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Beyond the Nation: Issues of Identity in the Contemporary Narrative of Cuban Women Writing (in) the Diaspora

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University of Miami

BEYOND THE NATION: ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE OF
CUBAN WOMEN WRITING (IN) THE DIASPORA

By

Yvette Fuentes

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

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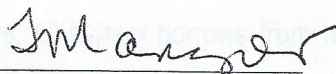
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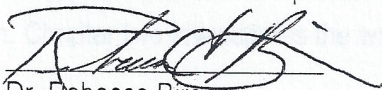
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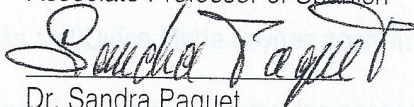
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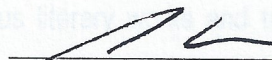
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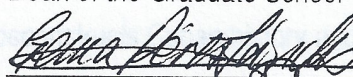
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This dissertation traces the narrative of contemporary Cuban women writers from their early work published in Cuba through their Diaspora narratives. It explores the discursive and narrative techniques that contemporary Cuban women deploy in their narratives to challenge Cuba's dominant cultural constructions of national and gendered identity. I posit that contemporary Cuban women's narratives produced on and off the island display *aislamiento* (isolation) that serves as a means of "talking back" to Cuba's patriarchal discourses. The introduction presents an overview of recent debates on nation, gender and identity within the context of contemporary Cuban literary history and feminist theory. Chapter one examines the textual and discursive techniques Daína Chaviano deploys in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre to expose and denounce dominant discourses on nation and gender. In her insular and Diaspora narratives, Chaviano borrows from and contests various literary works and traditions to rewrite Cuban history and the Canon and "talk back" to those who have sought to construct and silence women. Chapter two investigates the ways Zoé Valdés deconstructs Cuban history and its national icons in order to represent Cubanness. Whereas the first part explores the narrative techniques Valdés and Dulce María Loynaz apply in their novels, Sangre azul and Jardín, to contest traditional notions of nation and gender, the second part analyzes La nada cotidiana and elucidates how this text debunks Cuba's revolutionary icons. Chapter three examines the narrative and discursive strategies Yanitzia Canetti utilizes in Al otro lado and Novelita Rosa to represent and undermine gender and national identity. The conclusion offers some insight into the future of Cuban Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

DIVING INTO CURRENT DEBATES ON CONTEMPORARY CUBAN LITERATURE

RODEADA de mar por todas partes,
soy isla asida al tallo de los vientos...
Nadie escucha mi voz si rezo o grito:
Puedo volar o hundirme... Puedo, a veces,
morder mi cola en signo de Infinito.
Soy tierra desgajándose... Hay momentos
en que el agua me ciega y me acobarda,
en que el agua es la muerte donde floto...
Pero abierta a mareas y ciclones,
Hinco en el mar raíz de pecho roto.

Crezo del mar y muero de él... Me alzo
¡para volverme en nudos desatados...!
¡Me come un mar abatido por las alas
de arcángeles sin cielo, naufragados! ¹

[Surrounded by sea on all sides,
I'm an island held by the stalks of the winds...
No one hears my voice, if I pray or scream:
I can fly or sink...
I could, at times,
bite my tail like the Infinity sign.
I am earth that breaks off...
There are moments
when the sea blinds and scares me,
moments when the water is the death I float upon...
But I am open to the tides and the storms,
I bury myself into the sea like the roots of a broken breast.

I rise from the sea and die from it...
I rise up to turn myself into undone knots...!
The sea eats me,
shattered by the wings of heaven-less and shipwrecked archangels!] ²

It is fitting to begin this study with Dulce María Loynaz's "Isla", in particular because this poem and Loynaz's work, in general, reflects the notion of Cuban identity, Cubanness, as fluid and transportable. Loynaz's unique body of literary work echoes the strong bond with the sea that has permeated Cuban literature in the past and present. In this 1947 poem, Loynaz portrays a poetic I, "un yo poético," that is insular, an ambiguous and buoyant island-body. The sea appears to direct

the poetic voice, and there are moments when the sea threatens, exposing the island-voice to rough waves and hurricanes, and yet the sea also appears to provide a kind of freedom and stability. Loynaz's poetic I stands firm, despite her movements, paradoxically rooted by her very insularity. In this poem as with other works, Loynaz embraces the island and its qualities, adopting "*la isla*" for herself as well as for those voices she recreates in her literature. That is, Loynaz is an island, and takes in that isolation, or *aislamiento*, as a way of life. But, *aislamiento* does not equal marginalization, per se; rather, it refers to the various ways in which Loynaz, and women like her, assume the condition of the island, *se aislan*, as a way of surviving within multiple spaces.

Aislamiento refers to a discursive and narrative technique intricately tied to the island-space that serves as a means of contesting patriarchal Cuban discourses. Literally meaning "to [move towards] an island," *aislarse* is a move toward isolation. *Al aislarse* one assumes or adopts the paradoxical condition of the island, a floating space at sea lacking fixed roots and borders, that both isolates, as well as allows for movement. *Aislamiento* is both imposed from the outside (by society, as well as voluntary (assumed by the individual) and has as much to do with the condition of isolation from within the island (*insilio*), as from outside the island (*exilio*). As opposed to *afincarse*, the planting or setting down of roots, *aislarse* suggests the transportability of one's identity, wherever one finds oneself. *Aislamiento* suggests the need to isolate oneself in order to forge a space of one's own, in a sense to create a "third space", from which to think and speak.

Aislamiento, then, is an inherently paradoxical term, with, in fact, opposing definitions. On the one hand, Cuban women writers as *aisladas* rely on the "island" as a sort of anchor; in their literature, in fact, characters return to *la isla* again and again most often in search of "wholeness". Yet curiously enough, *al aislarse* Cuban women also seek to move beyond the island. They adopt a metaphorical island, rather than a geographic one. Thus, literary returns to the island ultimately expose the impossibility of achieving wholeness. Rather than essentialize identity, Cuban women

argue its constructedness. Via their *aislamiento*, in their metaphorical island-space, or third space, found beyond Cuba and beyond the Diaspora in-between nations and canons, Cuban women rewrite nation and gender. Through *aislamiento* Cuban women writers, such as Loynaz and those who have followed her footsteps "talk back", to borrow Debra Castillo's term, to a society that has sought to silence them.

A precursor to contemporary Cuban women's literature, both within the island and in the Diaspora, Loynaz's work is crucial for a reformulation of a more encompassing view of Cuban identity and her work needs to be regarded a precursor to contemporary Cuban and Latin American, feminist texts. Moreover, Loynaz and her work should serve as bridges between the narrative being produced by contemporary Cuban women writers on and off the island. I return to discuss Loynaz, and analyze her work in more detail, specifically the lyrical novel *Jardín*, in the second chapter of this study, "Feminine Spaces and Transnationality: Gendered and National Identities in the Narrative of Dulce María Loynaz and Zoé Valdés".

This dissertation focuses on the narrative of Daína Chaviano (1957), Zoé Valdés (1959) and Yanitzia Canetti (1967), three Cuban women writers who began their literary careers on the island, and who currently write in the Diaspora. I center on these three because in many ways they represent the diversity of contemporary Cuban women writing in the Diaspora, and in their narrative they confront issues of gendered and national identity. Born, raised, and educated in post-1959 revolutionary Cuba, these three women published successfully on the island before leaving in the last decade. Their works produced on and off the island center as much on exile, the movement outside nation, as on inner exile, or *insilio*, the condition of alienation from within the nation-state. By borrowing from and contesting various Cuban discourses, including works from the Cuban Canon and marginal Queer texts, these women reveal the construction of national and

gender identity. They also rewrite those identities; in their narrative, Cuba and Cuban national identity transcend geographic borders, rethinking the nation as transnational.

Before proceeding to discuss specific works by Chaviano, Valdés and Canetti, it is necessary to dive into some recent debates and trends in Cuban Studies. Since the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, but especially within the last decade, Cuban literary and cultural studies have flourished both on and off the island. In Cuba, government-owned publishing houses such as Editorial Letras Cubanas, Unión and Casa de las Américas have long provided writers a dependable outlet for publishing their works. However, these Cuban works have rarely reached large numbers of readers outside the island. Thus, in recent years, a growing number of Cuban writers have sought to publish their works abroad. As for Cuban exile writers in the United States, works written in the 1960s and 1970s were for the most part published by independent publishers in Miami, such as Ediciones Universal or Torre de Papel. However, as with insular Cuban literature, contemporary Cuban exile and Cuban-American writers have also succeeded in having their literary work published by Spanish and English-language publishing houses throughout Latin America, the United States and Spain.³ Therefore, one may argue that the market has been a factor for the growth in interest (and sales) of present-day Cuban and Cuban-American publications. To augment this, many Cuban writers living in the Diaspora now boast prestigious literary prizes, including the Premio Azorín and the Premio Alfaguara, for instance.⁴ One plausible underlying reason for the growth of studies on Cuban and Cuban-American literature may lie with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and its effect on Cubans on the island and abroad. Without a doubt, the Cuban Revolution has meant many things for different people and it is difficult to speak to anyone, but particularly a Cuban, about "la Rev" without expecting some kind of emotional reaction. Yet, despite the different points of view on the subject, despite the more than forty years that have passed since its triumph, it continues to be the focal point of numerous Cuban

works produced in and out of Cuba. The Revolution's other half was and still is exile itself with its various migratory waves since 1959. In the essay "Introduction: Narrating the Nation", Homi Bhabha argues the following regarding nation:

The locality of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always be in the process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. (4)

In this essay, Bhabha further argues that the 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously "between ourselves" (4). It is with this "Janus faced" notion of nation that we can analyze the phenomena of Revolution and Exile. Revolution and Exile (and each side's rhetoric) are mutually interdependent on each other for survival. In this symbiotic, complex relationship, the death of one would result in the death of the other. Neither can stand alone, the one half constantly pushing and contesting the other.

In a literary context, critic Danilo H. Figueredo argues, for example, that Cuban and Cuban-American literature's "milieu" is its historical background, i.e. the Revolution and Exile (18-19). Another critic, Pamela Maria Smorkaloff writes,

... all Cubans, wherever they are, hold a common obsession with 1959. For all, inescapably and without exception, that year stands as a defining moment. It colors, shapes, and informs both self-perception and perception of the world, context, the individual's relationship to historical process, national and international, and how he or she views the island's articulation with the world. January 1959 marks for some the moment when the island closed in on itself. For others, it signaled Cuba's projection into history in its own right, a full opening to the crosscurrents of the world. Either way, it is an inescapable historical and existential fact. (6-7)

By no means should one assume that all contemporary Cuban works focus solely on the Revolution or on Exile. Many writers, surely, choose to pass it over, ignore this moment in history

altogether, erases it from their memory banks. Yet, if 1959 isn't the historical marker from which a Cuban novel (written either on or off the island) begins or is set the focus then turns to Cuban identity itself, to Cubanness or *cubanía*. In the 1939 essay "Los factores de la cubanidad" (The factors of Cubanness), Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coins and makes a distinction between the terms *cubanismo*, *cubanidad* and *cubanía*. According to Ortiz, of these terms, only *cubanía* makes reference to Cuban identity, defining the term as "cubanidad plena, sentida, consciente y deseada" [Cubanness to the fullest, heartfelt, conscious and desired] (Ortiz 1939, 8). In other words, Cubanness, or *cubanía*, is not determined by origin or place of birth or by particular mannerisms or habits. Rather, according to Ortiz, to be Cuban one must feel and desire to be Cuban. Ortiz's ideas on Cuban identity remain as relevant today as we enter the twenty-first century, as they did in the 1930s when they were developed, especially in lieu of Cuba's large and ever-growing Diaspora population. Ortiz's *cubanía*, in conjunction with recent works on the relationship between exile and identity, help in an analysis and understanding of the contemporary work of Cuban writers and artists living and producing work off the island.

The fact remains that Cubanness (often with the Revolution and/or Exile as an influential part of that identity) is an inherent part of Cuban literature wherever it is produced. Yet since 1959, Cuban studies have for the most part looked at either literature written in Cuba or in exile, *aquí o allí*, here or there, with few comparative studies in between. Isabel Alvarez-Borland and Eliana Rivero, as well as Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, to a lesser degree, have mostly centered on Cuban exile literature and the problem(s) of identity inherent in these works. These critics have surveyed the gradual development of Cuban exile literature from the first exile generation (writing in Spanish on the events leading up to or following the Revolution) to a second generation of writers. This second generation, the "one and a half" often centered on their personal experiences as preadolescents or adolescents immigrating to the United States after 1959. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat was the first critic to popularize this term (developed by Cuban sociologist Rubén Rumbaut) in his work Life on the Hyphen (1994). Isabel Alvarez-Borland describes the one-and-a-half generation as a subgroup of writers, who, having left Cuba during their adolescence, had Cuban childhoods and U.S.

adulthoods. Thus, this group had to cope with two "crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions" (Alvarez-Borland 7). On the one hand, second generation Cubans had to face adolescence and the transition from childhood to adulthood, and on the other, they had to grapple with acculturation and the transition from one sociocultural environment to another. Furthermore, according to the group's most vociferous critic, Pérez-Firmat, although the "one-and-a-halfers" have never felt entirely at ease in either culture (Cuban or Anglo) they have been capable of "availing themselves of the resources" of both ("Transcending Exile" 5). Aware of their hyphenated condition, these writers have made use of the two languages to which they have had access. In fact, most began their writing in Spanish and, only later, adopted English as their literary language. Carolina Hospital, a writer and member of this second generation, coined the phrase *los atrevidos* to describe the audacity (or daring) of this group to (choose to) write in either/or/both Spanish and English. In light of the historical circumstances and the experiences faced by the one-and-a-half generation, it should come as no surprise that much of their work is fraught with tension. Their works often portray the divisiveness between and among Cubans (of various generations) and U.S. nationals (i.e. *los americanos*), as well as a general feeling of loneliness and displacement present in the Cuban-American communities (especially, but not always Miami). To further clarify the diversity of contemporary Cuban-American writers, Alvarez-Borland and Rivero subdivide this second generation: the *one and a half* (who first write in Spanish, then switch to English), and the so-called Cuban-American ethnic writers (who primarily write in English about a broader Latino or Hispanic immigrant experience).

However, what about writing in Cuba? Even though many similarities exist between works produced and/or published on and off the island, for years critics have insisted on separating works published on and off the island into divergent camps. Yet, like those works written in the Diaspora, Cuban identity (gendered and national) also plays a monumental role in contemporary literary works published on the island. In an analysis of Miguel Barnet's 1988 short story "Miosvatis," which centers on a Cuban who lives between Havana and Zurich, Pamela Maria Smorkaloff writes: "Cuba is a site of estrangement, and the narrator's condition is one of seemingly permanent in-

betweenness, despite his protestations to the contrary; he is nostalgic for Havana when in Europe, yet hauntingly estranged from the city upon his return and reinsertion into the life of the island" (73). While the number of studies on Cuban exile and Cuban-American ethnic literature has been growing in the past few years, the same is true of studies on their literary counterparts on the island. However, as some critics, such as Catherine Davies, have commented, it is much more difficult to obtain Cuban literature from the island than to find works by those writing in the Diaspora (1997, 155). But despite real difficulties faced by writers on the island due to lack of paper or other supplies, for example, writing has not stopped. Anthologies and studies on Cuban literature on the island published in Cuba and abroad continue to grow in interest and numbers. Some recent anthologies and studies include: Los últimos serán los primeros (The Last Ones Will Be the First) (1993), edited by the late Salvador Redonet; El submarino amarillo (Yellow Submarine) (1993), edited by Leonardo Padura; El cuerpo inmortal: 20 cuentos eróticos cubanos (The Immortal Body: Twenty Erotic Cuban Stories) (1997), edited by Alberto Garrandés; and Amir Valle's study Brevísimas demencias: narrativa joven cubana de los 90 (Very Brief Madness: Young Cuban Narrative of the 1990s) (2000). There has also been a rise in the studies and anthologies on Cuban women writers. Some of these include, A Place in the Sun (1997) by Catherine Davies; El alfiler y la mariposa (The Butterfly and the Pin) (1997) by Nara Araújo; and Álbum de poetisas cubanas (Album of Cuban Women Poets) (1997), Cubana: Contemporary Fiction by Cuban Women (1998), both edited by Mirta Yáñez. Only a handful of studies have tackled the difficult task of comparing (or compiling and translating) contemporary Cuban literature written on both sides of the Florida Straits. Some recent anthologies include, Bridges to Cuba: Puentes a Cuba (1994), edited by Ruth Behar; The Voice of the Turtle: An Anthology of Cuban Stories (1998), edited by Peter Bush; Dream With No Name: Contemporary Fiction From Cuba (1999), edited by Juana Ponce de León and Esteban Ríos Rivera; and Nuevos Narradores Cubanos (New Cuban Narrators) (2000), edited by Michi Strausfeld.

Few studies, however, have centered exclusively on the ever-growing works by young, Cuban writers who have migrated or gone into exile in the last decade, including the growing

numbers of Cuban women writing, including Daína Chaviano, Zoé Valdés and Yanitzia Canetti, on whose work I focus in this study. Educated in Cuba, this new generation of writers was for the most part producing and publishing successfully before leaving the island. Thus, this group resembles the so-called first-generation of Cuban exiles, in that they were also mature writers when they left Cuba. They also follow in the footsteps of a broader, more encompassing Latin American literary tradition, especially influenced by the writing of the Latin American Masters, such as José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges. Furthermore, many of these new writers coincide with the older group in their criticism of the Castro government and certain (but not necessarily all) aspects of the Revolution. However, despite the fact that these works often confront the Revolution and/or are critical of Cuba's current political and economic situation, writers from this generation are acutely aware that they are products of that very revolution, they are *children of the Revolution*. In a sense, therefore, unlike the early Exile writers or the Cuban-Americans, contemporary Diaspora literature owes as much to the Revolution as to Exile. A diverse group, the Diaspora writers include individuals who left the island both for political reasons, as well as economic ones; indeed, some from this group have returned to the island, while others have chosen not to. I would like to underscore the reasons why I refer to this literary group as Diaspora writers, rather than Cuban exile writers. For me, the term Diaspora is far more encompassing than the term exile. In fact, the term Diaspora is quite appropriate for referring to the location and status of those Cuban writers who have left the island in the last decade. First, as I already mentioned, many of these writers do not view themselves as exiles, and many have not broken their ties completely with the island and its institutions. Second, the term Diaspora is elastic, it does not stand in opposition to exile, and thus certain Diaspora writers may also be classified as (in) exile. The terms exile and Diaspora are not interchangeable, although they have often been used that way, yet both terms may be used together to describe certain Cuban writers currently writing outside Cuba. It should be stressed that the title of this study refers to both Cuban women writing in *and* writing the Diaspora, for to refer to Diaspora is to refer to something in process, changing with each migratory wave. The term Diaspora aids in transmitting the idea of a group of

Cuban writers scattered around the globe who appear to (de)center the notion of nation in both their narrative, as well as their personal lives. On and off the island, in-between spaces and canons, this new group of writers redefines nation and Cuban nationality, to suggest a transportable, personal Cuba.

In the introduction to Nation and Narration, Homi Bhabha argues that individuals within a nation, whether consciously or unconsciously, participate in the struggles between the “pedagogical” center and the performative “margins” (8). Yet, even when one is aware of one’s complicit participation in the nation, how does one criticize something that one is (a) part of/ from? Writer Eliseo Alberto, one of the most successful of the Diaspora writers, for example, chooses to criticize himself in his (political/personal testimonio) Informe contra mí mismo (Report Against Myself) (1996). In this work, Eliseo Alberto narrates his involvement and disillusionment with Cuban revolutionary society from his childhood, through adolescence and adulthood. Particularly poignant are Eliseo Alberto's references to his family (father Eliseo Diego, as well as uncles Cintio Vitier and Fina García Marruz) as well as his friendships with other Cuban intellectuals, including his encounters with his Cuban-American counterparts on their return visits to the island in the late 1970s-1980s. Eliseo Alberto's testimony, rather than simply pointing fingers or naming names, begins with a criticism of himself, and in a sense of that blinding passion that overtook many in (and outside) revolutionary Cuba. His narrative defends the positive elements of Cuban revolutionary society and calls for a necessary peace, without hatred, on both shores, in order to heal those wounds that Cubans have inflicted on each other. Whereas Eliseo Alberto actually narrates his own experiences, as well as the experiences of those around him, others, such as Zoé Valdés and Daína Chaviano, narrate quasi-autobiographical adolescent experiences that portray a gradual disillusionment with Cuba's political and economic situation and the imminent exile (or isolation) of female characters. In these texts by Cuban women writers, such as Valdés and Chaviano, there are allusions to contradictions between the island's official Revolutionary rhetoric and actual ideas and practices regarding the role of women in society. In short, although differences do exist between members of this new group of Cuban Diaspora writers, this new

literary Boom remains in-between canons. They neither fit into the canon of exile or ethnic literature, nor in the official Cuban canon with which they have broken. Like the nation, their literature is also a site of struggle between the margins and the center.

The narrative of Cuban women writing (in) the Diaspora reveals their interest in the role and situation of women in revolutionary society, in addition to concentrating on the relationship between gender, nation, and isolation or exile. Although the 1959 Cuban Revolution opened up spaces for women in the public sphere, double standards prevailed and women were still expected to continue to perform the usual domestic roles allotted them. According to the sociologist Isabel Holgado Fernández in her study *¡No es fácil! Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria* (It's Not Easy! Cuban Women and the Revolutionary Crisis), "En la Cuba revolucionaria, las responsabilidades domésticas y de crianza de los hijos siguen siendo responsabilidad exclusiva de las mujeres. Si por algo se destaca el hombre en la familia es por su abrumadora invisibilidad ante las tareas del hogar y el cuidado de los niños" [In revolutionary Cuba domestic responsibilities and child rearing continue to be the exclusive responsibility of women. If men stand out in the family it is for their overwhelming invisibility when it comes to household chores and caring for the children] (131). As occurs on the island many Cuban women in exile have continued to be outside, isolated from, the national. Indeed, paraphrasing Julia Kristeva, the Cuban-American feminist Ileana Fuentes posits that women are the first exiles and as "...mujeres [cubanas] expatriadas, nuestro exilio es doble; para las feministas es triple" [Cuban exile women, our exile is double, for feminists it is triple] (8). Several feminists have forged a connection between gender and the condition of exile, such as Trinh Minh-ha commenting on Gloria Anzaldúa's work on women in the Borderlands: "She has to confront both those who have alienated her and those for whom she remains the perennial 'alien.' Terrorized by the wounds they/she inflict/s on her self, she is likely to assume at least two exiles (external and internal), if she is to live life on her own. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back..." (Minh-ha 1989, 13). In its traditional definition, exile is the enforced removal or self-imposed absence from one's own country (i.e. the nation-state). That is, the actual, physical exit from the nation (as political/geographical space). But for many feminists, including

Anzaldúa and Minh-ha, exile is also the condition of alienation, or isolation, experienced by women from within any nation-state. As (a) woman, it is possible, therefore, to be (an/in) exile as a result of one's gender. Ileana Fuentes argues that, as women, "hemos sido socializadas para el exilio" [we have been socialized for exile] (9). Indeed, historically women have been conditioned by society into exile, being turned over from paterfamilias number one (the father) to paterfamilias number two (the husband). This condition is made even more pronounced in women who are exiled from nation-states for political reasons and who are also exiled within the new geographic areas where they now live (i.e. the United States, France, etc.). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the condition of exile, or alienation, becomes one of the major underlying themes in works published recently by Cuban women writing in the Diaspora who see themselves as multiply exiled. These women, rather than focus directly on the initial experience of exile (the movement, enforced or self-imposed, out of one geographical space into another), narrate the condition of alienation that begins from within the nation-state, Cuba. Yet, as I already mentioned, and as argue throughout this study, *aislamiento* becomes the means by which contemporary Cuban women writers respond and react to those (societies) that seek to marginalize or silence them. Through *aislamiento*, or *al hacerse isla*, in adopting the condition of the island, they create a viable means of "talking back", to those wielding power. Indeed, in chapter two, I trace *aislamiento* to Dulce María Loynaz and her work, to posit that this apparently paradoxical condition, stemming from the geographical space, the island, appears as a viable form of feminist agency that lends Cuban women writers a voice.

Intricately tied to *aislamiento* and exile, are ideas regarding culture, and the acquisition of identity, be it gendered, sexual or national. In the work of contemporary Cuban women writing (in) the Diaspora, identity appears as something in process, perennially reconstructed and in constant transit. Indeed, in the works of these women, Cuban identity and its culture are represented as always in motion, in continuous reconstruction. As Trinh Minh-ha argues, despite conscious efforts to purify and exclude, "cultures are far from being unitary, as they have always owed their existence more to differences, hybridities and alien elements than they really care to acknowledge

(1996, 1). In the case of Cuba, studies on cultural hybridity may be traced to Fernando Ortiz's text Contrapunteo del tabaco y el azúcar (Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar) published in 1940. In this monumental work, the well-known Cuban anthropologist created the neologism *transculturación* to explain the social and economic situation in Cuba. According to Ortiz, *transculturación* was a cultural phenomenon and thus, only by understanding the term, could one hope to understand Cuba and its history. With the creation of the term *transculturación*, Ortiz was contesting the Anglo sociological/ anthropological acculturation, which for the Cuban anthropologist implied the "passive reception" of dominant culture by immigrants into a new place. The term *transculturación*, however, implies that in the meeting of cultures (no matter in what circumstances), there is always an exchange; a process of giving and receiving, rather than one of simply adopting (which is what acculturation implies). In this transitive process, there are both losses *and* gains (of culture) and what emerges is a new reality, a hybrid culture (Ortiz 1940, 1). Cuban culture, as such, is the result of the coming together of different peoples throughout different eras. Beginning with the native population(s) that once inhabited the island, and continuing with the arrival of the Spanish during the Conquest, through the violent importation of African slaves and up to the arrival of the Chinese, North Americans and other groups, Cuba has been the site of continual immigration. But also, Cuba has been the site of confrontation (in many cases violent) between these different groups. As Ortiz puts it, each one of these groups experienced the process of "desculturación o exculturación y de aculturación o inculturación, y al fin de síntesis, de transculturación" [disadjustment and readjustment, of deculturation and acculturation -- in a word, of transculturation] (Ortiz 1940, 80, English translation 98). Ortiz explains the coming together of these diverse elements as follows:

En Cuba decir ciboney, taíno, español, judío, inglés, francés, angloamericano, negro, yucateco, chino y criollo, no significa indicar solamente los diversos elementos formativos de la nación cubana, expresados por sus sendos apelativos gentilicios. Cada uno de éstos viene a ser también la sintética e histórica denominación de una economía y de una cultura de las varias que en Cuba se han manifestado sucesiva y hasta coetáneamente, produciéndose a veces los mas terribles impactos. (Ortiz 1940, 81)

[In Cuba the terms Ciboney, Taíno, Spaniard, Jew, English, French, Anglo-American, Negro, Yucatec, Chinese or Creole, do not mean merely the different elements that go into the make-up of the Cuban nation, as expressed by their different indications of origin. Each of these has come to mean in addition the synthetic and historic appellation of one of the various economies and cultures that have existed in Cuba successively and even simultaneously, at times giving rise to the most terrible clashes.] (English Translation, Onís 99)

By its very nature, *transculturación* implies continuity, the comings and goings of new peoples and new cultures that will continue to change and alter Cuban society.

Cuban-American literary critic Gustavo Pérez-Firmat takes Ortiz's ideas one step further, adapting the idea of transculturation in order to analyze twentieth-century Cuban texts of the Republican period. Basing his ideas on several of Ortiz's works, Pérez-Firmat argues that Cuban culture results from the importation, even the smuggling of foreign goods (1989, 1). He dubs Cuban style "translation style" and argues, through the analysis of various Cuban works, that Cuban writers have "distanced" themselves in order to translate or transform both European works and those from the Cuban canon. For Pérez-Firmat, translation acts as displacement for these authors; theirs is a desire to move away from previous texts, while at the same time translating, recreating these in a different way. In other words, Cuban writers throughout the twentieth century have been both involved in and removed from the literature they have sought to "counterpoint". Furthermore, according to Pérez-Firmat, Cuban criollism is transnational rather than foundational, therefore allowing for or giving way, naturally, to a literature of exile. Pérez-Firmat's ideas suggest that Cuba's autochthonous discourses, as they appear in most of Cuba's canonical works, are ones of diversity. As in the process of editing and rewriting itself, one can argue that Cuba's literary history is one of cutting and pasting, of borrowing, countering and transforming previous works to create something new.

However, what about Cuban women writers? The flaw in Pérez-Firmat's work lies precisely in his blatant exclusion (erasure) of Cuban women writers. Why are women excluded from his work? Was it simply an oversight on his part or is the absence of Cuban women writers an indication that their work lacks "translation style"? Clearly the intense Republican period on which Pérez-Firmat focuses his study is a productive one for Cuban women writers. Both anthropologist Lydia Cabrera (Fernando Ortiz's student) and poet Dulce María Loynaz, were actively writing during the first and middle half of the twentieth century, as were many other Cuban women, such as Fina García Marruz. Yet more fruitful than debating the reasons why Pérez-Firmat excludes [these] women from his study, are questions about the very role of women in the Cuban literary canon and their positions in relation to [the] nation. Are works by women writing in the Republic, as well as in the revolutionary period, different from Cuban male writers of the same period(s)? If so, what is it about their work that differs? Can we not assume that they too are "translating" previous works (of both the general Western Canon, as well as the Cuban one? How do these women define/represent the nation? Do they suggest something different from other Latin American women writers? Why, if they write from the outside, do they continue to write about nation? Finally, some overarching, interrelated questions remain: How can a nation exist outside its political borders? Why and for whom does it [continue to] exist?

Sociologist Jorge Duany observes in his essay on Cuban identity that historically, discourses on Cuban nationalism have limited *lo cubano* to within the geographic boundaries of the nation-state. In post-revolutionary works on Cuban identity published in Cuba, those Cubans living outside the geographical space of Cuba have been ignored. The Cuban Diaspora has been represented as lying outside the nation, not as part of its current history and culture (Duany 5). Yet as Duany argues, more recent texts, such as Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba, see Cuban identity as residing both in Cuba and in the Diaspora (28). Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba is a

remarkable work in that it manages to encompass the diversity of Cuban culture on and off the island into one, multi-genre volume. Divided into three parts, "Reconciliation/Reconciliación," "Rupture/Ruptura" and "Remembering/ Recuerdos" this anthology includes essays, poems, short stories, excerpts from novels, interviews, photographs, as well as art, to suggest the possible reconciliation or dialogue between Cuban intellectuals (mostly of the second generation) on and off the island. In the introduction to the anthology, editor Ruth Behar calls Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba "a meeting place, an open letter, a castle in the sand, an imaginary homeland (1994, 5). In another anthology that attempts to encompass elements of Cuban culture, Cuba: la isla posible, Antonio Vera-León follows suit by proposing Cuban culture's "cubist" nature, or "una isla deshilachada" (an island thread bare), that exhibits multiple shores (77). Thus, these anthologies hint at Cuban culture's transnational nature. Cuba is no longer limited to what lies between the island's two extremes "*el cabo de San Antonio*" (in the west) and "*el punto de Mais*" (in the east), it goes beyond the geographic land mass, to the hearts and minds of those that [dare to] imagine it.

Although Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's ideas are often as limited and exclusionary as that Cuban official discourse(s) discussed by Duany, it is through his notion of translation and distancing, and the possibility of translational and transnational Cuban literature, that one may envision a study of Cuban women writers. By their very nature, Pérez-Firmat's ideas lend themselves to re-workings, or translations, if you will. By reading Pérez-Firmat against the grain, one is able to rework, and rewrite him. Therefore, we open up spaces for the literary texts of those Cuban women writers that he ignores in his study. Through an appropriation of Pérez-Firmat's notions on translation and distancing, combined with the work of contemporary feminist theorists, especially those whose interest lies in women of color, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Debra Castillo, Trinh Minh-ha and bell hooks, I argue that contemporary Cuban women's Diaspora narratives move beyond essentialist notions of identity (gender and national) to represent nation and gender.

The works of contemporary Cuban women writers, Daína Chaviano, Zoé Valdés and Yanitzia Canetti, portray a desire for a more fluid identity, for a transcendence of the national. They rethink the nation as transnational. Writing from the Diaspora, from the outside, contemporary Cuban women center as much on the experience of exile as movement out of the political/geographical space (*exilio*), as they do on the condition of exile within that area itself (*insilio*). The writing of these women questions previous assumptions of Cuban literature as belonging either to the "inside" or the "outside", suggesting in their works that it is no longer possible simply to divide Cuban literature into two camps. Their writing, both on and off the island, displays a continual double movement, a to and fro or "in-betweenness" between here and there. It suggests Cubanness as something fluid, like the sea that surrounds the island -- a sea that both separates and unifies. These women writers, following in the literary tradition of the island, "distance" themselves, specifically *se aislan*, in order to "translate" or represent and rewrite previous narratives of gendered and national identity. They borrow from and contest previous Cuban discourses, including works from the Canon, in order to talk back, as well as reformulate a more encompassing view of identity without losing interest in the intersection of gender and nation.

Several works are helpful in understanding this new group of Cuban women writers. Mary Louise Pratt's "Criticism in the Contact Zone: Decentering Community and Nation" is particularly important for a study of Cuban women writing outside nation. Pratt's study explores the notion of "decentering community" and identity to show how "social bonds operate across lines of difference, hierarchy, and unshared or conflicting assumptions" (88). She suggests that a contact zone approach considers how differences and hierarchies are produced in and through contact across such lines. In a contact perspective, borders are placed at the center of concern, while homogenous centers move to the margins (88). Also helpful are Pérez-Firmat's The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature and Antonio Benítez Rojo's La isla

que se repite (The Repeating Island). As mentioned before, Pérez-Firmat's study shows that Cuban literature is marked by the foreign. It translates the literature that came before, creating something new on the way, a literary *ajjaco*, always in the cooking process. Benítez Rojo argues that Caribbean literature reveals a chaotic repeating nature, a practice that contains difference and, at the same time, moves toward nothingness, *en dirección aproximada* (in an approximate direction). *El caribe* is not limited to the geographic space itself; it is a meta-archipelago that lacks a center, "donde se detectan regularidades dinámicas, no resultados, dentro del des-orden que existe más allá del mundo de líneas predecibles" [where within the disorder that exists beyond the world of predictable lines, are revealed dynamic regularities, rather than results] (Benítez Rojo 1998, 54). *Lo caribeño* is something carried within each individual and is as fluid as the sea itself. Following the ideas of Fernando Ortiz, Benítez Rojo reads the Caribbean as "polémica unidad/diversidad" or "the polemics of unity/diversity" (54). Yet, although both Pérez-Firmat's and Benítez Rojo's texts are useful for a study of any contemporary Cuban literature, they must be read against the grain. For both critics exclude/erase the writing of [Cuban-Caribbean] women, denying them entry into the Canon.

