Aída, the narrator continues, does not forget this suffering because she has it written by, on, and in her body, which suggests that the woman is a text, and therefore language, that men need to read to understand and in order for women to make their voices heard. The narrator states: "Aída es una mujer que no olvida. Aída es una mujer que guarda las heridas como si fueran textos antiguos, inscripciones que hay que volver a leer, a revisar, para reinterpretar, para enlazar el pasado con el futuro" 'Aída is a woman who does not

forget. Aída is a woman who keeps the wounds as if they were old texts, inscriptions that have to read again, to revise, in order to interpret, to unite the past and the future' (107).

In the next section, the narrator remembers the evening that Aída left him and her child alone in her apartment. He thinks of Aída's child with jealousy because he has been where the narrator will never be able to get to, that is, Aída's bosom "alimentándose de sus jugos, lamiendo sus entrañas, restañando sus membranas, sorbiendo su sangre, nadando en el líquido amniótico, acariciando sus tejidos, oprimiendo su cintura" 'nourishing himself with her juices, licking her entrails, stanching her membranes, sipping her blood, swimming in the amniotic fluid, caressing her tissues, pressing her waist' (110). The narrator will never be part of Aída's self and what really hurts him is the fact that the child possesses Aída and her love for him. Then, viewing the child as his competitor, the narrator states: "Yo no estoy. Yo no existo. Yo no soy" 'I am not here. I do not exist. I am not' (111). The child knows that "Aída es suya, que la posee, que Aída lo ama, que forman una pareja indestructible" 'Aída is his, that he possesses her, that Aída loves him, that they make an indestructible couple' (112) and so, the narrator desires to return to an infantile state in order to possess Aída himself because he feels "transitorio, vulnerable, hipersensible" 'transitory, vulnerable, hypersensitive' (112) as an adult man. In contrast to the usual context of phallogentrism, here the narrator is diminishing the value of the male sexual member and emphasizing the woman's body because he knows his sexual organ cannot unite two human beings in the same way as the umbilical cord does.

Despite her refusal, the narrator is convinced that he wants to be Aída's husband. Ironically there is an inversion of roles because he wants to do the chores assigned to

women by this same tradition, that is, he wants to stay indoors and take care of the family and home. He is not embarrassed to say: “Quisiera ser tu marido: comprar para ti coles en el mercado, volver con una gran bolsa de papel llena de lechugas, higos, rábanos, zanahorias y pepinos... Dormiría a tu lado todas las noches. Me gustaría esperarte en la casa, y oír tus pasos en el umbral, escuchar el ruido de las llaves antes de abrir” ‘I would like to be your husband: to buy cabbage in the supermarket for you, to go back home with a big paper bag full of lettuce, figs, radishes, carrots and cucumbers... I would sleep by your side every night. I would like to wait for you at home, and hear your steps at the doorstep, to hear the clatter of the keys before opening’ (117). With this inversion of social roles, I maintain that Peri Rossi mocks the conventions imposed on both women and men by an arbitrary tradition that, in the end, is damaging to both.

Throughout the entire novel, the narrator repeatedly discusses both love and the meaning of being in love, and affirms: “El amor es derroche, es exceso. No se puede estar enamorado y al mismo tiempo preservarse, guardar algo, producir, lucrar, invertir, «enriquecerse»” ‘love is loss, it is excess. One cannot be in love and at the same time preserve him/herself, keep something, produce, make a profit, invest, «enrich» oneself’ (119). Love is excess because the lover pays total attention to the loved one and desires to give everything to him or her. However, this loss and excess is also selfish because the lover expects to receive everything back from the loved one, the narrator and Aída in this case. When he says “doy lo que no tengo” ‘I give what I don’t have’ (119), he gives the impression that his love is gratuitous but the careful reader understands that he unconsciously expects something back.

The narrator also describes a second sexual encounter with Aída (or perhaps it is another of his erotic fantasies) that consists of him looking at Aída's white skin under the transparent fabric of her black dress. When the erotic fantasy begins, the black dress that covers Aída's body stands in for the narrator who states that the black dress "me representa, me simboliza, ejecuta por mí lo que yo no puedo hacer" 'represents me, symbolizes me, executes for me what I cannot do' (124). But this symbolism turns into identification when he pleads: "quisiera ser la tela sobre su cuerpo. No tener más vida ni más consistencia que ésa" 'I would like to be the fabric over her body. To have no other life or consistency other than that' (124), because in that way he "podría estar todo el tiempo sobre su piel, ciñéndola, de los pies al escote" 'he could be over her skin all the time, fastening her, from feet to neck' (124). In other words, his dependence on Aída's body is such that he desires to give up his own identity to become a piece of fabric enveloping her body. During this deeply sexual scene Aída again controls the situation and the narrator, in an act of total submission, simply responds to Aída's requests. She takes his head with her hands and places it "en la única llanura, entre ambos senos" 'in the only plain, between both breasts' (124). Thus, there is once again an inversion of sexual roles in the traditional hierarchy of the heterosexual relationship: here the woman is active and controls the action at the same time that she demands and receives sexual satisfaction. The phallus does not here control the erotic relationship because the center and the power are now located in the woman's sexual organ; the vagina has supplanted the phallus. The narrator describes his lack of power by stating that "Ella está abajo, yo estoy arriba. Sin embargo, no experimento ninguna sensación de poder" 'she is under me, and I am on top of her. However, I do not experience any sensation of power' (125)

because he is simply responding to “su pedido, a su breve reclamo, por tanto, no hay ningún poder” ‘her request, her brief claim, thus, there is no power’ (125). Unlike the conventional heterosexual relationship, where the man’s sexual pleasure is the focal point, in this erotic scene the woman’s sexual satisfaction is the narrative center, and so Aída “se reconcentra sobre sí misma” ‘concentrates on herself’ (125) and controls the situation: “Gime. Gimo. Grita. Grito. Jadea. Jadeo. Aúlla. Aúllo. Fricciona. Fricciono” ‘she moans. I moan. She yells. I yell. She pants. I pant. She howls. I howl. She rubs. I rub’ (125). Unlike the traditional sexual act, Peri Rossi shows here that it is possible to achieve a reciprocal arousal in the erotic relationship, and so both the narrator and Aída are able to reach the orgasm, an experience that had been traditionally allotted to men: “Farfullo. Farfulla. Bramo. Brama. Goteo. Gotea. Borboteo. Borbotea. Ahora, nuestros movimientos son conjuntos” ‘I sputter. She sputters. I roar. She roars. I drip. She drips. I gurgle. She gurgles. Now, our movements are simultaneous’ (125).

The narrator also analyzes the language of love when he remembers a comment by Aída regarding various linguistic expressions that denote the sexual act. Aída had rejected the words “follar” ‘to fuck’ and “joder” ‘to screw’ (126) because of their vulgar and eschatological connotations. She prefers the expression “hacer el amor” ‘to make love’ (126) because it refers to “una tarea de dos, compartida, un trabajo delicado, cuyo premio está al final, en la hermosa consecución de la obra” ‘a task for two, shared, a delicate job, with a prize at the end, in the beautiful consummation of the task’ (126-27).

After being abandoned by Aída, the narrator tries to create a new routine that will make him forget her (as his psychologist has advised him) and so he begins to gamble. He remembers a conversation with an old lady one night at the casino. During their chat,

he compares the casino players with lovers because both types gamble and love in solitude. For him, the lover is like the casino player who faces “su desafío al azar con la conciencia absoluta de su singularidad” ‘his challenge with random chance with the absolute consciousness of his singularity’ (134). Moreover, love, like gambling, can become an addiction, from which the narrator suffers. He tells the old lady: “Todas las cosas que dan placer engordan, son caras o inmorales” ‘all the things that give pleasure make you fat, are expensive or immoral’ (135), to which the old lady replies “Lo que es peor ... crean adicción” ‘even worse ... they create addiction’ (135). During this conversation, the narrator becomes conscious of his own addiction and realizes that in order to overcome it, he needs to undergo a treatment to “deshabituarse de Aída” ‘to make himself unaccustomed to her’ (135). Ironically, the narrator states that “El mono de Aída me induce a otros hábitos, a otras adicciones: cuando no estoy con ella, juego, o fumo, o bebo exageradamente” ‘the need for Aída induces me to other habits, to other addictions: when I’m not with her, I gamble, or I smoke, or I drink in excess’ (135-36). One notices here that, although the novel lacks a linear organization, it has a circular structure, one that corresponds to the narrator’s life. Moreover, the idea of excess in drinking, smoking, and gambling is related to the type of love the narrator feels for Aída. In my opinion, every issue in the novel is interrelated, an interrelation that is made manifest through repetition which, at the same time, emphasizes the gravity of the narrator’s identity crisis and its relationship to the novel’s structure.

In *Fantasías eróticas* (1991), Peri Rossi asserts that erotic fantasies reinforce one’s individuality by giving vent to one’s imagination. Through erotic fantasies we renovate our capacity for “la percepción de la realidad y la construcción imaginaria” ‘the

perception of reality and the imaginary construction' (22). In their sessions, Raúl tells the narrator about the odd but intimate fetish of one of his patients: to collect stolen left-foot women's shoes. The narrator, then, imagines and describes what the scene of the crime might look like, an act that sexually excites the thief and maybe the narrator himself. He describes it as if the woman were going to be raped, which creates an intense suspense in which both the woman in the story and the reader of the novel participate. Both the woman and the reader "expect" a rape and, in fact, when the thief runs away with his much desired prize, the victim is left in the street "Despeinada, con la ropa suelta, ... Mira sus medias, y descubre que, con el forcejeo, una carrera larga y fina se ha abierto en su pierna izquierda" 'with messy hair, with her clothes unfastened, ... She looks at her pantyhose, and she realizes that, due to the struggle, there is a long, thin run in her left leg' (142). The woman is described as if she had been raped, but the incident was simply an obsession caused by a desire for left-foot women's shoes. After picturing this scene, the narrator visualizes his own erotic fantasy with Aída at the moment of putting her left-foot sandal on: "imagino el delicado pie de Aída, blanco y pequeño, para su estatura, hilos de cuero que deberá anudar en la suave contorsión del tobillo" 'I imagine Aída's delicate foot, white and small, for her height, leather threads that she will have to knot around the soft skin of the ankle' (143). Obviously these are the intimate erotic fantasies that sexually excite the two men. The important aspect here is that Peri Rossi writes erotic fantasies for them, and in so doing she creates a new sexual imaginary for the modern Latin American man.

Unlike traditional erotic male imaginary, in which men project their desires onto women, in Peri Rossi's novel, the narrator is Aída's mirror through which he sexually fulfills her. The narrator states:

soy el espejo que te refleja, soy una lámina de azogue sin tacha, soy tu marido, tu padre, tu hijo, tu amante, soy tu admirador, tu contemplador, tu feto, tu entraña, tu masturbación, soy tu menstruación sangrante, tu dolor de parir, tu placer de estremecerte, tu goce, tu angustia y tu imagen. Melibeo soy 'I am the mirror that reflects you, I am a sheet of mercury without flaw, I am your husband, your father, your child, your lover, I am your admirer, your contemplator, your fetus, your bosom, your masturbation, I am your bloody menstruation, your pain at the time of labor, your pleasure when shivering, your enjoyment, your anguish and your image. I am Melibeo.' (146)

Opposing convention, the man here defines himself in terms of the woman. At the same time, with this intertextual reference to Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina*, Peri Rossi mocks the entire Hispanic literary tradition, which is mostly patriarchal in nature. In fact, critic Isabel Quintana, argues that Peri Rossi makes the subject's identity more complex precisely because she relates it to this tradition: "Peri Rossi trabaja desde adentro de la tradición para revertirla" 'Peri Rossi works from inside tradition in order to subvert it' (56). As with the subject's newly formed identity, tradition is not definite but, rather, "se va reconstruyendo a través de la escritura, lo cual supone un trabajo sobre la memoria histórica y cultural" 'it is reconstructed through writing, which implies a work dealing with historical and cultural memory' (Quintana 56). As Peri Rossi makes clear, desire is the force that moves such reconstruction.

The narrator manifests his nostalgia for Aída's body because he does not possess a complete identity in his male body. Aída is an independent and modern woman who does not want to be the reflection of any man. She is determined not to be "el sueño" 'the dream' of her father because he wanted her to be "una hija dócil y tranquila, arquitecta,

en lo posible, buena esposa, amante de su hogar y dominada por su marido” ‘an obedient and calm daughter, an architect if possible, a good wife, a lover of her home and dominated by her husband’ (148). Neither did she want to be her ex-husband’s dream who wanted “Un matrimonio feliz con muchos hijos, excursiones a la montaña y pesca submarina” ‘a happy marriage with lots of children, excursions to the mountains, and underwater fishing’ (148). Aída is a strong willed woman with a well-defined identity. She asserts that she never tried “ser el sueño de ningún hombre: yo soy mi propio sueño” ‘to be any man’s dream: I am my own dream’ (149). For this reason, the narrator understands that in order to be loved by Aída, he must be her mirror since only the image of her reflection on him pleases her: “Para que me ames, no he de tener ningún sueño, he de ser un hombre espejo, un hombre que te ama porque puedes mirarte en él y la imagen te complace. Melibeo soy” ‘for you to love me, I don’t need to have any dreams, I need to be a mirror-man, a man who loves you because you can look at yourself in him and the image pleases you. I am Melibeo’ (149). However, it is a difficult task for men to be mirrors of women since tradition has determined that when men look at women they see themselves.

Due to his identity crisis, the narrator’s erotic fantasies are ambiguous and the reader is not sure whether they are product of his imagination or if they are really based on his relationship with Aída.² Nevertheless, it is important to note that these same erotic fantasies have the woman’s body at the center. Some of these fantasies originate from the stories that Raúl the psychiatrist tells him during the visits. One of these fantasies is related to Raúl’s story of a Hindu girl and an English doctor. Since the Hindu girl was very sick, her father, in despair, hired an English doctor to treat her. Although the father

covered her entire body with sheets, the doctor had to make a little hole in them so that he could auscultate her, and “Por el agujero así abierto, la adivinó” ‘through the opened hole, he divined her’ (154) and fell in love with her. The tale suggests the imprisonment of women’s bodies by men in patriarchal societies, and how men have “divined,” imagined, and molded women according to their imagination. Peri Rossi, however, uncovers the woman through the language of the narrator because, in his fantasy, he describes in detail every part of Aída’s body until he rips the sheets up with his teeth in order to penetrate her so that both man and woman reach orgasm. In addition to the erotic fantasies, the narrator also tells the reader about his odd habits, behaviors that only he can understand. One of his odd habits is that the narrator keeps “un vello del pubis, un vello de las axilas y un cabello” ‘a pubic hair, an armpit hair and a hair from the head’ (157) from Aída’s body. For him, these hairs are a physical connection to Aída and a way of stimulating his memory of her. For example, he thinks that the hair from the head

sale del ombligo de Aída, como una cuerda, y se anuda a mi cuello, dando vueltas alrededor de mi nuca. De ese modo, Aída me arrastra, me lleva donde ella va. Me muevo con ella, giro con ella, me traslado con ella, reposo con ella. El cabello sale de su ombligo y se estira hasta mí, envolviéndome como un fular ‘emerges from Aída’s navel, like a cord, and knots itself around my neck, going around my nape. In that way, Aída drags me, takes me where ever she goes. I walk with her, turn with her, move with her, rest with her. The hair emerges from her navel and stretches out to me, covering me like a foulard.’ (158)

Fantasies like this one show the narrator’s frustrated desires and emphasize his obsession for Aída, which he cannot mitigate in spite of Aída’s abandonment. In one of the last sections of the novel, the narrator compares Aída with an “Enorme comadreja oculta en su cuarto, cuando sale es para atrapar una presa que arrastrará hasta su aposento y cultivará, aderezará, seducirá, combatirá y devorará ávidamente, rodeada de sus trofeos anteriores, de sus armas antiguas, de sus objetos favoritos, en tanto dure su deseo”

‘enormous weasel hidden in her bedroom, and when she leaves [her bedroom] she traps a prey that she will drag to her chamber and cultivate, garnish, seduce, combat and devour eagerly, surrounded by her previous trophies, her old arms, her favorite objects, as long as her desire lasts’ (162). Like Diana in Denser’s novel, Aída attracts her victims to her lair where it is easier to execute her power. Once there, Aída absorbs everything she can from her prey, feeding on it to enrich herself; in other words, I maintain that, by devouring the narrator, Aída emphasizes her identity as a woman. She utilizes everything he can offer her and then she disposes of him.