One way to approach Pérez-Firmat and Benítez Rojo is through the notion of the "resistant reader". In Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism feminist critic Debra Castillo suggest ways to appropriate the positive, and resist the negative, in [masculine] critics' works. In an analysis of Roberto González Echevarría's The Voice of the Masters, Castillo suggests that a resistant reader can, "teach herself to read otherwise, rejecting the model of the critic who rams/punctures the feminized text, realizing that the woman's relation to authority, textuality, desire is based on a historical relation to identity different from her male counterpart's" (1992, 300). Debra Castillo's ideas on the resistant reader allow for a borrowing and a rereading of Pérez-Firmat, Benítez Rojo, and other male critics writing on Cuban/Caribbean literature. Thus,

rather than accept these critics' notions of what constitute the Canon, a resisting reader can reject these models and appropriate what is useful. In the case of contemporary Cuban women, rather than simply view their writing as "outside" the Cuban canon (due to their exclusion from male critics' analysis), resisting readers need to turn to these texts to determine what it is they are proposing. The work of these women comes into the forefront, deconstructing and rewriting previous narratives. Cuba as an imaginary space appears in these Cuban women writers' narratives, but it is constantly coming undone at the seams, expanding itself, translating itself, crossing over into some other plane of existence. Thus these works reinterpret, deconstruct and represent history. These Cuban women writers deterritorialize nation and gender, opening up spaces from where to speak, "...a space in the imagination, which allows for the inside, the outside, and the liminal elements inbetween" (Kaplan 1987, 197). As Caren Kaplan posits, the term "deterritorialize" locates the moment of alienation and exile in language and literature; it describes the effects of radical distancing between signifier and signified. This distancing, much like Pérez-Firmat's notion, enables imagination, even as it produces alienation (Kaplan 1987, 188). As multiply exiled, the writing of contemporary Cuban women displays alienation from the national at various levels. In their work, they de-center community, moving the locus of nation from the public to the private and exposing nation's construction. Their choice of language, plot narration, themes and genres, contributes to their distancing and deterritorialization and from out of the borderlands they suggest new ways of being Cuban and women.

Despite the growing interest in Cuban culture and literature, few studies have appeared on Cuban women writers who left the island in the last decade. This dissertation traces the narrative of contemporary Cuban women writers from their early work, published in the 1980s and 1990s in Cuba, to their recent narrative published in the Diaspora in the late 1990s. This study, therefore, tackles a field that is relatively understudied, and explores the discursive and narrative techniques

contemporary Cuban women deploy in their novels to challenge Cuba's dominant cultural constructions of national and gender identity from within multiple spaces. My study is the first to compare both the insular and Diaspora texts of Chaviano, Valdés and Canetti. Although several scholars have analyzed the work of these writers, they have done so separately. None has chosen to look at these writers and their narrative within a larger context, choosing instead to analyze these women's insular narratives in isolation from that produced in the Diaspora. However, all narrative produced by any author must be viewed as a process; no text stands alone, as the scholar Trinh Minh-ha contends. Rather than rupture, therefore, the Diaspora narratives of these women writers display continuity with those works produced on the island.

In the first chapter, "Contrapunteo del aquí y de allí: Cuban Identity in Transit", I focus on the narrative of Daína Chaviano. I analyze the ways in which her narratives produced on and off the island intersect, juxtapose and ultimately enter into dialogue with one another. I counterpoint Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre (1988) and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (1998), to posit that Chaviano returns to and rewrites previous narratives, including Cuban canonical works, in order to redefine nation and gender as well as to question contradictions present in contemporary Cuban society. In the first part of the chapter, I present an allegorical reading of Chaviano's science fiction novel Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre (Fables of an Extraterrestrial Grandmother) (1988), written and published in Cuba. I elucidate how Chaviano uses fantasy and science fiction. I show how she places importance on the act of storytelling and rewriting, to expose dominant discourses on nation and gender and offer alternative visions of identity. In the second section, I turn to the discursive and textual strategies Chaviano deploys in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (Man, Woman, Hunger) (1998) to denounce social inequalities on the island. Written and published in the Diaspora, this novel both borrows and dissents from Cuba's canonical and national discourses, to represent nation and rewrite the Cuban Canon from the outside. I conclude that in

her insular and Diaspora narrative, Chaviano borrows from varied texts and traditions, in order to rewrite Cuba's history, "talk back" to those who have attempted to silence women, and ultimately suggest new ways of imagining Cuban identity.

Chapter two, "Feminine Spaces and Transnationality: Gendered and National Identities in the Narrative of Dulce María Loynaz and Zoé Valdés," explores the ways in which Zoé Valdés deconstructs Cuban history and its national icons in an attempt to represent Cubanness. The first part explores the narrative techniques utilized by Valdés and her predecessor Dulce María Loynaz to contest traditional notions of nation and gender. Through a close reading of Jardín (Garden) (1951) and Sangre azul (Blue Blood) (1993), I illustrate how Valdés returns to and rewrites Loynaz by suggesting the inexorability of reality and fantasy in the formulation of identity. The second part of the chapter turns to La nada cotidiana (Yocandra in the Paradise of Nada) (1995), written in Cuba but published in the Diaspora. Whereas in Sangre azul nation and gender appear masked beneath fairy tale and surreal narrations, La nada cotidiana uses realism to debunk Cuba's revolutionary icons and suggest that the Revolution's discourse, like Cuba's previous national discourses, is ultimately patriarchal, perpetuating violence on both women and men. Moreover, in both novels, Valdés goes beyond the nation to suggest a transportable Cuban identity, carried within no matter where one finds oneself.

And finally, in chapter three "Crossing Borders: Redefining Identity in the Narrative of Yanitzia Canetti", I examine Al otro lado (On the Other Side) (1997) and Novelita Rosa (Rosa's Novel) (1998). I examine how Canetti relies on a number of narrative techniques, such as fantasy, parody and allegory, to represent, and at the same time, undermine history and redefine identity. Whereas Al otro lado is set in Cuba and focuses on the re-construction of identity, Novelita Rosa transcends the Cuba divide by centering on Mexican-Americans living in California. In the first section of this chapter, I explore the various ways Al otro lado displays the in-betweenness of

gender and national identity, through its narration, its characters, the plot, and the themes upon which it focuses. In the second section, I investigate Novelita Rosa to argue how Canetti's interest in the Latino/a experience suggests a new literary trend by Cubans writing in the Diaspora. In a sense, Canetti's narrative goes beyond the national, beyond Cuba, to argue identity as something in continual re-construction, mediated by circumstances in society, as well as by the individual subjects themselves.

The conclusion offers some final thoughts about the narrative of these three women and other Cuban women writing inside and outside Cuba. By carrying out the first in-depth comparison of these novelists and their texts published both inside Cuba and in the Diaspora, this study questions previous assumptions of Cuban literature as belonging to "the inside" or the "outside", and reveals the transnational characteristics of Cuba's literature. As multiply exiled, the writing of Chaviano, Valdés and Canetti displays an alienation from the national and the canonical at various levels. These works are in and about in-between spaces, and display a continual double movement, suggesting a Cuba and a Cuban identity that transcends geographic borders.

NOTES

¹ Dulce María Loynaz, "Isla," Homenaje a Dulce María Loynaz, ed. Ana Rosa Núñez. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1992) 109.

² English translations throughout this study are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ It is impossible to list all the Cubans and Cuban-Americans whose works have been or are being published by European or US publishers. However, below I have listed some of the better-known writers, including the titles and dates of their most recent publications. Please refer to the bibliography at the end of this study for publishing information, including English translations. Also note that I have separated these writers into the four categories I discuss in this introduction: Exile writers, Cuban American, Diaspora and insular writers. Exile writers: Reinaldo Arenas, Antes que anochezca (1992); and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Mea Cuba (1992). Cuban-Americans: Cristina García, The Agüero Sisters (1997), Dreaming in Cuban (1992); Roberto Fernández, Raining Backwards (1988); Ivonne Lamazares, The Sugar Island (2000); Elías Miguel Muñoz The Greatest Performance (1991); Achy Obejas, Memory Mambo (1996), We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This? (1994); and Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, Life on the Hyphen (1994), Next Year in Cuba: A Cuban's Coming of Age in America (1995). Diaspora Writers: Eliseo Alberto, Caracol Beach (1998), La fábula de José, (1999), Informe contra mí mismo (1997); Jesus Díaz, Dime algo sobre Cuba (1998), Siberiana (2000); and Mayra Montero, Tú, la oscuridad (1995), Como un mensajero tuyo (1998). Cuban Writers Residing on the island: Abilio Estévez Tuyo es el reino (1997), Antonio José Ponte, Cuentos de todas partes del imperio (2000), Las comidas profundas (1997); and Ena Lucía Portela, El pájaro: pincel y tinta china (1998).

⁴ Recipients of literary prizes include: Daína Chaviano, Premio Azorín, 1998, given by the provincial government of Alicante in conjunction with the publisher Planeta, for her novel El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, and Eliseo Alberto Diego, 1998 winner of the Premio Alfaguara, given by the Casa de América in Madrid, for his novel Caracol Beach. Zoé Valdés was the runner-up of the Premio Planeta in 1996 for her novel Te di la vida entera, given by the publisher Planeta

in Spain. Cuban-born author Mayra Montero, living in Puerto Rico since the early 1970s, received the Prize "La Sonrisa Vertical", in February 2000, for her novel Púrpura profunda. International prizes have not been limited to Cuban authors residing abroad, however. In fact, writers living on the island have also been recipients of prestigious international awards. For example, Ena Lucía Portela (b. 1971), a member of the *novísimos* generation, received the prestigious International Juan Rulfo Prize for a Short Story in 1999. Leonardo Padura, also a resident on the island, is the recipient of the Café Gijón Prize in 1995, the Hammett Prize in 1997/1998, the Premio de la Islas in 2000, and the Casa de Teatro Prize in 2001. Exile writers have also received prestigious prizes, including the novelist and playwright Matías Montes Huidobro, recipient of the Café Gijón Prize in 1997, and José Abreu Felipe, recipient of the poetry prize Gastón Baquero in 2001.

CHAPTER 1

CONTRAPUNTEO DE AQUÍ Y DE ALLÁ: CUBAN IDENTITY IN TRANSIT

In his study The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature, Cuban-American literary critic Gustavo Pérez-Firmat utilizes Fernando Ortiz's ideas on transculturation to describe the transitional and translational characteristics of Cuban culture. For Pérez-Firmat, Ortiz's work is paramount for understanding Cuban culture, specifically its literature, as synthesis, a permanent process of development and redevelopment, *en cocción*, or always cooking (1989, 26). Although Pérez-Firmat's take on Ortiz is original and enlightening, his study is exclusive, focusing heavily on a corpus of masculine writing produced by Cuban male authors of the early Republican period. Left outside his study is an analysis of the works of Cuban women authors of this period, as well as texts produced on the island and in the Diaspora since 1959. It is, in fact, in post-1959 literature where Cuban literature as in [a] "trans", to borrow the term from Pérez-Firmat, continuously appears. According to Pérez-Firmat, Cuban literature is in a "trans" for its translational aspect, for the way in which Cuban works emerge from the translation of exogenous models and forms (1989, 4-5). Pérez-Firmat's interest is in "writing as translation", or more specifically, the idea that Cuban texts return to rewrite the masterworks of the Spanish and Spanish-American Canons. I accept Pérez-Firmat's assertion that Cuban literature is in a "trans" (and "in a trance") for its translational characteristics. However, "in a trans" has an additional meaning, as well. I go beyond Pérez-Firmat's statements to suggest that contemporary Cuban literature is in a "trans" for the means by which it is being produced. That is, "in a trans" refers to the "how and where" of contemporary Cuban literature. The concept "in a trans" points to a Cuban literature that lies between cultures, a literature perennially in transit, which in turn often centers on movement and/or border crossings. Like its precursors from the Republican period, on whose work Pérez-Firmat focuses, contemporary Cuban literature returns to previous works and discourses in

order to rewrite, and therefore "translate" what came before, and by doing so redefines what constitutes Cubanness.

During the last four decades Cuban studies in the United States have either focused on the literature of the Revolution, or on Exile and/or Cuban-American texts. Very few studies have centered on the recent literature of those Cuban writers who were born and raised in Cuba following the 1959 Revolution, many of whom left the island as adults during the first half of the 1990s. In addition, even fewer scholars analyzed the literature of contemporary Cuban women writers, authors "in transit" writing in and about in-between spaces. In both their literature produced on the island and in the Diaspora, these women rewrite previous narratives, returning to Cuba's, as well as their own past stories, to question and redefine traditional notions of identity; thus they rewrite Cuba's national discourses from both before and since the Revolution.

Of the three women on whose work I focus, Daína Chaviano was the most well known in Cuba before leaving the island in the early 1990s. Her work has received a fair number of analyses and reviews from scholars focusing on feminist or science fiction literatures. Scholars that have examined Chaviano's work include Catherine Davies, John Clute, Peter Nicholls, Margarite Fernández Olmos, Raquel Romeu, Juan Carlos Toledano and Ester Whitfield. In her study on Cuban women writers of the twentieth century, A Place in the Sun, Catherine Davies calls Chaviano "the most prolific and innovative" of Cuba's younger women writers (133). In their volume, The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, Clute and Nichols cite Chaviano as an example of Cuba's original science fiction. In fact, they note that in Cuban science fiction, "there is a strong political trend, but also, less expectedly, purely fantastic and clearly erotic traits, best exemplified by the work of Daína Chaviano..." (694).

Born in Havana in 1957, Chaviano began writing at a young age, heavily influenced by the fantasy and science fiction of American, Canadian and British authors, as well as Celtic and

Arthurian myths and legends. Her early literary influences include the narrative of such diverse authors as William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, Manuel Mujica Láinez, Margaret Atwood, Anais Nin, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov.³ Her interest in North American and British literature was a determining factor in her decision to major in English Language and Literature at the University of Havana. She received her degree (Licenciatura) there in 1981. These diverse literary influences are present in all of Chaviano's works, but especially so in her first short story collection, Los mundos que amo (The Worlds I Love), published by Editorial Letras Cubanas in 1980, and for which she received the David Prize in Science Fiction in 1979. This collection, in fact, was the first of several successful works produced on the island by the young Chaviano.

Despite the long list of literary influences, including several canonical male authors, Chaviano's work is markedly divergent, focusing on gender issues within a fantastic or science fiction context. In the short story "Los mundos que amo," for example, one finds a first person narration that sharply resembles those found in Poe's horror stories. Yet unlike Poe's tales, in "Los mundos que amo," the main protagonist is a woman, as is often the case in Chaviano's narrative, and the tale focuses on a UFO encounter in (after-dark) Havana, rather than an encounter with horror or the uncanny. In the story, the main protagonist witnesses the arrival of a spaceship in Havana, and has direct communication with the benevolent extraterrestrial beings that visit her city. Indeed, one of Chaviano's most important trademarks, both in her narrative and poetry, published on and off the island, is that of Havana after-dark. In a great number of Chaviano's works, the Cuban capital city becomes a space where the unreal is possible and the uncanny takes place, a space quite distant from daytime Havana. I shall return to this idea later in the chapter to show the ways in which nighttime becomes a space of freedom for Chaviano's characters, both from the restrictive gender roles that bind them, as well as from other societal prohibitions. Nighttime lends

women in Chaviano's works an opportunity to hide, thus allowing them the freedom to perform even the most prohibitive and transgressive activities without fear of retribution by those in power.

Chaviano's unique blend of various literary genres, including science fiction, fantasy and myth, intertwined with a concern for gender issues, such as male-female relations, is present throughout her insular narrative. These include the fantasy and science fiction short story collections Amoroso planeta (Loving Planet) (1983), Historia de hadas para adultos (Fairy Tales for Adults) (1986), and Abrevadero de los dinosaurios (Watering Hole for Dinosaurs) (1990), and the science fiction novel, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre (Fables of an Extraterrestrial Grandmother) (1988), which I analyze later in this chapter. Of the short story collections, her last published work on the island, Abrevadero de los dinosaurios, is the most telling regarding Chaviano's views on identity, specifically the construction of gender. Composed of a series of vignettes or mini-stories, the collection centers on male and female dinosaurs and the personal relationships in which they engage within their realm, underscoring the complexity of gender identity in contemporary society. Indeed, Abrevadero de los dinosaurios may be read as an allegory of male/female relations, and, in particular, of the presence of machismo and homophobia in contemporary Cuban society. As Catherine Davies argues, Chaviano's stories and those of other women of her generation "tend to avoid representations of contemporary life" (1997,134). But, she adds, these stories are women-centered, even when some are not narrated by women, and when read allegorically, "[they] make for interesting commentary on contemporary women's lives and interests" (134).

Chaviano's interest in the construction of gender is also an intrinsic part of her poetry, as evidenced in Confesiones eróticas y otros hechizos (Erotic Confessions and Other Spells). This collection received special mention in Mexico's 1984 "Concurso Plural de Poesía" and in 1986 several of the poems appeared in the Mexican feminist magazine *Fem* (Fernández Olmos 146).

The bulk, therefore, of Chaviano's literary oeuvre reveals a marked feminist position. In both her narrative and poetry, Chaviano continuously offers readers situations in which women face and overcome obstacles presented to them as a consequence of their gender and/or origin or nationality. And in addition, in her work Chaviano redefines notions of identity, giving way to a reinterpretation of Cuba's history and a rewriting of the Cuban Canon. As scholar Margarite Fernández Olmos explains in a study on Chaviano's poetry, "La obra de Chaviano afirma el derecho femenino de tomar las riendas para satisfacer sus propias necesidades. En sus desafíos poéticos Chaviano utiliza un tono directo y desinhibido, combinado con un sentido del humor sutil, y a veces, irónico" [Chaviano's work reiterates women's right to take up the reigns [of power] in order to satisfy their own needs. In her poetic defiance, Chaviano uses a direct, uninhibited tone, combined with a subtle and often ironic humor] (146). Moreover, Fernández Olmos posits that Chaviano "reclama un cambio a las normas sexuales de la sociedad, reexaminando críticamente la experiencia sociosexual femenina" [claims a change in society's sexual norms, critically reexamining the feminine socio-sexual experience], and adds that Chaviano's desire for change is one of *conscientización*, tied to both feminist and revolutionary ideologies (146). If indeed Chaviano's narrative and poetry produced on the island reflect her desire for female equality within that society, her work produced in the Diaspora appears to be just as conscious of the various problems facing women within various spaces. However, her Diaspora narrative brings other issues to the forefront, in particular by openly questioning nation and national identity and for its redefinition of Cuban identity or Cubanness. That is, Chaviano's Diaspora narrative contributes to a virtual rewriting of works from the Canon, as well as her previous work, that which Fernández Olmos labels (Chaviano's) "obra literaria de conscientización" [consciousness-raising work] (146).

This chapter examines Chaviano's narrative, specifically the ways in which her prose works produced on and off the island intersect and engage in dialogue with one another. In

Chaviano's narrative, particularly her short stories, characters face love and death within very diverse worlds. In fact, the idea of "worlds", "universes" or "dimensions" recurs in Chaviano's work. The theme of the "other-worldly" not only appears in her publications inside Cuba, but also in those produced in the Diaspora, such as the series titled "La Habana Oculta", consisting of the novels El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (Man, Woman, Hunger) (1998), Casa de juegos (House of Games) (1999), and Gata encerrada (Caged Cat) (2001). In her short stories and novels, written on both sides of the Florida Straits, Chaviano's protagonists, who for the most part are women, come face to face with tense or troubling situations within and in-between worlds or spaces. Yet in Chaviano's narrative produced in Cuba, the worlds represented could not seem further away from the present time and space of late twentieth-century Cuba. In her Cuban texts, the author and nation's present(s) lie hidden behind tales of fantasy and time travel, trips into past, present and future. In these works, fantasy and science fiction are used to comment allegorically upon contemporary situations on the island. However, in those texts produced in the Diaspora, the heavy focus is on realism. Time travel and fantasy still appear, but in these works they undermine, or distance the characters from that ominous and unbearable present. In a sense, therefore, in Chaviano's Cuban texts realism lies buried beneath fantasy or science fiction, and contemporary situations are understood only through an allegorical interpretation of the text. In her Diaspora narrative, on the other hand, Chaviano does the opposite of what she does in her Cuban texts. In her Diaspora texts, Chaviano openly explores realistic contemporary situations, while simultaneously allowing the fantastic to intervene as a way of exposing the surreal elements of this "reality". That is, the presence of the fantastic in Chaviano's Diaspora texts serves to expose contradictions present in contemporary society; it also acts as a means of escape for the characters living in this society.

The tension or tense confrontation (in) between worlds, time periods and/or fantastic or otherworldly creatures appears most developed in Chaviano's novels. This chapter, therefore,

focuses on two novels produced at different moments and in different spaces that confront nation and gender in distinct ways: Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. Published by Editorial Letras Cubanas in 1988, and 1989 winner of the Anna Seghers Prize, given by the Berlin Academy of Arts, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre is a long and complex novel that narrates three seemingly unrelated tales. In each tale, diverse characters inhabiting different time periods progressively depend on "others," in alternate realms, for survival within their specific spaces. These characters move continually into and through temporal and spatial borders. In the end, only by coming together are these different characters, acting as parts or pieces of a puzzle, able to survive within their own time-space. Unlike Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Chaviano's second novel, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (Azorín Prize, Planeta 1998) does not rely solely on science fiction or fantasy as a means of allegorically depicting contemporary conditions on the island. Rather, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre blends fantasy and stark realism, and turns to figures from both Cuba's past and present, such as historical and traditional figures, to openly represent nation and gender. In this novel, as in her first, characters cross (spatial and temporal) borders in search of "wholeness" or "union". These diverse characters rely on one another to understand what goes on around (and between) them. The borders alluded to in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre are not intended to separate worlds, but rather to separate time: these borders differentiate distinct moments in Cuba's historical teleology. Thus, both novels stress the importance of understanding and knowing personal and collective histories, albeit in distinct ways. In Chaviano's narrative, to return to the past becomes a means of comprehending the present, and possibly the future. Published ten years apart, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre portray a movement within and in-between spaces that is reflective of the author's own movement on and off the island.

This chapter juxtaposes Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre to posit that Chaviano returns to and rewrites previous narratives, including her own, to contest dominant notions of identity. Her narrative moves in between spaces to point to contemporary Cuban society's in-betweenness, its search for unity and wholeness on and off the island. Rather than rupture, Chaviano's Diaspora narratives display continuity with her early work produced on the island. As feminist scholar Trinh Minh-ha affirms in Woman, Native, Other, "writing constantly refers to writing, and no writing can ever claim to be 'free' from other writings" (21). Thus, in addition to returning to (rewrite) her previous narrative, Chaviano's Diaspora novels also return to (or turn to) the Cuban canon. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Chaviano revisits Fernando Ortiz and his ideas on transculturation and hybridity, appropriating his notion of the counterpoint. Moreover, Chaviano also reworks Alejo Carpentier's marvelous real, while simultaneously returning to her early science fiction and fantasy influences. Chaviano draws from texts from the Cuban Canon, including authors of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also incorporates her early fantasy and science fiction influences. Thus, Chaviano redefines identity in multiple ways.

Cuban identity, or Cubanness, has been an integral part of Cuban discourses from both before and after 1959. Scholars such as Jorge Duany, Rafael Rojas and Iván de la Nuez, for example, have focused on the struggle between "being or not being", *el ser o no ser*, of Cuban identity, an idea present in multiple Cuban discourses through the years. These scholars posit that in most of Cuba's discourses, from before and after the Revolution, the Cuban subject has been represented as masculine, white, heterosexual and insular. As Rafael Rojas explains in "La diferencia cubana", "Eso que llamamos <<cultura cubana>> no es más que la construcción simbólica, en el lapso de dos siglos, del metarrelato de la identidad nacional. Un metarrelato que postula un sujeto, el Sujeto Blanco, Masculino, Heterosexual Católico o Marxista, cuyos valores

históricos legitiman los discursos y las prácticas hegemónicas de las élites nacionales" [What we designate as Cuban culture is nothing more than the symbolic construction, over the course of two centuries, of a metadiscourse on national identity. A metadiscourse that envisioned a subject -- the white, masculine, heterosexual Catholic or Marxist male -- whose historical values legitimized the national elite's hegemonic practices and discourses] (*Isla sin fin* 105). In the essay "Un fragmento en las orillas del mundo: Identidad, diferencia y fuga de la cultura cubana", Iván de la Nuez posits that Cuba's history and its teleology have been most often depicted in classic or lineal terms. As he explains: "La persecución de ese modelo y la necesidad imperiosa de pertenecerle, marcan extraordinariamente la conducta cultural cubana" [The pursuit of that model, and the pressing need to belong to it, overwhelmingly branded Cuban cultural conduct] (25). In this study, I seek to elucidate the ways in which contemporary Cuban women writers, including Daína Chaviano react to, contest and reinterpret Cuba's history, its masculinist teleology and patriarchal discourses. Their work posits a hybrid, fluid concept of gender and national identity.

In part one of this chapter I center on *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*, analyzing Chaviano's first novel from a feminist framework, basing my analysis on the work of women interested in third world women, including Trinh Minh-ha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Debra Castillo, bell hooks and Eliana Rivero. First, I focus on the importance of the borderlands in Chaviano's novel, as well as on the concepts of translation, re-writing, and storytelling; these discursive and narrative techniques become a means of "talking back", to borrow Debra Castillo's phrase, for the author, the narrator, and the protagonists in the work. Secondly, I explore the individual stories or tales present in the novel, focusing on the questions they pose regarding nation and identity. Third, I consider the various ways in which these tales, and the storytelling process itself, present a threat to contemporary society. And finally, I turn to analyze what these stories reveal about national identity and the intersection of gender and national identity.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to El hombre, la hembra y el hambre to examine the ways in which Chaviano returns to her previous narrative, as well as the Canon, to redefine nation and gender and openly question contemporary conditions on the island. Once again, I borrow Debra Castillo's concept of "talking back," specifically in relation to the way in which Chaviano gives the power of the word to marginal beings traditionally excluded from official Cuban discourses. In this novel, marginal beings appear in the form of ghosts from Cuba's past, individuals left outside official discourses for their race and/or gender and who continue outside the mainstream because of their condition as dead. The most important of these figures is the black slavewoman, Muba, who serves as the protagonist's guide and protector through different periods of (Cuban) history. In effect, in this novel, as in her first, Chaviano grants a non-white female the power of the word, thereby undermining masculine, patriarchal power and in effect, rewriting/retelling Cuban history. With these various figures, Chaviano once again includes the fantastic in her narration. What is significant is that rather than focus on extraterrestrial beings living in other worlds, Chaviano centers on historical ghosts or specters, beings that presumably lived and died on the island, and whose voices have been all but forgotten by contemporary citizens in the nation. More importantly, in addition to concentrating on the fantastic elements of this novel, I turn to the ways in which Chaviano borrows and dissents from Cuba's canonical and national discourses to represent and rewrite the Cuban Canon from the Diaspora. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Chaviano brings together a diverse group of Cuban works into her novel, including the work of nineteenth-century writers Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Cirilo Villaverde and José Martí, as well as twentieth-century writers Fernando Ortiz, Carlos Montenegro, Alejo Carpentier, and Caridad Oliver Labra. She blends narrative techniques such as the counterpoint and the multivoiced text. She juxtaposes realism and fantasy as a strategy for commenting upon the contemporary conditions facing the island.

Although set in very different spaces, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre are nevertheless similar in various ways. First and foremost, in both novels the fantastic plays an integral role in the narration. As Tzvetan Todorov explains in the now classic study, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, at the heart of fantastic literature lies a tension between the perceived real and the imaginary:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for two possible solutions: either he is victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of an imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (25)

In both novels, Chaviano's characters are ultimately faced with two possibilities, between believing the unbelievable to be "real", or finding a rational explanation to an otherwise unusual occurrence. This hesitation over whether to believe or not to believe, or over whether to act or not to act, in fact, overwhelms Chaviano's characters. As with all fantastic texts, characters in both Chaviano's insular and Diaspora novels continuously question what revolves around them, yet ultimately opt to accept the fantastic over conventional reality or the supposed rational.

Secondly, in both novels identity appears as something fluid, inexorably tied to reality and fantasy. In Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, the idea of Cuban identity, or Cubanness, appears to be present in-between spaces, in the imaginary borderlands. That is, both Cuba and Cubanness appear in a space that, to borrow from Antonio Vera León, "exhibe no sólo dos orillas... sino tres, o cuatro o más" [exhibits not only two shores... but rather three, four or more] (77). The imaginary borderlands point to a Cuba that is both "real" (a space or place of action, where real historical figures live/d) as well as "imagined" (fictional and/or tied to fiction). Moreover, Cuba appears in and in between spaces, contemplated by the diverse characters that inhabit/ed it.

PART I

FABLES, MYTHS, STORIES: WRITING AND REWRITING "OTHERS" IN THE BORDERLANDS

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal". (Anzaldúa 1987, 3)

It may seem, perhaps, unusual to begin an analysis of Daína Chaviano's science fiction novel, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, with a quote from the Chicana feminist writer and activist Gloria Anzaldúa. Yet there is a parallel between Chaviano's *extraterrestres* and Anzaldúa's *los atravesados* which becomes quite useful when analyzing Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre. There is no doubt that Chaviano's novel confronts the issue of "us versus them", the idea of "alien(s)" as "other(s)", juxtaposing starkly different worlds and peoples to then expose both identity and reality as mere constructions. Although Cubans and Cuban-Americans rarely define their culture as lying in *the borderlands*, as do Mexicans and/or Chicanos, in this chapter I contend that in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre Chaviano argues precisely that. In fact, in Chaviano's novel, Cuban culture, and by extension Cubanness, appears fluid and hybrid, caught in the borderlands, in that vague space that Anzaldúa argues is in a constant state of transition. Chaviano is not the first, nor the last, to allude to a hybrid, Cuban "borderlands" culture. In her essay "Fronterisleña, Border Islander", the Cuban-American scholar Eliana Rivero creates the term *fronterisleña* to describe Cuban-Americans like herself. As she explains: "I have come to understand that we U.S. Cubans are border people and border entities, in the spiritual and social sense of the term: within the national political panorama, within the U.S. Latino cultural landscape, and some even within our ethnonational subgroup -- more so those of us who are female, a

condition which adds its own marginality" (672-73). Furthermore, Rivero utilizes the metaphors of land and sea to describe individuals like herself, Cuban-Americans caught in-between two worlds: neither Cuban nor American, yet both. "Yes, I am Cuban by origin and culture (should I say temperament or is it too emotional?), but I have lived elsewhere all of my life... I am a hybrid, a puente, a being in two places at once, but also of one place which is dual and fluid and rich. The anguish is gone, a sense of wholeness now presides over the process... soy lo que soy donde estoy" (673).

As a border-islander, Rivero describes herself as an island, a set space, whose borders change depending on her particular location, in perennial transit. Yet although Rivero's assertions are aimed at describing Cuban-Americans, rather than insular Cubans, her ideas may be broadened to include insular Cubans, as well. For Rivero, the term *fronterisleña* defines or describes an identity caught (in) between two cultures, Cuban and American, it may be used to point to the multiplicity of identity in any given space or context. In much the same way as Gloria Anzaldúa characterizes herself as a turtle that carries her home on her back (1987, 21), with the notion *fronterisleña* Rivero envisions a portable identity carried in and through multiple spaces. Rivero's ideas on the multiplicity of identity are reflective of other feminists of color, as found in the works of Trinh Minh-ha, Ana Castillo, bell hooks, Cherrie Moraga, as well as Anzaldúa. In the narrative of Cuban women, as is the case of the majority of works by women of color, identity appears fluid, yet nevertheless fraught with tension and ambivalence. That is to say, issues of identity are not resolved in either Chaviano's narrative or in the writing of women of color. Issues of identity are, in fact, problematized in their work; identity is laid bare, revealing its constructed nature. Likewise, in both Chaviano's narrative produced on the island as well as in the Diaspora, there is a search for wholeness on the part of the characters, a search that ends up borrowing, questioning and later redefining traditional notions of Cubanness.

Dáina Chaviano's Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre focuses on the lives of several characters inhabiting different times and spaces who quickly discover that they are mutually interdependent. Although from different worlds or planets, these characters continuously intervene either physically or mentally in those other spaces. In Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, therefore, the concept of border(s) has as much to do with real (geographical) spaces, as with mental (imaginary) ones. In her essay, "World Travelling and Loving Perception", the Argentine feminist María Lugones ties the idea of travel, of movement, to the construction of identity. She recommends traveling across "worlds" to better understand oneself and learn about (our) "others" (390). Indeed, Lugones' focal point is on the crossing of racial and ethnic/cultural worlds, something on which Anzaldúa also often centers. And, although Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre appears quite distant from Lugones' ideas in an essay written about contemporary US inter-ethnic or interracial relations, it is precisely on the very idea of "crossing of worlds" as a means of understanding oneself and "other(s)" that this Cuban novel focuses. Through the use of allegory, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre goes beyond the obvious communication between actual planets and extraterrestrial beings, to comment upon the status of interracial, inter-ethnic and/or cross-gender relations in contemporary Cuban society.

This novel emphasizes the process of storytelling, that is, the telling and the rewriting of stories, *las fábulas* of the novel's title as a vital part of "world-traveling" and/or border crossing. For it is precisely through storytelling, through the retelling of the fables, that Chaviano's characters cross borders, creating or writing each other in different spaces through the oral transmission of stories or by writing them down on paper. Oral storytelling, as well as rewriting, are part of the novel's plot, becoming so complex in the narration that readers often find it difficult to discern who is rewriting, telling, or creating whom, where. Writing becomes a search, a way of discovering past, present and future; indeed, time and space are inseparable in this novel *in transit*. In Fábulas de

una abuela extraterrestre the past and memories of the past are indispensable for understanding personal and collective histories. Or as the African-American feminist scholar bell hooks explains, writing becomes a way to capture speech, hold onto the past, to tell the story as it should be told, often against the grain (208). It is no surprise, then, that for Chaviano writing is tied to creation. Writing becomes parallel to Helena María Viramontes's *nopalitos*, her mother's favorite dish, a creation that like her writing requires hard work and focus (292). I shall return later in this chapter to the ways in which Chaviano's work points to the idea of the woman writer and storyteller as creator. As I will argue, storytelling and creation by the female characters in this novel ultimately appear as threats to a patriarchal society's mores and expectations regarding gender and national identity. The women in this novel are deemed dangerous for their audacity to narrate and/or write down their stories, for wielding the power of creation and wresting it away from official power. These women hold the memory of the past and transcend the limits of time and space by communicating with their "others" against society's expectations or mandates. In addition to the threats implied in storytelling and creation, there are other possible threats present in this novel, including the threat of the "other", the threat of the mind, and the threat of memory itself, of the retelling or rewriting of history. As I shall argue, these threats to the status quo are inexorably tied to one another in the novel, as well as in society.

Narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre is comprised of sixty chapters and three epilogues that alternate between three different stories and their specific sets of characters residing in their respective "worlds". Although separated in time and space, these characters are ultimately interrelated. They appear to recreate each other, and their particular worlds depend on the direct communication between diverse beings that initially believe the "others" to be mere "inventions" or fictional creations (invented through storytelling or writing). Thus, communication implies the crossing of spatial/temporal

borders, *las fronteras*, into the realm of the "other(s)". As María Lugones explains: "Without knowing the other's "world", one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one" (402). In *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre* successful communication entails a loss of fear, a necessary trust between beings that once perceived the "other(s)" negatively. To cross borders is to overcome fear and accept each other's differences, as well as to accept the interdependence of fact and fiction, of "the real" and the fantastic. In *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*, as with all of Chaviano's narrative, reality and the fantastic intertwine. The real, or reality, becomes what one believes as an individual, not necessarily what is officially accepted by society. As I posit in subsequent chapters, the juxtaposition of "the real" and the fantastic, of reality and fiction, is also a crucial component of the narrative of Chaviano's contemporaries, including Zoé Valdés and Yanitzia Canetti.