Towards the end of the novel, the reader is reminded of the beginning of the relationship between the narrator and Aída. For the first time, he describes the night they met; it was Saint Joseph’s eve and Aída had made a comment about her fondness for fireworks. At that moment, the narrator begins to fantasize and “divines” Aída: “te imaginé, levemente borracha y obcecada por las luces, ebria por el ruido, vagando entre las luces azules y rojas, bajo la incandescencia del cielo sembrado de destellos, oliendo a pólvora (tu perfume favorito) y a azufre, como las brujas en las ceremonias paganas” ‘I imagined you, slightly drunk and blinded by the lights, inebriated by the noise, rambling among the blue and red lights, under the glow of the sky filled with gleams, smelling like powder (your favorite perfume) and sulphur, like witches in pagan ceremonies’ (167). In my opinion, Peri Rossi suggests that the narrator’s mistake is to imagine Aída according to his own needs and desires instead of seeking out her real identity. For this reason, when Aída abandons him, he is quite disillusioned because their relationship turned out not to be what he had imagined, or desired.

After the description of their first meeting, the narrator relates their break-up. In the last part of the novel, the reader is presented with the beginning and the end of the narrator's and Aída's relationship, and with the beginning of the process of writing the novel, including the motives that caused the narrator to start writing it. The narrator dreams that Aída has abandoned him and, full of anxiety, he goes to her house immediately. In the mean time, the reader hears Raúl's voice saying "Se sueña con lo que se desea o con lo que se teme" 'one dreams about what one desires or fears' (170). The narrator admits that he has dreamed about his fear of Aída's abandonment. The minute he finds out that Aída really has abandoned him, that it was not simply a dream, there is a moment of realization in the narrator's mind. Now he begins to distinguish the days of the week and the seasons, and he notices what goes on in the society he inhabits. He has been reborn, inserted into society again because earlier, when he was in love, he had been "indiferente a las estaciones, al frío, al calor, a la lluvia, al sol, al hambre, al hastío, a la sed, a las enfermedades, a los virus, a la lectura de los periódicos, a los anuncios publicitarios, a la televisión, al cine, a las conversaciones de los demás" 'indifferent to the seasons, to the cold, the heat, the rain, the sun, the hunger, the boredom, the thirst, the diseases, the viruses, the reading of newspaper, the advertisements, the television, the movie theater, the conversations with other people' (171). The narrator then resorts again to his metaphor of the exiled man, the pariah, or the orphan. At this moment of clarity (when he learns that Aída has abandoned him), he loses his identity and is now lost, a man without structure or context:

Un hombre desgarrado, desgajado de su centro, escindido, perdido de sí mismo, que anhela la muerte, que ansía el olvido. Soy un hombre egoísta que mira su hematoma, que contempla su muñón, que acaricia su miembro ausente, que observa la proliferación de células malignas que destruyen su cuerpo y su

imaginación 'a man ripped apart, broken off from his center, split, lost of himself, who yearns for death, who anxiously desires oblivion. I am a selfish man who looks at his bruise, who contemplates his stump, who caresses his absent member, who observes the proliferation of malign cells that destroy his body and his imagination.' (175)

The narrator feels this way because he does not have a woman who fulfills him as a man; now, no woman depends on his sexual member, which, he realizes, is nothing without her. The narrator goes to Aída's house but, symbolically, she does not let him enter. He realizes he is unfulfilled because he does not have the key to enter into Aída's house, and that, in psychoanalytic terms, he is impotent, a man without a sexual member. This is an image that subverts the conventional patriarchal order because the male sexual member has given men their identity for centuries. By lacking a sexual member, the man feels incomplete or, rather, he is without his sign of identity. Aída is to blame; that is, with no woman by his side, the man cannot demonstrate his virility, which causes an identity crisis that reflects his fear of not being considered virile enough. In short, the male narrator suffers from the nightmare of castration. Thus, the narrator must possess Aída because only she will fulfill his sexual desires and psychosocial identity. As I maintain, however, Peri Rossi utilizes the images characteristic of the traditional man-oriented imaginary in order to subvert its values so that the woman's sexual organ becomes the dominant image, the core, the center that holds.

At the same time, the traditional imaginary (that is, his ideas about women) that he had been using as a point of reference is lost. He discovers the foundation of love, egotism. Like pain, love is selfish because the lover is only concerned about himself or herself loving the loved one. He clearly manifests this egotism when he wonders, "¿cómo puede alguien disfrutar de una prenda de ropa, mientras yo sufro y me desgarró por la

ausencia de Aída?” ‘how can anyone enjoy a piece of cloth, while I suffer and tear inside because of Aída’s absence?’ (176). Moreover, Aída’s absence causes not only the destruction of the narrator’s spiritual self (he feels bereft of an identity) but also his physical destruction: he does not eat nor sleep, realizing that he is “una víscera sangrante, soy una pulpa herida, una entraña desgarrada que vibra y se mueve al compás de las imágenes que fluyen desde mi deseo insatisfecho” ‘a bloody viscera, I am a damaged pulp, ripped entrails that vibrate and I move simultaneously with the images that flow from my unsatisfied desire’ (178). Raúl consoles him by saying that the pain will pass, but the narrator wants to keep his pain because it makes him feel alive and, through it, he feels that somehow Aída accompanies him.

The metaphor of the newborn baby and the mother returns again towards the end of the novel when the narrator affirms that he feels as if Aída has both given birth to him and abandoned him as well. With this complex metaphor, Peri Rossi suggests the man’s dependence on the woman whom he needs to achieve a complete identity and individuality. On the one hand, the woman feels liberated when she abandons the man and yells, as Aída does, “¡Por fin te he parido!” ‘I have finally given birth to you!’ (179). On the other hand, this is the moment when the process of depersonalization begins for the man because, as the narrator says, it is the woman who names him: “Si ella no me nombra, soy un ser anónimo, despersonalizado, sin carácter, sin identidad. Soy un niño castrado” ‘If she does not name me, I am an anonymous being, depersonalized, without character, without identity. I am a castrated child’ (179). Without the woman, the narrator does not even have a body. In this fashion, Peri Rossi realizes an inversion of roles by using the traditional metaphor of the mirror. Patriarchal conventions identify the woman

as the mirror in which he looks at the woman and sees only himself because she makes his male identity complete. In the novel, however, the narrator realizes that, in reality, he is the mirror in which Aída's image is reflected, in which she, not he, is made complete. However, when she abandons him, the narrator understands that he is not Aída's reflection any more and that he is now an empty mirror: "Este espejo ya no refleja a nadie. Me he quedado sin cuerpo que devolver, sin rostro que iluminar, sin fantasías que proyectar" 'this mirror no longer reflects anyone. I am left without a body to give back, without a face to illuminate, without fantasies to project' (180). Without Aída, the narrator does not recognize his inner self and he does not even recognize his body.

The last section of the novel is an exquisite, beautifully poetic one where the idea of beginning and end come together in a circular structure. The narrator is at a train station, ready to leave the city where Aída and he had played out their romance. He is attempting to distance himself from his obsession, passion, and pain. He remembers the first weeks of his relationship with Aída when, from the same train station, they left the city and spent all night making love in a reserved compartment. Thus, the reader observes how the beginning and end of the relationship unite. It is at this moment that the narrator decides to write down his memories of their love relationship and so declares: "He de escribir cada uno de nuestros recuerdos. Condenado al olvido por su áspero corazón, condenado al olvido por su cuerpo cerrado para mí como una cripta, seré el escriba de este amor" 'I must write down each of our memories. Condemned to oblivion because of her harsh heart, condemned to oblivion because of her body closed to me like a crypt, I will be the scribe of this love' (183). The reader understands that those words take us back to the beginning of the novel and the moment when the idea of its writing

originated. Therefore, the reader understands that she or he has read a novel at the same time that the narrator was writing it. The reader, then, gains a better appreciation of the structure of the novel: each small section or fragment corresponds to seemingly random but actually inter-connecting remembrances in the narrator's stream of consciousness. The narrator aims to offset the absence of Aída with the act of writing because it provides him with a form of therapy to deal with his love obsession for Aída and overcome his identity crisis. Moreover, his love for Aída will remain alive in the writing, the term língua unifying the two poles of his existence, love making and language. From the train station, the narrator tries to guess what Aída may be doing at that moment. Here the reader faces again the ambiguity of the narrator's thoughts because the reader does not know for certain whether the narrator is imagining what she is doing or whether it is really happening. What follows can thus be interpreted as either the last or the first erotic fantasy of the narrator. It could be the last one because it occurs at the end of the novel, right before the narrator leaves the city, but it could also be the first one since the narrator decides to write his love story at the beginning of his trip.

The end of the novel also parallels two narrative lines: on the one hand, there is the erotic fantasy that centers on Aída masturbating; on the other hand, there is the image of the train as it leaves the city. The fantasy is beautifully described and the narrator combines the action of the two scenarios, that is, the train's departure and Aída's masturbation:

Está tumbada en su lecho, sola. El tren está a punto de arrancar... El tren tiene las luces encendidas. Desprende el broche de la malla, sobre el sexo, y la tela se abre, estalla, como una flor... El tren comienza a andar, primero lentamente. Aída se acaricia los muslos blancos... Ahora, el tren avanza más rápido. Comienza a frotarse el sexo con caricias intensas, veloces... Ahora, el tren avanza más rápido. Lo toma con la yema de los dedos y lo estira, como quien despunta una flor. Se

escucha el silbido de la locomotora. El clítoris asoma, ingenuo, infantil, niño sin bautizar... El tren va ganando velocidad. El clítoris se inflama, una gota brillante y transparente se ha fijado en su extremo... Y el orgasmo estalla, entre estertores, como la fruta madura de Aída, como una parturienta que rompa aguas 'she is laying on her bed, alone. The train is about to pull out... The train has its lights on. She unpins the cloth's clip, above the sex, and the fabric opens, bursts, like a flower... the train starts to move, slowly at first. Aída caresses her white thighs... Now, the train advances faster. She starts to rub her sex with fast, intense caresses... Now, the train advances faster. She touches it with her fingertips and stretches it, like someone who blunts a flower. The hiss of the engine is heard. The clitoris peaks, naïve, infantile, baby without baptism... The train speeds up. The clitoris becomes inflame, a transparent and shining drop is at its edge... And the orgasm explodes, among shivers, like Aída's ripening fruit, like a pregnant woman who breaks water.' (184-85)

After writing a novel that tells of the male narrator's obsession for a woman and the identity crisis he suffers due to his total dependence on her, Peri Rossi seems to claim, in a scene like this, the sexual and social independence of the woman. While Aída masturbates, the narrator is leaving the city. He wonders where he can go and, in despair, he thinks of his mother's house. Thus there is also a backward movement, a return to origins and another dependence on another woman (now depicted as his mother); the narrator thinks: "«A la casa de tu madre», me parece oír que murmura Aída, en el orgasmo" "«To your mother's house," I seem to hear Aída murmuring, in orgasm' (185). The narrator then returns to his mother's house to write the novel. In my opinion, this sentence is quite subversive because it is most clearly at the moment of her self-induced orgasm that Aída not only controls but utterly dominates the narrator's behaviors. There could be no more fitting end for a novel about a hopeless passion, obsession, gender, and power, as *Solitario de amor* is a novel that ultimately praises and celebrates the feminine.

Peri Rossi utilizes certain traditional tropes of romantic love—the man in love with the woman and the woman as the object of desire and pleasure—only to exaggerate them to the extreme and imbue them with a new value and meaning. The Uruguayan

writer utilizes them to show men's need for women, men's dependence on women to achieve a complete formation of their own identity. Unlike the other women writers who work with the idea of woman's identity, with identity as a subject in general, and with female identity as a sexual function, Peri Rossi concentrates here on men's lack of identity. In this way, Peri Rossi celebrates both woman's identity and love as forces that create a person's identity. With the image of the woman so depicted, Peri Rossi suggests that women have finally liberated themselves from men. I think that both men and women allow themselves to be prisoners of each other. The difference in Peri Rossi's world is that the man is left alone and without identity. But it is through this same process that the woman recovers her real identity, of which she was not aware before. Since Peri Rossi suggests that man's identity is not complete without woman, I maintain that this is connected with Oliveira's theory, which claims that we should acknowledge our differences while realizing that we necessarily complement each other.

To bring this chapter to a close, I want to go back to Peri Rossi's words in *Fantasías eróticas* (1991). In this book she affirms that eroticism exists in art and that we need to search for it. Peri Rossi links imagination to the writing of fiction when she states that eroticism, like art, has the quality of transforming bare reality. Throughout this chapter, I have contended that these ideas are clearly reflected in *Solitario de amor*, a novel that brings together a woman's body, her sexuality, and the act of writing. In other words, the Uruguayan novelist maintains that eroticism and art have the same goal: to search for an object of desire that expresses one's self. This is a key statement in order to understand the novel because *Solitario de amor* describes the journey a man undertakes in search of such object of desire. In fact, I argue that the male narrator already knows

that his object of desire is Aída. However, he does not recognize that this object of desire expresses his self. The novel then narrates the narrator's passage of awareness, that is, his realization that the female body he adores fulfills his identity and individuality. This idea goes back to the introductory chapter when I cited Oliveira to argue that the revision of the notion of women's sexuality and subjectivity will lead to the revision of men's sexuality and subjectivity. Indeed, Oliveira affirms that "the reconstruction of feminine will bring about the reconstruction of the masculine" (62). Here I want to refer again to the erotic scene at the mid-point of the novel when the narrator describes one of his sexual fantasies with Aída. Through this erotic fantasy, the narrator recreates his identity as he returns to the initial state of a newborn. The narrator is reborn due to the woman's self-realization that she has simultaneously attained through a satisfactory sexual experience. Finally, it is necessary to emphasize a unique feature that differentiates *Solitario de amor* from Eltit's and Denser's novels: Peri Rossi utilizes a male narrator to realize and reaffirm the woman's subjectivity. In addition, the author goes one step further in the reemergence of this new man because she also establishes a link between language, man, and woman. A new language emerges in the male narrator when, at the end of *Solitario de amor*, Aída "gives birth to him" (that is, when she abandons him). One observes that the rebirth of the man is accompanied by the rebirth of a new language, a revitalized language with which he will begin rewriting his solitary love story. Therefore, I conclude that if women are regaining their ignored voices and validating their social and sexual identities through the written word, men are writing now to redefine themselves in terms of the new linguistic and sexual patterns that women are creating.

¹ This term refers to the return of political exiles to Uruguay. But it also implies that those who were exiled inside the country ceased their self-censorship.

² I maintain that most of the erotic scenes narrated in the novel are erotic fantasies in the imagination of the narrator since he begins therapy only after Aída abandons him.

CHAPTER V

THE POLITICS OF EROTICISM IN DENSER, ELTIT, AND PERI ROSSI: A COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

When I began my dissertation research, one of the first articles that I read was “Issues for an International Feminist Literary Criticism” (1993) by Amy Kaminsky. Kaminsky begins the article with a satirical comment on the contradictions inherent in feminist theory and the assumptions that it utilized in the years previous to her article. Kaminsky in particular questions the legitimacy of one of the key principles on which feminist work has been based, namely that it “resists systems of hierarchy and privilege” (213); she also remarks that feminist scholarship “has fostered its own hierarchy,” placing English and French studies at the top of the ladder (213), and observes that feminist scholarship has virtually overlooked feminist scholarship on and in other national literatures.

These early paragraphs of Kaminsky’s article reminded me of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), where Woolf recalls the afternoon she was denied entrance to a university library in England. Later, as Woolf pondered the events of that day, she states: “and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out” (24). In my opinion, this statement underscores Kaminsky’s contention because, as she maintains, although “US academic feminism has for some time now been awake to the need for a multicultural feminist scholarship ... work on non-French-European, Latin American, Asian, African, and diasporan/postcolonial literature remains marginal” (216-18). I believe there has indeed been a lamentable tendency to “lock out,” borrowing Woolf’s expression, women

authors from these “other” traditions and to dismiss them as inferior to the Anglo-American and French corpus of feminist criticism. In addition, Kaminsky points out that the reading of feminist criticism does not occur in both directions, that is, feminist critics read Anglo and French scholarship but not vice versa (213). I maintain, however, that Kaminsky’s comment is still too general, and that it needs a specific socio-cultural point of reference. To support this argument, I want to emphasize that the basic theory of H el ene Cixous was deeply influenced by her reading of the Brazilian author, Clarice Lispector, and that Cixous published her book, *L’heure de Clarice Lispector. Pr ec ed e de vivre l’orange*, in 1989, four years before the publication of Kaminsky’s article. This means that at least one first-world scholar was indeed paying attention to what women outside the English and French-European traditions were saying. Nevertheless, Kaminsky makes a valid point when she states that “[t]he Holocaust may be the central feature of twentieth-century history from the point of view of Europe... But it is not the central feature of this century for the non-European world, much of which is characterized in the modern era by colonialism at best and the continuing experience of genocide at worst” (219).