In *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*, characters in one story must rely on the actions and experiences of the others that inhabit other spaces (and chapters). The novel begins with a conversation between Dezca, an extraterrestrial grandmother, and Ijje, her pre-adolescent grandson, residents of the planet Faidir. It is, in fact, Dezca, the grandmother, who is the storyteller of *las fábulas* that comprise this novel. Through her dialogues, Dezca teaches her grandson about Faidir, the history of their world and its people, the zhiffic. This nomadic race of winged beings with three mouths and three eyes are telepathic with extremely acute mental abilities and are capable of traveling mentally through different times and spaces. As members of a nomadic race, Faidir's inhabitants live in a society that is in continual movement, in perennial transit. In constant fear of an incoming invasion from the Jumene, a generations-long enemy, the zhiffic flee in caravans from their makeshift villages to new ones, recreating new villages and homes along the way. Their society is tribal in nature; the village's elders' are both religious and political leaders who make

decisions for the group. As in most tribal societies, zhiffic youth engage in a series of trials or tests before officially entering adulthood, rituals that the character Ijje faces in the narration. The most important of these tests is held on "el Día del Frontispicio", the day on which the village elders challenge a young zhiffic to arduous physical and mental trials. A crucial component of this challenge is the young adult's travel to Faidir's borders, to *las fronteras*. Traveling to (and through) these borders allows the young adult access to Faidir's history (both its past, present and future); it awakens the memory of the past and of one's ancestors, as well as visions of the future. As Dezca explains to her grandson, "Conocerás todas las Fronteras. Sabrás de tus ancestros y de tus descendientes; verás lo que fue y aquello que será: también lo que pudo ser y lo que pudo evitarse... El viento de cuatro mil mundos azotará tu rostro: nada querrás oculto a tu visión" [You shall know all the Borders. You shall know about your ancestors and your descendents. You shall see what was and what will be, as well as what could have been and what could have been avoided... The winds of four thousand worlds will hit your face: you shall want nothing hidden from your view] (Chaviano, *Fábulas* 8). Past, present and future inhabit these borders or *las fronteras*, spatial and temporal borderlands that point to both the positive and the negative, to the real and the unreal or imaginary, to what lies on both sides of time and space. Telepathic awareness is crucial to the success of these voyages across borders. Despite belonging to the science fiction genre, this novel is clearly influenced by traditional myths and legends, in particular by Celtic Druidry or Pagan beliefs, as is also the case with much of Chaviano's work, including her most recent novel, *Gata encerrada* (2001).⁴

Although chapters on Faidir mostly center on Ijje and his ascent into adulthood, in a sort of extraterrestrial bildungsroman, a great part of this tale focuses on the young man's relationship with his grandmother. These chapters focus on the retelling of stories, on the process of storytelling, stories which blur the confines between "the real" and "the fictional", *las historias* or, better yet, *las*

fábulas of different worlds and peoples whose adventures could not seem further away from the adolescent's specific challenges or tests. As the first chapter concludes: "Escucha -- dice la anciana --, voy a contarte una historia tan extraña como los Tiempos Heroicos y, sin embargo, tan real como los vartse que ahora descansan en la cueva. Comienza así..." [Listen, says the elderly lady, I'm going to tell you a story so strange like the Heroic Times, and nevertheless, as real as the vartse that now rest in the cave. It begins like this...] (13). That is, in addition to narrating the story of Faidir to Ijje, Dezca's words serve to connect this first tale in the novel to those that follow, and indeed, making it appear as if she is the narrator of those tales. Thus, although this novel is entirely narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator, there are numerous indications that point to Dezca as the narrator of this novel's subsequent tales. *La abuela* appears to weave the novel's various tales together, serving as both storyteller and guide to her grandson, as well as to the other characters and readers of the novel.

In Woman, Native, Other, feminist scholar Trinh Minh-ha focuses on the importance of storytelling in the lives of Third World women. She writes, "The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of a people. Of us, peoples. Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics)-- all in one..." (119). Storytelling is tied to history but more importantly to creation; for a story tells what came before but is also recreated with each telling. Therefore, each and every story is infinite and ongoing, as long as it is retold, recreated by the storyteller. The process of storytelling is as important, if not more important than the individual stories themselves. Storytelling is tied to creation. Thus, it is extremely significant that the storyteller in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre be a woman, and even more importantly, an elderly alien woman, an individual with creative powers, most often marginalized in a patriarchal society, and regularly accused of witchcraft, confusion or madness. The

grandmother's tales are not just stories she tells her grandson on their flight from the Jumene; her tales are a re/creation of past, present and future, a retelling of *history*. "Every gesture, every word involves our past, present and future", says Trinh Minh-ha (1989, 122). And *la abuela* tells these stories, *her stories*, because they are a means of retelling Faidir's history. As the keeper of Faidir's history, *la abuela* is narrator and creator, transmitter of her people's story, an integral *part* of the history of her people. Not only does *la abuela* tell stories (*las fábulas*) to her grandson, she is also an important part of that history.

In Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, as she does in several of her works, Chaviano bestows an older, marginal woman the power of the word. These women appear to threaten society for their marginality, for their transgressions into male domains, and most importantly, for their creative powers. Although Ijje, the grandson, plays a crucial role in the plot, most of the protagonists in this novel are women: La abuela, Arlena and Ana, a triad of "alien" women. Indeed, these female characters and their movement through and across borders divulge this novel's take on gender and nation. In this work, nation (as nation-state) and national identity defy more traditional definitions, and worlds or planets replace traditional nation-states. As a science fiction novel, this text moves beyond the geographic space of planet Earth, towards and beyond other worlds and peoples. However, the fact that the novel distances itself from traditional notions of nation or nationality does not imply that it merely erases the notion of national identity. Rather, quite the opposite is true; read allegorically these worlds and what occurs on them are indicators of what occurs closer to home, in Cuba. They also suggest ways of redefining Cuban identity as something fluid, hybrid and multiple.

Whereas the novel's first chapter centers on the figures of Dezca and her grandson, the second chapter narrates a second story or tale, the experiences of another non-human character, Arlena. Narrated in the third person, quite possibly by *la abuela* Dezca, Arlena's story appears

fantastic or made-up, a tale created by a grandmother for her grandson. Yet as the narration progresses, both grandson and readers become aware that Arlena's story is not merely a fictional tale but is "real". At the start of the tale, priests, named *los sacerdotes falsos*, pursue Arlena on the planet Rybel. Originally on a space mission with others from her unnamed planet, Arlena and crew first land on the inhabited planet of Faidir. A few however, including Arlena, return to the mothership to perform routine maintenance operations. While on one of the crew's vessels, Arlena discovers that the others from her crew, aboard another vessel, are killed in a freak accident. Arlena miraculously survives, travels through a rift in the time-space continuum, and eventually reaches the planet Rybel. Once there, she becomes involved in a series of adventures while in search of a way off the planet and a means to reach and save those crewmembers left on Faidir. During her voyage across Rybel, Arlena develops powerful telepathic abilities that eventually aid her in communicating with others, including Ijje on Faidir and Ana on Earth (in 1970s Cuba). As with Faidir's inhabitants, Dezca and Ijje, the power of the mind and memory become crucial elements in Arlena's tale of survival. The omniscient third-person narration about Arlena relies heavily on the past and the memory of the past. Arlena returns to her past through memory again and again in the narration, allowing for the retelling of her past experiences both on and off Rybel. As the narrator explains, "Sintió regresar los recuerdos. De nuevo el aire marino la rodeó con la sensación del pasado que se niega a morir. Aunque respiraba el aroma dulzón de la planicie, su mente paladeó la memorable brisa de Mar Uno. Anduvo con más brío mientras repasaba los detalles vividos durante todo ese tiempo" [She felt the memories return. Once more the ocean air filled her with a sense of the past that refused to die. Although she breathed the sweet aroma of the plains, her mind felt the memorable breeze of Sea One. She paced with more spirit while she reviewed the lived moments during all that time] (*Fábulas* 179).

By novel's end, Arlena becomes aware that the retelling of her past experiences is a means of understanding her future and becomes a protection or weapon that aids when reacting to future events. Thus past, present and future are inexorably linked. Yet the past is not the only time to which Arlena, and other characters in this novel as a whole, return. Past, present and future intricately converge in this novel. Arlena's encounters with others on the planet also involve a convergence of time and space. Arlena meets several magical or mythical beings, including Miruel and Tiruel, twins who metaphorically represent time and space; Ciso, a Rybelian nobleman with whom she has a love affair; and Soio/Merlinus, a magician from Early Medieval Earth who longs to return to his time and space. Reminiscent of Merlin, the elderly druid of the Arthurian cycle, Soio/Merlinus's presence in the narration unites these stories. His desire to return to his space on Earth is possible only through his communication with "others" in parallel universes, and through his ability to convince these "others" to communicate with one another.

Arlena's story puts forth the question of fiction in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre. Does Arlena's story become "real" through its telling or narration, that is, through the process of storytelling, or has Arlena's tale been "real" from the very beginning of the novel? These questions permeate the novel and are a crucial part of the third tale or story in the narration, that of the Earthling (Cuban) Ana. Like Dezca, Ana is both a character in, and a creator of this novel's tales. However, she is a young, rather than elderly storyteller, and a writer rather than oral transmitter of history. Living in 1970s Cuba, the adolescent Ana dedicates her spare time to writing fantastic stories, including ones on the extraterrestrial grandmother Dezca and her grandson, and on the alien Arlena. Yet while Ana creates these characters and their worlds she is simultaneously being "created" by the extraterrestrial grandmother. Moreover, Arlena is more than just Ana's creation, or invention; she is also, in a sense, her alter ego, the "other" that invades her dreams and visions and eventually affects the young woman's mind. Soio-Merlinus the magician observes, "Las dos

son... la misma persona... en dos universos distintos, separados por las celdillas de... mundos paralelos. Ana y Arlena son iguales/distintas: dos criaturas semejantes... en mundos paralelos" [The two were... the same person... in two different universes, separated by the cells of... parallel worlds. Ana and Arlena are the same and different: they are two similar creatures... in parallel worlds] (201-202). Ana and Arlena's communication with one other becomes a central element of the plot, for without it, Soio-Merlinus cannot return to his time-space, Arlena cannot return to her planet, nor can Faidir's borders break open. Ana and Arlena's communication only becomes possible through the process of writing and storytelling. In fact, the two novels Ana writes, the one on Dezca and Ijje and the other on Arlena, although initially distinct, gradually intertwine, as do all the stories that compose Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre. These individual stories reveal, in fact, a series of clues. They become different pieces or parts of a larger puzzle, of a larger story, one where time and space, as well as individuals inhabiting multiple spaces, interact and are interdependent on one other. With the exception of Dezca, these characters are limited in their comprehension of truth and veracity at the start of the novel. They are unable to see that fiction is something real, capable of affecting and transforming our lives. Only at the end of the novel does Ijje discover that *las fábulas*, the stories told to him by his grandmother, are not merely invented or imagined, but they were/are real. Ana also becomes aware that fiction is not any less real than perceived reality. As she comments to her friend Rita, "La fantasía también es parte de la realidad, porque surge de ella" [Fantasy is also a part of reality because it arises from it] (405). Thus, in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Chaviano makes a connection between fiction and the power of creation, pointing to the implied threat of creation.

But first of all, to and for whom does creation pose a threat? And secondly, is the process of creation the only implied threat present in *las fábulas*? This novel points, in fact, to various implied threats, all of which are directed at undermining society's established norms. The first

threat is storytelling by women. The threat of storytelling lies not just with the specific women narrating or writing these tales, but more importantly, with what they are actually retelling. Their stories go against official history, against the rational, against what should be told in their specific societies.

Intricately tied to the threat of storytelling is the implied threat of "creation". All creation, such as fiction, the rewriting of stories and *history*, poses a threat to society for its association with women. In her study on *xicanisma*, the writer Ana Castillo argues that throughout history men have attempted to deny and erase women's power of creation. As she explains, "Man was so afraid of mortality that he cursed women -- a reminder of his birth -- for being the one who has the ability to "create" him" (113). According to Castillo, gynophobia, the fear of mortality, is at the root of man's fear of woman's creative abilities and of his dichotomization of women into the virgin/whore schema (116).

The third threat on which this novel centers is that of the "other". Once again, this threat is tied to the processes of storytelling and creation. In this novel, the presence of the "other(s)" poses a threat to the status quo at various levels, for the "other" is intricately tied to the political as much as to the personal. This novel suggests that the "other is multiple"; we are all "other(s)" to someone else. The characters in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre are "other" to each other, but despite fear, they choose to communicate. Ijje, the alien young man, breaks with his society's fear of the Jumene by traveling through the borders, *las fronteras*, to eventually communicate with both Ana and Arlena. These characters are "others" to themselves, as well as to others within and outside their specific worlds. Ana, who is "other" to both Ijje and Arlena, chooses to believe in the unbelievable; she communicates with extraterrestrial beings against her society's ideas on what constitutes acceptable or normal behavior. So she is also "other" within her own society, because of her actions and beliefs. The same may be argued of Arlena, who is "other" to Ijje and Ana as

well as Ciso, the nobleman with whom she has an affair on Rybel, and to the priests who pursue her. Arlena, an “other” on Rybel, is a threat for being both an outsider and a woman with powerful, creative abilities. Arlena upsets the established order maintained by Rybel’s patriarchal priests.

As Julia Kristeva maintains in Strangers to Ourselves (1991) the barbarian is the “other”, the outsider with whom we do not wish to communicate. The “other” is present in all societies as the individual society fears, scapegoats for all ills, and never trusts. In Chaviano’s novel, each character appears to have his or her “other”, but also to be “other” to someone else or to a whole society. These characters pose a threat to the survival of the status quo for their audacity; they communicate with their “other(s)” and continuously threaten to expose established beliefs designed by those attempting to hold onto power. Yet as Julia Kristeva suggests in Strangers to Ourselves to fear the “other” implies the rejection of the “other” that lies within us (181-182). Thus, only reexamination of the “other” and his/her cultural attitudes can ultimately lead to the reexamination of one’s own cultural beliefs and attitudes.

The fourth implied threat is that of the power of the mind. Through this power, characters are able to transcend the limits imposed by their time-space to communicate with their “other(s)”. Indeed, all of the characters in this novel play with the power of the mind. They often cross borders mentally, and are able to communicate through telepathy. The mind is secretive, and despite societal laws or prohibitions, it cannot be entirely controlled. Thus, even if there are laws imposed against certain actions, the mind can never be as dominated as can the body. The mind symbolizes the individual’s innate freedom and may, therefore, be deemed extremely dangerous. Storytelling, creation and communication with our “others” are all possible via the power of the mind. Through the mind, individuals may travel beyond the limits imposed on them by both physical and manmade laws. Through the mind, individuals hold onto and guard their past, the memory of the past, tales that are often not sanctioned by societies’ official discourses.

Thus, another implied threat that appears in this novel is, in fact, the memory of the past. As I already suggested, these threats intertwine and depend on one another, making them difficult to control or limit. Memory holds the story of those who were the victims of history, the marginal, such as women and children, Anzaldúa's *los atravesados*. These individuals exist in memory, living on in our minds, as well as through our retelling of their stories. As long as their tales are retold, they will not die, and their stories shall live on.

The implied threats in these tales, as well as the tales themselves, reveal a great deal about national identity. Since this novel focuses on several characters that inhabit three distinct realms or societies, the “threats” cross borders. And indeed, the crossing of borders and/or the communication between characters on different planets focuses attention on nation and national identity as well as the intersection of gender and national identity. Although Ana and her friends inhabit 1970s Cuba, this space is void of the social, political or economic situation facing the island during that specific historical moment. Readers must delve deeper into the novel to find evidence of the protagonist's presence (present) on the island. In Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Cuba seems distant. Even in those narrations describing Ana's present, the nation-state and national identity (Cubanness) lie beyond the island, somewhere else altogether. If Ana's realm is that of the present, the readers find very little of that present. Rather, the novel focuses more on the present of Faidir and Rybel. In opposition to this lack of context in Cuba, there is an explicit exposure of the intense discord between the inhabitants of Faidir and their archenemies, the Jumene. The social situation on Faidir and references to its past history appear in conversations between Ijje and his grandmother. The chapters on Arlena point to the internal conflicts on Rybel, a male-dominated, slave-owning society. As already mentioned, the male priests of Rybel pursue Arlena across the planet. These priests are fearful of Arlena's power and knowledge, and seek to

maintain their (patriarchal) power over the planet and its inhabitants. The narrator explains: "Tuerg, el alto sacerdote, y los otros miembros del consejo, ya no tolerarían la presencia de una mujer cuya aparición en la corte, además de constituir un enigma para ellos, representaba un poder capaz de enfrentárseles" [Tuerg, the high priest, and other members of the council, would no longer tolerate the presence of a woman whose appearance in court, in addition to representing an enigma for them, was also capable of confronting them] (Chaviano, *Fábulas* 228). Ciso, the local ruler, accepts Arlena as his equal, but reluctantly, because she is both a woman and a slave when they first meet. Once the palace priests discover that Ciso is a threat to society for his association with Arlena, he is assassinated and she is forced to flee. This escape ultimately leads to Arlena's meeting the twins, Miruel and Tiruel, and Soio, the magician, whose help she needs to return to her own time-space.

Despite appearing on the surface quite distant from Cuban history and culture, these explicit narrations of peoples from other planets may be read as an allegory of both pre and post-1959 Cuban history. In simple terms, "...allegory says one thing and means another" (Todorov 62). Allegory is also often defined as "a narrative with two parallel levels of signification" (Sommer 42). Indeed, in all its definitions, allegory is intricately tied to narrative, and therefore to both history and fiction. The literary critic Hayden White, whose interest is in the narrativity of history, makes a correlation between historical narrative and allegory, or *allegoresis*, arguing that historical narrative endows real events with those meanings found in myth or literature (1987, 44-45). Other critics, such as Paul Ricoeur, define allegory as expressing "excess of meaning", "present in those apprehensions of reality as a dialectic of human desire and cosmic appearance" (White 1987, 42). Others, such as Doris Sommer, take allegory "to mean a narrative structure in which one line is a trace of the other, in which each helps to write the other" (42). Allegory is a discursive or literary phenomenon that works in narrative to imply a double movement for both writer and readers.

Allegory requires us to delve beyond the outer (first) meaning, in order to comprehend a second, or inner, meaning. Chaviano's science fiction novel, therefore, in addition to narrating a fantastic tale about extraterrestrials, tells us a great deal more about the historical circumstances that both the author and her island-nation face or have faced. Indeed, an allegorical reading of Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre suggests that Faidir's long-lasting troubles with "their enemy" makes reference to Cuba's uneasy relations with the United States following the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The troubles between the zhiffic and the Jumene may also possibly refer to the division between those Cubans who supported the Revolution, and those who did not, going into exile instead. If these sections on Faidir appear to focus on a society that resembles post-revolutionary Cuba, those that center on Rybel reveal a culture very similar to that of colonial, nineteenth-century Cuba. Indeed, although Arlena does not belong to this planet, she nevertheless encounters a highly patriarchal, religious society, one where women are deemed inferior, and slavery is commonplace. She does not fit into this world, first for being "other", particularly for her condition as a foreign woman, and secondly for her audacity to transgress from this society's established norms. On Faidir, Dezca and her grandson Ijje may also be described as "other(s)", outsiders. First, Dezca dons the power of creation through storytelling, and guides her grandson into accepting what others on the planet do not accept. And although Faidir is far more egalitarian than Rybel, Dezca and Ijje's choice to communicate with the "other", the Jumene, implies a break with, or transgression from, the status quo. Their communication, against protocol, virtually breaks down the borders of fear that have separated the two worlds. Thus, the various characters in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, may be considered "others" in one way or another, and as such, pose a threat to their respective, patriarchal societies.

One of the most striking features of Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, when read allegorically, is the almost complete absence in the work of references to the Cuban present and to

the Revolutionary Cuban nation. Although there are direct references to the island in those chapters on Ana, they are brief and elusive, never delved into or developed at length. Yet, in an allegorical reading, it is precisely the silences that say the most about contemporary Cuban society, particularly about national identity (Cubanness) and the intersection of gender and national identity. The more poignant moments that make reference to Cubanness are found in those sections centering on Ana in school or out with her peers. I should briefly add that Ana's presence in the narrative is precisely what allows for an allegorical reading of this novel. Without those chapters on her life in 1970s Cuba, it would be farfetched to read this novel as something more than a science fiction tale about intergalactic wars. Indeed, those chapters develop a continual tension among the adolescent (Cuban) characters. Ana's peers mock her, challenging her sanity and identity. Although her best friend Rita regularly helps Ana with her occult experiments, such as automatic writing and the Ouija board, she nevertheless doubts Ana's sanity. Both her friends and classmates are openly critical of Ana and her belief in the supernatural. Young men are the most critical, especially her current and former boyfriends, such as Mario, who accuses her of being "*una loca*", a madwoman, and warns her that she will end up alone for her *unorthodox* views. As bell hooks explains, being accused of madness has been the traditional punishment given to women for "too much talk" (209). For Ana, her punishment is not solely isolation from her peers, but also being labeled crazy or mad. Her apparent insanity stems not solely from her beliefs or actions, but also for "talking too much", for actually telling others about her unorthodox beliefs. She is also continuously harassed and taunted for her desire to write. Upon Ana's verbal assertion that she enjoys writing, thereby revealing "too much talk", her ex-boyfriend Carlos exclaims, "¡Ah! Pero si eres una intelectual, y no lo sabía" [Ah! You're an intellectual and I didn't know it] (Chaviano, *Fábulas* 24). To be an intellectual in this (Cuban) society implies and/or results in insanity,

especially for a woman, and even more so for a young woman interested in the fantastic and the supernatural.

In Ana's world, in her present, she is deemed a threat, a transgressor or individual that refuses to follow strict (patriarchal) notions of how a woman should act. Ana's alien "other", Arlena, is also viewed in the same manner by the priests on Rybel. Her knowledge of magic, her telepathic abilities, as well as her affair with a nobleman against the wishes of the tribal priests, result in her persecution on the planet. Yet, whereas Arlena runs away from Rybel's priests, Ana distances herself from her peers by hiding her interests, beliefs, and experiments from others. Few within Ana's (Cuban) present approve of her views and activities; her family worries about her physical and mental health, her best friend mocks and fears associating with her, and her classmates fail to comprehend her. Contemporary Cuban society forces Ana (and to a lesser degree her friend Rita) into hiding to perform her unconventional activities or rituals. Ana writes and communicates with "others" at night; nighttime provides freedom for the young woman. In this novel, as is also the case in Chaviano's subsequent works, nighttime becomes the time to which her female protagonists turn when seeking freedom from society's constrictions. In Chaviano's entire work, in poems such as "Bruja en invierno" (Witch in Winter), "Oyá" (Oyá) and "Triángulo de luna" (Triangle of the Moon), as well as in the novels from the series "La Habana Oculta", nighttime appears as a time during which women hide and escape. Nighttime allows women to regain their creative powers, often by invoking the powers of the moon, and/or honoring non-Christian or pagan deities. In Chaviano's work, allusions to figures from Celtic, African and/or Native American belief systems, grant woman the role of spiritual guide and goddess, equal and counterpart to the male god(s). In addition, nighttime acts as a safe space, for it helps hide and protect both men and women from the watchful eyes of those in power.

Despite societal pressures, Ana does not conform but rather escapes from these constrictions through writing, creating, and communicating with beings from other spaces. Writing, especially at night, allows the young woman some freedom. Yet if Arlena and Ana are one and the same, as the Druid magician Soio/Merlinus believes, both women remain perennial outsiders, continually fleeing and hiding from those who misunderstand them. Indeed, in this novel both extraterrestrial and Earth women are forever traveling in (and between) foreign spaces, always outside the conventional. However, although outsiders, it is for the very fact that they are outside that these women end up rewriting history and identity, inserting themselves into the history of their respective spaces or worlds. Ana rewrites her stories, all of which focus on other worlds, and in doing so, rewrites herself into the figure of Arlena, therefore able to escape through her creative powers and her mind from an unbearable 1970s Cuban present. As the narrator explains:

Su libro es un mundo noche y nieve donde las más extraordinarias criaturas se encuentran o evitan, obedeciendo leyes impredecibles, incluso para ella misma. Y a veces aquel mundo se adueña de ella, sumiéndola en un trance mental casi orgásmico en el cual --- como un dios pequeño o una madre omnisciente --- puede ser salida a seres de otro universo, cuya noción de la felicidad parece concretarse en el hecho de existir. (25)

[Her book is a world of night and snow where the most extraordinary creatures find or avoid each other, following laws unpredictable, even for her. And sometimes that world overpowers her, subjecting her to an almost orgasmic mental trance, where, like a small god or omniscient mother, she can be a portal for beings from another universe, whose notion of happiness appears to lie in the fact of existing.]

Although Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre does not seek to rewrite the Cuban Canon, it does manage to place official narrations and discourses into question. Indeed, by continuously giving outsiders a voice, the novel destabilizes notions of inside and outside. It rewrites *historias*, both collective and personal and from various worlds or realms, and in doing so abrogates the strict separation between the real and the fantastic. The fantastic transcends Ana's Cuban context by making way for those worlds that she creates and that, in turn, create her. It becomes an issue

even with non-humans, figures such as Arlena residing on other worlds. And like most fantastic narrations, as Todorov maintains, there is a certain degree of hesitation on the part of its characters in this novel; a hesitation that causes individuals to continuously question what goes on around them within their respective worlds.

Although on the surface this novel appears to sidestep the issue of nation by focusing on science fiction tales, through the retelling of these various *historias*, the novel says the most about national identity and the intersection of nation and gender within contemporary society. As I have argued throughout this chapter, this science fiction novel and its three simultaneous and interrelated stories focus mainly on history and identity. Through the first and most concise of these *historias*, that of Dezca, the grandmother, and her grandson, Ijje, the novel retells and redefines the history of the nation. Therefore, the personal becomes a means by which to comment upon the collective history of a people. As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the zhiffic, the inhabitants of Faidir, are forever condemned to wander and flee the Jumene, their archenemies that live on the other side of the *las fronteras*, the borders that divide Faidir from other worlds or dimensions. Countless stories surround the Jumene, and most of these point to their cruelty toward the Zhiffic. Yet, there is little proof regarding specific acts of violence against the zhiffic, and no one alive actually claims to have encountered a Jumene. The stories surrounding these outsiders come mainly from ancient stories, myths accepted as truth, passed down orally from generation to generation. Other tales surrounding the Jumene also appear written in Faidir's *crónicas*. According to these chronicles, Semur, a warrior deemed the "Father of Faidir", is responsible for battling the Jumene and closing down the borders between the two worlds, thereby preventing a Jumene invasion. Regardless, even though the borders are closed, the threat of invasion continues, and thus, the zhiffic continue to flee their homes whenever they telepathically sense the Jumene approaching.

Faidir's troubles appear in those chapters centering on Dezca and her grandson. Through these narrations, this novel uses science fiction and allegory to comment upon nation, but it also highlights the intersection of nation and gender. Dezca, *la abuela*, chooses to narrate the tales from Faidir's past as well as tales or "*historias*" of other worlds. Thus, Chaviano gives a woman a voice; Dezca is the keeper of Faidir's history, the storyteller who holds the memory of her people's past and transmits it to others lest it be forgotten. Furthermore, by retelling Ijje these tales about non-zhiffic peoples, *la abuela* pushes her grandson to reevaluate his own (individual) past and that of Faidir (its collective history). Her representation of other worlds allows for a rethinking of reality and fiction as linked together, rather than severed or disjointed. As for Faidir's society, it is one in movement, yet one that bases its present entirely on the past. The actions of Faidir's inhabitants are perennially dependent on what has apparently occurred in the past. Only through Ijje's mental ability to transcend borders of time/space (upon reaching adulthood during his test or *El día del Frontispicio*) do the inhabitants of Faidir free themselves from their history. Yet, it is difficult to convince Ijje and others on faith alone that what they believe is not "real" (reality) and that what appears to be fiction is, in fact, reality. The Jumene, the long-time enemy, are merely peoples from another world, misunderstood and stranded across Faidir's borders. They are, in fact, the abandoned crewmen from Arlena's story, thus the importance of her appearance in this tale. Stranded on Faidir and unable to use telepathy to communicate with the zhiffic, the Jumene are thought of as invaders. As "others", they are perceived as dangerous and untrustworthy. Their attempts at first contact result in the zhiffic fleeing. As a consequence, Faidir's society turns into one in transit, based on fear, something the zhiffic were not before the Jumene's arrival. What is said of the Jumene aids in the recreation of zhiffic identity. Their attitudes, their reaction toward the Jumene, lead the zhiffic to change their societal or cultural habits. In this novel, rewriting a story (*una historia*) therefore also implies the rewriting of identity. In her rewriting or retelling of Faidir's

history, *la abuela* reconstructs both the Jumene's and the zhiffic's identities. Indeed, Faidir's own history implies a rewriting of the history of the Jumene, of Rybel, of Arlena and all others who appear in other stories and other time-spaces. Our identity is as much a result of historical circumstances as our perceived notions of others and ourselves. We construct ourselves as a reaction to "others", as a means of differentiating "us from them". In many cases, to communicate with the other is perceived as dangerous; it is a threat not solely because of what the "other" may do to us, but more concretely for what the "other" may turn out to be. That is, rather than prove our preconceived notions of the other, our communication with the other may reveal that the "other" is not "other" at all. Thus, often what we have constructed threatens the very fabric of our society, our very construction of ourselves.

In this novel, the rewriting of history, through the process of storytelling, appears as a threat for various reasons. First, it is woman who transmits these stories, "an other" at various levels, a transgressor and alien. Secondly, the rewriting of these *historias* is a threat for what they reveal about national identity. These women's stories reveal the construction of gender roles and of national identity. These stories are retold/rewritten yet their rewriting is only possible via the contact between the different characters within different spaces. Thus, in the case of Arlena's tale and her experiences on Rybel, one also finds the presence of nation and history. As a foreign woman on a foreign planet, Arlena spends a great deal of time on her own. Her time is consumed with travel, fleeing, in search of freedom. And unlike Faidir's society where males and females seem to partake in societal events equally, Rybel's is male dominated. On this planet, Arlena faces multiple hardships for her condition as both woman and foreign.

Tied to both these stories is Ana's tale, although she is most intricately bound to Arlena and her actions. Almost a reflection or projection of Arlena on Earth, Ana is and isn't Arlena. Indeed, one can posit that Ana's troubles on Earth are augmented on Rybel with Arlena's

character. Unaccepted by the priests and followed by them, Arlena must flee in order to escape death. Ana also flees from her peers and her family, in search of her freedom and identity, in search of a space that allows her movement. Writing becomes that vehicle by which Ana attempts to make sense of her life, escaping from a society that fails to comprehend her. As the narration develops, Ana becomes increasingly obsessed with writing [down] and understanding her peculiar supernatural or fantastic experiences, particularly her unusual dreams and visions. So much so that Ana appears less and less in her present and more in other spaces, and the otherworldly appears to overwhelm her present. Therefore, as Ana's present becomes more and more complex, those around her fear for her health and sanity. At the same time that Ana withdraws from the present, Arlena moves toward danger, as well. Inexplicably tied one to the other, these women search for freedom or escape from societies that do not accept them for who they are and for what they believe. If Ana and Arlena are two young women on different worlds who are and aren't one and the same, the tension that Arlena faces on Rybel hints at the tension that Ana faces on Earth. Ana is misunderstood due to her beliefs and for her apparent insanity and Arlena is not accepted on Rybel for her superior telepathic and mental abilities, as well as for being a foreign woman. Thus, both women are a threat to their male-dominated societies for their gender and foreignness. Furthermore, on another level Ana and Arlena point to contemporary Cuban history, in particular to those individuals who chose to remain on the island as well as those who went into exile following the 1959 Cuban Revolution. In an allegorical reading, Arlena represents Cuba's exiles; she travels outside her home to other lands, yet she remains a perennial outsider in those new spaces. Whereas Ana appears to represent the inner exile, the individual who chooses to remain on the island, albeit in silence, *en insilio*. They are *aisladas*, isolated within their specific spaces, yet their creativity allows them a way of "talking back", a form of feminist agency.

In conclusion, Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre presents its readers with issues of national and gender identity within a science fiction framework. Although the end of this novel offers some resolution to the various conflicts presented, there is no clear resolution to Ana's problems in her (Cuban) space. Ana and Arlena's communication with each other and Ijje and Soio/Merlinus allows for a return to "normality" in all time-spaces, apparently marking a happy, or at best resolute, ending. But a deeper reading suggests that Ana's character remains in-between spaces at the end of the work, as her society is the only one that does not appear to change. The accusations of insanity by her peers against her, particularly by young men, shall most probably continue in her daily life. However, by way of her nighttime transports, her escapades, and/or her writing, through the freedom of her mind, Ana may possibly find solace. The novel's third and final epilogue offers a fragment from Ana's diary. Her words reveal a young woman aware of her own creativity, and aware of the power of creation and the freedom of the mind. As she explains:

No quisiera nunca que mis sentidos se adormecieran. No quisiera ser sólo un ser humano preocupado por la frágil apariencia de su persona.

Soy libre y tengo cerebro y corazón. En mi boca caben todas las palabras. Mi cuerpo es vasto y puedo comprender otras actitudes. Mi mente es infinita y me lleva a la infinitud.

No ceso de pensar. Tampoco olvido el pasado; por eso miro al futuro.

Mi elemento es el aire que revuelve las aguas, levanta el polvo de la tierra y aviva el fuego.

Mis sueños son los sueños de toda la especie. (412)

[I do not want my feelings to ever become numb. I do not want to be merely a human being concerned with the fragile appearance of my body.

I am free and I have a brain and a heart. In my mouth fit all the words. My body is vast and I'm able to comprehend other attitudes. My mind is infinite and takes me into Infinity.

I do not cease to think. I also do not forget the past; that is why I look to the future.

Air is my element, which stirs the waters, lifts the dust from the earth, and quickens fire.

My dreams are the dreams of the entire species.]

In her second novel, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre Chaviano returns to many of the very same issues she dealt with in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre. Notwithstanding, rather

than center on other worlds and the beings inhabiting them to allegorically expose inconsistencies in contemporary society, Chaviano delves directly into Cuban spaces. Still, she continues to elaborate on the importance of history and memory in a redefinition of identity. In the section that follows, I analyze El hombre, la hembra y el hambre to argue the ways in which this Diaspora novel exposes the paradoxical elements of contemporary society. In addition to rewriting Cuba's canonical discourses, this novel also places great emphasis on the fantastic as a way of allowing characters an access to the past and a means of escape from a contradictory present. Thus, in Chaviano's insular and Diaspora narrative literary creativity is found side by side with social commentary. Undoubtedly, as Trinh Minh-ha asserts, these two elements cannot stand alone: "neither entirely personal nor purely historical, a mode of writing is in itself a function. An act of historical solidarity, it denotes, in addition to the writer's personal standpoint and intention, a relationship between creation and society" (1989, 20). Likewise, Trinh Minh-ha argues that to deal exclusively with either of the two aspects proves vain as an approach. At times writing stems from a personal necessity, devoid of an ulterior motive, while at other moments, it intends to be a substitute for something lying beyond it (21). As we shall see shortly, the importance of creation, and its relationship with society, particularly with history, continues to be a focal point of Chaviano's work, most especially in her Diaspora narrative.

PART II

REWRITING NATION, HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN DAÍNA CHAVIANO'S
EL HOMBRE, LA HEMBRA Y EL HAMBRE

Nos hemos vuelto autistas. No nos ha quedado más remedio que inventarnos un país interior con leyes que podamos manejar para tener al menos algo sobre qué decidir. Cuestión de supervivencia. (Chaviano, El hombre 281)

[We have become autistic. We have been left no choice but to invent for ourselves an inner country, with laws that we can manage, so that at least, we can have something on which we can decide. It's a question of survival.]