Sara Castro-Klar en makes a similar comment in her introduction to *Women’s Writing in Latin America: An Anthology* (1991), but she specifically refers to Anglo-American feminist criticism and its relationship with Latin American feminist studies, which is the field that pertains to this dissertation. Castro-Klar en maintains that

Not all women’s writing can best be understood within the generalizing categories developed by recent Anglo-American “feminist” social or literary studies. Such an attempt brings forth, among others, difficult problems of cultural translation. The implicit comparative approach between Latin American women’s writing and Anglo-America women’s writing—an approach unavoidable for the readers of this anthology of texts in English translation—must begin by reexamining such

stereotypical cultural differences between the Protestant, or largely secular, North and the Catholic South; the nuclear family of capitalist society in contrast with the extended kinship ties of people living in “developing” economies. (4)

Both Kaminsky and Castro-Klarén are referring to what I call the “fallacy of generalization,” that is, the essentialism to which scholarly work on feminism may lead. In other words, these two scholars are exacerbating their error in using the same framework to discuss feminist issues in the First World and developing countries. It is a fact that I, too, have used the theories of important feminist scholars in the English and French traditions such as Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler. However, in order to avoid the “fallacy of generalization,” I have also employed the theories of feminist scholars—Sara Castro-Klarén, Amy Kaminsky, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, Diane Marting, Debra Castillo, Peggy Sharpe, Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, Earl E. Fitz, Nelly Novaes Coelho, and Ana María del Ríó, to name a few—whose work has had great relevance in the field of literature written by contemporary Latin American women writers. My purpose in doing so is twofold. First, I want to contribute to the tradition of literary criticism on Latin American women’s writing, which, in my opinion, experienced a dynamic growth in the nineties. As Kaminsky states, the production of scholarly work on the literature written by Latin American women authors is not extensive,¹ but thanks to the work of scholars such as the ones mentioned above this type of literary criticism has expanded continuously up to the present time.

Second, by employing the theories of Cixous and Butler within the context of Latin American literature written by women, I want to move away from traditional comparative studies, which until recently have focused on English, French, and German. At the same time, I want to go further in the field of Latin American comparative studies

by including the Brazilian literary tradition, an extraordinarily rich one that has not traditionally been studied in relation to that of its neighbor Spanish America until lately. From Mexico to Argentina, the Latin American countries form a community of nations, linguistically united in many cases, with cultural traditions and historical evolutions that, while far from identical, often coincide. Despite these common factors, the geographical diversity, the ethnical plurality and the varying intellectual traditions—often accentuated by the self-interested involvement of certain foreign nations—explain how these countries have evolved differently and how they have experienced a series of historical events that are culturally unique to each of them. By employing a comparative approach for my analysis of the works by Márcia Denser, Diamela Eltit, and Cristina Peri Rossi, I have sought to establish the differentiating features that locate these women authors in the national milieu of Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay respectively. In the process, I have tried to establish a new paradigm for the more international study of literature written by Latin American women in the last decades of the twentieth century.

The literary canon of Western civilization has tended, first, to recognize women's writing in a way that actually reinforces the patriarchal tradition and, second, to overlook other, more culturally marginalized texts (Scott 5). In addition, if we look at anthologies of women writers from the turn-of-the-century period, it seems that only women who had turbulent and tormented personal lives are included in them. One thinks, for example, of Delmira Agustini, who suffered mental instability and who was killed by her jealous ex-husband; Alfonsina Storni, who committed suicide before cancer would end her life; and Patrícia Galvão ("Pagú"), who was constantly harassed by Brazilian authorities because of her political views. René Scott explains this trend by affirming that these women were

regarded first as women and only secondarily as women writers. In her analysis of modernismo and women's writing in Spanish America, Sylvia Molloy also calls our attention to the representation of the woman writer and affirms that "[w]ithin the ideological boundaries of turn-of-the-century literature, woman cannot write woman" (109). According to her, modernismo produced and legitimized certain stereotypes of femininity which "were to channel the perception of woman in Latin America and inform cultural attitudes toward her for years to come" (109). What is worse, Molloy adds, is that these clichés "became ways of viewing—and controlling—women writers themselves" (109). For this reason, women writers in Latin America seriously considered the need to break away from the past. It was, indeed, during the modernismo movement that Latin American women began to engage in the revision of their old roles and to invent new forms of self-representation. Nevertheless, this was only the beginning because, as Molloy states, the "desiring woman in Agustini's texts, cannot live out her own passions but must become, at some point, woman desired" (120). Although Molloy concludes that "woman's erotic expression remains tentative and needs to be explored further" (120), I believe that women authors in the late seventies and eighties intentionally begin systematically to explore woman's erotic expression and that the work of Márcia Denser, Diamela Eltit, and Cristina Peri Rossi epitomize this. Unlike Agustini's desiring but unfulfilled woman, for example, Denser's Diana Marini lives out her own passions and sexual needs through the young men she "hunts" at night.

In her introduction to *Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology*, a key work in this dissertation, Castro-Klarén states that the "emergence of woman is the central concern of the writings selected for this anthology" (4). Indeed, in the texts dealt

with here, the Latin American authors—such as Nérida Piñon, Clarice Lispector, Rosario Castellanos, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Lygia Fagundes Telles—deal with the notion of being a writer, a woman’s capacity to partake in the construction of a discourse, and the experience of being and of being a woman in the world. In this dissertation, I maintain that by the beginning of the eighties, the emergence of the woman writer has been clearly established. At this point, however, I also maintain that new concepts emerge with an unprecedented strength, particularly those focusing on the female body and its erotic manifestations.

Throughout the previous chapters, I have contended that the exploration of sexuality, the female body, and politics that takes place in the last quarter of the twentieth century has its roots in the exploration of women’s presence in Latin American literature from the first half of the twentieth century onward. Writing from countries that are traditionally patriarchal and conservative, Latin American women writers had to search for a space in which their voices could be heard and where they could participate in the creation of a discourse of their own as a counterbalance to male hegemony. Once literary production by women emerged with strength, once a literary tradition was recognized (one that male-oriented scholar academia had neglected for many years), and once the female voice was recognized and received by cultural institutions, Latin American women authors, in particular from the seventies onward, undertook the task of re-affirming their sexual and political identities. In other words, at first the women of Brazil and Spanish America defined themselves in relation to the clichés legitimized and maintained by patriarchy by either conforming to them or suffering from them. Later, however, Latin American women writers realized they needed to create their own modes

of representation, modes through which they could achieve an affirmation of their identity in the world. The women writers examined in this dissertation belong to this second phase, and they share a common interest in using the eroticized female body as a discursive form of self-affirmation and political engagement.

A key factor that links Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi is the fact that their countries suffered the repression of a military dictatorship during a large portion of the second half of the twentieth century. Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay began the transition from a dictatorship to democracy only in the first half of the eighties, the years during which these women authors are writing and publishing their works (Peri Rossi had already been publishing for a decade). This fact suggests an implicit relationship between the apertura/abertura period in these countries and the emergence of literary texts with an overt erotic content in the publishing market. After many years of political, social, and cultural repression, the citizens of these countries—not only the male and female intelligentsia but also the people who belonged to other social and subcultural groups—saw the democratization of their countries as an opportunity to develop new ways of discussing life, their inhibitions, and desires.² At the same time, the fact that these women wrote and published such works as *Animal dos motéis* and *Lumpérica* without censorship means that institutions were becoming more flexible. Peri Rossi is the exception—since she left as an exile a year before the dictatorship began in Uruguay in 1973—but I include her work in this dissertation because, like Denser and Eltit, she was definitely influenced by the dictatorships.³ Although she writes now from Spain, she published *Solitario de amor* in 1988, which shows that this new emphasis on erotic discourse in Latin American women's literature was constant throughout the entire eighties decade.

This fact has led some critics to argue that the eighties are the years of the “boom” in women’s writing. Throughout the nineties women have continued to explore new modes of erotic discourse, and in fact the numerous publications of erotic fiction written by women and the surge in scholarly work devoted to women’s writing show this continuing interest. Thus, it is essential that this type of writing be added to the various modes of expression characteristic of women’s literature in the twentieth century that Castro-Klarén points out in her article.

I am aware that, as I mentioned above, one cannot talk about the Latin American woman writer in abstract terms because to do so would be to fall into the “fallacy of generalization” trap. During the process of writing this dissertation, I tried always to bear in mind that Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi belong to a specific group of women who have been present in Latin America, as a living tradition, since the beginning of the twentieth century. In saying this, I am referring to what Beatriz Sarlo calls “urban middle-class women” (233). In her study of women, history and ideology, Sarlo explains that “educated women were the principal characters in the staging of the social drama of inequality and the battle against it” (233) and that the feminist movement’s desire to break with social conventions and to create a space for women in the public arena was initiated by “the intellectual categories of society” (233). With this reference to Sarlo’s article I mean to emphasize that in writing this dissertation I am aware that Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi are quite distinct from Tina Modotti (Mexico), Luisa Capetillo (Puerto Rico), Rigoberta Menchú (Guatemala), or Teresina (Brazil).⁴

In the introduction I stated that these women share a desire to claim a space, a voice, and an agency by themselves. Women writers have done so through the creation of

radically new political, racial, and gender discourses. The women authors under consideration in this dissertation chose to use the discourse of eroticism and the body (both male and female) in order to fulfill their demand for new and more authentic modes of self-affirmation and self-representation. Nevertheless, due to the nature of women's literary history, which male supremacy almost condemned to oblivion, one concludes that the various forms that women's discourse takes, inevitably enter the political arena and the public sphere, becoming, ultimately, texts that empower both women and men (whose liberation from repressing, violent, and sexist views must also be effected). In fact, I maintain that erotic discourse is probably the type of discourse that is most clearly linked to the discourse of power relations in patriarchal societies. In the novels here studied, Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi use eroticism as a way of gaining both personal and political freedom. When Sarlo analyzes the "styles that women produce or modify when they participate in the ideological debate or enter the political arena" (237), she recognizes three broad trends: "politics as reason, politics as passion, and politics as action" (238). I have argued that in the novels studied here a common trend is that the standpoint taken by the women is what Sarlo calls "politics as passion." According to Sarlo, "Politics as passion describes women's relations to the public sphere within the space drawn by certain distinctive traits for the "feminine image"" (240). I maintain that Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi write their novels from the position of "politics as passion" not only because of the erotic content or because the female body stands at the center of the narration but also because they develop the "purely feminine" (240) as a tool of power. By "purely feminine" I mean the female body and its sexuality because, as Peri Rossi affirms, if there is something that all women share it is that we all have breasts and a

vagina, we all menstruate, we all have the ability to give birth, and we all have the natural instinct to sexual activity.⁵ By “tool of power,” I mean that by subverting the values and modes of conduct that the male tradition has legitimized as typically feminine, and by giving them a new social and moral function, women affirm their participation in the ideological and political world. The outcome of this, Sarlo explains, is that “[n]ew values emerge as the process of turning public the private as lived by women, who were thought of as secondary characters yet suddenly begin to play leading roles” (241).

An especially powerful example of this is the female protagonist of Eltit’s *Lumpérica*. L. Iluminada challenges both patriarchal values and behaviors and dictatorial power by stepping outside the private realm of the house at night and exposing her body in the middle of the public plaza. Denser’s female protagonist act similarly in *Animal dos motéis*. Diana offers a new dynamic in the play of the traditional codes of romantic courtship by using the “purely feminine” subversively, that is, Diana lets herself be seduced by men (as the traditional courtship rules demand) in order to take control afterwards. While I maintain that Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi have written these novels from a belief in politics as passion, and that they share a common interest in writing female bodies into their fictions along with awareness of the potentialities of the eroticized body, they employ a variety of expressions of the female erotic imagination. Of the three writers, Denser’s erotic voice is the most physical (though not necessarily the most pornographic), aiming at the inversion of traditional models of sexual behavior as a strategy to deal with the stress the Brazilian woman (this is to say, the urban, middle-class, white woman) is experiencing as her country’s politics and government evolve.

In her electronic article entitled “Eroticism and Latin American Women Writers,” Diana Niebylski identifies “three noticeable distinct modes of representing the eroticized bodies of women and erotic female behavior” (par. 2) in women’s literature from the second half of the twentieth century, two of which I have identified in the novels under discussion in this dissertation. The first form of erotic discourse is found in *Animal dos motéis* where Denser seeks to “invert and subvert traditional models of sexual behavior and imagine new for erotic solos or erotic couplings” (Niebylski, par. 2). The second mode of erotic representation is found in Eltit’s novel, where it “considers female eroticism within the political, social and historical structures that seek to limit its potential and thus provoke transgressive and subversive behavior by bodies unwilling to be controlled and regulated by outmoded patriarchal institutions and discourses” (Niebylski, par. 4). For Niebylski, the third mode of erotic representation “relies on parody—often parody with comic intent—to expose and puncture the rigid limitations of traditional porno-erotic scenarios and discourses” (par. 6). This latter approach is not found in the novels under discussion here. In *Solitario de amor*, however, I argue that it is possible to find an erotic discourse distinct from the ones in Eltit’s and Denser’s novels. Like Denser, Peri Rossi seeks the subversion of traditional gender roles, but the erotic discourse is less violent and more focused on the desire, not satisfaction, of the individual’s drive toward self-fulfillment and recognition within new formulations of social bodies.

Within the context of the first type of erotic discourse, I refer to the possible influence of Nogueira Cobra’s works on Denser. In her book *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf affirms that “Books continue each other” (79), and in this sense I consider Denser

to be the descendant of Ercília Nogueira Cobra, a forgotten woman writer from the Brazilian modernista movement whose works have been brought to light thanks to the work of scholars Susan C. Quinlan and Peggy Sharpe. The work of these critics has brought women writers from this movement to light, women writers whose works significantly influenced contemporary Brazilian fiction (a fact that has not been adequately publicized). Nogueira Cobra's liberal ideas earned her family's enmity and a hostile reception from the literary public and Brazilian authorities.⁶ Her most influential works stand out in Brazilian literature for being thematically scandalous and politically liberal, and for having such titles as *Virgindade anti-higiênica: preconceitos e convenções hipócritas* (1924) and *Virgindade inútil: novela de uma revoltada* (1927). The narrative voices of these novels decry the taboos of the time (for example, the one that inveighs against female eroticism) and present the sexual liberation of women as the only viable vehicle for the liberation of women in general (Quinlan and Sharpe 27). As the titles of the novels suggests, Nogueira Cobra challenges those social restrictions that “contribuem para a preservação da virgindade feminina como meio efetivo de manter um estado de subjugação, ignorância e desemprego” ‘contribute to the preservation of female virginity as an effective means to preserve a state of subjugation, ignorance, and unemployment’ (Quinlan and Sharpe 28). As other women writers of her time who wrote on women's sexuality (and later throughout the entire twentieth century), Nogueira Cobra had to endure attacks from critics who considered her work as pornographic—the distinction between the pornographic and the erotic being something that I have tried to establish throughout the dissertation.⁷ But these critics missed the main point in Nogueira Cobra's arguments. She identifies the lack of financial and legal equality with woman's

difficulties in leading “um vida natural” ‘a natural life’ (Nogueira Cobra, qtd. in Quinlan and Sharpe: 29) and she highlights the effects caused by “angústia mental, emocional e econômica das mulheres quando são proibidas de exercitar efetivamente sua natureza sexual e física” ‘women’s mental, emotional, and economical anguish when they are prohibited from effectively exercising their sexual and physical nature’ (Quinlan and Sharpe 30).

The context from which Denser writes has obviously changed since Nogueira Cobra published her works. The economic situation of Brazilian women towards the end of the twentieth century (again, I should specify that I am writing about the middle-class white woman) has improved and they enjoy a financial autonomy that allows them to live independently. In fact, this is the type of women that the reader finds in the different episodes in *Animal dos motéis*. With a job in a newspaper, Diana enjoys a stable financial situation which places her in a more advantageous position. Nevertheless, she still feels mental and emotional anguish as she does not know what identity to choose in order to flourish in a Brazilian society that is changing politically and economically but that still lives under traditional presumptions about women’s sexual behavior. Diana is painfully aware of the social consequences that choosing a public life, that is choosing to have a professional career, may cause; for example, her parents hardly have a relationship with her because the type of life she leads embarrasses them. Diana Marini suffers the ambivalent and irreconcilable situation of both desiring and fearing an affirmation of power in relation to the young men she meets at night. At the end of the novel’s various episodes, Diana Marini’s sexual identity is not yet clear. On the one hand, she feels affirmed when controlling the young men she “hunts” at night. On the other hand, when

daylight comes, she returns to patriarchal modes of behavior. Does this mean that it is only in the dark environment of the night that the woman is able to indulge herself in full liberty? The reader finds a similar phenomenon in Eltit's *Lumpérica*, where the female protagonist decides to act at the public plaza at night. Does this mean that the hours of daylight, and its symbolic importance to woman, constitute a field to explore in terms of the novel's significance? Nevertheless, it is clear that Denser here presents a polymorphous woman; Diana Marini enjoys the pleasures of sexual and psychological freedom and yet feels acutely the loneliness and bitterness that her new life options offer her.