I choose to begin part two of this chapter with a quote from Claudia, the main character of Daína Chaviano's novel, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. This statement is crucial for it reveals the importance and the necessity of creation in order to survive the present. As in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, in her second novel, Chaviano emphasizes the importance of rewriting the nation's past, a history that has been erased or altered by those in a position of power. In this novel, Chaviano centers on the ways in which writing and/or rewriting personal and collective histories becomes a means by which individual characters reinvent themselves and their past. Despite differences in content, style, and narration, there is a marked continuity between Chaviano's first novel, produced on the island, and her second, produced in the Diaspora. First, both works focus on women in-between spaces, in search of personal and collective histories. As argued in the first part of this chapter, in Chaviano's narrative, identity, both national and gender, is tied to the notion of fiction. Although Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre avoids openly delving into the issue of Cubanness, it nevertheless uses allegory as a means of confronting and questioning identity in contemporary society. And although the societies represented in this first novel are not necessarily Cuban, in the work of post-1959 Cuban women writers, as Nara Araújo argues, *lo cubano* is still present even if as she adds, "there is a deep, albeit problematic, bond with *lo cubano*" and concludes that the "enclosed space does not serve a teleological purpose..."

(2000, 360). This problematic bond with *lo cubano*, that is, with the issue of national identity, is undeniably present in the narrative of Cuban women writing both on and off the island. However, the issue of Cubanness is further complicated in the work of women writing in the Diaspora specifically as a result of their condition as exiles. As the Eastern European scholar Vytautas Kavolis argues in the essay "Women in Exile", in exile proper "language is not (or not only) what must be kept alive for a community which is real only in memory. The community becomes for the exile all the more important as a symbolic entity to be contemplated" (43). One may argue, then, that Chaviano's choice to focus entirely on Cuban spaces in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, to return to rewrite Cuba's discourses, is a direct result of her alienation and distancing from the island. The rewriting of history becomes even more important in her Diaspora work because it is, in a sense, doubly rewritten. On the one hand, her novel rewrites Cuba's pre-1959 masculinist, historical narrations, and on the other, she rewrites those from the Revolution. These multiple discourses, although apparently in opposition, reveal the continual marginalization of Cuban women throughout the nation's history. Therefore, Chaviano lends a voice to marginal beings that inhabit/ed Cuban space(s). It should also be noted that at another level, Chaviano returns to rewrite her narrative published on the island, in particular by touching again upon many of the same themes.

Unlike her narrative produced on the island, Chaviano's second novel El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, 1998 recipient of the Premio Azorín, does not fit into the science fiction genre, nor can be it viewed wholly as a fantastic text. Written in Miami and published by the Spanish publisher Planeta, this novel openly contests and rewrites Cuba's national and canonical discourses. Yet, nevertheless, although Chaviano's Diaspora narrative portrays the harsh realities of contemporary Cuba, within those narrations of daily life and conditions, there are constant interruptions/ intersections of the fantastic and the supernatural. The combination of stark realism

with the fantastic in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre acts to deconstruct and rewrite Cuba's official history and its canonical and national narratives. In fact, this novel turns to figures inhabiting (or from) Cuba's present and past, such as historical or traditional figures, to represent nation and gender. Through the use of alternating voices in the narration, Chaviano captures the different characters that inhabit contemporary Cuba, most specifically its capital city, Havana, as well as the voices of its past inhabitants, ghosts that continue to wander its streets and alleyways. The narration is complex, alternating between Claudia, the main character's first person narrations, the first person narrations or counterpoint (in alternating chapters) of two male characters and third person narrations that may or may not belong to the same omniscient narrator. Each chapter contains a different narrative in counterpoint with the previous and following chapter(s) and voice(s). In this novel, the borders between the present "reality" and the otherworldly constantly come undone, and a blurring of present and past, of contemporary and colonial Havana, decenters nation and narration by deconstructing official versions of history. Through counterpoint, the use of multiple narrative voices, and the incorporation of the fantastic into the narration, such as the character's ability to travel into and through Cuba's present and past, this novel presents alternative versions of history. Furthermore, the use of these techniques exposes the inconsistencies present in Cuban society and reveals the construction of identity.

Divided into six parts, with eight chapters in each, in addition to a prelude and an interlude, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre is set in early 1990s Cuba, during the so-called Special Period.⁵ The novel revolves around Claudia, a 30-something art historian who is fired from her position at the National Art Gallery following her discovery that many of the museum's paintings, part of the national patrimony, are being sold abroad. Around the time of her dismissal, Claudia meets Rubén, a young artist who sells handmade leather goods at the Cathedral's Main Square. The couple becomes romantically involved, but their relationship is short-lived. While Claudia is out of town

visiting an aunt, Rubén disappears without a trace and his apartment is sealed shut. Upon her return to Havana, Claudia is unable to find out what has happened to Rubén but suspects that he was jailed for dealing illegally in dollars. Shortly thereafter, Claudia discovers that she is pregnant. Facing a precarious future, Claudia initially subsists by working as a freelance translator. When the translations cease, she turns to prostitution as a means of feeding her newborn son.

As a *jinetera*, the colloquial Cuban term for a Special Period prostitute, a woman who exchanges sexual favors exclusively with foreigners for money or goods, Claudia adopts the alias La Mora in order to hide her true identity from her tourist-clients. This name signals the fracturing of identity and the subversion of history and official canon(s). First, through the adoption of the name La Mora and her entry into *jinetismo*, Claudia the subject divides. Indeed, from this moment forward, Claudia begins to lead a double life. Second, also significant is the fact that the name La Mora stems from Jose Martí's poem "La perla de la Mora" (The Moor's Pearl), from the children's collection *La edad de oro* (The Golden Age). By renaming her protagonist (as *jinetera*) a name from a poem by Cuba's most important hero, *el apóstol*, Chaviano undermines those "sacred" texts of the Cuban Canon. Moreover, the Martí connection is also important for another reason: the name La Mora hints at the irreversible loss of nation. In Martí's poem, La Mora grows tired of her pink pearl and tosses it into the sea; but years later, she aimlessly laments the loss of what she can never recuperate. If we consider the pearl to symbolize Cuba, *La perla de las antillas* (the Pearl of the Antilles), we may interpret La Mora's loss as the loss of her homeland, of the nation. Like Martí's La Mora, Chaviano's Claudia/La Mora also irrevocably loses "la perla", her pearl or nation, and its history. Moreover, la perla symbolizes La Mora's personal integrity and innocence, lost through prostitution. Her narration is her quest to recover what she has lost, nation, history, and innocence.

The alias La Mora also hints at another literary connection, albeit not as explicit as the Martí connection. La Mora may also make reference to Carlos Montenegro's 1937 novel Hombres sin mujer (Men without woman). Set in a Cuban jail, one of the main protagonists in this canonical novel is a homosexual prisoner "prostitute" with the nickname La Morita. Hombres sin mujer is one of the first novels in Cuban literary history that centers on the presence of homosexuality in Cuban society, specifically in the nation's penal system. By choosing the name La Mora to represent Claudia's split self, Chaviano makes reference to Martí's childhood poem, on the one hand, while simultaneously alluding to another work from the Cuban Canon, a work that confronts issues of masculinity and violence in 1930s Cuban society. Intertextual references in this novel, as in the case of the alias La Mora, are revealing for they expose both the construction of identity and the construction of the novel as a whole. And as I argue later in this chapter, tied to these allusions to works from the Canon, one also finds the incorporation of the fantastic and the supernatural into the narration. In this novel, the fantastic is intricately tied to both memory and history, and the narration of Cuba's history becomes indispensable for the future of the nation, as well as for the well-being of the main protagonist. Later in the chapter, I shall return briefly to the importance of history and the fantastic in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. In particular, I examine the ways in which Chaviano juxtaposes the so-called historical and the fantastic, thereby undermining the authority of Cuba's history and its various discourses.

Following Rubén's disappearance and her entry into *jineterismo*, Claudia, now as La Mora, ponders with the possibility of a new love, this time with Gilberto, a Cuban economist, turned butcher, when she meets through Sissi, her friend *la jinetera*. However, La Mora eventually disappears from Gilberto's life, leaving him perplexed as to her real identity. At the end of the novel, Rubén and Gilberto, childhood friends, decide to flee Cuba on a raft, as many others are doing along *el Malecón*. The novel concludes with Claudia and her young son's appearance as the two

men are preparing to depart. At this moment, the two men discover that Claudia and La Mora are one and the same, and Claudia/La Mora, the split subject, must choose whether to leave with them, or remain in Cuba. The novel's open ending allows for diverse readings. Nonetheless, it makes little difference whether Claudia stays or chooses to leave; in either case she continues as a split subject. Although fleeing the island may permit Claudia an escape from her life as a *jinetera*, she may possibly also face exclusion in those new spaces to which she flees. As a woman, Claudia is perennially outside, no matter where she may find herself.

As I've already mentioned, several narrative voices in this novel offer a distinctive view of the situation facing the various characters on the island. Through this complex narration, Chaviano represents the diverse voices of Cuba's contemporary and past residents. According to Debra Castillo in Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Literary Criticism, the double-voiced or multiple-voiced text is an important element in contemporary women's fiction because it counteracts "the impacted overdetermined murmurings of official history" (242). There are two levels by which Chaviano's novel represents nation and rewrites history, both having to do with the narration itself. First, Chaviano focuses on the present, using first and third person narration to discuss particular incidents occurring in contemporary Cuba. In addition to these first person and third person narrations, Chaviano adopts the counterpoint as a way to expose, once again, inconsistencies in the present. These various types of narrations reveal the divergence between what *should be* and *what actually is* in contemporary Cuban society. Although there are two types of counterpoint in the novel, one present between chapters and another between characters, the give and take between Rubén and Gilberto, the two male protagonists, reveals the most about both the social and the personal. I shall concentrate shortly on this masculine counterpoint and I will demonstrate that Chaviano appropriates the ideas of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz for a markedly different purpose. Furthermore, it is also important to emphasize that throughout these various narrations

that center on the present, there are continual intersections of the surreal and the fantastic. These intersections, once again, undermine contemporary discourses as well as past discourses. Thus, the second level by which this novel represents nation and rewrites history is through its continuous return to the past, in particular through the incorporation of the fantastic or the supernatural into the narration. The main character, in fact, has direct contact with *visiones* (ghosts) from Cuba's past, ghosts that often serve as guides during her transports from present into past. Both Claudia's jumps into the past, *los desplazamientos*, as well as the particular ghosts and their role in the narration, underscore the contradictions of the present. They also reveal the history of Cuba to Claudia, a history to which she has not had access until this moment. This novel, therefore, represents nation by travelling backward and forward in time, between present and past, but without ever losing interest in the role gender plays across time.

Before discussing the role of the fantastic in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, and in particular the ways in which it intersects in both present and the past, I would like to turn briefly to the use of the counterpoint in the narration. There are various ways of defining counterpoint, the most literal being "*punto contra punto*", that is, the idea of a continuous argument in any subject by two or more individuals which is explained or debated one idea, or point (*punto*) at a time. The counterpoint, between individuals, may very well take place in either a rural or urban setting. Perhaps one of the most famous counterpoints in Cuban traditional society is *el punto guajiro*. Improvised and highly original, this popular art form is performed by Cuba's rural farmers. In their performance, each individual, who for the most part are men, vocally heralds his specific abilities, in a sense competing against his neighbors. If *el punto guajiro* is the best-known *contrapunteo* present among Cuba's masses, Fernando Ortiz's definition of the term and his work on the subject is the best remembered by intellectuals. In his now canonical study, El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar, Ortiz documents the history of two of Cuba's most important agricultural

staples, sugar and tobacco, to stress the ways in which these two divergent products helped shape both Cuba's economy and its culture. Likewise, in addition to centering on the economic importance of these products, Ortiz takes these seemingly opposite products and their particular characteristics, as symbolic of Cuba's diverse, racial makeup as well as its particular national characteristics.

As she does with the incorporation of the pseudonym La Mora, Chaviano returns to the Cuban Canon through her use of the counterpoint as both a narrative and discursive technique. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Chaviano appropriates the Cuban counterpoint gives voice to specific members in society, as well as to comment upon the intersection of nation and gender in contemporary society. The most revealing counterpoint that appears in the narration is the one between the two male protagonists, Rubén and Gilberto, Claudia/La Mora's two lovers. In their *contrapunteo*, Rubén and Gilberto narrate their experiences with the women in their lives, Claudia and La Mora, completely unaware that these two women are one and the same. Rubén and Gilberto's dialogues not only reveal each man's side of the story, that is, the retelling of experiences with Claudia/La Mora and in society, their counterpoint also exposes Cuba's masculine discourse(s). In alternating chapters, mostly every four chapters, Rubén and Gilberto attempt to outdo each other's actions and stories by using contemporary Cuban (masculine) jargon. Through these characters, the only two males that appear in the "present", Chaviano creates a masculine counterpoint, what I dub "*un contrapunteo de dos cubanazos*", a dialogue, in a form of individual monologues, between "hyper-males" competing with each other for a bigger story, and unknowingly for the same woman. Although victims of their particular society, intermeshed with their criticisms of the social and economic situations they face, Rubén and Gilberto reveal inherent patriarchal attitudes toward women. Therefore, Chaviano explores the ways in which individuals both participate in and fall outside society, pointing to what scholar Homi

Bhabha coined the "pedagogical" and "performative". Rubén and Gilberto, although critical of the nation's dominant discourses, the pedagogical, if you will, perpetuate patriarchal ideas about women. Despite their dissent or disagreement with certain political ideas or social situations, their dialogue reveal ideas about women that clearly predate the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The fact that these men display patriarchal attitudes is quite revealing for it points to the endurance of these attitudes across time and in contradiction to official revolutionary rhetoric.

The novel begins with Rubén's monologue to his "*compadre*" or "*asere*", his best friend, Gilberto. In his narration, Rubén recalls the good old days, when they first met and became friends, to then argue how life turns on you, or as he puts it:

Es que la vida te hace cada mierda... Estudias como un burro, trabajas como un imbécil, y cuando crees que puedes sentarte a vivir de verdad, ahí mismo aparece algo que te desgracia la existencia. Claro, en mi caso no fue una sola cosa, fueron un burujón, pero la principal de todas fue Claudia... Nunca conocí a una tipa como ella: era más rara que un cementerio al mediodía. Por eso me embarqué. Me enamoré como un idiota. De no haber sido como era, a lo mejor me habría acostado con ella y un par de veces y luego si-te-veo-no-me-acuerdo. Pero no. Tuve que fijarme en la tipa más intrigante que se cruzó en mi camino. Yo creo que me amarró. Algún trabajito debió de hacerme. No es que la sorprendiera en algo sospechoso; nunca vi que anduviera en brujerías ni nada de eso, pero en este país uno nunca sabe con las mujeres. Te lo digo por experiencia: no hay que fiarse de ninguna, por muy graduada universitaria que sea. Porque, eso sí, mucho estudio que tenía, mucha historia de arte y mucho marxismo, pero ésa era más espiritista que Allan Kardec. Así mismo como te lo cuento. (17)

[Life does all sorts of shit to you... You study like an ass, you work like an idiot, and when you think that you can finally sit down to live life in full, something comes along to ruin your life. Of course, in my case it wasn't just one thing, there were several, but the main one was Claudia... I never met a broad like her: she was weirder than a cemetery at midday. That's why I got screwed. I fell in love like an idiot. If she wouldn't have been like she was, I might have slept with her a few times and then "if I see you I don't remember". But, no, I had to fall for the most intriguing broad that crossed my path. I think she cast a spell on me. She must have performed some witchcraft on me. I never caught her doing anything suspicious; I never saw her practicing any kind of witchcraft or anything like that, but in this country you can never be sure with women. I tell you from experience; you can't trust any of them, even the university graduates. Because, despite her years of studies, her knowledge in art history and Marxism, she was more spiritist than Allen Kardec was. It's just like I'm telling you.]

Rubén's grievances are multiple, he first insinuates that Claudia trapped him, perhaps through the use of witchcraft, and therefore, he is unable to rid her image from his mind. He then goes on to complain about women in general by using the universal catch phrase "can't live with them, can't live without them". In another section, Rubén complains about Claudia's love for science fiction, and her otherwise bizarre behavior. He also describes how one of her oddities is the ability to recite sections from Ray Bradbury science-fiction novels:

Se había aprendido de memoria varios capítulos para poder leerlos con los ojos cerrados. De tantas veces que me la oí, casi me vuelvo marciano yo también. Los capítulos que más le gustaba repetir hablaban de canales de vino y de unos barcos de arena tirados por pájaros... Compadre, yo no sé si estaba loca o si era iluminada, pero aquellos recitales marcianos me desquiciaban. Allí mismo tenía que quitarle la ropa porque no me podía aguantar. A lo mejor yo también me volví loco. Me traspasó toda su locura por ósmosis, como hacen los paramecios. ¿Tú crees que esas cosas se pegan?... A mí habrá que hacerme un monumento. Por sufrido. ¡Qué puñetera suerte la mía! Venirme a enamorar de una loca que me jodió mi existencia de mierda... (110)

[She had learned several chapters by heart so that she could read them with her eyes closed. Having heard her so many times, I almost turned into a Martian myself. The chapters that she most loved to repeat were those on wine canals and about sand ships pulled by birds... My friend, I don't know if she was crazy or enlightened but those Martian recitals drove me crazy. Right there on the spot I would have to take off her clothes because I couldn't control myself. Maybe I was also going crazy. She transferred her insanity to me through osmosis, like the psychics do. Do you think that stuff is contagious? They're going to have to build a monument in my honor for suffering. What horrid luck I have! I fell in love with a crazy woman who ruined my shitty life...]

Although accusatory, Rubén's narration reveals a tragic-comic tone, one that describes how Claudia's insanity ultimately rubbed off on him. His complaint, therefore, stems not solely from Claudia's behavior, but also from his frustration for falling in love with, and then losing her. Claudia appears to have placed some magical power over him, which helps explain his apparent irrational behavior.

Rubén, however, is not the only character who gripes about the incomprehensibility of his woman, *su mujer*. In his response, four chapters later, Gilberto argues that *his* La Mora is far worse than Claudia is. As he explains, "...Y eso que tú no conociste a La Mora. Al lado de ella, tu Claudia es una niña de teta" [And you didn't even meet La Mora. Claudia is a baby next to her] (31). And he further adds that La Mora ruined his life, "Esa Mora me saló la vida" (32). Like Rubén, he finds women incomprehensible, calling them "animales misteriosos" (mysterious animals) that only God, perhaps, understands. Or as he says: "Sólo Dios es capaz de descifrarlas. Y a lo mejor, ni El" [Only God is capable of deciphering them. And maybe even He can't] (135). Using colloquial Cuban street jargon, both men attempt to outdo each other with each narration. Indeed, in their monologues, Rubén and Gilberto seek to portray their virility and their manhood. Yet within their narrations, they simultaneously comment on the social situation facing their island-nation. It is important to reiterate that these figures are representative of Cuba's racial diversity, as Rubén is mulatto, and Gilberto white. As I illustrate later in the chapter, the issue of Cuba's racial makeup is just as important in the representation of the ghosts from the past. As pertinent as the issue of race is the fact that in their counterpoint each man narrates his particular troubles with revolutionary society, once again outdoing each other with each conversation as they do in those narrations focusing on Claudia/La Mora. Frequently, these sections on the social or political problems facing the nation are intermeshed with those focusing on the women. During Rubén's narration on his troubles with Claudia, he immediately jumps to an account of his expulsion from the Art Institute for his participation in the writing of a polemical article in the school's magazine. His narrative quickly turns to a criticism of the contradictions found in Cuban society:

Y pensar que hace tres años te metían preso si te cogían con un dólar en el bolsillo. Pero así es la cosa en este país. Lo que hoy está prohibido, mañana-- por obra y gracia del Espíritu Santo-- ya no lo está. O al revés. Y eso es lo que más me encabrón: no saber nunca a qué atenerme, vivir a la buena de Dios, vigilando a ver dónde piso no vaya a ser que me hunda en un agujero que el día antes no estaba. Qué va, mi socio, con esta intriga no hay quien viva; yo creo que por eso hay tantos suicidios. Quizás si la miseria fuera parejita, a lo mejor uno la sobrellevaba mejor; pero lo malo es que te han engañado. Todo el puto día diciéndote que aquí todo se reparte igual, y al final resulta que hay algunos que sí tienen de todo porque son los que la administran, mientras el resto se muere de hambre. (60)

[And to think that only three years ago they'd arrest you if they caught you with a dollar in your pocket. But that's the way things are in this country. What is prohibited today, tomorrow, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, isn't any longer. Or vice versa. And that's what really angers me: to not be able to know what to expect, giving yourself up to God, watching where I step so as to not fall into a hole that wasn't there before. No way, my friend, no one can live with this uncertainty, I think that's why there are so many suicides. Perhaps if misery was the same for everyone, maybe one could accept it better, but the bad thing is that they fool you. The entire day is spent telling you that everything is distributed equally, and in the end, it turns out that some have everything because they're the ones administrating, while the rest die of hunger.]

Rubén's complaints lead him to an acknowledgment that these inconsistencies not only may lead to suicide but also to trauma or downright insanity. Gilberto's response echoes his friend's statements. In his monologue, he tells how he studied Economics at the university only to discover that he had chosen a career with no real future. Following his graduation, he spent two years soliciting work from office to office, proposing useless projects until he met Toño, a butcher who offered him more practical employment. As he explains:

Te lo juro. En este país, ser carnicero es mejor que ser médico. Todo el mundo te respeta, te trata bien, se ofrece para resolverte cualquier problema, desde soldarte una tubería rota hasta conseguirte un turno para comer en La Torre. Saben que eres un tipo poderoso que tiene en sus manos el reparto de la carne; el oro de los pobres. (86)

[I swear to you. In this country, it's better to be a butcher than a doctor. Everyone respects you; they treat you well. They offer to help you solve any problem, from fixing a broken pipe to getting you a reservation to eat at La Torre [restaurant]. They know that you're the powerful man who has the distribution of meat in his hands, the poor man's gold.]

Gilberto's narration reveals yet another contradiction of Cuban society. Although Gilberto does not complain about his current position in society, his narration reveals that one must learn how to adapt to one's surroundings in order to survive in this society. Both men must learn to adapt, learn how to *resolver* (resolve) problems in a society that is interminably contradictory. Yet even when they are able to *resolver*, in much the same manner as the picaresque Lazarillo de Tormes, or *el Vivo*, the wise one, to which Pérez-Firmat refers in The Cuban Condition, neither Rubén or Gilberto is able maintain his *viveza* (sharpness) indefinitely. As Rubén explains, what is legal one day, is illegal the next; therefore, their survival depends on continuously readapting, in much the same way the chameleon survives in the wild. Ultimately, both men discover that they can no longer, or no longer wish to adapt, and choose, instead, to flee the island together on a makeshift raft.

Through the counterpoint Rubén and Gilberto display their masculinity and criticize those aspects of society with which they disagree. Yet, ultimately, the counterpoint leads nowhere; it does not resolve or change either man's life. What this novel suggests is, in fact, the idea that men in this society are caught in an endless trap. They are expected to continue their role of *macho*, but are unable to change or affect social and/or political policies. Although in their dialogues Rubén and Gilberto appear to flaunt their virility and manhood, they also reveal impotence at various levels. First, despite their patriarchal attitudes, neither man achieves real control over *their* women. In fact, neither man is able to maintain a relationship, nor does he truly know the women with whom he has been. Their inability to hold on to their women stems from both their lack of comprehension for them, as well as from social and political circumstances beyond their control. Thus, there is impotence at two levels: at a personal level and at the political/social level, as well. Despite endless complaints, neither man effects a real change in society. Rather, they are expected to adapt, continuously, to an increasingly paradoxical society, as is shown in each man's respective career changes. Furthermore, these men are relegated to endless chatter; they are

participants of a "masculine" counterpoint that goes around in circles. Their exaggerations and cursing are evidence of a masculine rhetoric, yet it is void or empty. This counterpoint reveals an abundance of words but no action. In a sense, then, the chatter, their counterpoint, surfaces as a form of emotional release because there is no real possibility for political action.

In addition to using the counterpoint as a means of representing nation and gender, Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre also questions and undermines history's veracity through the incorporation of the fantastic. Most specifically, this work juxtaposes stark realism (the real) and the fantastic (the supernatural) in the narration. In the first part of this chapter, I reflect on Tzvetan Todorov's contention that the confrontation between the real and the unreal (or the impossible) is one of the most fundamental characteristics of fantastic literature. Furthermore, Todorov maintains that there is a degree of hesitation present in fantastic literature; that is, characters in fantastic works continually question the veracity of the occurrences taking place around them. And, almost always, it becomes difficult to differentiate between what is real and what is not in a fantastic text. Although not science fiction, or fantasy literature, as is true of her early works, in Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre elements of the real and the fantastic continuously come face to face. However, in this novel, the *normal* and the *impossible* are not merely reversed. Rather, the tension stems from the fact that "everyday life," however unbelievable or surreal, *is actually reality* (in contemporary Cuba).

As she does with the adoption of the counterpoint, Chaviano borrows, once again, from one of Cuba's twentieth-century canonical writers, Alejo Carpentier and his ideas on the marvelous real. But before turning specifically to the correlation between Chaviano's text and Carpentier's ideas, it is first necessary to define the expression "marvelous real". In the now classic prologue to El Reino de este mundo (The Kingdom of This World), Carpentier begins by centering on the uncanny, or the marvelous occurrences that abound in the Caribbean, a space marked by specific

historical circumstances. First, he defines the marvelous, a state that emerges either as a result of unexpected alteration of reality, or as a revelation, or rare illumination. Above all else, Carpentier stresses that the belief in or the sensation of the marvelous presupposes faith. Or as he explains, those who do not believe in miracles cannot be cured by miracles. In the prologue, Carpentier explores the role of the marvelous in Western European history and literature, and then turns to the case of the Caribbean and the New World. What is significant is that in the New World, the marvelous transforms into something more than religious beliefs or literary techniques. For Carpentier, the Americas' particular history is, in fact, both marvelous and real. Carpentier posits that *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous real) is found in the history of Haiti, and by extension, in the history of the Americas as a whole. Moreover, Carpentier ends the prologue by positing that the history of the Americas is but a chronicle of the marvelous real.

There is no question, therefore, that there is an intricate connection between the marvelous real and history. However, the presence of, or the belief in, the marvelous real erases or puts into doubt the traditional concept of the "real". Thus, although the marvelous real is a product or a part of Latin American history, the view of history proposed by Carpentier is quite distant from the rational view of nineteenth and twentieth-century scientists and historians. Certainly, Chaviano borrows from Carpentier's notion of the marvelous real, yet she does so with a different purpose in mind. A great deal of this novel focuses on eighteenth-century Cuba, an era that appears frequently in Carpentier's works. Chaviano's interest in this époque, and its residents, to which I turn later, as well as her incorporation of marvelous elements, is reminiscent of several of Carpentier's works, such as El siglo de las luces. Yet, Chaviano's adoption of these elements and in particular the marvelous real does not merely seek to point to Cuba's distinct history. Rather, her focus is also on a marvelous real that continues in the present. And more importantly, she turns to look at how these unbelievable occurrences

in the present adversely affect the lives of Cuba's contemporary citizens. In addition, Chaviano transforms the marvelous real from a unique Caribbean experience, that may be positive or negative, to one that becomes entirely associated with hunger and desperation.

Although there are numerous references in Chaviano's novel to the fantastic or to elements of the marvelous real, most of these appear in the final pages of each part of the novel. These last sections, most often narrated in the third person singular by an omniscient narrator, while in other cases incorporating the use of the first person plural (*nosotros*), always focus on the present. These narrations appear separated from each individual chapter by a bold phrase or statement and center on the contemporary conditions facing the island during the Special Period. Also important, these narrations appear directed at a non-Cuban audience or readership, at foreigners unfamiliar with 1990s Cuban society. One of these sections appears at the conclusion of part two of the novel and is titled "Donde se revelan los secretos culinarios" (Where culinary secrets are revealed). In this section, the narrator delves into the Special Period Cuban diet, specifically on the preparation of some of Cuba's most recent culinary dishes. Reminiscent of various texts by Latin American women, such as Laura Esquivel's Como agua para chocolate (Like Water for Chocolate) the narrator in this section focuses on "the art" of making Special Period dishes. Commonly prepared meals include "*el bistec de colcha*", colcha referring to the rag used to clean floors, and "*el picadillo de cáscara de plátano*", or ground skin of plantain, used as a substitute for ground beef. Consequently, the difficulty of knowing or differentiating what is "real" from what is not, then, is found in the most basic element: sustenance. And as the narrator explains, in order to create this new culinary artwork, one must first have an artistic soul or "alma de artista" (Chaviano, El hombre 101). The case of the "*bistec de colcha*" dish, for example, takes on an almost mythical shape in the novel, becoming a kind of urban legend. These urban legends

or rumors, *las bolas*, permeate the novel, and contribute to the representation of unbelievable, the surreal [elements] of everyday life, one might say, a late twentieth-century version of Carpentier's marvelous real. Indeed, at the end of part five, in "Donde nadie sabe a qué atenerse" (Where No One Knows What to Believe) the third person narrator discusses the role of *las bolas*, always present in Special Period Cuban society. As the narrator explains: "En un sitio donde se sabe que las noticias oficiales nunca son lo que parecen y jamás parecen lo que son, el papel de las bolas cobra especial significado. La sociedad se entera de lo que ocurre a través de las bolas... [In a place where it is known that the official news is never what it seems and never seems what it is, rumors obtain a significant role. An entire society finds out what is happening through these rumors that circulate from person to person] (256). Most often, however, these rumors turn out to be misleading or false, causing hopelessness and despair in those individuals receiving them. Referring to the effect *las bolas* cause, the omniscient narrator adds: "Cuando esa esperanza fallida se repite año tras año, la gente se vuelve escéptica y se anulan sus posibilidades de acción. Y con esa incertidumbre a cuestas no queda otra alternativa que la inacción absoluta o el escape hacia otro mundo donde las leyes naturales sean más previsible" [When false hopes repeats themselves year after year, people become skeptical and cancel any possibilities for action. And with such uncertainty looming over, there is no other alternative than that of total inaction or escape toward another world where the laws of nature are more predictable] (259).

Unlike magical realist novels, such as Laura Esquivel's novel where the protagonist prepares culinary dishes as a way to control or influence loved ones, in Chaviano's text the creation or invention of dishes has a more direct and practical purpose. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, creation is an act of survival for the characters and is not just associated with magic or the literary as with Chaviano's first novel. In this novel, survival is possible through the preparation of these Special Period dishes, through the retelling of *las bolas*, and through the characters'

viveza, or sharpness. As a result, verbs such as *inventar* (to invent), *crear* (to create), and *resolver* (to resolve), become crucial for survival in Special Period society. The necessity to invent, *inventar* or "*inventarse*", the reflexive form of the verb, is evident in everything from the creation of new dishes to the recreation of history and personal identity. As with Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, in Chaviano's Diaspora novel, the concept of creation continues to play a crucial role in the narration. Yet, in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, creation transcends the literary and plays a role in everyday life.

As already mentioned, an important part of this novel centers on the presence of surreal or paradoxical situations present in society. As important, if not more, than these elements is the continual intervention of supernatural beings into the narration. Again, although the surreal or paradoxical elements present in everyday life, such as *las bolas*, or Special Period dishes, are accepted in society as normal, the supernatural occurrences are not. Once more, therefore, one may argue that Chaviano takes a spin on Carpentier's notion of the marvelous real, limiting it only to Cuba's present, to the surreal political, social and economic conditions. In fact, the appearance of ghosts and the ability to travel through time are not accepted as (marvelous) real occurrences in this society. In this novel, for example, only Claudia, the main character, and her friend Ursula encounter or are able to "see" ghostly visions and are able to transport themselves into the past. The supernatural, an element normally associated with the marvelous, is *not accepted* matter-of-factly by characters in Chaviano's novel, as in Carpentier's works. Quite the opposite is true; clairvoyance and time travel remain anomalies that only a select few experience or accept as real. And even those characters experiencing these supernatural occurrences, at first brush them off or deny their veracity. After Claudia's return from her first transport into the past, the third person, omniscient narrator describes her confused state at length:

Su regreso a un espacio conocido actuó como pantalla protectora. Ya era suficiente saber que estaba a salvo; y fue como si un piadoso filtro comenzara a velar su memoria, haciéndola dudar de su anterior percepción. Ni siquiera se propuso indagar más adelante lo ocurrido. Primero sospechó algún tipo de alucinación provocada por una comida, quizás un virus o fiebre. ¿O se habría intoxicado? Seguro que había agarrado una siguatera con aquel pescado que se comió anoche. Era una milagro que estuviera viva después de tantas horas... (170)

[Her return to familiar territory acted as a protective screen. It was enough for her to know that she was saved; it was as if a benevolent filter began to fog her memory, making her doubt her previous perception. She didn't even attempt to delve deeper into what had just taken place. First, she suspected [that her] hallucination was caused by food poisoning, or perhaps a virus or fever. Had she become intoxicated? Surely she had become ill from that fish that she had eaten the night before. It was a miracle that she was alive after so many hours...]

Claudia, the main character, despite her clairvoyant abilities, constantly questions the supernatural and the fantastic elements that surround her. Yet, she and others around her accept the surreal or paradoxical elements present in Special Period society as *normal*. For example, her friend Nubia, like Rita from Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, is a very practical young woman that often questions and rejects her best friend's abilities to see ghostly visions and transport into the past. On one occasion, she even suggests, albeit jokingly, that Claudia's transports and visions are drug-induced. Unlike Rita who fears associating with her friend, neither one of Claudia's best friends shun her. These three women are outsiders who accept their condition as such. They are, indeed, a strange threesome, a trinity of women reminiscent of the Biblical Marys. In a sense, Chaviano takes hold of this traditional image, gives it a new shape, and uses these figures to expose the surreality of contemporary Cuban society. For one thing, Claudia/La Mora is a single mother with a young son who considers herself, *una puta mística*, a mystical whore with clairvoyant abilities. Her best friend Ursula, a Catholic nun, is also clairvoyant and believes herself to be the reincarnation of Hildegard of Bingen. And finally, Nubia, the most levelheaded of the three friends, nevertheless

believes in the contradictory *bolas* that circulate through society. Part of the tension in this work lies, then, with society's ability to accept, or better still, to become accustomed to contradictory (elements) in the present, yet its inability to accept the supernatural, and in turn, the past. Indeed, the present, the day-to-day events in the lives of the characters, is just as contradictory as the history that is revealed by the ghosts and through the jumps into the past. The present is inconsistent with the way things "should be" according to official (revolutionary) discourse(s). However, without access to the past, individuals in the present cannot fully see those inconsistencies. Only a select few, such as Claudia and Ursula, have access to the past, through their clairvoyant abilities.⁶

Indeed, the presence of the supernatural in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre becomes intricately tied to both memory and history as occurs with the fantastic in Chaviano's first novel. From the outset, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre seeks to comment on the importance of history and memory for a nation. Hence, the novel begins with two epigraphs, one taken from Milan Kundera's novel El libro de la risa y el olvido, the other from Hildegard of Bingen. Kundera's quote reveals how through the erasure of memory, and the destruction of history, nations are destroyed:

Para liquidar a las naciones [...], lo primero que se hace es quitarles la memoria. Se destruyen sus libros, su cultura, su historia. Y luego viene alguien y les escribe otros libros, les da otra cultura y les inventa otra historia. Entonces la nación comienza lentamente a olvidar lo que es y lo que ha sido. Y el mundo circundante lo olvida aún mucho antes. (Chaviano, El hombre)

[In order to liquidate nations [...], the first thing that one does is take away their memory. Books, culture, history are destroyed. Then, someone comes and writes them other books, gives them another culture, and invents another history for them. Then the nation begins to slowly forget what it is and what it was. And the world around forgets even sooner.]