In the novels under analysis in this dissertation, we find female characters that exemplify the type of woman of whom Nogueira Cobra wrote in defense. From this, one concludes that, despite writing five or six decades later, Denser emphasizes in *Animal dos motéis* that the sexual and political situation of Brazilian women is still a controversial issue. Early in the twentieth century, Nogueira Cobra maintained that “as mulheres casadas são, na melhor das hipóteses, desajustadas psicologicamente e, provavelmente, fisicamente, pois a falta de expressão sexual livre subjuga sua posição à seus maridos” ‘married women are, in the best of hypotheses, psychologically misfit and, probably, physically, for the lack of free sexual expression subjugates their position to their husbands’ (Quinlan and Sharpe 30) and this state is due to the “falta de alternativas profissionais, pois recebem uma instrução inútil ou insuficiente sem nenhum treinamento profissionalizante que se une à moralidade religiosa distorcida pregada pela Igreja Católica Romana” ‘lack of professional alternatives, because they receive useless or deficient instruction without any sort of professional training, which is linked to a

distorted religious morality preached by the Roman Catholic Church' (30). The second female protagonist of "Tigresa" (the second chapter in *Animal dos motéis*) identifies with this type of married woman. As a newly-married young woman (and who belongs to decadent Brazilian bourgeoisie), Lila tries to seduce Diana simply because of her desire to challenge the role society has assigned to her, her desire to act without bowing to social and sexual restraint and to have control over her body. Nevertheless, the traditional bourgeois mentality weighs strongly on her because when Diana responds to her sexual advances, Lila suddenly resists and leaves with embarrassment. In this way, the narrator highlights the superficiality and repressiveness of traditional patriarchal values and modes of conduct.

Two other female characters studied here that identify with this type of woman are Lorena and Ana Clara in *As meninas*, by Fagundes Telles. Lorena belongs to the same decadent bourgeois class as Lila, and bases her life on the same traditional female roles with which she was reared and educated. Ana Clara, in contrast, belongs to the proletariat class and is the woman who is inevitably forced to fall prey to drugs, and even prostitution, because of her parlous financial situation. It is worth noting that Fagundes Telles's characters do not conform to the paradigm of upper-class, white girls who play the game of embodying the conventional female roles that their mothers and grandmothers had. These young women are closer to the new realities of Brazilian life in the seventies and reflect other type of social pathologies, such as affairs with married men, divorce, drugs addiction and prostitution.

The second type of erotic discourse is found in Eltit's novel, and it is not based on physical sex as much as it is based on the subtle relationship between the subject's carnal

desires and political expression. It is therefore a more politicized eroticism in the sense that it describes the literary work of Eltit in general. In other words, Eltit belongs to a generation of writers who, due to the political effects of Pinochet's brutal dictatorship in Chile, committed themselves to denouncing the record of the abuse perpetrated by the regime. During the seventeen years that Pinochet's dictatorship lasted, Chilean writers moved in two directions. On the one hand, there were those who wrote testimonios, a genre appropriate to periods of repression because, according to critics such as Tierney-Tello, it "seems to promise an authentic representation of the subaltern's voices in Latin America" (79). On the other hand, there were those who tended to write an alternative, more avant-garde type of artistic creation. Tierney-Tello explains that "Experimental, unapologetically aesthetically concerned but also politically committed, the visual and literary art that emerged from the movement known as the avanzada works to defy and facile opposition between political commitment and aesthetics" (80). It is in this second variety of Chilean artistic production that Eltit's work is included. This type of artistic production is characterized by being both socially and aesthetically committed. In fact, as Tierney-Tello affirms, "Eltit's concern in all her cultural projects and narrative works is to explore the marginal spaces of culture in order to shed light on the self-constituted center and what it has excluded" (80). This concern with the inclusion and representation of the underrepresented resonates with the political agenda that, according to Sarlo, a number of women writers have elected to follow. Sarlo states that "[w]omen asked and fought for citizenship according to models that also served to convey the claims of peasants, cultural minorities, and racial communities" (235-36). At the same time, I maintain that the issues of marginality and representation in Eltit's works do not only pertain to the local context

of Pinochet's regime but are also relevant in a broader historical context. In other words, as scholar Alice Nelson puts it, "the marginality characterizing Eltit's postcolonial, violent, and solitary characters is the same issue that connects them with other marginal peoples in Latin America and the world" (152).⁸

But Eltit is also concerned with a commitment to aesthetics and proves it by deploring authoritarianism in the artistic arena. By taking this position, she breaks with long-established conventional formulas of the novel and the "use of aesthetic elements like linguistic rupture, fragmentary, nonmimetic narrative form, and ... allegorical protagonists" (Tierney-Tello 80). Critics such as Hernán Vidal have characterized this type of literary production as "incomprehensibly hermetic" (Vidal, qtd. in Tierney-Tello: 80) and indeed Eltit's works are quite complex and demand an alert, involved reader. I maintain, however, that this allegedly "hermetic" feature is understandable if one considers her particular political and aesthetic agenda. As I mentioned above, Eltit is trying "to unveil and unravel the multiple oppressions of a patriarchal, classist, racist, and politically repressive social structure" (Tierney-Tello 80), and she is doing it by rejecting all forms of political and linguistic authoritarianism. For this reason, I argue that the type of erotic discourse found in Eltit's work is profoundly and strategically related to politics.

In her definition of "politics as passion" (240), Sarlo states that

New values emerge as the process of turning public the private as lived by women, who were through of as secondary characters yet suddenly begin to play leading roles. New subjects, these women often speak a language profoundly different from the language of politics: Placing values such as life, dignity, security, and basic human rights as the axis of their action and discourse. (241)

I maintain that Eltit attempts this in novels such as *Lumpérica* and *Por la patria* because the complexity of these novels rests on the fact that she creates a language

different from the official one—that is, the official language of Pinochet’s dictatorship—by means of her portrayal of women and other marginal bodies. But the text’s political discourse inevitably grounds itself in the new language Eltit tries to create. Through the main female character, L. Iluminada, and the marginal bodies of the lumpen, Eltit seeks to provoke subversive behavior vis-à-vis an interrogation of patriarchal institutions and discourse.

In the novel, L. Iluminada’s body is eroticized in direct relation to its opposition to the authoritarianism of Pinochet’s dictatorship because, in Trevizán’s terms, the body becomes a battlefield. L. Iluminada’s body is doubly subversive because her body becomes a battlefield at the moment that she exposes herself at the center of the public plaza at night. The narrative voice says that “La plaza pública contiene la tinta para escribir” ‘the public square contains the ink to write’ (106). I argue that the novel’s narrative voice refers, first, to the fact that a woman (who, according to Cixous, contains her own ink) dares to enter the public plaza and, second, that only by stepping into the realm from which she has hitherto been excluded can the woman speak and write, that is, gain power. Thus, the woman and the lumpen “enter the public sphere as a disruptive force” (Sarlo 242) and, from there, they seek to legitimate their identities as subjects and, ultimately, as citizens.

Another type of style that Sarlo identifies in her article is “politics as action” (242), which also finds a clear manifestation in Eltit’s marginal characters. Sarlo affirms that

Politics as action does not necessarily entail violence. Through the last decades many Latin American women’s organizations have shown that they can manage to stand precisely on the limit of pacific but no passive presence in the public sphere. They tend to occupy physically the symbolic ground of their claims: Standing in

the agora, they embody the values they are fighting for, but their action seems to be at the same time resolute and not aggressive. (242)

But for writers such as Eltit, writing is also a form of political action, and she reaffirms this position in *Lumpérica* when she has L. Iluminada standing at the plaza and writing both with her body (she scribbles some words on the ground with a piece of chalk) and on her body (she inscribes her self-recognition through cuts and burns on her skin). Eltit also concerns herself with other forms of anti-authoritarian writing in *Lumpérica*. For example, in part six of the novel, the narrative voice describes “Los graffitis de la plaza” ‘the graffiti of the plaza’ and compares them with the lumpen and, ultimately, with L. Iluminada. The narrative voice refers to them as proclama, desatino, ficción, seducción, engranaje, sentencia, refrote, evasión, objetivo, iluminación, burla, abandono, and erosión.⁹ By doing this, the narrative voice explains that these marginal elements enter into and begin to participate in the dominant system but in an alternative fashion (for example, graffiti paintings are part of the city) and, once they are considered to be part of the system, they claim the legitimization of their subaltern voice and “rub against” the official one. In addition, L. Iluminada seizes control of her body—which challenges the control that the patriarchal tradition has exerted on the female body generally—by doing harm to herself, specifically by inflicting burns on her skin and cuts on her head. By having her character do this, Eltit posits the opposition of sexuality to power and restates the potential for women’s (and the lumpen’s) empowerment through the subversive articulation of self-inflicted violence and sexual iconoclasm.