The other epigraph, a quote from Von Bingen, states "Oh, cuánto debemos llorar y lamentarnos" [Oh how we should cry and lament], and alludes to the tragedy that is life. Together, these statements allude to the tragic loss of history by a nation and its people. If indeed this (Cuban)

nation's memory has been erased, the *retelling* of its history becomes indispensable for the future of both the nation and its citizens. As Claudia argues, only through the knowledge of history, can there be faith in the future. She states, "Para tener fe en el futuro, uno necesitaba de su pasado; pero su pasado le había sido escamoteado, reprimido y alterado..." [In order to have faith in the future, one needed one's past; but one's past had been circumvented, repressed and altered...] (186).

No doubt, therefore, a great part of this novel centers on the importance of history for both the individual and society. And just as important, is the way in which the fantastic, or the supernatural, aids in the transmission of that history. Later, I shall turn in more detail to the role of the fantastic in the transmission of history, but first, however, I would like to suggest, that the presence of the fantastic is also important for other reasons. The fantastic, in the shape of supernatural occurrences, is intricately tied to the psychological well-being of the characters. Through so-called distancing games, or *juegos de distanciamiento*, as well as through spatial/temporal transports, or *desplazamientos*, Claudia seeks normality, sanity, in a society that has become unbearable. Therefore, Claudia is not simply presenting the past, she also appears to rewrite or retell her/Cuba's past and her/Cuba's present as a means of survival. Through such techniques as *juegos de distanciamiento*, for example by pretending to be a character in a film or a subject in a painting, in conjunction with *desplazamientos*, or jumps into the past, allow Claudia to escape from the present. As time progresses, these games and transports increase in number, becoming especially more pronounced following Claudia's entry into *jineterismo*, for as already suggested in that moment she splits or divides in two.

One might argue that in a contradictory society such as this one, subjects desperately seek normalcy, or sanity. The crossing over of spatial and temporal borders offers a means of both uncovering history, as well as a means of escaping reality. As opposed to Fábulas de una abuela

extraterrestre where characters from different spaces cross over or through "other spaces", in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, characters cross over insular temporal/spatial borders. That is, characters in this novel remain within Cuban spaces, although they may travel through different parts of the island, and certainly to different moments of the past. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, although spatial/temporal borders are set, they ultimately lead to different manifestations of Cuba. Borders between present reality and the otherworldly constantly come undone and there is a blurring of present and past, of contemporary and colonial Havana, that acts to decenter nation. Indeed, El hombre, la hembra y el hambre suggests that nation (as political state) causes its citizens to "divide" and repress themselves. Only by fleeing or escaping (into alternate spaces) can Cuba's "characters" hope to find their wholeness. And although her *desplazamientos* allow Claudia an escape from an unbearable present, the only form of normality available to her is one that has passed -- the history of her nation transmitted to her by its dead ghosts.

One of the most important roles of the fantastic in this novel is to aid in the transmission of history. Thus, history is retold in this novel, albeit not by conventional means. The fantastic, in the form of supernatural manifestations, opens up a space for the narration of history. Indeed, history is transmitted to Claudia through supernatural beings or ghosts from Cuba's past. These ghosts, in fact, hold the key to the memory of the community. Yet, only Claudia has access through her transports into those past realities. And her only access to history, to both individual and collective histories, is via her communication with ghosts from Cuba's past. These ghosts serve both as guides to *and* narrators of the past. And Claudia needs these figures to survive her present, as much as Ana needs her extraterrestrial "others" to overcome her unbearable present. Without these ghosts, Claudia would not have become familiar with a past starkly different to what she had been taught in school: "lo que vi es distinto a todo lo que nos han enseñado" (190). And by coming into contact with these beings, as well as through her *desplazamientos*, Claudia also becomes

aware of the fact that the memory of her nation's history lies deep within her. Thus, this novel suggests that the transmission of history does not simply require the presence of fantastic elements, rather, it suggests that the knowledge of the past, the memory of a people, is transferred unknowingly from generation to generation, specifically through women. Trinh Minh-ha explains this idea as follows:

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, pleasure in the reproduction. No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. (1989, 122)

Therefore, the desire by official discourses to erase or alter history cannot entirely succeed for there is always a woman that holds the memory alive.

In addition to serving as guides through and transmitters of Cuba's history, the supernatural beings or ghosts that appear in this novel also make reference to Cuba's traditional races. Indeed, these figures are representatives of Cuba's history, of a violent past that few in contemporary society remember. First there is el Indio, a representative of Cuba's native population who is a ghostly reminder of the extermination of Cuba's natives during the conquest and early colonial period. His figure only appears in critical moments in the narration, mainly to warn Claudia of impending danger. The second figure is Muba, the eighteenth-century African slave woman that represents those African slaves violently brought to Cuba during the colonial period. The third figure is Onolorio, the most disturbing of the ghosts that appear in the novel. Representative of the carnivalesque in Cuban history, Onolorio is a mulatto, with some Chinese blood, belonging to either the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, a time during which the African populations celebrated *El Día de Reyes* (Three Kings Day) in Havana's streets. Although there is no specific reference to this figure's background, Onolorio was probably begotten from a violent

relationship. What is mentioned is that he met his death during an altercation with a prostitute, thus his constant proximity with the underside of society. As a specter, Onolorio continues to perpetuate (sexual) violence and acts as supernatural pimp to Cuba's contemporary *jinetes*, including Claudia. The final ghostly figure that appears in this novel is that of José Martí, Cuba's nineteenth-century national hero, poet and father figure. Like the others, Martí also encountered violence, losing his life in battle during the 1898 War of Independence.

In his essay "La diferencia cubana," Cuban historian Rafael Rojas posits that the discourses of both the Republican period (1902-1958) and the Revolutionary period (1959-?) promote a certain image of a Cuban national family tree. These discourses have portrayed the Cuban nation as "un tronco en el que desembocan cuatro raíces antropológicas: la india, la española, la africana y la china" [a branch where the four anthropological races, the Indian, the Spanish, the African and the Chinese, culminate] (Rojas 1998, 109). By using these ghostly figures to represent the nation, Chaviano both rewrites previous narrations, as well as redefines national identity. Indeed, I posit that these figures both represent and confront nation. That is, their continuous interventions in the narration serve to disrupt the present, opening up a space for the past to seep in and for (Cuba's) history to be retold. By showing and guiding Claudia through *their* past, which is *hers*, as well, these ghosts expose the official discourses that have attempted to erase them. The most striking feature in the work is the way in which these characters appear; they are dead yet continue to wander the streets of contemporary Havana. With the exception of Claudia and her friend Ursula, these figures or ghosts are completely forgotten and remain invisible. They are and were multiply marginalized in both past and present, in the past, possibly for their race or status, in the present for being dead.

As is the case with a many works by contemporary Latin American women writers, there is a noticeable absence of parental figures and the traditional family structure in Chaviano's EI

hombre, la hembra y el hambre. As with other works with feminist overtones, friendships or relationships between women are strong, while biological fathers *and* mothers are dead, weak, insane or absent from the narration(s). According to critic Jean Franco, in the contemporary narrative of Latin American women, "...parody national myths, roam all over the globe, and pronounce radical exile of women from the traditional family. It is not "daddy, mummy and me" who dominates their novels, but precarious and often perilous alliances across generations and social classes" (186). This is clearly evident in Chaviano's Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, novels in which women cross racial/generational lines as well as temporal/spatial borders, as a means of forging alliances and combating personal and collective dangers. Also significant in Chaviano's work, and consistent with what Jean Franco posits, is the absence of the traditional father and mother figures in the narration. This is especially significant when taking into account the role of the ghostly visions in the narration. These ghostly figures, such as Muba, the conga slave woman, ultimately replace Claudia's absent, real family. Moreover, these dead figures not only allude to the Cuban national family tree (*el tronco* of Cuba's traditional discourses), in a sense they metaphorically represent the individual Cuban family. By choosing an adoptive, supernatural family, Chaviano upsets the traditional, nuclear family, as well as a larger national one. Scattered and forgotten, these dead, helpless and often mute members of this new Cuban family wander the streets of Havana, in search of someone to listen to their stories and to heed their warnings. Neither their appearance nor Claudia's temporal jumps follow a specific historical chronology. In fact, Claudia travels back and forth into different epochs and back into the present. The novel's narration also goes back and forth, chapter to chapter, from narrator to narrator, weaving in and out through both Claudia's private *historia* (her story) and Cuba's (not so) public history. Absent from this novel is what Benedict Anderson coins "empty time", "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise

analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (26).

The supernatural in this novel, specifically the presence of ghosts from the past, serve three purposes. These ghosts represent and transmit Cuba's history to the protagonist. They become surrogates for the protagonist's dead family and represent the larger Cuban family. In addition, these ghosts and their presence, as is true with other fantastic or supernatural occurrences in the novel, aid in the protagonist's escape from her unbearable present. Thus, the fantastic becomes a means by which Claudia/La Mora comes closer to healing her troubled soul and it serves as a tool of education. The ghosts in this novel are in fact, just as important as Claudia and others, for despite their condition, they are paramount in transmitting this novel's ideas regarding Cuba's past and present history. In the paragraphs that follow I will delve further into the four ghostly figures that appear in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre.

The first ghost that appears in the novel is Muba, the eighteenth century African slave woman, representative of those African slaves brought to Cuba during the colonial period. Although belonging to the colonial period, Muba weaves in and out of the narration, going back and forth through (her) past and into (Claudia's) present. She acts as a guardian, offers protection and advice in the present, as well as guides Claudia through the (past) history of her city, Havana. Without a doubt, out of the various ghosts in the novel, Muba's role is the most important in the narration. Having appeared shortly before or shortly after the death of Claudia's parents, Muba assumes the vital role of adoptive or surrogate mother for the protagonist.

Perhaps the most engaging character in the novel, the figure of Muba is reminiscent of other Cuban mother figures presented in canonical novels such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Sab (1841), and Cirilo Villaverde's Cecilia Valdés (1888). In effect, Chaviano rewrites and conflates the figures of Martina la India, the old Indian mother figure in Sab, and María de

Regla, the old black slave woman in Cecilia Valdés, into the figure of Muba. Like Martina la India or María de Regla, Chaviano's Muba represents a sort of "Mother Cuba", the mother of all Cubans. The first and almost obvious link rests directly in the slavewoman's name. According to the author, she ran across this name while effecting research on the history of slavery in Cuba. Despite the name's origin, there is no denying that the name Muba sounds like Cuba. Furthermore, the "m" sound, in nearly all languages, is often frequently associated with babies' first utterances and the word for "mother" (i.e. mama).

To fully comprehend the figure of Muba and her role as "mother" to all Cubans, it becomes necessary to delve deeper into previous Cuban discourses, and specifically into the syncretic origins of Cuba's traditional mother figures. As already suggested, Muba's figure is reminiscent of various mother figures found in numerous Cuban literary texts, including works from the Canon. But Muba's character also hints at Cuba's traditional religious mother figures. In his study on Caribbean literature and culture, La isla que se repite, Antonio Benítez Rojo posits that the Cuban mother cult is best found in the figure of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's patron saint. According to Benítez Rojo, the Virgin of Charity is the culmination of the syncretic union of three previous mother figures, Atabey, the Taíno Great Mother; Ochún, the Yoruba orisha; and Nuestra Señora, the Hispano-Christian mother of Jesus Christ. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Chaviano incorporates mother figures from various Cuban traditions into the figure of Muba, thereby pointing to the syncretic nature of this character, as well as to the syncretism present in Cuban culture. As is the case with all of Cuba's mother figures, the syncretic and hybrid figure of Muba takes on the role of mother to both the individual (protagonist) and the nation as a whole.

Another important element in the novel that points to the syncretic nature of Muba herself, and by extension the syncretic elements of Cuba's culture found in those allusions to African customs and beliefs. Muba points to her Africanness, first and foremost through her race and

status as a Conga slavewoman, but more importantly through her references to African, specifically Yoruba, spiritual beliefs. In Chaviano's work, there is a strong presence of *lo africano*, of African religious beliefs, including allusions to the mother-sister deities Yemayá and Ochún, represented in the Christian Pantheon as the Virgins of Charity, and the Virgin of Regla. In this novel, Claudia consistently seeks guidance from Muba, rather than from the Christian God or from Mother Mary. In one scene, for example, Claudia sees a public *Santería* ritual aimed at [European] tourists. She is horrified at the sight of state-sponsored official *babalaos* (priests) who make a show out of what she deems sacred rituals. Her concern over the lack of respect for the orishas leads Claudia to think about Muba.

Me gustaría saber qué piensa Muba de esto. Hace más de un mes que no la veo. Sabe Dios por dónde andará esa negra, siempre jalándole las orejas a sus protegidos... Porque alguien tendrá que castigar a esa gente que se dice religiosa y luego vende la palabra de sus orishas. ¡Qué tipo tan descarado ese babalao! Quisiera ver qué cara pondría si Muba se le apareciera por un instante. Seguramente morirse de susto. Y esos extranjeros... ¡Qué pena, santísimo, qué pena! ¡Cómo se dejan engañar los pobrecitos! Muba, ¿dónde te has metido? ¿Por qué no paras la pata y descansas un rato? ¿No te bastan tus doscientos años de muerta para sentar cabeza? (Chaviano, *El hombre* 25)

[I would like to know what Muba thinks about this. I haven't seen her in more than a month. God only knows where that [black] woman is, always pulling on the ears of her protected ... because someone will have to punish those people that claim to be religious and then sell the words of the orishas. That babalao is such a shameless guy! I'd like to see what kind of face he'd put if Muba appeared [before him] for an instant. He'd probably die from fright. And those foreigners... What a shame, dear God, what a shame! How they allow themselves to be fooled, the poor souls! Muba, where have you gone? Why don't you stop your traveling and rest a while? Isn't the fact that you've been dead for two hundred years enough to make you sensible?]

This narration indirectly hints at Muba's connection to the orishas, possibly hinting that Muba is herself an orisha, perhaps an earthly manifestation of the goddess Yemayá. Known in the Christian pantheon as the Virgen de Regla, Yemayá is Havana's patron saint, la patrona (L. Cabrera 9). It is easy, therefore, to associate the figure of Muba to the orisha Yemayá, since it is Muba who

appears to transport and guide Claudia through different epochs of *her* city, La Habana. In fact, she never leads Claudia through any other area of the island. Like the orishas, Muba's power includes the ability to transport through time, as well as guide others through (and in between) time(s). Also significant is the fact that in the Yoruba religion, the orishas are deemed messengers, in addition to the children of the great god. They speak to their people, their *protegidos*, or protected ones, and act as their guardian angels, or tutors (Bolívar Aróstegui 7-9). Muba's appearances before Claudia are often to warn her to be careful, to "keep her eyes open", therefore acting as her protector. Yet, although Muba has ties to the orishas, she clarifies on several occasions that she is not responsible for Claudia's transports into the past. When asked whether these transports into the past have occurred to others, Muba answers "L'orisha sabe. Yo non sé, na má que gente viene y gente va" [The orishas know. I don't know, only that people come and people go] (Chaviano, El hombre 183). Despite the fact that Muba does not actually cause Claudia's *desplazamientos* (transports), she is her guide during most of these. As her surrogate mother, Muba shows Claudia her city and nation's past because "tiene que veló," Claudia needs to see and know her past. Yet, although Muba's role is indispensable for Claudia's understanding of the past, Claudia herself is unsure as to why Muba is her guide, as well as to why she's been chosen to experience the past. Yet despite her confusion as to whether her transports or visions are real or not, Claudia does accept Muba's presence, referring to her regularly as her *guía* (guide) and *ángel* (angel). As she explains,

¿Era su visión un sueño o un milagro que su ángel le había otorgado? Y por qué aquella mujer era siempre su guía? Tal vez los ángeles fueran almas que adoptaran a alguna criatura, según sus necesidades. Claudia siempre había estado ávida por conocer la ciudad donde había nacido; una ciudad cuya historia, sin embargo, le había sido escamoteada. Quizás eso explicaría que su ángel fuese aquella negra conocedora de La Habana que ella presentía, pero que nadie le había mostrado. (277)

[Was her vision a dream or a miracle that her angel had given her? And why was that woman always her guide? Perhaps angels are souls that adopt certain creatures, depending on their needs. Claudia had always had a desire to know the city where she had been born, a city whose history, however, had been concealed. Perhaps that would explain why her angel was this black woman familiar with the Havana that she sensed, but that no one had shown here.]

Thus, once again, the fantastic is present, but this does not imply that it is merely accepted at face value. Was her vision a dream or a miracle? Claudia doubts; she does not quite understand why she has been chosen to receive these visions. Chaviano's text, as occurs with other fantastic texts, blurs the possible (a dream, perhaps) from the impossible (miracle or vision), fact from fiction. Nevertheless it is important to emphasize that despite Claudia's reservations, or doubts, she ultimately accepts the fact that she has been chosen to carry on Muba's stories. Claudia, in fact, becomes the contemporary guardian of her city and nation's history. As she explains:

Por eso prometí a Muba que yo cuidaría de esa fe. Me haré pitonisa de esta ciudad para que su aliento no muera; para que alguien al menos recuerde lo que fuimos; para poder contar lo que tal vez somos; para que no desaparezcan los sueños de nuestros abuelos que un día desembarcaron aquí por voluntad propia o fueron arrancados de sus tórridas selvas o huyeron de los arrozales asiáticos o abandonaron sus guetos medievales o renunciaron a sus brisas mediterráneas, para venir todos juntos -- por las buenas o las malas -- a regar con sus lágrimas y su sangre esta tierra: la más mágica, la más hermosa que ojos humanos vieran. (282)

[That is why I promised Muba I would take care of that faith. I will become the oracle of this city so that its breath will not die; so that someone remembers, at least, what we were; and in order to recount, perhaps, what we are. [I will become the oracle] so that the dreams of our grandparents, those that arrived her by choice or were taken from the torrid jungles, or fled from Asian rice paddies, or abandoned their medieval ghettos, or renounced Mediterranean breezes, all of whom came together-- for good or bad-- to spread their tears and blood on this land: the most magical, the most beautiful land that humans eyes have seen.]

According to the author, Claudia's ability to see Muba and other ghosts stems from her clairvoyant abilities. Spiritism or mediumship, as portrayed in the ideas of the French thinker Allan Kardec, is an integral part of this novel. Yet although one may argue that Claudia's ability to see

ghostly manifestations points or is tied to her clairvoyance, in this novel, spiritist traditions appear intricately tied to Afro-Cuban ones. Furthermore, these two traditions, which have often been intermixed in Cuban popular culture, are not the only traditions from which Chaviano borrows in this work. As already alluded to, references to other religious beliefs, as well as literary or canonical mentions, are an integral part of El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. Although "la fe" (faith) to which Claudia refers in the above excerpt may possibly refer to a specific religious belief, it is probable that it refers to memory itself, to the keeping of the memory of a hybrid culture and its people. Through her incorporation of multiple traditions into the narration, Chaviano's novel attempts to represent the polymorphous *ajijaco* that defines Cuban culture.

Despite her importance in the narration, Muba is not the only ghostly figure who appears in this novel. The second ghost or vision in this work is El Indio, a native Cuban. As opposed to Muba, a figure from Cuba's colonial past, the period during which Cuba began the importation of African slaves to replace the dwindling native population; el Indio represents Cuba's pre-Colombian past, an idyllic time, ruptured by the arrival of the Spanish. Initially appearing during Claudia's childhood, shortly before the death of her parents, El Indio's appearances always foreshadow tragedy. Unlike Muba who is given a name, El Indio remains nameless as an indication of the complete erasure of Cuba's native population following the arrival of Columbus and the Spanish. More importantly, whereas Muba is given a voice, el Indio is completely mute. During his visits, he merely points and makes hand gestures to Claudia. El Indio speaks only on one occasion, during Claudia's first and last transport into his pre-Colombian past. At that moment, he speaks to Claudia in his native tongue, repeating incomprehensible phrases. But, outside his world, El Indio is mutilated, unable to act or speak. Nevertheless, his ghostly presence in the novel is significant for it points to a deep-seated, unconscious presence of the native in the Cuban collective and his appearance contributes to yet another element of hybridity found in the novel and in Cuban society,

in general. As anthropologist Daisy Fariñas Gutiérrez affirms: "La huella indígena está presente a nivel de consciencia individual y social en su forma pura, al menos muy interrelacionada con elementos hispanos y africanos" [Traces of the indigenous are present, in its purest form, at the individual and social conscious level, at the very least interrelated with Hispanic and African elements] (100).

As with Muba's figure, El Indio and his manifestations remind the reader of previous Cuban narratives. Although virtually non-existent in Cuban society, the native Ciboney has been mythologized in a number of Cuban narratives. As is true with other North and South American narratives centering on native cultures, the native Cuban islanders have been portrayed as heroic members of a race that preferred death to slavery. Chaviano's El Indio is reminiscent of the figures of Hatuey and Camagüey, two native caciques murdered by the Spanish during the Conquest. In various Cuban legends, the figure of the native is said to appear in the form of a light to warn of impending danger. The most famous of these popular legends is the so-called *Luz de Yara* (Light of Yara). According to this legend, the Cacique Hatuey was burned at the stake by the conquistadors in the town of Yara for refusing to accept Christianity. Since the very night of his death, in the area surrounding Yara, in the eastern part of the island, "pudo verse por primera vez la fatídica LUZ, que es amarillenta y fría, y va creciendo entre las sombras hacia el cielo..." [one could see for the first time the dreadful light, which is yellowish and cold, and rises above the shadows toward the sky] (Alzola 21). Following the first appearance of this light, "se presentó, vengador y terrible Huracán, el dios devastador del caribe, sembrando a su paso la muerte y la desolación" [Huracán, the destructive god of the Caribbean presented himself, vengeful and terrible, sowing in his path death and despair] (21). Variations of this legend have made their way into Cuban literature, as in the narration of the story of Camagüey that appears in *Sab*. In Avellaneda's novel, the character Martina la India narrates the story of her ancestor Camagüey to

her adopted children, in particular, Sab, the mulatto slave, who, in turn, retells the story to others. In Sab, the story tells of frequent appearances of Camagüey in the Cuban countryside in the form of a light, warning the descendants of his murderers "la venganza del cielo caerá sobre ellos" [the sky's vengeance will befall them] (Gómez de Avellaneda 168). In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Chaviano returns to both a popular legend and to Cuba's canonical nineteenth-century novel by representing the figure of the native Cuban, El Indio. She returns to and rewrites previous narrations of the Cuban native, giving the native an important role in the life of the protagonist, that of soothsayer. Reminiscent of the traditional legends, in Chaviano's novel, El Indio appears as "*una figura de niebla*," a fog-like being who warns others, specifically Claudia, of impending doom (222). He also forewarns the arrival of death and violence, but by sea. In her transport to El Indio's past, Claudia observes the massacre of El Indio and his family by the Spanish upon their arrival on the island by sea and interprets his words to mean "en el mar está el peligro" [in the sea there is danger] (225). The vision of the past acts as a foreshadowing of the future, of Claudia's choice (and that of other Cubans) to flee the island on a raft at the conclusion of the novel.

Thus, in both the novel Sab and in Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, the figure of the native appears to forewarn a violent future, yet the authors' motives are quite different. In Sab, Avellaneda inserts the image of the native leader Camagüey as a warning of imminent violence if slavery is not abolished. Thus, the dead Indian's message is transferred from an Indian, early colonial context into a White-Black, nineteenth-century slavery context. In Chaviano's novel, the Pre-Colombian, dead Indian is tied to the contradictory and unbearable conditions that affect late twentieth-century Cuba and its citizens. That is, whereas for La Avellaneda, slavery threatened to tear up the (unborn) nation, for Chaviano, it is the current political and socio-economic situation that threatens a nation in decay, causing its citizens to throw themselves into the temperamental sea.

The third supernatural being that appears before Claudia is the lonely, unnamed figure of Martí, whose eerie presence watches over (and laments) his city and its people, and his poetry appears as a backdrop throughout the entire work. Unlike el Indio, who dons a generic name, symbolic of his complete erasure from official history, in this text, Martí is never even acknowledged by name. Indeed, Claudia heeds both Muba's and El Indio's warnings, and has more contact with figures from Cuba's colonial past, than with Cuba's most famous father figure. Although his ideas have resonated in both Cuban and Latin American history for over one hundred years, in this novel Martí is barely visible, and his voice remains faint. His poetry and ideas seem out of place in the reality of late twentieth-century Cuba. In the novel's interlude, for example, Chaviano inserts Martí's poem "Los zapaticos de Rosa" (Rosa's Little Shoes) into a description of the comings and goings of the *jinetas*, the Cuban prostitutes that solicit tourist-clients all along the famed Malecón. As mentioned before, by incorporating segments from poems from La edad de oro, Chaviano pokes holes at the very fabric of Cuban nationality, exposing its construction. As required reading in Cuba's grammar schools, "Los zapaticos de Rosa" is, to use Benedict Anderson's term, a "product" (141) of Cuban nationalism, as it is read and memorized by children throughout the island. A poem about a child's confrontation with poverty and the necessity of helping others, the poem represents Martí's pure ideals and has been used as a patriotic emblem of community. Yet, by using the verses to describe the comings and goings of a certain kind of "girl", *la jinetera*, Chaviano uses irony to undermine those symbolic icons of the Cuban nation. Although not critical of Martí, the man, per se, Chaviano does challenge the view of Martí the hero, particularly since his figure has been used again and again in all of Cuba's twentieth-century discourses to describe the ideal or model (patriotic) citizen. Hence, in Chaviano's work, as in others by contemporary Cuban women writers, there is a serious questioning of hero-worship, especially of the male heroes in Cuban history, from the founding fathers all the way through the heroes of

the 1959 Cuban Revolution. In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Martí's figure appears helpless, horrified at what he sees around him but unable to act. He is "sólo una sombra traslúcida, una presencia de otro siglo" [a translucent shadow, a presence from another century] (156). Standing watch, he rewrites those verses from the past, "versos que surgen como ramalazos de otra época... de su propio época..." [verses that rise like flashes from another era... from his own era...] (156). At one point, a gust of wind brings a page of verses to Claudia's feet, and she picks it up, and searches for its author. She spots Martí, yet although his face is familiar, she cannot truly recognize him. His appearance, although familiar, is completely out of context, "Le resulta tan familiar, pero a la vez tan fuera de contexto..." (157).

The fourth and final vision that appears before (and interacts with) Claudia is that of Onolorio, a lascivious mulatto with hints of Chinese ancestry that represents "lo desenfrenado" or the frenzied passion and promiscuous elements in carnivalesque Cuban (Caribbean) history. Unlike the jovial Muba or the solemn El Indio, Onolorio's presence is far more disturbing for various reasons. First, his presence in the narration appears to perpetuate stereotypes associated with the black or mulatto male, especially ideas on male virility. Secondly, unlike the other ghostly apparitions, he is the only figure who appears to be associated with the dark side. It is significant therefore that the first character to see Onolorio be the clairvoyant nun, Ursula. Even more important is when he first appears, moments before Claudia's meeting with Sissi and her tourist-clients, associated therefore with *jineterismo*, or prostitution. In a sense, his presence represents a kind of supernatural pimp, in addition to representing violent sexuality. From his conversations with Claudia, the reader learns that a prostitute was to blame for Onolorio's death and that, as a consequence, he now dedicates himself to "leading them" [into prostitution] and surviving through them. Several comments in the novel suggest that Onolorio's appearances are a direct consequence of Claudia's *jineterismo*. He feeds on her and others like her, living on through the

sexual act. It is noteworthy to add that the sexual act in this novel takes on a special role. On the one hand, sex appears to liberate those who engage in it. As with the transports to the past, sex often becomes a means of escaping society, and more importantly, may be considered an act of rebellion or freedom. On the other, despite Claudia's sexual freedom, her entry into *jineterismo* feeds her stomach but not her soul. Sex turns into something mechanical, necessary for survival. Sexuality, therefore, as with sustenance, is yet another of the paradoxical elements in this society.

Finally, although not a ghostly apparition, there is yet another historical figure whose presence permeates this novel, and that is the figure of the German nun Hildegard of Bingen. First, the presence of the medieval nun may be felt through the incorporation of fragments from her writings and music into the narration. Indeed, in this novel, the work of the nun serves as a catalyst for Claudia's transport into other planes of existence. Through Hildegard's music, Claudia achieves separation of body and soul. This method allows Claudia to practice *jineterismo* without going insane, although it is important to add that Claudia is perpetually on the verge of schizophrenia, "on the borders" between sanity and insanity, in this novel. Indeed, as already mentioned, Claudia experiences various *desplazamientos* throughout the narration, what may be loosely translated as astral traveling, only those that occur following her entry into prostitution may be directly connected to Hildegard and her music. Before going to work, what is described as "*irse a putear*", Claudia lies down to listen to the music of the medieval nun and practices transcendental meditation. The omniscient narrator explains this practice in the following way: "Porque ella era una puta mística. Lo de puta era por necesidad; lo de mística por vocación. También ella tenía visiones, como la monja, y percibía entidades que nadie más veía. Se había convertido en una nueva Sibila de Rin" [Because she was a mystical whore. She was whore out of necessity and a mystic out of vocation. She too had visions, like the nun, and perceived beings that no one could see. She had turned into the new Sybil of the Rhine] (180). Thus, through the music of Hildegard,

Claudia/La Mora is able to separate mind (soul) from body. By choosing to incorporate the figure of this German medieval nun into this novel, Chaviano opts not to center entirely on a Cuban context. That is, although entirely set on the island, with Cuban characters who are both alive and dead, the work of Hildegard of Bingen lends the novel a universal quality. As was the case with Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre and the incorporation of Celtic elements into a science fiction novel, Chaviano intertwines Western historical and cultural icons with non-Western ones. Thus, the figure of a medieval nun appears side by side with references to the belief in reincarnation, Spiritism, Afro-Cuban Santería, to produce a hybrid Caribbean text, focusing on a hybrid society in turmoil.

El hombre, la hembra y el hambre rewrites Cuba's history and its discourses, including its canonical works, such as the foundational fictions Sab and Cecilia Valdés. Yet in Chaviano's Diaspora novel, the rewriting of these texts serves a completely different purpose. In her well-known study Foundational Fictions, Doris Sommer argues that in Latin America's national romances tragedies occur to give way to the birth to the nation. Moreover, these early national narrations served to construct nation in areas where a nation was lacking. Chaviano's novel, however, seeks to deconstruct an already decaying nation and in its place, offers an alternate view of national identity. Rather than create nation, Chaviano's novel decenters and recreates nation. This novel posits, in fact, the idea that the nation (as state) has failed to provide its citizens a future within its space, and further, has forced its subjects to divide themselves, to split. Only by going outside, by fleeing that space, can individuals hope to come closer to freedom and identity; that one can hope to become whole. Yet it is possible that from the outside, as exiles, for example, women may continue to be multiply marginalized. Furthermore, by choosing supernatural beings, specifically ghosts from the past, to narrate the history of Cuba, Chaviano undermines history's scientific claims, revealing its construction as all narrations, and offers a voice to those that were either silenced or erased from previous narrations. Indeed, the incorporation of the supernatural

into the narrations serves three purposes. First, the ghosts serve as guides to the past history of the island. Their presence allows for the retelling of history and lends a voice to individuals previously silenced or marginalized. Thus, the supernatural appears to replace traditional history and becomes the means by which the marginal "talk back", a point to which I shall return shortly. Secondly, the supernatural lends individuals a means of escape, specifically from uncomfortable or oppressive present situations. This is especially true of the main character, Claudia, who transports to different moments in Cuba's history and thus, not only learns about the past but also escapes her present. And third, the supernatural appears to take on the role of adoptive family, for both the main character and the larger nation as a whole. This is especially crucial since in this narration, the nation appears in disarray.

Finally, as is true of Chaviano's insular novel Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, the idea of "talking back" is also an important part of El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. In this novel, the importance of talking back is twofold. First and foremost, the historical figures, in the form of the ghosts, are given the power to "talk back" and serve as the keepers of history in the narration. Their stories, erased or absent from official narrations of history, appear in this novel and are transmitted to the main character, Claudia. Secondly, therefore, Claudia also talks back in this novel. She has access to the past via those ghosts and talks back to a society that attempts to silence those stories, as well as her own. Thus as is true with the women in Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Claudia is the receiver and transmitter of *las historias*, personal and collective stories. She and other women, including her friends Ursula and Nubia, "talk back" on several levels, each one retelling stories from both present and past. Women, in fact, become the keepers of history. Their stories continue on, generation to generation, often in contradiction to official histories. It is noteworthy that this novel also comments upon the role that men play in "talking back" albeit in quite a distinct way. For one thing, the male characters in this novel, both inhabiting

the present and the past, appear stunted or muted in their narrations. For example, in the case of Rubén and Gilberto, despite the fact that their counterpoint becomes a means of venting their personal frustrations, their "talking back" does not appear to lead anywhere. Rather, their monologues appear as "talk" that goes around in circles. This is also true of the ghostly male figures, such as El Indio and Martí, both of whom lack a clear voice. As I argue earlier, El Indio transmits his history to Claudia via signs, he is mostly mute in those appearances, and ultimately he is unable to act or change the outcome of any event, either in the past or in the present. In the case of Martí, despite his anger at what is occurring in the present, his voice is muted. Both figures are all but invisible and forgotten in this contemporary society, their voices faint. Even the figure of Onolorio, a mostly negative one, speaks very little. We know more about him from his actions, rather than from his words.

In conclusion, in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Daína Chaviano returns to many of the same discursive and narrative techniques used in her insular, science fiction novel Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre. However, in this Diaspora novel, Chaviano moves beyond science fiction to center on contemporary conditions facing Cuba. In this novel, Chaviano borrows from a vast range of universal traditions and texts to rewrite Cuba's history. In the narration, Chaviano rewrites previous Cuban canonical works and authors, while continuously incorporating Western and non-Western traditions into her text. Her return to the "masters", such as Martí, Ortiz or Carpentier, in conjunction with her incorporation of Afro-Cuban, Spiritist, non-conventional New Age or Pagan traditions, serve to comment upon the hybridity present in Cuban culture. In a sense, Chaviano rewrites Ortiz's theory on the Cuban *ajjaco* by adding everything from medieval mysticism, to reincarnation and clairvoyance into *la caldera* (the pot). More importantly, with the creation of this new *ajjaco*, Chaviano's novel stresses the importance of the past in order to understand the present. And just as important, history is not solely what is told to us, or what

appears in textbooks, rather it is found in the memory of the people, transmitted orally from generation to generation. Most importantly, this history is transmitted through women; women such as Muba, Hildegard of Bingen, in the past, and Claudia and Ursula, in the present, who hold onto these stories to later retell them to subsequent generations. According to Chaviano, women are the keepers of history, they also understand that our histories are hybrid, syncretic; they are never lost, as long as they remain in our memories. As the omniscient narrator explains in the following excerpt, during one of her transports into the colonial past, Claudia approaches a convent that once stood in Old Havana. She feels the energy emanating from its bell and comes to the realization that despite it all, she carries the history of the past within her. It is not the official history that she has been taught, but rather the memory of the past that lives on, those memories and personal stories of those that came before, of our ancestors. It is the "chain" or "continuum" to which Trinh Minh-ha refers, a story that has no end and no beginning but which women both carry and transmit from generation to generation:

Allí estaba la energía, la potencia, el aché que brotaba del antiguo metal. Efluvios de vida. Cantos de sus ancestros yorubas y celtas. Legado que persistía en la calidez que besaba sus dedos, invadía su piel y avanzaba hasta el fondo de ella, clavándose en ese punto ovárico donde respiraba el mismísimo Dios. Entonces supo que aquel pasado, aunque desaparecido, siempre seguiría junto a ella, invisible como Muba, aunque capaz de hacerle notar su presencia pese a cualquier realidad. (Chaviano, El hombre 279)

[There was the energy, the power, the "aché" that emanated from the ancient metal; the essence of life, songs of her Yoruba and Celtic ancestors. A legacy that persisted in the warmth that kissed her fingers, invaded her skin and traveled into her deepest part, nailing itself to the ovarian point where God Himself breathes. And then, she knew that that past, although gone, would always live within her, invisible like Muba, but capable of making its presence known despite any reality.]

NOTES

¹ In a telephone conversation in October 1999, Daína Chaviano explained to me that her fascination with Anglo, North American and Celtic cultures and literatures began as a child. At home, she had access to classic English and North Americans texts in their Spanish translations. According to her, some of her favorite authors were William Shakespeare, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Margaret Atwood, Ray Bradbury, and Isaac Asimov. As a result of her desire to read these authors in their original language, Chaviano decided to study English language and literature at the University of Havana. Chaviano discusses these very influences in an interview with Héctor Pina, "Entrevista con Daína Chaviano." Librusa (August 2001): 11 pp. Online. Internet. 9 April, 2002. For more on Daína Chaviano and her literary work, please see her webpage www.dainachaviano.com.

² In a recent study dedicated to the Celts and their culture, El pueblo de la niebla: Un viaje en el tiempo por la cultura celta (Madrid: Aguilar, 2000), Suso de Toro points out that the Celts were a literary culture, unlike the Romans who were more concerned with order and technology (207). Thus although the Celts are conquered by the Romans, their legends and myths do not disappear. In terms of their society, there were two casts in society, the warrior and the druid. Although not common, an individual could be both. In Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Chaviano's character Dezca appears to belong to both casts. This is significant, for in traditional Celtic societies women could serve as druidesses but they did not hold full powers as their male counterparts. In terms of their philosophy, the Celts believed in the relativity of truth. They also believed in the existence of two worlds, the realm of the dead, the sidh, where their gods lived, and the real world. The only ones capable of communication with this realm were the ancient Druids, thus their importance in society. In fact, they were the ones who held the society together, only they knew the religious mysteries of their culture, and were required to learn them by memory, as it was prohibited to write them down. Julius Caesar wrote the following about their education: "Se

cuenta que la enseñanza consiste en aprender de memoria un gran número de versos, siendo hasta veinte el número de años que algunos pasan en la escuela, y esto se debe a que piensan que la religión prohíbe escribir estos conocimientos, como hacen con el resto, cuentas privadas y públicas, para lo que usan la escritura griega" (Susó de Toro 211). Also see the section "Celtas: entre el mito y la realidad" in Mitos, ritos y leyendas de Galicia: La magia del legado celta by Pemón Bouzas and Xosé A. Domelo (Barcelona: Editores Martínez Roca, 2000).

³ *Periodo especial* or the Special Period refers to the period of time immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. This period was characterized by severe shortages, as a consequence of the former Soviet bloc's withdrawal of aid to Cuba. As a response to this crisis, the Cuban government began promoting foreign tourism to the island, and began allowing foreign investors access to the island's economy, mostly in the tourism industry. Many young Cuban men and women turned to *jineterismo*, selling themselves to tourists in order to earn a living and have access to lacking material goods. Although *jineterismo* usually refers to sexual prostitution, usually by young women, it also is used to describe any type of metaphorical prostitution to foreigners. For a concise study on this period and especially on its effects on women, see Isabel Holgado Fernández's study ¡No es fácil! Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria (Barcelona: Icaria, 2000).

⁴ The character Ursula deserves a separate study, particularly for her association with reincarnation. This character believes that she is the reincarnation of the medieval German nun, Hildegard of Bingen. The name itself hints at that association since Hildegard was a member of the Ursuline order. Ursula, furthermore, has prophetic dreams and visions, like the medieval nun claimed to have. As a Catholic nun, Ursula's ideas are, if anything, heretical. But more importantly, the fact that this character believes to be the reincarnation of the German medieval nun undercuts any notion of nationalist identity. Jean Franco analyzes the role of reincarnation in recent Latin

American feminine/feminist literature, positing, "Reincarnation undercuts any notion of fixed identity..." (179). For more information on this topic see Franco's chapter "Rewriting the Family" in Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 175-187.

CHAPTER 2

FEMININE SPACES AND TRANSNATIONALITY: GENDERED AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE NARRATIVE OF DULCE MARÍA LOYNAZ AND ZOÉ VALDÉS

Born in 1959, only months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Zoé Valdés is, in many ways, a child of the revolution. And like many of its children, Valdés' narrative portrays a gradual disillusionment with the system in which she grew up. Through the use of various narrative techniques, Valdés' work underscores the perennial violence present in contemporary Cuban society and points to the inherent doubling of Cuba's "characters" as a means of surviving within multiple spaces. In both her writing within Cuba, as well as in those works produced in the Diaspora, Valdés represents nation and identity. By demystifying the national and the nation and traditional notions of family and gender, Valdés displaces and de-centers identity and offers new ways of re-thinking Cubanness. This chapter focuses on Sangre azul (1993), written between Paris and Havana and published in Cuba by Editorial Letras Cubanas, and La nada cotidiana (1995) written on the island, smuggled out, and published in Spain by Emecé Editores.¹ In both novels, Valdés follows the footsteps of her predecessors, most specifically the Cuban poet and novelist Dulce María Loynaz. Although Valdés denies a direct connection between her first novel, Sangre azul, and Loynaz's Jardín, she does acknowledge her friendship with and admiration for Loynaz. In an e-mail to me dated March 12, 2000, Zoé Valdés writes:

Dulce María Loynaz fue gran amiga mía, conservo recuerdos muy bellos de ella, y cartas hermosas. Pero no creo que su novela lírica tenga que ver con mi novela lírica. Yo le puse novela lírica a Sangre azul sólo para homenajearla a ella, pero estamos distantes. Dulce jamás hubiera utilizado palabras del argot, Dulce era muy clásica y férrea en cuanto al idioma español, mas férrea inclusive que la propia Academia Española. Fuimos muy amigas.

[Dulce María Loynaz was a great friend of mine, and I hold dear memories of her, as well as beautiful letters. But I don't think that her lyrical novel has anything to do with my lyrical novel. I called Sangre azul a lyrical novel in order to honor her, but we are distant. Dulce would have never used colloquial language; she was very classic and strict about the Spanish language, stricter in fact than the Spanish Academy. We were great friends.]

Thus, Valdés consciously dubs Sangre azul "*una novela lírica*" (a lyrical novel) in honor of Loynaz and Jardín. Despite differences, particularly in language, Sangre azul hints at a connection, or continuity, with its novelistic predecessor, Jardín. It is in both these similarities and differences that one finds Valdés' rewriting of Loynaz.

The first part of this chapter, therefore, analyzes and compares Valdés' Sangre azul to Loynaz's Jardín. First, I focus on the similarities, in particular, 1) both novels' feminist interventions vis-à-vis the fairy tale narrative, and 2) the role that geography, or space, plays in these works, as well as their contribution to transnationality and the reformulation of Cubanness. Secondly, I elucidate the main differences between these works, specifically each novel's starkly different conclusions regarding the place (*space*) of woman within nation (Cuba). Loynaz's Jardín, I posit, is a necessary precursor of later Cuban feminine/feminist works such as Valdés', specifically in her reformulation of both gendered and national identities, as well as for her juxtapositioning, and questioning of, reality and fiction, the relationship between inside/outside, and the decentering of fixed space(s). As in much of the writing of contemporary Cuban women, in Loynaz's work one finds a tension between the real and the unreal, or the fantastic, a tension that is ultimately tied to (a) woman's place in the nation. In a study on contemporary Brazilian women's fantastic literature, Cristina Ferreira-Pinto argues that the fantastic in women's literature seems to "highlight the ambiguous position of women in a male-centered order, to underline their marginality" (72). Furthermore she adds, "the fantastic produces an effect of estrangement and thereby serves to highlight and address the incongruities of the established social order" (75). In Loynaz, as in

contemporary fiction by Cuban women, elements of the fantastic serve to destabilize and question societal norms regarding woman within nation. Yet, although Loynaz herself described her novel as ahead of its time, or in any case, outside linear (i.e. masculine) teleology, Jardín's conclusions fall short of optimistic. In a sense, woman in Loynaz's novel, represented by Bárbara who is both one character and many, is trapped in-between spaces. Only the sea seems to offer Bárbara, the protagonist, both freedom and safety. She is "Other" as a woman while living in Cuba, and again, most notably "Other", as a foreign (Cuban woman), once she marries and leaves the island. Indeed, both Loynaz and her character, Bárbara, lie beyond the nation. Bárbara is perennially "Other", her unconventional "irreality" (described by the narrator as "*un ser irreal*") is rejected in those spaces in and through which she traverses.

In the novel Jardín, the protagonist, Bárbara, is trapped at home and in the garden, whereas abroad she is forever the outsider. In both spaces, she is an outsider, foreign, and moreover, speechless. Her return home at the end of the novel may be read as a return to silence and nowhere. In Jardín, and specifically through Bárbara, Loynaz alludes to the idea that women in and outside nation are perennially beyond the national, not fitting into the discourse(s) of the nation (state). Loynaz suggests that there are no clearly demarcated spaces from where to speak, and only in-between spaces seem to offer women a place and/or the possibility of fitting in. In Margen acuático: Poesía de Dulce María Loynaz, Asunción Horno-Delgado proposes that through her poetics, Loynaz designs, "un imaginario o identidad basado en la liberación de los presupuestos patriarcales que lo configuran tradicionalmente" [an imaginary or identity grounded on a dismissal of traditional, patriarchal preconceived notions on identity] (12). According to Horno-Delgado, Loynaz's strategy of liberation resides in her use of aquatic imagery, "la metaforización acuática" (aquatic metaforization), from where "el yo lírico, paradójicamente, al adquirir una posición marginal alcanza la integridad deseada" [the lyrical I, paradoxically, upon acquiring a marginal

position achieves the desired integrity] (12). Thus, the sea becomes crucial in Loynaz's novel, as in her poetry, for by its very nature, the sea is shifting and fluid; an (in) transit(ive) space that is both traversed and traverses, and as such, acts to erase imaginary (national) borders. The sea is a protective, albeit ambivalent space, a middle space to which Bárbara, as both child and woman, continuously turns. Throughout Jardín readers find references to the sea as both a vehicle of escape, "mar para ahondarse en él, para traspasar su azul trémulo, para gustar su sal y su menta" [sea to sink into, to transcend its trembling blue, to taste its salt and mint], as well as a dangerous space, "mar de invierno, oscuro y torvo, hablando solo como un loco, alzando el cielo unos puños verdes y coléricos, babeando espumarajos junto a la orilla" [winter sea, dark and grim, talking to himself like a madman, raising blue furious fists into the air, drooling foam by the shore] (Loynaz 31-32). The sea becomes a means of real physical escape (best exemplified in Bárbara's actual escape on the ship Euryanthe with her husband), as well as a mental escape, for "el mar es una puerta cerrada para la angustia del mundo, y es también como un sueño largo, interminable, que sueña el mundo mismo. El mar es la pesadilla de la tierra" [the sea is a closed door for the anguish of the world, and it is also a long dream, unending, that dreams the world. The sea is the nightmare of the earth] (22). The sea offers the protagonist an escape from reality, a space not only from where to dream, but a place that dreams (or creates) reality, and in turn, the world. In spite of its ambivalence, Bárbara does not fear the sea, "no asustabas a la Niña, no; no la hacías huir tierra adentro..." [didn't scare the girl, no; didn't make her run inland] but rather welcomes (32).

Like its literary predecessor Jardín, Sangre azul confronts and contests the fairy tale narrative, and focuses on the role that space and geography play in the life of the female protagonist. As with Jardín, Sangre azul does not offer the protagonist (or its readers) a happy ending, yet unlike its novelistic predecessor where the protagonist appears lost at novel's end, Sangre azul suggests an acceptance of the fantastic (and surreal) as reality. Sangre azul questions

the notion of reality itself. Towards the last part of the novel, Attys, the protagonist dares to ask "*¿qué coño es la realidad*" or "What the fuck is reality?" (Valdés 157). Reality and/or the lack of reality do not serve to merely dismiss the nation in this novel, but rather, the ability to question reality, and the acceptance of the surreal or fantastic, help individuals cope with life within multiple spaces. Except for occasional references, the mundane or daily elements of life are not delved into in Sangre azul as occurs in Valdés' third novel La nada cotidiana. Instead, what appear in Sangre azul are surreal/fantastic narrations, reconstructions or versions of reality. In A Place in the Sun, British scholar Catherine Davies explains that by shifting into the past, the future, or the supernatural, the narrative of contemporary Cuban women "tend[s] to avoid representations of contemporary life" (134). Yet as Davies posits, read allegorically, these works "make for indirect commentary on contemporary women's lives and interests" (134). I would argue, then, that Valdés evades an open discussion of nation in Sangre azul. In a sense, in this novel woman lies *outside* nation; she is *beyond* nation. In Sangre azul, as in Jardín, there are no spaces for women within nation, for either the author or her female protagonist(s). Neither on or off the island is woman "a part" of the nation and its historical teleology. Cuba's national discourses, from the Republic (pre-1959) and the Revolution, have been inherently patriarchal. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Valdés' and other Cuban women's works produced or published on the island, including Chaviano's Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, or Chely Lima's Brujas, avoid an open representation of (or challenge to) nation and Cuba's national discourses. Like their predecessor Jardín, these works lie outside nation (in alternate spaces), outside the traditionally masculine Cuban Canon.

But what takes place in those novels produced and/or published by these very same Cuban women writers outside Cuba, in the Diaspora? The second part of this chapter attempts to answer this question by turning to Valdés' third novel, La nada cotidiana, a work that also sets out

to question reality in contemporary Cuba. Far more pessimistic than Sangre azul, La nada cotidiana points to the doubling of characters, the use of *la doble moral*, as well as the exit from the nation-space via *insilio/exilio*, as *means* of survival in an unbearable contemporary Cuban society. In La nada cotidiana, Valdés exposes the inherent violence, masculinization and militarization, of the Cuban Revolution, a social movement that promised equality for men and women but which instead continued to perpetuate previous patriarchal, nationalist rhetoric. This novel challenges the Revolution's heterosexist, male-centered dogma, including the image of *el hombre nuevo* or New Man, exemplified by revolutionary figures like Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Despite this novel's open contestation of the Revolution and its discourse(s), something which Sangre azul does not openly do, there is continuity rather than rupture between these two novels. Essential in both novels are questions concerning Cuban society and a woman's place within that society, yet only La nada cotidiana blames the current economic and political situations within the nation for the "splitting" of Cuban subjects.

Finally, it is important to point out that works produced both inside and outside Cuba go *beyond nation*, but in different ways. In both cases, to go beyond nation does not imply a full-hearted acceptance of nation or the complete erasure of nation or the national, but rather, points to the very ambivalence of the concept nation, to an in-betweenness of both nation and national and gendered identities. Texts written and published on the island, such as Sangre azul, go beyond nation toward some alternate space through the avoidance or the masking of the nation. Read allegorically, as Catherine Davies suggests, however, these texts represent and rewrite nation; characters in these texts are caught in-between nation, beyond fixed spaces. On the other hand, works written and/or published off the island, in exile or the Diaspora, are beyond nation for the fact that they are actually being produced outside the nation-space: caught in-between multiple spaces. In such novels as Valdés' La nada cotidiana and Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, the

(Cuban) nation is not masked or obstructed, rather it is openly represented. These novels published in the Diaspora seek to rewrite both the nation's discourses, as well as the Cuban Canon, and in addition these authors return to their early narrative produced on the island, as well as marginal works, including Queer Cuban texts. In novels written inside and off Cuba, to go beyond nation implies that these works, and their authors, are consciously far removed from the fixity implied by traditional notions of nation and national identity. These authors and their novels challenge the nation, national discourse(s), and national and gendered identity, proposing a Cuba and a Cubanness that move beyond the geographical (island) space to or toward what Ruth Behar calls an "imaginary space" in Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba. In these narratives, Cuba becomes an imagined space for these novelists and their protagonists, reminding us of what Caren Kaplan describes as, "a new terrain, a new location, in feminist poetics. Not a room of one's own, not a fully public or collective self, not a domestic realm—it is a space of imagination which allows for the inside, the outside, the liminal elements in-between" (1987, 197).

Far from rupture, Sangre azul and La nada cotidiana, as well as Valdés' subsequent Diaspora novels display continuity, especially in the choice of themes. However, in her novels Valdés changes her narrating techniques. Whereas in Sangre azul Valdés opts for lyricism and fantasy to confront and question reality and identity, in La nada cotidiana she turns to realism to openly confront these very issues. Yet in both, Valdés employs an autobiographical-style narration, consistent with other works by women, to portray her characters' disillusionment with/in contemporary Cuban society. In addition, Valdés incorporates different genres into her novels, including poetry, essay and epistolary, to create what Jacqueline Stefanko calls a "hybrid text" to describe US Latina women writers who "cross and recross borders of language and culture" in order to survive in the Diaspora (Stefanko 50). Like the work of US Latinas, Valdés' novels, written on both sides of the Atlantic (Cuba and France), incorporate hybridity as a means of survival, albeit

for different reasons. As part of this hybridity, Valdés brings humor into the narration, as well as sexual/erotic language, all of which contribute to unmasking family, nation and identity. Whereas in Sangre azul, lyricism and fantasy serve to mask, unmask and remask issues of identity, La nada cotidiana questions dominant national discourses from the outset. In this novel, Valdés openly represents, demystifies and contests the nation and its icons, including historical figures, national symbols, and historical events.

The autobiography as genre and/or narrative technique has long been associated with contemporary feminist literature, as well as exile and Diaspora literatures. Various scholars, including Debra Castillo and Rita Felski, have converged on the use of the feminine/feminist autobiography, and/or what may be coined *the pseudo-autobiography*, by women writers in their reformulation of (feminine) identity. In Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change, Rita Felski posits that modern autobiographies are "often fragmented and highly subjective, and the boundaries between fiction and autobiography become difficult to demarcate" (87). In her study, Felski describes "the ambiguous positioning of much feminist writing between autobiography and fiction" (93). And she adds that contemporary feminist literature is "often marketed in such a way as to foreground the persona of the author through the inclusion of photographs and biographical details which link the text to the life and act as a guarantee of its authenticity" (93). In "Rosario Castellanos: Ashes without a Face," Debra Castillo describes the ways in which the lines between autobiography and fiction become blurred in feminine/feminist writing. She calls this blurring an "ambiguous textual space" and adds that such texts seek to break the silence to which women have been subjected, as well as act to re-invent the self and to place oneself in the (narration of the) nation (1992, 251). Scholars concentrating on ethnic and/or exile writing, such as Isabel Alvarez Borland in Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona and Julia Kristeva in Strangers to Ourselves, point to the importance of the

autobiographical mode of writing to convey issues of ethnic, national and/or gendered identities. In all cases, contemporary autobiography, and the use of the autobiographical style, appear to be tied to notions of ambiguity, and are marked by tension in one form or another. However fruitful these comments on autobiography may be to a study on contemporary women's literature, none of the novels in this study may be defined as truly autobiographical. Rather, these texts and their authors apply autobiographical forms and/or elements to break open the construction of the narrative itself, thereby exposing inconsistencies present in Special Period Cuban society.

In the narrative of contemporary Cuban women there is the presence of this so-called "ambiguous textual space". Furthermore, there is a confrontation between what is real and what is not, as well as a distinct in-betweenness in the work of those women currently writing in the Diaspora. Present in their narratives is what I label genre-crossing; the best example is the use of the pseudo-autobiography, the "confusing distinction" between autobiography and fiction. Besides pointing to the slippery definitions of Truth and Fiction, genre crossing also describes the appropriation of other genres, such as poetry, drama, the epistolary and the essay, into the narration. Genre-crossing goes hand in hand with spatial and/or temporal crossings, an integral part of the narrative of these Cuban women writers. These crossings refer to the characters *and* the novelists. In fact, all of the writers in this study have been caught in-between spaces throughout most of their literary careers. Zoé Valdés and her peers, Daína Chaviano and Yanitzia Canetti, portray young Cuban women, like themselves, in (and out of) contemporary Cuban society. As women, in a male-centered patriarchal Cuban (Revolutionary) society, these authors find themselves in-between spaces, like their novels and the characters in them. In their works, characters are often isolated and in fact, isolate themselves (*aislarse* -- as in becoming an island), in order to survive their daily reality. They fantasize, create and re-create, write and rewrite a past and a history for themselves; talking back to a nation-state that has attempted to silence them. In

these novels, the nation's (Cuba's) heroes are demystified, and the patriarchal family ultimately appears fragmented and powerless.

The notions of re-crossing and/or shifting appear often in the narrative of contemporary Cuban women. To cross implies a move toward and away from multiple spaces, including the island of Cuba. As an island, Cuba's shores forever shift, they are in perennial motion; Cuba's sands are taken out to sea, to later return with other sands to the coast. The island has most often been portrayed as an ambivalent space, either as paradise (a vacation dreamland) or as prison, the island represents extremes. For the shipwrecked, the island symbolizes salvation and damnation. It is a safe haven, a space, that prevents death, but is also unfamiliar, a place where one must learn to survive. In neither scenario (the island as prison/hell, or the island as paradise/heaven) is the native islander given a public space. In fact, the native is almost invisible, caught in-between both realms; s/he appears trapped in a sort of insular purgatory, as suggested in several of the novels this study analyzes. In their narrative, contemporary Cuban women question Cuba, the island-space and explore the ways in which its citizens (the natives) react to their identity as islanders. In their work, the island-space appears as an anomalous landmass in the middle of the sea, a place where Cubans (the natives) isolate themselves (*se aislan*) from outsiders, as well as from each other. *Aislamiento* has as much to do with the condition of isolation from within the island (*insilio*), as from outside the island (*exilio*). Literally meaning "to [move towards] an island", *aislarse* is a move toward isolation. *Aislarse* transmits the idea of making oneself an island at will, as opposed to *afincarse*, the settling or putting down roots. *Aislarse* suggests the transportability of one's roots, and one's identity, wherever one may find oneself. It suggests the need to isolate oneself in order to maintain one's center. *Al aislarse* one assumes or adopts the condition of island, without fixed roots or fixed borders, floating endlessly out at sea. In the narrative of contemporary Cuban women, such as Valdés, there is a blurring between island

and aloofness, as found in the similarity in sounds between *la isla* and *la aislada*. The female protagonists in the novels this study examines, as well as the nation, turn into individual islands, complex, shifting spaces that both isolate themselves, as well as are isolated by or from other spaces. Often, in their isolation, *al aislarse*, characters double in order to survive or escape their surroundings. The island, therefore, reflects the condition of isolation. Simultaneously, however, the geographical reality of the island, a landmass enclosed by the sea, permits mobility and/or escape. Thus, the island has a paradoxical quality as it lacks fixity. Indeed, in this study, the island becomes the almost obvious metaphor for the individual Cuban (female) characters' themselves, women in perpetual motion, or *perpetuum mobile*, the phrase Nara Araújo uses to describe Maryse Condé's "poética de desplazamiento" (poetics of displacement) (Araújo 1997, 54). *Perpetuum mobile* refers to the moving away from absolute positions in the literature of Caribbean women; "a literature that portrays neither complete failure nor absolute success, something valid found in every step taken" (68). In their choice to isolate themselves, "*al aislarse*" or "*en hacerse isla*", Cuban women writers and their female protagonists, suggest new ways of envisioning Cuban identity, posing new ideas on the place (and space) of women in nation.

PART I

REWRITING FAIRY TALE AND FAMILY IN JARDÍN AND SANGRE AZUL

Written in intervals between 1987-1991, in both Paris and Havana, Sangre azul (Blue Blood) is Zoé Valdés' first novel. Because of its lyrical quality, Sangre azul has been described by Valdés herself as her transition from poetry to prose.² Whereas Valdés' subsequent novels are open in their discussion of nation and contemporary Cuban society, readers must dig beneath various layers of seeming "irreality" in search of reality in Sangre azul.³ It is a search that turns up countless versions of events and stories, none of which offer absolute Truth. Although Valdés' narrative cannot be labeled science fiction or fantasy, as with Chaviano's work, there are elements of the fantastic and the fairy tale in her work. Indeed, in Sangre azul, there is an interweaving of reality and fiction, a blurring, or ambivalence that makes it difficult for the reader to determine what *is and what isn't* real. In The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as the hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature when confronting an apparently supernatural event (25). According to Todorov, the reader's hesitation is the first condition of the fantastic (31). In Sangre azul, the reader constantly hesitates and Attys, the protagonist, is capable of weaving in and out of her personal history through fantasy to recreate her family and personal life. Rather than focus on fairy tale happiness, the happily-ever-after ending of so many romances, Sangre azul intentionally plays with the fairy tale narration, one of the most common forms of fantasy, and breaks away from it, to offer an openly feminist ending.

As mentioned in the introduction, an integral part of the use of fantasy in Sangre azul lies precisely in Valdés' reworking of Dulce María Loynaz's Jardín, a novel characterized by the insertion of the fantastic into the narration. Although different in plot, narrative techniques, language, and even conclusions, significant similarities exist between these two works. As Rita

Felski contends, in feminine/feminist literature a female protagonist's search for her identity (her Self) is intricately tied to family and nation. In Jardín and Sangre azul, the protagonists, Bárbara and Attys are in search of themselves; they seek to understand themselves, often through their relationship(s) with men. In "*Jardín*, una novela inatendida," Fina García Marruz explains: "No sólo hay una sola 'acción fingida' sino que la obra pertenece al linaje de novelas que lo son de búsqueda de la propia identidad, otra forma de 'viaje a la semilla' de nuestros orígenes aunque proyectada hacia una futuridad" [There isn't only a fictionalized action, rather that this novel belongs to that group that searches for an authentic identity, another form of "return to the seed" of our origins although projected into the future] (García Marruz 555). Moreover, in Jardín and Sangre azul, the protagonists enter the realm of the real (i.e., the world), upon their exit from the familiar space *and* through their travel outside the nation (Cuba) into other spaces. They weave in and out of reality, from the supposed real to the seemingly unreal, in search of themselves and their past(s).

These works differ, perhaps, most in their endings, yet again, much depends on how the novels are read. Whereas in Jardín Bárbara returns home to Cuba apparently to die, crushed by the house that she abandoned years before, in Sangre azul, Attys loses in love but, nevertheless, continues living her life on her own terms. Jardín's cryptic ending opens up a space for an alternative, more positive reading of the novel. In "Poética de la novela *Jardín*" ("Poetics of the Novel Jardín"), Susana Montero suggests that Loynaz's novel offers an open, rather than a negative ending. As Montero explains: "la vida nacerá de entre las ruinas y las sombras de aquella angustiada realidad" [life will be born again from within the ruins and the shadows of that anguished reality] (521). Bárbara's obscure death may be read as the rebirth of yet another version of Bárbara (of woman). Later in the chapter, I return to Jardín's ambiguous ending and to the

various ways this novel may be read, particularly in lieu of this novel's use of the fantastic to communicate a feminist message.

Yet another similarity between Jardín and Sangre azul, and also tied to the fantastic, is the role of multiplicity or doubling. That is, the main characters from both novels represent one and several characters at once. In Jardín, doubling appears in the melding of Bárbara and her great aunt and the love that Bárbara develops for her great-aunt's lover through old letters and photographs. Bárbara grows into her great-aunt through her reading of her aunt's letters and the wearing of her aunt's clothing. Later in the narration, she develops, or turns into other women, always being "other" to her own self and to those around her. A similar melding into other(s) and a play on birth/rebirth also surfaces in Sangre azul. First, Attys weaves in and out of death while giving birth to her son, Arión. And second, the name Attys points to a kind of "othering" for in Greek mythology the name is associated with a dying-god myth, hence tied to death and resurrection, something to which I shall turn later in the chapter.

An analysis of these *novelas líricas* (lyrical novels) cannot truly begin without discussing the authors themselves, two Cuban women writers separated in both time and space. As the daughter of a War of Independence general, Enrique Loynaz del Castillo, Dulce María Loynaz belonged to Cuba's social elite, and her life seemed to be forever tied to the nation. In fact, Dulce María was born in December 1902, the same year that Cuba became a Republic. In much the same way as her predecessor, Zoé Valdés also came into being at the beginning of another crucial point in Cuban history, born in 1959, the year of the Cuban Revolution's triumph. Both women, in many ways, are/were daughters of Cuba's revolutions, however different those revolutions may have been. That is, both women were born in Havana during two crucial moments in Cuban history, beginning their lives at the commencement of Cuban teleologies-- moments that mark the start of historical processes understood to have a greater goal, a certain cause. Loynaz lived

through most of the twentieth century, she died in 1998, and chose to stay -- albeit silent and forgotten -- in Cuba after the 1959 Revolution while many in her social class, including her husband, chose exile. Valdés, from humble origins (her father was a cabinetmaker, her mother a sales clerk at a pizza parlor) was born into and in many ways benefited from the Revolution, yet she chose exile in 1995. Loynaz stayed stoic and silent after the Revolution, only to be re-acknowledged in Cuba shortly before 1992, the year she was awarded the prestigious Cervantes Prize in literature. Valdés has chosen *not* to stay silent after her permanent exit from the island, publicly critical of that very political system into which she was born. In addition, significant although certainly coincidental, perhaps, is the fact that both Jardín and Sangre azul were written by Loynaz and Valdés early in their literary careers and both novels may be categorized as transitional works from poetry to prose. This may explain why both texts tackle issues of childhood and adolescence.⁴ Consequently, Loynaz remained in Cuba (*en el in-silio* and *en el silencio*) *aislada*, inside the island but outside the public sphere. Valdés, on the other hand, exits, or "se *aisla*" upon becoming an *ex-ile* -- moving outside the isle, while essentially choosing another island in which to live, Paris (l'île de France). She leaves the space in which she was born, but remains obsessed with Cuba and Cuban identity, as is reflected in her poetry and prose produced in the Diaspora.

There is no doubt that there are significant textual differences in each woman's writing styles, as Zoé Valdés herself affirms in her e-mail, but there is also a marked continuity between Loynaz's work and Valdés'. It is in that continuity that one finds traces of Cuban feminism and transnationalism, more specifically, a desire to move away from, transcend, fixed notions of identity towards or beyond the island. Yet transnationalism by no means implies the erasure of the national or national identity, that is, of Cubanness or *lo cubano*. Rather, transnationalism in these texts suggests the carrying of Cuba, specifically Cubanness, within oneself to and through multiple

spaces. Cuba, thus, appears as an imaginary, shifting space found wherever a Cuban resides. As an island, Cuba's borders are not clearly demarcated; rather, its border is the sea and its continual shifting sands. The sea serves as a fluid border, one that shifts with the coming and going of the waves. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the sea is so emblematic in a great number of Cuban and Cuban-American texts: the sea represents the fluidity of Cuban identity and gives way to *aislamiento*. The sea has a paradoxical quality for on the one hand it is a moveable space that entraps, but on the other it is what allows for movement, in and out of the island. The island's physical attributes, thus, allow for the transnational aspect of Cuban identity, one which appears closely tied to the notions of inner and outer exile and Diaspora -- movements within, through and outside Cubans spaces -- in the work of Dulce María Loynaz, and her successors Valdés, Chaviano and Canetti.⁵

Loynaz's Jardín remains a relatively unknown novel although it has received a fair amount of study in recent years.⁶ Although written between 1928-1933, during the Machado dictatorship, a period of massive industrialization and modernization on the island, Jardín only came to be published in 1951, in Spain by the publisher Aguilar (Smith 138). As Fina García Marruz explains, "la única y sorprendente novela de Dulce María Loynaz, acaso tuvo más eco fuera de Cuba que en nuestra patria..." [Dulce María Loynaz's surprising and sole novel had, perhaps, received greater recognition outside Cuba than within our nation...] (548). García Marruz's assertion is surprising but her statement rings true for almost all of Loynaz's work, including her rarely studied travel book, Un verano en Tenerife, written in Cuba following the author's travels to the Canary Islands and published by Aguilar in Spain, in 1958. Jardín tells the story of Bárbara, a young (Cuban) woman whose life seems to center on house, garden and the ever-enclosing sea. In the novel's prelude, Loynaz describes the work as "una historia incoherente y monótona de una mujer y un jardín" [an incoherent and monotonous story of a woman and a garden] (7). In Jardín "no hay

tiempo, ni espacio" [there is no time, no space] and this woman and her garden could be located anywhere, "en cualquier grado de la circunferencia del tiempo" [in any latitude in the circumference of time] (7). Indeed, Loynaz sets out to negate her work, accusing it of being weak and unable to sustain itself. She questions the very nature of the work as a novel, particularly because it lacks action. She then attempts to explain its apparent "weakness" by using the adjective "lyrical", and by adding that Jardín is extemporaneous and goes against established literary norms. Moreover, Loynaz describes her character, Bárbara, as *una irreal*; an individual who does not fit into society's expected patterns or norms (7). As Nara Araújo explains in El afiler y la mariposa, various feminists have pointed to Loynaz's attempts to counteract possible critics or censors, or what Araújo calls "un intento deslegitimador" (an attempt at delegitimization) (Araújo 1997, 118). Loynaz utilizes, therefore, what Debra Castillo so aptly dubs "negation" in her description of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's tactics, "a transvaluation of values that permits bridging the gap of difference *on her own terms*" (1992, 55). Be that as it may, Loynaz's attempts to delegitimize her work only act to underscore the novel, in particular by peculiar way(s) of representing gender and national identity during Cuba's early Republican period.

A study of Jardín could take many shapes, especially since few studies call attention to this novel.⁷ Since my interest lies in analyzing the ways in which Jardín contributes to the development of contemporary Cuban women's writing, particularly its influence on writers such as Zoé Valdés, I shall focus on two particular themes present in this proto-feminist work. First, the novel's reworking of the fairy tale narrative and secondly, on the role space and geography play in this novel. The reworking of the fairy tale theme is, in fact, double: on the one hand the text directly refers to the story of Sleeping Beauty, or Bella, and on the other, and more importantly, the main story of Bárbara is also a reworking of the fairy tale. These two stories within the novel rely on the reader's previous knowledge of fairy tales, as well as on each other's narratives. Although the

Sleeping Beauty narrative appears in the first part of the novel, in chapter five, Bárbara's story continues throughout the text. As for the role of space and geography in this novel, these contribute to and suggest a kind of transnationality. Particularly important are the ways that space(s) appear(s) within the island in relation or as opposed to the ways that space appears abroad. In both spatial configurations, woman (Bárbara) appears as outsider, a foreigner. Thus, I shall look at the idea of "origin(s)" in the work, as well as the relationships between marriage and foreignness, and silence and language following Bárbara's entry into the world.

Jardín is a highly innovative novel with a rather complex narration. Divided into five parts with eight to ten chapters in each, the novel begins with Bárbara in her garden, looking out through the gates, into the street, and further out to the sea. This first section, in conjunction with a final section at the end, appear to enclose the novel, in much the same way as the garden and sea enclose Bárbara from the world around her. These two short sections, unlike those to follow, are unnumbered fragments that describe Bárbara and her surroundings. An external voice narrates these fragments in the third-person singular, a narrator who is aware of Bárbara's actions, although not her thoughts. A third-person omniscient narrator takes on the narration following the initial opening fragment. This second narrative voice is aware of both Bárbara's actions and her thoughts, and narrates the greater part of the novel. There is also another level of narration in this novel, one that appears in the old letters directed at the protagonist's great aunt. These personal letters reveal the great aunt's lover's personal frustrations, as well as his qualms with his lover, to whom he speaks using the second person familiar, "tú". Although directed at the great-aunt, who is already dead, these old letters, written by an also deceased lover, strikingly appear to speak to Bárbara. In addition to frequent changes, the narration is important because it becomes a means of juxtaposing reality and fantasy. In the initial fragment, for example, the narrator describes the apparently fantastic fall of the Moon onto the Earth:

Y de pronto, la luna empezó a temblar con un temblor cada vez más apresurado, más violento cada vez, y las sombras de las cosas giraban al revés y al derecho, y Bárbara se detuvo y miró a lo alto. La luna se desprendía; desgarraba las nubes y se precipitaba sobre la tierra dando volteretas por el espacio. Pasó un minuto y pasó un siglo. La luna en el alero del mirador, rebotó con un sonido de cristales y fue a caer despedazada en el jardín a los pies de Bárbara. (11)

[And suddenly, the moon began to tremble, shaking ever so quickly with each passing moment, more and more violent each time, and the shadows of things spun backwards and forwards, and Bárbara stopped and looked up. The moon was detaching itself, tearing the clouds, and plunging down to earth while spinning in the air. A minute passed, and a century passed. The moon, in the eave of the balcony ricocheted and with the sound of glass, ended up falling into pieces in the garden at Bárbara's feet.]