The third type of eroticism is manifested in Peri Rossi’s novel, *Solitario de amor*. This type of eroticism is similar to the one employed by Denser in *Animal dos motéis* in the sense that both writers interrogate traditional roles of sexual behavior that Western

culture has established for women; they play with the inversion of these reigning paradigms, and they imagine new modes of both heterosexual and homosexual behavior. Denser achieves this through her protagonist, Diana Marini, and her ambiguous relationships with the young men she meets throughout the different episodes that frame the novel, a narrative structure in which the characters always seem to be in an environment of sexual anarchy that combines masturbation, violent sexual combinations, lesbian encounters, and other so-called “deviant,” or non-standard, sexual happenings. However, Peri Rossi’s novel does not focus on the female figure as much as it does on the male figure, the figure in whom so much power is imbedded and entrusted. What is surprising, and at the same time ironical, about the novel of the Uruguayan writer is that the inversion of traditional paradigms is realized primarily through the male protagonist-narrator and through a discourse that has been mainly associated with men. Unlike the novels by Fagundes Telles, Márcia Denser, and Eltit, in which woman is overtly the center of the narrative structure, in Peri Rossi’s *Solitario de amor*, both man and woman occupy the structural narrative center, though it is the male figure upon whom the novel’s subversive force is placed.

Peri Rossi draws from psychoanalysis and from the theory of phallogentrism (for example, the vagina as gap and the penis as space filler). She challenges these assumptions and inverts them by portraying a man whose exile from the beloved woman’s body has caused him a crisis of identity, and rendering him a man who needs to return to the origin, which yet again is found in another female figure, the mother. Peri Rossi also draws from traditional metaphors (for example, the metaphor of the madwoman) that men have long used when writing about women, though it is also true

that this same metaphor has also been used by women writers from different time periods. Denser and Eltit, for example, integrate this metaphor in their novels by presenting women characters who narrate themselves in fragments. One should remember that in *Animal dos motéis*, Diana Marini writes herself through the unorthodox life episodes she experiences (particularly at night). Marini is both socially and sexually alienated and seeks to reaffirm her identity through alternative interactions with both men and women. Eltit thus presents, through fragmented pieces of prose, a fragmented female protagonist who is in quest of an integrated and cohesive whole, the latter understood both personally and politically. Throughout the text, L. Iluminada inscribes such fragmentation in her own body by cutting her skin, a subversive symbolic act that emphasizes both damage and the need for healing. In relation to this thematically complex metaphor, Trevizán affirms that the writing of the eighties retains characteristics of the crazy woman, the schizophrenic woman, and the woman who is unable to structure a unitary distinct discourse and who writes herself in fragments (47). Unlike the novels by Denser and Eltit, however, Peri Rossi shifts the function of this metaphor only to incorporate it in relation to her depiction of the male narrator. He affirms his own fragmented identity (he, too, is a victim of phallocentrism) because he has been exiled from the female body (he uses the metaphor of the umbilical cord that has been severed from the mother) and because his sexual organ is dependent on the woman's sexual organ. The narrator realizes that his identity derives from his ability (or lack thereof) to penetrate into the totality of being that the woman's sexual organ represents. At the same time, he presents his own fragmented identity by means of a fragmented narrative which consists of the fragmented reality characteristic of memories, dreams, and desire.

What is also surprising in *Solitario de amor* is the function of the novel's writing, which serves as a sort of therapy for the narrator. Thus, the narrator's writing serves two purposes: he writes to formulate a new paradigm of women's sexuality (one that undermines phallogentrism) and he writes in order to recover his own fragmented identity. Then, if women are recovering their ignored voices and legitimizing their identities through the written word, men write now to redefine themselves in terms of the new linguistic and sexual paradigms that women are creating, and that will benefit men as well.

Castro-Klarén affirms that "Poniatowska considers writing to be a complete act of insurrection" (22). In my opinion, there exists a strategy for addressing this sense of both insurrection and renewal that has become characteristic of Latin American women writers particularly in the eighties. For these writers, the female body engages in an erotic and sexualized relationship with the forces of power inherent in patriarchy and, in the process, transforms it into a political structure that is more inclusive, tolerant, and democratic. Thus, the very concept of the body itself becomes a key concept in the eighties when, still suffering from brutal dictatorships, people in many countries began to mobilize and demonstrate in public in favor of los desaparecidos de las dictaduras 'the disappeared ones of the dictatorships' and giving a voice to all aggrieved and marginalized people, both male and female. Women writers in the eighties, then, began to challenge the power of the dictators and, at the same time, to give a new life to their bodies and to the bodies on the periphery.

Here I have approached the last decades of the twentieth century (the seventies, eighties, and nineties) with considerable caution. I have not intended to categorize the

literature written by women during these decades in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay into static forms isolated from literary history or from the rest of the century (since periods of time in art mean both a continuity and break from current trends). On the contrary, moving among works from various geographies, I have sought to map a body of writing that defines the praxis of women writers from these countries and that at the same time adds something of value to the growing field of comparative studies in the Latin American framework. Although it would be difficult to conceptualized this body of writing with a single term (for example, I would not classify the literary manifestation of women writers in the eighties with the expression ‘erotic literature’), one can lucidly identify its unique agenda, that is, Denser, Eltit, and Peri Rossi write from inside patriarchal tradition in order to reconstruct it through the writing of the woman’s body and sexuality.

¹ To illustrate this fact, I used the main database in the Central Library at Vanderbilt University. The search results for “Women and literature United States History 20th century” gives us a total of 520 entries while the search results for “Women and literature Latin America History 20th century” gives a total of 7 entries.

² For example, I am thinking here of the so-called *la Movida*, a cultural and social movement that took place after Franco’s dictatorship in Spain and that was initiated by young people. This movement argued for a new way of understanding life, especially night life, and focused on an apparently alternative culture that encouraged a break from both the post-dictatorship society and the society of the new democracy.

³ When Peri Rossi arrived in Spain, a thirty-three-year-old dictatorship awaited her. In an e-mail conversation with her, Peri Rossi writes that she also had to escape from *el franquismo* (another name for Franco’s dictatorship in Spain) in 1974. She continues to say that all dictatorships look alike, and that to fight against the Uruguayan dictatorship is not different from fighting against the Spanish one.

⁴ In her article, Sarlo mentions Tina Modotti, Luisa Capetillo, and Teresina as examples of women who, despite not belonging to the urban middle-class, became active militants involved in social reform activities and women’s rights movements in their counties.

⁵ Peri Rossi mentioned this in one of our e-mail conversations.

⁶ According to a distant relative of the family, Nogueira Cobra suffered abuse from the authorities: “...ela foi interrogada durante a noite, sempre nua, sempre muito maltratada; porque o interrogatório dela todo girava sobre sexo, ninguém interrogava a opinião política dela, ninguém queria saber; só queriam saber o que ela pensava dos homens, os homens estavam muito machucado com a opinião dela (...) a visão que eles tinham é que ela era uma ameaça tremenda. Porque se ela levantasse as mulheres naquela época, eles tinham a impressão que iam derrubar o regime (...) ela mudou de nome e fugiu para o Paraná” ‘she was questioned during the night, always naked, always quite mistreated; because the interrogation was all about sex, nobody questioned her political views, nobody wanted to know; they only wanted to know what she thought about men, and men were quite bruised by her opinions (...), they thought that she was a huge threat. For, if she could organize the women of that period, they had the impression that they [women] would destroy the regime (...) she changed her name and escaped to Paraná’ (Mott, qtd. in Quinlan and Sharpe: 27).

⁷ In her defense, Nogueira Cobra affirms: “Eu poderia, se quisesse, escrever um livro pornográfico. Para isso, não precisava imaginação nem estudo. Bastar-me-ia um lápis, um caderno de notas e a frequência de certos lugares—não pensem que tascas, “cabarés” e outros, não! Mas os grandes hotéis, os grandes chás, os grandes transatlânticos, isto é o lugar da aristocracia do dinheiro, dos reis do café, açúcar, algodão, etc., que são também os reis do vício, da imoralidade, que muita gente só atribue às coquetes como se as *coquetes* não fossem regamente pagas” ‘I could, if I wanted, write a pornographic book. For that, I would not need imagination or research. A pencil, a notebook, and going to certain places with frequency would be enough—do not think bars, nightclubs, and other places, no! Rather, big hotels, big tea houses, big transatlantic boats, this is the place of the aristocracy’s money, of the kings of coffee, sugar, cotton, etc., who are also the kings of vice, of immorality, which many people only associate with coquettes, as if coquettes were not royally paid’ (Nogueira Cobra, qtd. in Quinlan and Sharpe: 29).

⁸ For example, Nelson interprets the word *Lumpérica* as a reference to the proletariat and to the Latin American woman (see Nelson, *Political Bodies*).

⁹ Claim, nonsense, fiction, seduction, gearing, sentence, rubbing, evasion, objective, illumination, mockery, abandonment, and erosion.

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