The narrator then recounts how Bárbara picks up the pieces of the moon and then buries it in her garden. This scene is important for various reasons. First, this novel openly displays characteristics of the fantastic, a technique that appears throughout the work, and serves to question societal norms regarding the place of women in nation. Second, the figure of the moon is crucial for it is personified and associated with Bárbara. The moon, with its eternal quality, symbolizes the circularity of time. Bárbara's burial of the moon gives way to its rebirth, to its uncovering at the end of the novel, in much the same way that the figure of Bárbara transforms herself, several times throughout the novel, into the figures of many women. Both Bárbara and moon allude to the universal woman and in particular to the *aislamiento* women encounter in male-dominated spaces. I shall return to the importance of space in this novel, suffice to say that already in the first fragment, Loynaz appears to microcosmically represent the protagonist within her enclosed environment, she appears as a figure trapped behind the gates of her family home. The ending of the novel is also important because it returns to center on the condition of the home and its garden following the disappearance (or possible death) of Bárbara. These two fragments, therefore, serve to enclose the novel and render circularity to the work. Although the chapters that appear in

between these brief fragments concentrate on Bárbara, they ultimately transcend her life to reveal the lives of other women entrapped in and by the spaces around them.

In House, Garden, Nation, Ileana Rodríguez posits that Jardín represents the nation's (Cuba's) movement toward modernity, toward an international global economy. For Rodríguez, Bárbara has "one foot in enclosure, alienation and decadence and the other in modernization" (95). Catherine Davies prefers to analyze the role of the fantastic in Jardín and its relationship with feminism, offering an analysis of this work as a female/male gothic novel. Unlike the male gothic where "the Other" is always male, or the female gothic where "the Other" is always female, according to Davies, "the Other" is both male *and* female in Loynaz's novel (1997, 69). Both Rodríguez' and Davies' readings are elucidating, suggesting in their own ways Jardín's ambivalence, a precursor of the in-betweenness found in contemporary Cuban women's writing, an in-betweenness where woman (Bárbara) is forever *outside* nation. I would like to go one step further to argue that through the use of the fantastic, as well as through the inclusion of family photographs, postcards, letters, newspaper clippings, as well as other objects, such as clothing, into the narration, Loynaz contests both the traditional family and the nation. Bárbara searches for clues surrounding her own history and background, reconstructing her past, particularly her childhood, through old photographs and objects. While looking at the photo postcards of "la Niña", Bárbara as a child, the omniscient narrator explains how Bárbara looks at her own childhood photographs in their chronological order. Yet despite a change in time, the photos are all the same, in them one finds a girl who "*vive, crece y se conforma a través de ellas*" [lives, grows and adapts through them] (Loynaz Jardín, 21). In addition to childhood photographs, Bárbara also looks at the photographs of family members, including those of dead family members, including her brother, great-aunt and her late great-aunt's lover. These photographs, as well as objects, contribute to a deconstruction and reconstruction of the protagonist's family history and, in a sense, the nation.

Time and space appear static in this (Cuban) nation; this lack or absence of time and space is found in the personified figures of the garden, the pavilion, as well as in the figure of the wall clock whose hands never point to real time. The lack of time alludes to endless circularity, or eternity; the idea that no matter how much time passes, things remain the same. The novel's opening and closing fragments, and the presence and personification of the moon, aid in conveying the idea of frozen time and space. Therefore, despite the passage of time, indicated by automobiles and luxurious hotels, by the end of the novel, Bárbara again presses her pale face against the iron fencing, "pega su cara pálida a los barrotes de hierro" (247) as she did (or has done for) years ago.

With the exception of the garden, the pavilion, or spaces surrounding the home, the novel gives few concrete examples of the other areas Bárbara frequents, including those abroad, once she has left home and married. During those moments, Bárbara seems to roam, affirming her diasporic or exilic condition as "Other". The omniscient narrator describes Bárbara's condition once she has entered the world and begins encountering cities:

A su reflejo icterico, nuevos espacios iban desdoblándose unos de otros: hileras de automóviles verdes y amarillos pasaban y repasaban siempre, como si por un truco de juguete se unieran en círculo por detrás del paisaje, para volver a salir del lado opuesto.

Despedidas del núcleo de la noche, iban viniendo las ciudades. Bárbara creía atravesarlas con la luz, pero más bien era ella atravesada por las casas, los árboles, los muros, cosas que pasaban a través sin romperse, sin romperla a ella, inmóvil, asomada a los dinteles del mundo. (203-204)

[New spaces began to unfold before her ichtyic reflection, one after another: piles of green and automobiles passed and passed again, forever, as if by a child's game, they would unite behind the scene, only to emerge again on the other side. The cities began to appear, free from the night's nucleus. Barbara thought she could pass them with the light, but it was the houses that crossed her, the trees, the walls, things that passed through without breaking, without breaking her, who looked out, immobile, upon the lintel of the world.]

Bárbara is barely visible, she is a ghost-like figure who is both inside and outside this new space; she is there but not there. Several paragraphs later, the narrator describes her as if falling, "sin tiempo y sin distancia, dando vueltas en el vacío de una abstracción, y respirando un aire sin

espacio" [without time and without distance, spinning in the vacuum of an abstraction, and breathing in air without space] (204). As woman and foreign, Bárbara is marked "Other". The narrator calls her and other women *blandas*, soft or weak, lacking a space of their own: "Bárbara sin jardín, Eva sin paraíso..." [Bárbara without a garden, Eve without paradise...] (205).

One of the ways *Jardín* contests or rewrites nation and gender is through its representation or portrayal of the family structure. The family, be it nuclear or extended, is completely absent in this work, and parental figures do not appear as characters in the narration. According to Verity Smith, the lack of acting adults points to the novel's revision of the fairy tale narration (140). Although there are several references to Bárbara's mother early in the novel, she is never physically present. In fact, Bárbara's mother dies shortly after the death of her son, Bárbara's brother and heir to the family *history*. Shortly after revealing this fact, the narrator describes the mother as follows: "De todos los fantasmas que poblaron aquella infancia tan falseada, ninguno más raro que esta madre irreal, espejismo de madre, sombra desdibujada, fuga blanca, personaje escapado de alguno de sus libros de cuento" [Of all the ghosts that populated that false childhood, none was rarer than this unreal mother, mirror of a mother, blurred shadow, white gas, a character that has escaped from one of her storybooks] (Loynaz, *Jardín* 24). This statement reveals that supernatural, almost quasi-sinister, fantastic elements that surround (the narration of) Bárbara's life. For example, the narrator describes the mother figure with such adjectives as phantasmagoric, unreal, mirror-like, shadowy, and so forth. Her presence in the work, and in Bárbara's life, is of a wandering ghost, silent and scarcely remembered, compared, in effect, to a storybook character.

Indeed, if Bárbara's mother becomes fictional, non-existent in her life, the novel fails to provide a surrogate, either for the dead mother or for the lost (dismembered) family. Laura, the black servant, occasionally appears, and the novel makes mention of Bárbara's uncles, yet none of these figures hold authority. As a black female servant, Laura is subservient to Bárbara; she

cannot and does not hold any sort of power in early twentieth-century Cuban society. In this respect, *Jardín* differs from other feminine/feminist works, such as the novels and short stories of Mexican writer Elena Garro, where female servants often appear to provide companionship and/or complicity with the protagonists. Instead, in *Jardín* the housekeeper's presence seems to contribute to the sinister aspects of the novel. In fact, the narrator refers to the housekeeper as a witch on several occasions, and describes her as ghost-like and ethereal. As for the uncles, as males and for being closely related to the protagonist, they should hold some authority, yet they are *not* fathers, they are merely *uncles*. Thus, although male, they do not hold the same position of power as the *paterfamilias*. The narrator describes them as *muertos* (dead); they lack a voice and so cannot hold authority over Bárbara. Mute and helpless, "no pueden decirlo porque no hablan" [they cannot say it because they do not speak] (49). Finally, even Bárbara's husband, whose arrival points to an association with the figure of the fairy tale Prince, and who appears to replace an absent father figure, remains nameless in this novel, as do the children. What's more, a general loneliness permeates *Jardín*; even after Bárbara marries and leaves her house and garden behind, she seems forever aloof and distant. This loneliness appears to be linked to geography and most specifically to the lack of spaces offered Bárbara as woman within the nation. With the exception of the sea, there are no spaces where Bárbara feels at home: the narrator explains: "El mar no le había fallado nunca; siempre tuvo lo que esperó de él: libertad para sus ojos, caricias para su piel... visión amplia y clara, olvido de sí misma y una misteriosa esperanza... Y sobre todo esto, su azul..." [The sea had never failed her; she always received what she expected from him: freedom for her eyes, caresses for her skin... clear and vast vision, escape from herself and a mysterious hope... And above all this, its blue...] (47). Bárbara anchors herself at sea, "*aislándose*", or isolating herself, both physically and mentally. The sea serves as an in-between,

or third, space that lends the protagonist an escape from the limits society imposes on her and women like her.

In addition to representing and contesting the family through Bárbara's story, Loynaz' novel retells and rewrites the traditional fairy tale as a way of commenting upon the place, specifically *aislamiento*, of women in nation. Chapter five, "El cuento (Glosa de un cuento pasado de moda)" (The Story: Gloss of an Old Fashioned Story), contains Bárbara's reading of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty through the omniscient narrator's third person narration. This chapter serves a dual purpose: the reader encounters both the story of Sleeping Beauty (in Italics) as well as the narrator's comments on the fairy tale (in regular typeface). This story is *una glosa*, a gloss or note. Originating from the Greek "glochus", or "projecting point", definitions of "gloss" include "tongue", "language", and "obscure word" (Merriam-Webster 497). Moreover, a gloss is associated with telling or narrating, commentary and interpretation. In chapter five, Loynaz sums up or glosses over the well known, but passé, Sleeping Beauty story to give way to a rewriting or interpretation. Although the actual tale is brief, its effect on Bárbara is much greater, for in a sense Bárbara takes on the role of *La bella durmiente*, Sleeping Beauty, and *Jardín* transforms into yet another rewriting of this classic fairy tale. Thus, although the specific story of Sleeping Beauty only appears in chapter five, in a larger sense, Loynaz reworks or rewrites that very tale throughout the novel. It is relevant that this chapter be a *glosa*, analogous with tongue, language, and obscure word, as this tale narrates a woman's exit from one space and her entry into another, an individual who is a perennial outsider at home and abroad, in foreign spaces.

If chapter five comments upon the fairy tale, the following chapters seek to rewrite that tale by replacing *Bella* (Beauty) with Bárbara. Bárbara takes on the characteristics of *Bella*, and appears to become Bella. In chapter six of the second part of the novel, entitled "La ciudad," Bárbara is directly compared to Bella.

Igual que la Princesa de quince años, Bárbara tiene una cola fatigada que arrastrar por los escalones, rumbo a su destino.

Igual que la Princesa de quince años, ella sube sobre sí misma, se prolonga de sí misma hacia la altura-- la sombra de la escala no es sino su propia sombra, -- se empina sobra su vida para mirarla mejor.

Cuando llegue allá arriba encontrará una viejecita hilando, y como Bárbara tampoco ha visto nunca hilar...

Es parte de la historia que el huso hincue su dedo y ella caiga en su sueño que va a durar cien años.

Cumplido el tiempo, vendrá un príncipe de remotos países a desencantarla con un beso de milagro aleteándole en los labios. La historia es vieja y simple. Se puede repetir hasta el infinito... (82)

[Just like the fifteen year old Princess, Bárbara has a long train, tattered from dragging it through stairs, in route to her destiny.

Just like the fifteen year old Princess, she climbs over herself, she stretches out toward the heights, the staircase's shadow is but her own shadow, -- she reaches up over her life to see her better.

When she finally reaches the top she finds an old lady spinning, and since Bárbara also had never seen spinning...

It is part of the story that the needle pricks her finger and that she falls in a deep sleep that will last one hundred years.

Once the time has passed, the prince will come from remote countries to free her from her spell with a miracle kiss flapping her on her lips. The story is old and simple. It can be repeated until infinity...]

This excerpt foreshadows the arrival of Bárbara's (Bella's) future husband, the foreign prince, or "savior". In addition to directing the comparisons of Bárbara to Bella, there are other similarities between Jardín and the fairy tale in regards to references to the Prince. In Jardín, the first male that appears is the younger brother, the natural heir to the family who dies at a young age. The second male figure is the mysterious young man, the great-aunt's lover, who appears in the old photographs and letters that haunt Bárbara during the first half of the novel. The third and most important male figure present in the novel is the future husband, the young man who comes from abroad, takes Bárbara away, and leads her into the world. In a sense, these three men are virtual versions of the fairy tale Prince, a figure, that according to the narrator, all young women seek at some time in their life (40). In Jardín the Prince's qualities appear most clearly in the great-aunt's lover, reconstructed in the letters that Bárbara reads, and in the husband. Yet, neither one of these

manifestations of the Prince ever receive names in the work. The Prince and his qualities are conflated into two figures belonging to different spaces and temporal moments.

There are other similarities between Jardín and the fairy tale narration, and Bárbara and the fairy tale heroine. For one thing, the house and garden in the novel resemble the isolated castle and its surrounding forest of fairy tale lore, spaces through which the Prince must pass to find and save the young heroine. Yet in Jardín, rather than have the Prince (a version of him) rescue the heroine from the isolated house-castle, the heroine exits home and garden on her own. She travels to the fringes of those spaces, to the seashore, where she encounters the Prince. As in the fairy tale, in Jardín woman's identity is intricately tied to her relationship with men (her guide into the world). But, nevertheless, in Jardín it is woman who exits her (private) space, and moves into alternative spaces to choose her Prince and a new life abroad. Loynaz's novel is ambivalent, for despite the fact that it rewrites, and contests, the fairy tale in a way that allows woman a more active role in her own life, ultimately her entry into the world is only possible through man, her guide.

Besides serving as a nexus between the classic fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" and Bárbara's tale, chapter five also marks a break in the narration of Jardín. In fact, the gloss appears to break the spell of the fairy tale. In "Sleeping Beauty", the heroine is enchanted into a deep sleep after being pricked by a needle. While the princess is enchanted, rendered helpless, the prince sets out to awaken, and thereby save her. In the classic fairy tale, the first part of the narration leads up to the enchantment and once the spell is broken by the Prince's kiss, the fairy tale quickly concludes with a happy ending. Jardín, however, differs from the classic fairy tale. Here, the protagonist's life (as an adult woman) begins only after the narration of the fairy tale. Whereas the first four chapters of this work focus on Bárbara's childhood, vis-à-vis family photographs, after chapter five and the retelling of "Sleeping Beauty", the narration turns to Bárbara's awkward adolescence and ultimate

adulthood. Chapter five, then, breaks the spell of the first four chapters. Furthermore, following chapter five, Bárbara's, rather than Bella's life, *becomes* the fairy tale narration. However, from this point forward, the garden becomes a menacing space for Bárbara, a space that attempts to isolate her from the world, prevent her access to the sea (and freedom), and stop the arrival of her Prince. In chapter three, the menace against Bárbara takes hold through the appearance of her deceased aunt's correspondence. Written to the great-aunt by her obsessive lover, these letters progressively appear directed at Bárbara, rather than the deceased aunt. In his letters, the lover displays his obsession for Bárbara (the great-aunt), writing about how he watches her through her window from out in the garden. As he states: "¿No ves que soy todo una percepción viva que te cerca, que te vigila? No ves que siento repercutir dentro de mí, con la sonoridad de una bóveda, de un templo, el más leve roce de tu mano, la pausa mínima de tu corazón. Tú me esquivas; lo sé, lo siento. Tú huyes de mí" [Don't you see that I'm a living perception that fences you in, that watches you? Don't you see that inside me I feel reverberate within me, with the somber sound of a tomb, of a temple, the slightest rub of your hand, the slight pause of your heart. You avoid me, I know, I feel it. You flee from me] (125). He is aware of her desire to flee, not just from him but from the menacing garden. And he later writes in the same letter, "¿A dónde vas, a dónde quieres ir? ¿Y yo? Yo, yo, sí... ¿Qué quieres hacer conmigo?" [Where are you going? Where do you want to go? And me? Me, yes, me... What do you want to do with me?] (126). In another letter he tells her:

Tú quieres ser libre; tú quieres mover los pies y ensanchar tu horizonte, y para eso te pesaba mi amor...

Desde el principio sólo has estado pensando en escaparte, o mejor dicho, escapándote ya... Cuantas veces he creído que al fin te tenía, me he visto aire en las manos y sombra en el corazón... ¡Qué bien has sabido esfumarte, escurrirte en tu silencio con tus maneras suaves, con tus sonrisas inexpresivas, aunque yo, engañado y violento, cerrara todas las puertas y levantara todos los muros! (150)

[You want to be free; you want to move your feet and widen your horizons, and because of that, my love was a burden. From the beginning, you have been planning escape, or better still, have escaped already... How many times did I believe I had you at last, I have found myself with air between my hands and a shadow in my heart... How well you knew how to disappear! Although I, deceived and violent, closed all the doors and raised all the walls, you ran off in silence, with your soft ways, with your unexpressive smiles.]

These letters, directed at her aunt, leave Bárbara feeling cold. She has the sensation that someone watches her through the windows, as the young man had done to her great-aunt. While she walks through the garden, shadows surround her and the weather turns stormy. The dead lover appears to inhabit the garden, and his letters appear to foreshadow her voyage abroad, as well as her eventual return. Only when Bárbara she reaches the sea, does she escape the oppression of the garden. On the seashore she finally meets her prince, the young man she marries and with whom she travels abroad.

In Jardín, therefore, space and geography appear intricately tied to the fairy tale narration. The garden, the house/alcove, and the pavilion all dominate the first half of the novel, as does the sea, all representative of Cuban space(s). Indeed, space or geography both anchors and encloses Bárbara. These spaces isolate her, *la aislan*, preventing her access to the modern world. The sea, on the other hand, despite surrounding or enveloping her and her home, offers her an escape, lending her a proper space within her *aislamiento*. Her young man, her Prince, arrives by sea, and she seems happiest during her voyage on the ship back to his land. Towards the end of the novel, however, after Bárbara's marriage to the foreign young man (the Prince), space and geography change in appearance. Whereas in the first chapters, Cuban spaces appear personified, in later chapters foreign spaces appear vague, never delved into in the same manner, as are Cuban spaces. And although in these sections time moves more quickly and aimlessly in foreign lands, Bárbara continues *aislada* as she was in her Cuban spaces.

In a sense, Bárbara's life as fairy tale begins in chapter six, following the Sleeping Beauty narration of the previous chapter. Chapter six and those to follow concentrate on the lost dreams of adolescence and the solitude to accompany Bárbara throughout her life. Comparing Bárbara to Bella, this chapter centers on the protagonist's transition from adolescence to adulthood, citing her first long dress, and her presentation before society. The supposed happy occasion, her fifteenth birthday and presentation before society, are rejected "feo vestido, feo retrato, vamos a tirarlo por la ventana" [ugly dress, ugly picture, let's toss it out the window] (Loynaz, Jardín 45). The omniscient narrator subsequently adds that despite the presence of the photographs, Bárbara never even celebrated her fifteenth birthday. As orphan and perennial outsider, Bárbara does not participate in society's expected rituals not even within her island-home. Only upon her marriage is she (as woman) [partly] allowed entry into society, into civilization, or the world.

In Strangers to Ourselves (1991) feminist scholar Julia Kristeva studies the phenomena of exile, foreignness and gender. Kristeva ascertains that the first exiles in the Western Tradition were women, citing several examples from both Classical and Greek Judeo-Christian traditions, including the figures of the Danaides and Ruth the Moabite. In her study, Kristeva argues that the terms barbarian or "barbarophone," a term coined by Homer to describe the natives of Asia Minor, possibly stems from the onomatopoeia *bla bla* and *bara-bara*, or what she calls "incomprehensible mumblings" (1991, 51). In the Classical Greek period, the term barbarian was applied to both Greeks and non-Greeks, to anyone "having a slow, thick, or improper speech" (51). Thus, *barbarian* refers to someone's background (origin) as well as someone's speech pattern.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Loynaz's character Bárbara, as barbarian, is a perennial outsider. Described as *una irreal*, or unreal person, Bárbara lacks both physical and mental substance. She is an outsider inside Cuba for being both an orphan and a woman, as well

as for her incomprehensibility and speechlessness. Her future husband comments on her silence on several occasions. In their first encounter, he asks her,

¿Eres muda? -- saltó al fin, mortificado, más que por persistencia del silencio, por la de la mirada. -- ¿Los ratones te comieron la lengüita, como a las niñas malcriadas?

Ella con gesto rápido, se llevó los dedos a la boca. Indudablemente había comprendido, e indudablemente también, palpaba ahora su fina lengua pálida, sonriendo y cerrando los ojos. (159)

[Are you mute? -- he finally jumped, mortified, more so for her look rather than her persistent silence. --Did mice eat your tongue, like they do to spoiled girls?

And she, with a quick gesture, brought her fingers to her lips. She had, undoubtedly, understood, and undoubtedly as well, moved her pale, thin tongue, smiling and closing her eyes.]

The future husband is fascinated *and* terrified of Bárbara; her silence is both disturbing and foreign. Despite his concerns over her strangeness, the young man casts away his doubts and decides to take on the responsibility of *caring* for Bárbara. One scene that underscores Bárbara's strangeness or foreignness takes place aboard the Euryanthe, as she heads to her new home abroad with her husband. In this scene, Bárbara tosses [overboard] some rare shells that her had husband collected on Cuban shores. The narrator explains that:

Bárbara no hacía más que reír; no entendía nada. Cogió los caracoles y los echó al mar.

No se movió él, pero palideció un poco, y fugazmente, un impensado gesto de dureza le contrajo el rostro. No fue más que un instante, se repuso enseguida, y ella no se dio ni cuenta de la sombra que le pasó rozando tan de cerca... (196)

[Blanca did nothing but laugh. She didn't understand a thing. She took the shells and tossed them into the sea.

He didn't move, but paled a bit, and suddenly, an unexpected harsh gesture overcame him. It was only for a moment, he immediately reacted, and she didn't perceive the shadow that had passed so close to her...]

Again, despite the young man's worries and irritation at Bárbara's actions, he manages to tell her, "Estás entrando en el mundo" [You are entering the world] (199). For he, the husband has the responsibility of bringing or taming the *barbarous* Bárbara into civilization. He initiates Bárbara into

the codes of modern femininity by making her up, dressing her in modern clothing and forcing her to cut her braids, "[le] hizo cortar sus largas trenzas de color de río" (214). Unhappy with the results, he takes her to the hair salon where he "hizo que colocaran la femenina cabeza entre los tentáculos escalofriantes de una monstruosa araña de metal. Y el pelo de Bárbara, lacio como la lluvia que cae de noche, se encaracoló de súbito y tornóse áspero y chirriante bajo el peine" [made them place the feminine head between the chilling tentacles of a monstrous metal spider. And Bárbara's hair, straight like the rain that falls in the night, suddenly curled and turned rough and squeaky under the comb] (214). Bárbara's barbarous nature must be tamed, by force if necessary. Her foreignness comes to the forefront again on other occasions, particularly in her exchanges with her husband's friends and acquaintances. Several people describe her as coming from "una de esas islas que salpican los mapas del océano Indico como una lluvia de oro" [from one of those islands that dot maps on the Indian Ocean like golden rain] or as belonging to "una familia de casta sacerdotal" [a family belonging to the priestly caste] (213). Some recognized "un vástago decadente de los vikingos, cuyos restos se diseminaron por el norte de Europa a la caída de la dinastía bárbara" [the decadent line of the Vikings, whose descendents spread throughout northern Europe after the fall of the barbarian dynasty] (213). Finally, the narrator explains, "Otros más sensatos se encogieron de hombros, diciendo que habían comprado mangos a muchas criollas semejantes, que iban descalzas a recibir los barcos en los puertos de La Guayra y Pernambuco...Luego no se habló más del asunto" [Others, with more sense, shrugged their shoulders, saying that they had bought mangos from Creoles like her, in the ports of La Guayra and Pernambuco... Then they stopped speaking of the subject] (214-215). Bárbara, the outsider, represents, therefore, one woman and many. She is both silent and at once able to speak "sin acento particular muchos idiomas, y todos parecían serle asequibles" [many languages, without a particular accent, and all appear to be accessible to her] (213). Upon her introduction into the

world, Bárbara discovers that there are others like her, foreign and *aislada*. She recognizes herself in them, “[Bárbara] vio las mujeres de la tierra, mujeres blandas como ella... les tendió las manos; se reconoció en cada una de ellas. Todas eran ella misma repetida, desecha ya sin nombre y sin destino” [saw all the women of the earth, weak women like her... she reached out her hands to them; she recognized herself in each one of them. They were all her repeated, tossed, without a name and without a destiny] (204). By the end of the novel, Bárbara, the perennial outsider and “Other”, decides to return home. Ultimately the sea, then her garden, beckon her, yet those spaces for which she longs, house and garden, only appear to crush her. Indeed, in the novel's last chapter, Bárbara returns to her old garden, and the old walls appear to give way around her. As the walls crack she spots a tiny lizard, which resembles a dragon, a figure that appears in an earlier scene centering on her childhood fears. Closing her eyes shut in fear, Bárbara hears the figure tell her, “No tengas miedo, que yo te enseñaré el camino...” [Don't be afraid, that I will show you the way...] (246). When she eventually opens her eyes, she sees an enormous stone oscillating above her head. The narrator explains:

Y no vio mas. Hubo un chasquido sordo, y el pedrusco cayó también, rompiendo el equilibrio del paredón, que, ya resquebrajado, acabó de derrumbarse pesadamente entre nubes de polvo y hojas secas. Salía el sol. Por encima de la hojaresca y los escombros escapaba una lagartija amarilla... (246).

[She no longer saw a thing. There was a deaf sound, and the rock also fell, breaking the equilibrium of the wall, that, since it was already cracked, finished crumbling heavily between dust clouds and dead leaves. The sun was coming out. A yellow lizard was escaping above the leaves and the rubble...]

Perhaps, the garden's failing walls do indeed crush Bárbara, in a sense ending her *aislamiento*, and suggesting that only death frees the individual from the burdens of time and space. Yet a closer and more optimistic reading points to the fact that the last line refers to a new beginning, with the yellow lizard surviving and crawling out of the rubble. Moreover, although technically the

final chapter of the novel, the work does not end here. This chapter seems to finalize one of the stories on Bárbara, but it does not completely close the novel. As already alluded, *Jardín* begins and ends with two untitled fragments that describe Bárbara's solitude. Whereas the first fragment focuses on Bárbara's burial of the moon in her garden, the last fragment narrates its uncovering. While working on the old property, "una marisma inhabitable, un matorral malsano" [an uninhabitable marsh, an unhealthy scrubland] a workman finds a perfectly round plate buried in the ground. At first, he plans on taking the round, cold object home with him to serve as a plate, but then decides against this, choosing instead to toss the object away. The final fragment and the novel end as it began with Bárbara looking out of her garden: "Bárbara, por detrás, por arriba, por abajo, por siempre..., pega su cara pálida a los barrotes de hierro..." [Bárbara behind, above, below, for always..., placing her pale face against the iron bars...] (247). This last section is extremely important because it suggests that despite progress, despite the tearing down or crumbling of the old house and its garden walls, Bárbara continues behind the gate's iron bars. Despite the passage of time, despite technological advances, woman continues *aislada*, no matter in what space she finds herself. Bárbara represents all women everywhere, perennially outside the public sphere. The circularity of the novel, the various narrative voices, the incorporation of the fantastic and the rewriting of the fairy tale in *Jardín*, serve to destabilize and question societal norms regarding woman's place in the nation.

In conclusion, *Jardín* is a rather ambivalent novel. Although ahead of its time for its focus on the place of woman in and outside nation, this novel falls short of suggesting a means of feminist agency for women. Throughout the novel, Loynaz seems to argue that geography, and the condition of *aislamiento*, do not provide women a place from where to speak. We must therefore turn to the sea, to its fluid nature, if we wish to find a form of agency in Loynaz's work. The fluid sea, like other spaces, does appear personified in this novel and its presence transcends the

island-space (Cuban) to narrations on Bárbara's life abroad with her husband and children. Bárbara is only content while inhabiting that sea-space, for the sea acts as the unifying space between those two moments dividing Bárbara's life, her childhood and adolescence in Cuba and her married adult life abroad. Furthermore, the sea lends the character a means of escape from reality, at different moments in her life. Bárbara is representative of Loynaz (and her followers), a being without a proper language, always the outsider, traversing in and through different spaces. And finally, Jardín, the text itself, also appears to be an outsider, speaking, like Bárbara and Loynaz, differently, hinting at its transnational nature. First, Loynaz' novel lies outside the Canon as a result of its production, as well as for the themes upon which it focuses. Jardín speaks differently through its lyrical or poetic style, its complex narration and structure, its focus on time and space and how these affect the characters and the narration. This text also speaks differently through the continual juxtaposition of reality and fantasy, including the rewriting of the fairy tale for an altogether different purpose than the genre's original intent. Like author and character, Jardín itself lies beyond the canonical, transcending any one style or genre, and as such, is a precursor to contemporary Cuban women's transnational literature.

Throughout this study, I posit that the contemporary narrative of Cuban women borrows from and contests various discourses and traditions in order to represent women in and out of nation. In their works, the family, often as a metaphor of the larger Cuban nation, appears in disarray, absent or dismembered. Moreover, contemporary Cuban women's narrative portrays a search for identity, a search for "the self", as well as a search for Truth. These narratives juxtapose reality and fiction as a means to expose inconsistencies or contradictions within society, as well as to suggest more fluid ways of imagining identity. As with its novelistic predecessor, Jardín, in Sangre azul, Valdés turns to these very issues, and in fact, returns to and rewrites Loynaz's classic novel. Like Jardín, Valdés' novel focuses on a young, female protagonist, Atlys, and her

movements within and through various spaces. Although these novels differ in some ways, both reveal a desire to capture and retell the past, to rewrite and retell family, nation, and identity. Whereas Jardín reconstructs family and identity through photographs, letters and objects from the past, as well as through the use of the fairy tale, in Sangre azul the protagonist's past is continuously reconstructed through, and by the *retelling* of her often contradictory memories. In Sangre azul, thus, the narration, which flows between Attys' first-person and the third-person narration of an omniscient narrator, aids in the reconstruction of family and identity. In fact, in this novel, as with Jardín, memories are blurred, and identities merge or blend, making it difficult for the reader to determine what has truly occurred, and thus contributing to this novel's questioning of Truth.

In addition to the narration, which jumps between the first and third person, undoing previous narrations, in Sangre azul characters (and their names) serve in this novel's search for (and interpretation of) Truth. Indeed, in this novel Valdés turns to the empirical belief system, Gnosticism, not only by undermining variations of truth throughout the narration, but also in the continual appearance of Gnosis. This figure, whose name means “knowledge” or “to know” in Greek, reflects the continual search, by Attys and others, for answers to life's queries. In Gnosticism the concept of reality relies on each individual, and reality is perceived as an option in life, not a necessity. Moreover, in this system, matter is considered evil, and freedom is possible only through Gnosis, or knowledge. As for Attys, her name is a variation of Attis, Cybele's mortal son-lover in Classical Greek mythology.⁸ The ambivalence of these names, as well as others, contributes to the novel's questioning of truth and reality, as well contests the idea of identity as fixed. Indeed, in Sangre azul, there appears to be gender confusion, in particular with the use of ambivalent names such as Gnosis and Attys. The presence of Attys' cousins, Lorenzo and Leticia, adds further ambivalence to this novel. These two figures initially appear as separate identities, but

gradually meld into one in the narration, revealing the reconstruction of both gender and sexual identity. Thus, there is genre crossing and gender-crossing; the playing with and confusing of names deconstructs and reconstructs identity in much the same way that memory serves to deconstruct/reconstruct Attys' personal history.

From the outset, Sangre azul plays with readers, particularly through the continual reconstruction of Attys's realm or world. In the first chapter "Invenciones de la traviesa (Inventions of the mischievous one) Attys describes her childhood in detail; a childhood filled with references to the (Psychoanalytic) Imaginary. The fantastic and surreal first appear in this chapter, as well as a tension between what is and isn't real. According to Todorov, the fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work -- in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations. (33)

Furthermore, Todorov explains that the fantastic only lasts for as long as the character and the reader hesitate. Ultimately, however, the reader decides if what they read proceeds from reality or from the fantastic. Sangre azul, therefore, is not a fantastic text, per se, because by the second chapter, the reader discovers that the first chapter is a "creation" or invention. Section two, "De la invención de los otros", in fact, contests the previous "version" of reality, to "create" yet another version. Rather than perceive this work as fantastic, Sangre azul needs to be viewed as the self-conscious rewriting of the fantastic, or variations of the fantastic, for the purpose of commenting or contesting traditional views of identity.

Chapter one rewrites the fairy tale, one of several variations of the fantastic. As the title illustrates "Inventiones de la traviesa", this chapter recounts the inventions or creations of "*la traviesa*" (Attys). She is a transgressor for her unconventional activities, her *trucos* (tricks). Even her ambivalent name adds to her quality as transgressor, an adaptation of a man-god's name transferred to a mortal woman. Furthermore, the Greek myth of Attis makes reference to a being caught in between realms, neither man nor god, yet both. In Sangre azul, Attys appears to be perennially in between, back and forth different spaces, lovers, and the various narrations/stories she tells and the narrator tells about her. In addition, her narrations, or inventions are tricks; they upset or undermine traditional notions of what is and what is not acceptable behavior, as well as push the boundaries of what is and isn't possible in mainstream society.

Sangre azul, therefore, as with Zoé Valdés' subsequent novels, portrays multiple layers of in-betweenness. Sangre azul represents different narrative genres and creates, and re-creates both personal fictions and collective histories. The incessant in-betweenness appears, as well, in the geographic location(s) of both novel and author. Valdés' novels as with the narrative of contemporary Cuban women, including Daína Chaviano and Yanitzia Canetti, are not merely produced (in) between spaces; they also re-tell stories about in-between spaces. In Sangre azul, readers confront this in-betweenness from the outset. In one scene, Attys tells her readers that she never lost her baby teeth. This unusual, almost surreal revelation is indicative of this perennial in-betweenness that appears to enclose Attys. She is caught between states, between childhood and adulthood. Readers also encounter other examples of in-betweenness, including the back and forth movement of the characters, such as the protagonist's movements through and between two cities, Paris and Havana, the in-betweenness or multiplicity of Gnosis, as well as the gender confusion Leticia/Lorenzo embodies.

There is a marked continuity between Dulce María Loynaz's novel Jardín and Valdés' Sangre azul. Indeed, both novels juxtapose, as well as incorporate elements of the fantastic, such as the fairy tale, within reality, and in doing so, confront or contest various discourses on nation and gender. Several curious similarities exist, as well, between these novels and their protagonists. First, like Loynaz's Bárbara, Attys is referred as well as refers to herself as *una irreal*. Secondly, both Bárbara and Attys appear to represent one woman and many at once. Bárbara is multiple; she appears to meld into her great-aunt on several occasions, as well as takes on the role of the fairy tale heroine, Bella. She is a perennial outsider, representative of all women outside the confines of the nation. In effect, Bárbara's multiplicity is linked to the fantastic; there is confrontation and slippage from one realm into another. In one scene *La Niña*, young Bárbara, appears to jump out of the old photograph. As the narrator explains, "la cartulina se ha inflado ligeramente. Parece que se va a rajarse por los bordes... se raja ya. Y la Niña, alzando un pie en el aire, salta sobre la cama, [the cardboard had slightly inflated. It appears as if it is going to crack at the edges... it already cracks] (Loynaz, Jardín 19). Thus, through the bringing together of the real and the fantastic Loynaz's Jardín and Valdés' Sangre azul rewrite or recreate the lives of their young protagonists within various spaces. They contest a fixed notion of Truth to suggest rather:

Truth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure. It exceeds all regimes of truth. So, when we insist on telling over and over again, we insist on repetition in re-creation (and vice versa). On distributing the story into smaller proportions that will correspond to the capacity of absorption of our mouths, the capacity of vision of our eyes, and the capacity of bearing of our bodies. Each story is at once a fragment and a whole; a whole within a whole. And the same story is always changing, for things which do not shift and grow cannot continue to circulate. Dead. Dead times, dead words, dead tongues. Not to repeat in oblivion. (Minh-ha 1989, 123)

Whereas Bárbara's story appears to be a rewriting of the fairy tale, Sangre azul continuously rewrites the same endless story, Attys' story. With each narration, Attys, *La Traviesa* recreates *the* perfect childhood (for herself or for others?). However, this rewriting does not refer solely to Attys's

story, but also to previous stories. That is, Attys' story is as much a rewriting of her own life, as a return to, incorporation, and a rewriting of previous narrations, including the fairy tale, such as occurs in Jardín. The rewriting of these stories serves, as such, to expose dominant discourses and traditional institutions. For instance, whereas a lack of family marks Bárbara's childhood, an extended "hyper family" appears in the first chapter of Sangre azul. Like Bárbara, Attys is also referred to as *La Niña* in the narration, and in the first chapter, parents, grandmother, brothers and sisters, as well as aunts, uncles and cousins accompany her. Despite the apparent happiness, nevertheless, inconsistencies exist in this supposed large and happy family, incongruities that burst open in the following chapters, including chapter two, "De la invención de los otros."⁹ These inconsistencies reveal subtle references to Loynaz's Jardín. Like its predecessor, much of Sangre azul relies on the use and knowledge of the fairy tale to uncover and discover contradictions in society, particularly in those roles plotted women. The fairy tale surfaces, for example, through the presence and importance of childhood toys, specifically dolls, in the lives of the female protagonists. In Sangre azul, Attys describes her childhood and her dolls as follows:

En aquella época mi existencia era muy sencilla: comer, dormir y jugar. Jugar me entristecía, jugar siempre me hizo sentir la más solitaria. Las muñecas parecían cadáveres de niñas estranguladas, me disgustaban sus ojos plásticos, y más de una vez me encontraron descuartizándolas para averiguar que tenían dentro; quería curarles la frialdad, me empeñaba en conocer si también se horrorizaban ellas conmigo como yo con sus estériles ademanes. En vano, la muñeca es el juguete más inexpresivo que haya inventado la humanidad. (Valdés 8)

[In that time period, my life was simple: eat, sleep, and play. Playing made me sad, it always made me feel the loneliest. The dolls seemed like the cadavers of strangled girls, their plastic eyes disgusted me, and on more than one occasion I found myself opening them up to see what was inside. I wanted to cure their coldness. I was determined know if they were as horrified with me as I with their sterile bodies. It was in vain. The doll is the most inexpressive toy that humanity has invented.]

The doll, often associated with childhood, particularly the female child, as well as with the feminine, becomes associated with death and silence in the work of contemporary feminist writers. Rosario

Castellanos's drama El eterno femenino (The Eternal Feminine) Rosario Ferré's short story "La muñeca menor" ("The Youngest Doll") and Julia Alvarez's novel How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, all use the image of the doll to represent woman's silencing in society. In Jardín, Loynaz relates the doll with the morbid:

Sí; ella no pediría, como las niñas tontas que se mueren en el mundo, que la enterraran con su muñeca... Nunca había amado con ese puro amor de las niñas, con ese gran amor que se pierde para el mundo, aquellas representaciones de la figura humana que eran también -- ¡oh cielo santo! -- frías y calladas... (29)

[Yes. She would not ask to be buried with her doll, as do dumb girls that die in the world... She had never loved, with the purity of girls, with that great love that is lost to the world, those representations of the human figure, which were, dear Heaven, also cold and quiet...]

In Sangre azul, Attys describes her childhood games, toys and especially dolls, with a certain degree of ambivalence. Rather than deal with fairy godmothers and mythical beings, Attys' dreams are "sueños del dolor del silencio" [dreams of the pain of silence], that seem to foreshadow the pain and silence of adulthood (Valdés 9). In Jardín, the young Bárbara also appears haunted by silence; one that envelops her existence, dominates her childhood, and prepares her for the silence of adolescence and adulthood. In "Retratos Repetidos", the narrator describes her silence as follows:

En esta casa nadie habla. *El silencio* se congela en una escarcha finísima sobre los cortinajes, sobre los muros, sobre los rostros. La Niña misma se siente, a veces, envuelta en su telaraña invisible; lo siente frío y cosándose a sus labios, y tiene que romperlo con los dedos, con la palabra que quiere venir...

Y ella hubiera dicho palabras bonitas, como todas las niñas del mundo; hubiera hecho preguntas deliciosas, y hubiera explicado conceptos nuevos, conceptos puros de niño, de la vida y de las cosas...

Pero su vida ha sido una *lección de silencio*. Y tan bien enseñada, que la Niña ha aprendido a callar, la cosa más difícil que pudiera aprender un niño. Y aprendió otras cosas; se habituó a prescindir, a escurrirse, a *hacerse ella también un poco fantasma*; supo de la manera de disimular su presencia, y por las presencias, las ausencias; anduvo de puntillas, y abrió y cerró sin ruido las puertas; *supo de la manera de tener las cosas sin pedir las, o de no tenerlas sin necesitarlas, o de no necesitarlas siquiera...* Y la manera de hacer luz sin sorpresa para los ojos aletargados, fundiéndola poco a poco con las penumbras iniciales... *Y hasta los juegos eran lentos y silenciosos, como si jugara con sueños y con tristezas.* (Loynaz 48, my emphasis)

[In this house, no one speaks. Silence freezes into a thin frost over the drapes, over the walls, over the faces. La Niña herself feels, at times, encased in her own invisible spider web; she feels it cold and threading over her lips, and she has to break it with her fingers, with the word that wants to come out...

And she would have said beautiful words, like all the girls in the world; she would have asked delicious questions, and she would have explained new concepts, the pure concepts of a child, of life, of things...

But her life had been a lesson in silence. And she was so well taught, that La Niña had learned to shut up, the hardest thing a child could learn to do. And she learned other things; she became used to doing without, to scatter, to become a bit like a ghost; she learned how to conceal her presence, and for presences, absences; she tiptoed, and opened and closed the doors without making a sound, she knew how to obtain things without asking for them, and to not have them without needing them, or to not need them at all... And the way to make light without surprising drowsy eyes, fading it in little by little into the initial shadows... And even her games were slow and silent, as if she played with dreams and sadnesses.]

This silence not only characterizes Bárbara's childhood, it prepares her for the silence of adulthood as a woman and as a foreigner, and introduces her to the role of dreams within (her version of) reality. In The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, Bruno Bettelheim argues, "The Sleeping Beauty emphasizes the long, quiet concentration on oneself that is also needed. During the months before the first menstruation, and often also for some time immediately following it, girls are passive, seem sleepy, and withdraw into themselves" (225). Both

Loynaz and Valdés' novels' use the fairy tale and figures, such as Sleeping Beauty, to return to and reinterpret many of the themes associated with feminine adolescence, as well as to comment upon the silence to which women have been subject throughout history and in various societies.

Another connection between Jardín and Sangre azul may be found in each novel's emphasis on the family and its role in the life of the protagonist. Whereas Jardín erases the importance of parents in Bárbara's life, ignoring them altogether in the narration, in Sangre azul, the parents takes on a singular role. This novel deconstructs childhood and parenthood, as appears in Attys' narration regarding her unusual relationship with her parents as a young child. In one scene, for example, Attys describes those moments when she lay in between her parents during their sexual relations. These unconventional descriptions of family life reveal, in yet another way, this novel's in-betweenness. At this moment of the narration, Attys lies in between two realms or stages of life: infancy and adolescence, she returns to and exits her mother's womb as she pleases. This ability comes to an end, however, upon her entry into adolescence and her transformation into womanhood. Attys describes this crossover in a poetic, and ambiguous narration. In this scene, Attys appears to have her first sexual encounter, perhaps in the form of a rape, with "*el suicida*", a suicidal man she encounters at sea, the first manifestation of Gnosis in the narration. Following this dream-like encounter, Attys' body and mind are forever marked; she moves one step closer to knowledge. After informing her family, [ellos] "*pidieron que me transformara inmediatamente*", [they requested that I transform (myself) immediately] (Valdés 17). Following this encounter, Attys bleeds; her bleeding refers to her first menstrual cycle, as well as possibly her lost virginity. These two moments in the young woman's life, two different steps in womanhood, are conflated, blend into one. Although unclear whether this is a sexual encounter or merely a dream, after her menstrual flow, Attys attains knowledge, she knows. Attys gains access

to Gnosis, *knowledge*, passing from one stage to another. The crossing over into another stage of life, Attys' entry into adulthood marks a break with her family. As she explains:

En la cama de mi infancia mis padres gemían, abrí el camino entre los dos y cuando quise entrar en ella su vientre no cedió. Nunca más visité las entrañas de mi madre. Crecer tiene un precio, ahí está la medida, también dejé de volar y olvidé los estilos del delfín. Desde entonces nadé con la mediocridad de los terrestres. (Valdés 18)

[My parents moaned in the bed of my childhood, I opened a path between both of them but when I tried to enter her, her womb did not yield. I never again visited the insides of my mother. Growing up has a price; it's a requirement. I also stopped flying and forgot the ways of the dolphin. From that moment, I began to swim with the mediocrity of the terrestrials.]

As an adolescent, entering adulthood, Attys loses the ability to reenter her mother's womb, as well as her ability to fly and swim like the dolphins; she has lost her innocence. In *Jardín*, a similar scene concentrates on the protagonist's crossover into adulthood and attainment of knowledge. Bárbara, rummaging through her great-aunt's clothing, discovers and decides to wear an old white dress. Once on, she realizes that the dress is stained with blood spots. At first, the spots appear old to her, but then they seem new, emanating from her rather than from the dress. Panicking, "bruscamente se arrancó del cuerpo el traje a pedazos. Tenía ya la cara, las manos, los brazos embarrados de sangre. Y era sangre nueva, sangre fresca, recién derramada..." [she roughly tore off the pieces of her dress from her body. She had her face, hands and arms covered in blood. It was new blood, fresh blood, recently spilled...] (99). After the incident, she laughs, trying to dismiss what has happened. The blood appears to stem from a cut on her hand from a piece of broken glass. But once she declares out loud, "era mi sangre" [it was my blood], Bárbara turns somber; there is no hope for return to her pre-adolescent days. She knows and the narrator explains that "...ya no brillaba el sol por las juntas de las puertas, la tarde se había ido apagando afuera, y desaparecían en la sombra las arañas prendidas de mil luces, las saetas de oro cimbreantes, la lluvia bíblica y tremenda. Sólo quedaban en el jardín las ranas croando tristemente," [the sun no

longer shone through the cracks of the doors, the afternoon had begun darkening outside, and the spiders hanging from a thousand lights, the golden arrows shaking, the Biblical and terrible rain, began to disappear in the shadows. Only the sadly croaking frogs remained in the garden] (100). Thus, as in Sangre azul, the narration in Jardín appears unclear and ambivalent; it does not clearly state what occurs to the protagonist. Clearly, however, the presence of the blood in this novel symbolically makes reference to Bárbara's entry into womanhood.

There are other scenes in the first chapter of Sangre azul that turn to the various stages of Attys' life, including the increased solitude of adolescence. Yet, by the end of that chapter, readers discern that the first part of the narration has been an invention. Or as Attys exclaims, "la infancia uno se la inventa" [one invents one's childhood] (31). Thus, the last pages of chapter one act as a transition to chapter two, "De la invención de los otros" (On the Invention of Others). This chapter and those that follow, alternate between Attys' first-person narration, and that of a third-person narrator. These narrative jumps contribute to a blurring of teleology, as well as of reality, that allow for new versions, or retellings of Attys' story. Unlike the first chapter, where Attys' childhood and adolescent experiences follow a distinct chronological order, consistent with the fairy tale, in chapter two the narration, which include Attys' remembrances and the omniscient narrator's comments, flows back and forward in time. There is a tension between the real and the unreal that contests any notion of reality or Truth.

Whereas chapter one centers on Attys' happiness with her extended family, the following chapters tell a very different story, that of an only child living with a single mother and grandmother in a small apartment in Old Havana. Surreal, quasi-fantastic narrations appear immersed within the narration of this version of reality. One memorable narration describes the family cat's fatal fight with an oversized rat. What appears to be a surreal, unbelievable, incident becomes the topic of Glamoura's nosy neighbors. Their "version" of the story appears at odds with the narrator's surreal

tale; they all agree with the neighborhood gossip who declares, "Yo sabía que un buen día le iban a dar un navajazo, lo vengo pronosticando desde hace rato... Las mujeres bonitas nacen para eso, para la tragedia" [I knew that one good day they'd knife her, I have been saying it for a long time... Beautiful women are born for that, for tragedy] (36). Once more, reality and truth are relative in this novel; each individual reconstructs or rewrites his/her own version(s) of a story, in the same way that individuals reconstruct their identity.

There are several reconstructions of Truth that reappear in chapter two. Most of these focus on Attys' family, including the absent father, grandmother, stepfather and friends. Women dominate Attys' world; women who, in fact, rely on their creative powers to survive. Thus, like Chaviano, Valdés makes a correlation between women and creativity, and especially between the power of storytelling, or retelling, as a way of gaining a means of talking back. As I argue in chapter one, in addition to the artistic realm, in Latin American feminist/feminine texts the power to create often comes in the form of cooking. Valdés suggests quite the same in her representation of women in Sangre azul. Glamoura, Attys' mother is labeled an alchemist, a powerful magician, for her ability to prepare-create dishes without all the necessary ingredients. The figure of the elderly grandmother also constructs or creates, yet artistically. A former actress, *la abuela* teaches Attys about life's mise-en-scene, urging Attys to promise to be "an actress" like herself. Attys follows in her grandmother's footsteps, by choosing to "act", by "writing" and "rewriting" her life, into her narration(s). She creates her own storybook, or screenplay, in the form of a fairy tale, as a way of talking back to those that have silenced or abandoned her. As she explains to her stepfather:

¿Y a mí que me interesa que mi padre se haya largado? Es un hecho, ¿no? ¿Por qué tengo que cargar toda la vida con esta maldición? No soy la única hija de padre degenerado ni la única bastarda, y por suerte tampoco la única en soportar un padrasto tan imbécil... Eso sobra. ¡Yo he soñado mucho con mi padre, y lo he inventado! ¡Hasta inventé que íbamos a la playa, y que todos vivíamos juntos! ¡No quiero tocar más el tema! (65)

[And what do I care if my father left? It's a fact, right? Why do I have to carry this curse for the rest of my life? I'm not the only daughter of a degenerate father, nor am I the only bastard, and luckily, I'm not the only one to have to put up with an idiot stepfather... That's enough. I have dreamt a lot with my father, and I have invented him! I even made up that we used to go to the beach, and that we all lived together! I don't want to talk about this anymore!]

In much the same way as Chaviano's Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre, Sangre azul posits that writing and storytelling becomes the means by which women, caught in between spaces, forge a space from where to speak. Indeed, Attys returns to rewrite the classic fairy tale, to then offer other "versions" of reality, that exposes the inherently patriarchal elements of the fairy tale, as well as destabilizes any fixed notion of gendered, sexual or national identity.

Another way in which Sangre azul rewrites the fairy tale and confronts the issue of space and geography is through the representation of Gnoosis. This figure first appears in the initial chapter, and reappears again throughout the novel in Attys' dreamlike narrations. A conflation of several lovers and the father figure, Gnoosis represents all the men in (and outside) the protagonist's life, those belonging to reality and fantasy. As with the men in Jardín, the various versions of Gnoosis reflect the in-betweenness that characterizes Valdés' novel. He appears "in between" the multiple spaces that Attys traverses. He is present in the female protagonist's life in much the same way as the figure of the Prince dominates the traditional fairy tale. This multiple figure appears to accompany the protagonist through various spaces. Like Bárbara, Attys first travels abroad with one of these manifestations of Gnoosis. In "Gnoosis que no eres" (Gnoosis, You Are Not) Attys' reaffirms that she is *una irreal* (unreal) and *una ausente* (absent) (73). Thus, Valdés labels Attys in the same manner as Loynaz' Bárbara; these women appear to fall outside reality, they are isolated or *aislada*. Like Bárbara, Attys is caught in between spaces, in confusion in regards to her status in society and with her lover(s). Attys' doubts concerning her identity appear with her relationship with Gnoosis, or *aquel hombre* (that man). In her

narration, Attys cannot recall where and when she met Gnossis. She confuses the two cities where she has lived:

En París, en La Habana. Es que... en París soy tan habanera y en La Habana soy tan parisina que ni sé... Soy una irreal. Me gusta el trabajo. Le doy besos a la máquina de escribir. Este país, aquel, me deprime. No quiero vivir nunca más en el extranjero. ¿Realmente? Sí. Paradójicamente en aquel país, éste, vivimos en contacto directo con la guerra, en constante estado de sitio... (73)

[In Paris, in Havana. The thing is... in Paris I'm such a Habanera and in Havana I'm such a Parisian that I don't know... I'm an unreal [person]. I like work. I kiss my typewriter. This country, that country, depress me. I don't ever want to live again abroad. Really? Yes. In that country, in this one, we paradoxically live in constant contact with war, in constant state of siege...]

Attys is caught in between spaces; she is neither at home in Havana or in Paris. Like Bárbara, Attys is *una aislada*, caught in the middle, crossing back and forth through both time and space, as her erratic narration indicates. As Attys explains, "Los recuerdos transcurren rápidos. Yo salto en la memoria de un país a otro. De un amante a otro. No sé si pasó una semana o años..." [Memories pass quickly. I jump from one country to another in my memory. From one lover to another. I don't know if one week passed or years...] (92). Her narration reflects an ambiguity, the "confusing distinction" between the real and the fantastic. Yet, unlike the fairy tale where the Princess awaits the arrival of the Prince and the happy ending, this novel argues that there is no such thing as a 'true' happy ending, for individuals reconstruct their own reality.

Through the telling and retelling of real and imagined stories, Attys questions the fixity of identity and reality. Caught in-between lovers, friends and cities, she is beyond (or outside) nation and *the real*. No geographical space comforts her; rather, her space is not geographic but creative. Her space is that of storytelling and writing. Writing, like the sea, suggests fluidity. And thus, whereas the sea offers Bárbara an escape from her *aislamiento*, a space of her own, writing grants Attys freedom. And so, in order to write or create, Attys must isolate herself, *aislarse*, while

paradoxically this *aislamiento* offers her an escape from the limits imposed on her as a woman in transit, on either side of the Atlantic.

The final chapters in the novel return once again to fantasy, fairy tale, and dream narrations that comment upon women's power of creation. Flowing back and forth between time and space, the final pages of this novel center on Attys' pregnancy and childbirth. In dreamlike narrations that juxtapose reality and fantasy, the final chapter rewrites previous versions of reality, including the family. The father figure, for example, returns to take his place in the family. He appears to provide Attys with love and encouragement during her pregnancy. There is a reintegration of the family, a fairy tale happiness that Attys and narrator recreate in their narrations. Yet this happiness is constructed, it is based on the acceptance of stories and dreams as a form of reality. In these new versions of the family, the father appears powerful, however in truth, he is given that power by Attys, *la traviesa*, in her recreations/rewritings of him. Writing gives women a way a way of talking back, a way of rewriting family and nation. It is a powerful tool, a means of agency, even though it requires *aislamiento*.

In this novel, creation and the power of creation appear in narrations on pregnancy and childbirth that appear in the last chapter. Unable to tell who and where she is, Attys loses consciousness moments before going into labor. A stranger picks her up, gives her encouragement, and helps her during labor. The realism of childbirth quickly takes on a fantastic shape when the stranger's hands become covered in blue blood as he helps her give birth, not to a child, but rather to thousands of dolphins. The stranger, who stays by her side to help her educate "los niños azules" (the blue children), also counts and baptizes the nine thousand creatures. He leaves once he realizes his presence is no longer needed.

Following the fantastic narration of childbirth, there is a return to realism that breaks open the previous version. Alternating between the comments of a friend in the second person familiar

(tú form) and the third person thoughts of the unborn child, Valdés presents two different versions of one situation. On the one hand, Attys faces the hurtful, unending questions, comments and advice of her friends or relatives, regarding her choice to have a child out of wedlock. The comments reflect the cruelty of women against women, as well as greater society's ideas that a woman's life *must* change with motherhood. Attys must forget her studies, her writing, and her world:

Entonces, estás decidida a dejar la escuela. Mira que de un embarazo nadie se repone rápido. Olvida las ambiciones. Olvidate de escribir poemas y novelas. Un niño abarca todo. No tendrás tiempo ni para peinarte. ¡Es la mismísima esclavitud! Olvida cines, fiestas, olvida el mundo. Claro, es una esclavitud agradable hasta cierto punto, ¡son tan graciosos cuando tienen dos, tres, cuatro añitos! Pero al principio es un desasosiego interminable. ¿Tendrás nervios para aguantar? Pero, por supuesto, si tantas otras han podido, ¡no serás la excepción! Ahora, olvida hasta las lecturas. Hay que tener mucha concentración. (131-32)

[So, you've decided to leave school. Remember that nobody recuperates quickly from a pregnancy. Forget your ambitions. Forget about writing poems and novels. A child takes in everything. You won't have time to even comb your hair. It's slavery! Forget about movies and parties, forget the world. Of course, it's a pleasant slavery, up to a certain point. They're so cute when they're two, three or four years old. But at first, it's an endless chore. Do you think that you're capable? But of course, if so many others have been able to, you won't be the exception! But remember, forget reading. You have to have a lot of concentration.]

While Attys listens to the friend's advice, Taleb, within her womb, listens attentively to the conversation. Taleb, which means "student" in Arabic, is described by the narrator as "el cerebro más perfecto" [the perfect brain] (131). Having lived before, he is to be born again, reincarnated as Attys' son. His voyage within the womb is described in nautical terms; he is sailing towards his new life, waiting to reach land. He fears forgetting his previous life and friends, but it is inevitable and since he is helpless in this new situation, he decides to wait and forget in total darkness. In another narration / version of childbirth, nine thousand blue dolphins lead Taleb ashore and bring him to his new life. The presence of reincarnation in Sangre azul is revealing for it points to transnationalism. Taleb, an Arab, is reborn on an island (Cuba) as Arión. In Plotting Women, Jean Franco posits that

reincarnation, "undercuts any notion of fixed identity or any humanistic idea of the individual and introduces an idea of immortality quite different from that of Christianity or the secular immortality of great men" (179). Reincarnation questions reality, for time and space, both crucial to reality, are only real in the very moment itself. With each new life, the person forgets his/her previous life and begins a *new* reality again.

In conclusion, in Sangre azul, Zoé Valdés questions Truth and reality, to suggest the fantastic as a sort of reality, one that allows individuals a way of coping within multiple spaces. Writing and creation becomes a third space, a space that gives women a voice, as well as a means of talking back. To write and rewrite contests the notion of an overarching Truth, and alludes to the idea of possible versions of reality, of possible "truths". Dreaming, daydreaming, creating stories, become ways of responding to life's unending questions.

Although half a century separates Dulce María Loynaz and Zoé Valdés and their novels, there are numerous similarities between these two Cuban women and their work. Writing from markedly different experiences, as well as historical periods, Loynaz and Valdés may appear to us as worlds apart from one another. Yet a close reading of Jardín and Sangre azul point to shared interests: themes and narrative techniques that question traditional notions of nation, as well as gender and national identities. The incorporation and rewriting of the fairy tale in both works suggest the inexorability of reality and fantasy in the formulation of identity and as a means of survival within fixed spaces. Both Loynaz and Valdés' works are perennially caught in-between spaces, suggesting new ways of imagining identity. In Sangre azul, Valdés rewrites those very issues that Loynaz first problematized and brings readers back to the heart of Loynaz's novel, back to the fluid *sangre azul* (blue blood) or *mar azul* (blue sea) to help redefine Cuban identity. Like the paradoxical island, these authors and their characters *se aislan*, or isolate themselves as a means of creating a space of their own. Unlike those works found in the male-dominated Cuban Canon,

for which for the most part envision a Cuban identity that is firmly rooted in the island itself, *afincado*, the works of Loynaz and Valdés suggest a movable and fluid identity. In addition to incorporating various literary genres into their work, including the autobiography and fantasy, these women center on the crossing of borders or spaces in their work, thereby suggesting a transnational view of Cuban literature and culture. By analyzing the work of these women in-transit, this study ultimately attempts to redefine the Cuban Canon. For rather than inserting these women's work into the Canon, I argue the impossibility and pitfalls of such categorization. The Cuban Canon needs to be viewed as one in continual flux, inclusive of works by Cuban men and women, of writers producing work on and off island, and just as importantly beyond political or religious dogma. It cannot be viewed simply as a list of particular authors and their works, but rather must be recognized as transnational, in the same manner that Cuban culture, like the island, both anchors and sets free those who wish to adopt it.

PART II

BIRTH OF (LA) PATRIA: NATION AND GENDER IN LA NADA COTIDIANA

Unlike Sangre azul, where nation and gender appear beneath the surface, enmeshed in fantastic narrations, Zoé Valdés' third novel La nada cotidiana, published in 1995, represents and confronts nation and gender openly. In La nada cotidiana, Valdés uses a pseudo-autobiographical style, as in Sangre azul to narrate the trials and tribulations of Patria, the thirty-something Cuban protagonist. Born in May 1959, Patria is born with, and grows up with the Revolution. In her narration, *Patria*, the protagonist, confronts *La Patria*, the nation. However, in La nada cotidiana Valdés goes beyond Sangre azul to rewrite herself and her first novel. In La nada cotidiana, the protagonist's narration recounts personal experiences, as well as those of friends and family within and outside Cuban society. In addition, her narration reveals a gradual disillusionment with the social and political system under which she is born. In this novel, Valdés underscores the violence and inherent doubling present in contemporary Cuban society through the use of various discursive strategies and narrative techniques, and points to the perpetual in-betweenness in which all Cubans are caught. Yet in-betweenness in La nada cotidiana goes beyond the one portrayed in Sangre azul. Whereas in Sangre azul, Valdés portrays Attys in between fantasy and reality, between spaces (Paris and Havana) and between lovers, to rewrite various versions of "truth", in La nada cotidiana in-betweenness goes beyond the personal to include the national. Tied to this in-betweenness, lies doubling, a term that describes both the metamorphoses of characters within this work and Cuban society and the technique that contributes to the structuring of the novel. Through the use of dichotomies and stereotypical characters, "doubles" between each other and themselves, Valdés represents various individuals living within revolutionary Cuban society. Devoid of complete names, these characters reveal their construction and point to the constructed nature of nation and identity. Moreover, unlike Sangre azul where nation is noted precisely for its absence,

La nada cotidiana deconstructs and demystifies the nation and its heroes openly, it represents a patriarchal family "*en derrumbe*" (in decline), falling apart like the (Cuban) nation itself. Despite its open contestation of the Cuban situation, this novel, like "la nada" (nothingness) of the title, neither offers nor suggests solutions for society's problems. There's an apparent sense of fatality in La nada cotidiana, an allusion to a *deus ex machina* behind the scenes of this Cuban *mise-en-scène*, and the personification of nothingness, La Nada, who toys with the fates of Cuba's Special Period "characters".

La nada cotidiana begins with an omniscient narrator's dreamlike and lyrical third person description of a young island woman who discovers herself (dead) in Purgatory. The first chapter "Morir por la patria es vivir" (To Die For the Patria is to Live) begins with the line, "Ella viene de una isla que quiso construir el paraíso..." [She comes from an island that wanted to construct Paradise...] (Valdés, La nada 15). This line is significant for various reasons. First, it signals the recurrent themes to which this novel refers; the life of Ella (She) or woman (Patria), her island Cuba (La Patria) and their inexorable histories, both reborn in 1959. Secondly, the line "Ella viene de una isla..." reveals the chapter's and the novel's construction, for the work opens and closes with this very sentence. This statement encloses the novel, and makes reference to the novel that Patria, the protagonist, writes. As for the title of the chapter "Morir por la patria es vivir", is important for several reasons. First and foremost, the title makes reference to the last line of the Cuban national anthem. However, here it serves as title of the chapter, pushed to the beginning rather than end. Secondly, "Morir por la patria es vivir", appears as the first chapter of both the outer novel (La nada cotidiana) as well as the one Patria writes. From the outset, this novel places great emphasis on Cuba's history, its teleology and its effects on Cuban citizens, including Patria. In this work, Valdés literally inverts and thus subverts Cuban teleology. She incorporates historical icons, such as the phrase "Morir por la patria es vivir" to deconstruct and rewrite the nation. This

novel, like Sangre azul, centers on the rewriting and telling of personal and public histories, both the protagonist's (Patria) and the nation's (La Patria).

Whereas the first chapter uses an omniscient narrator to describe a young island woman in Purgatory, subsequent chapters turn to the first person, pseudo-autobiographical narration of the protagonist, Patria. The thirty-something Patria finds herself frustrated with her life and the daily "nothingness", or *la nada cotidiana* that encircles her. As her narration ensues, readers discern that the figure of Ella in the first chapter, is Patria's character from the novel she writes. In many ways, Ella serves as Patria's alter ego, like Arlena to Ana in Chaviano's Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre; they are women caught in between spaces. In addition the first chapter, which is presumably the beginning of Patria's novel, as well as her first person narration, following chapters point to the ways in which Patria talks back to *La Patria*, to a nation that has excluded her from its narration. In La nada cotidiana, as in other contemporary feminist works, writing and narration become the means by which the female protagonist represents and questions contemporary Cuban society.

In La nada cotidiana, Valdés presents readers with a series of dichotomies, some directly related to conditions within the nation, others transcending the national, to describe the varying extremes found in contemporary Cuban society. In this work, Valdés engages the contrasting themes of good/evil and Paradise/Hell. These dichotomies and doubling help structure this work. The protagonist finds herself in-between two realms, between two possibilities. And the novel, La nada cotidiana, like Sangre azul, appears caught in-between spaces and canons, as well, for its style and production. Written inside Cuba, then smuggled off the island, La nada cotidiana was published in Spain in 1995. It may be described as a novel about inner and outer exile, about the condition of exile or alienation both on and off Cuba. Like contemporary Cuban novels produced on the island and in the Diaspora, La nada cotidiana connotes the in-betweenness that permeates

contemporary Cuban society, an in-betweenness that describes Cuban authors and their literature. In Valdés' work, the in-betweenness breaks open the construction of nation, to challenge dominant discourses and point to the perpetual doubling, or dichotomization, of Cuban society. In-betweenness appears early in the narration, in Patria's chapter "Morir por la patria es vivir". Set in the liminal space Purgatory, the realm between Heaven and Hell, this chapter refers to both the actual space (state) where Patria's protagonist and alter ego, Ella, finds herself after death (or before her birth?), as well as to Patria's place within revolutionary society. Moreover, Purgatory refers to *La Patria's*, the nation's state or space. On yet another level, Purgatory refers to the in-between (mental) state between life and death. At the conclusion of chapter one, the island woman (Ella) receives another opportunity at life on the island. Chapter one, perhaps, alludes to reincarnation, as *Sangre azul* does with Taleb. But, if this is the case, in *La nada cotidiana* reincarnation offers only a Cuban return. Patria's "Ella" is given (back) life, and a chance to return to her island but a question remains, to what is she returning?

In addition to referring to the island woman's (Ella) return to life, "Morir por la patria es vivir" may also be read as Patria's mother's return to life, following a difficult labor. In chapters one and two, Valdés conflates the figures of mother and daughter, both figure fading in and out of life and death, and fade into each other. More importantly, after Patria's birth, as well as at other crucial moments in her life, Aída, her mother, also (mentally) leaves the present. She exits to other psychological realms. In effect, midway through the novel, Aída becomes *La lida*, the confused one (she who is gone). Thus, although Valdés rewrites the figure of Glamoura, the mother in *Sangre azul*, into Aída, there are differences between women. In *Sangre azul*, Glamoura loses her memory upon her husband's abandonment; her memory loss is due to personal reasons only. In *La nada cotidiana*, Aída also loses her memory and turns childlike and fearful, following a series of calamities. But Aída's memory loss has as much to do with the personal, as with the national.

Diverse events, such as the death of El Che, her husband's imprisonment and her daughter's failed marriages, all become catalysts for Aída's "absence" from the lives of Patria (daughter) and La Patria (nation). Although Aída's *aislamiento* does not allow for agency, it nevertheless permits her to cope with her individual losses.

Besides hinting at the (individual) protagonist's place in nation, "Morir por la patria es vivir", sets the stage for the novel's representation and reworking of the nation and its citizens. First, the third person narration presents the various philosophical dilemmas this novel engages. "Morir por la patria es vivir" denotes both the nation-state, "la patria", as well as name given to the novel's protagonist, Patria. To die (*morir*) in this novel becomes equated with living or *vivir*, and real death possibly serves as an escape from *la nada*. The interrelating of verbs with opposite meanings, of dichotomies such as *vivir* and *morir*, is crucial in this work, hinting once again at the contradictory doubling or duality present in contemporary Cuban society. The use of "Morir por la patria es vivir" as title, as well as these verbs connotes the idea of the model citizen, or more specifically, the hero who gives his life for La Patria. Secondly, these dichotomies underline others, such as inside/outside, Cuba/The United States, Cuba/Spain, *gusano/revolucionario*, *exilio/insilio*, inherent in the construction of Cuban identity, from its earliest inception to the present. Rather than continue to perpetuate these dichotomies, La nada cotidiana exposes them as constructions and contests the notion of the Cuban hero who dies for La Patria. Rather than propose the patriotic stance "to die for one's country is to live," Valdés inverts the intended meaning, and suggests the opposite, to live in La Patria is to die. Life in contemporary Cuba resembles a virtual death sentence, and real death is preferable to "living" in the nation-state.

La nada cotidiana does not appear to offer solutions or thoughts about the future of (*La*) *Patria*. As the narrator explains in chapter one, "Tiene hambre y nada qué comer. Su estómago comprende muy bien que debe resistir. En su isla, cada parte de su cuerpo debía aprender a

resistir. El sacrificio era la escena cotidiana, como la nada. Morir y vivir: el mismo verbo, como por ejemplo reír. Sólo que reía para no morir a causa del exceso de vida obligatoria" [She's hungry but has nothing to eat. Her stomach understands well that she must resist. On her island, each part of her body must learn how to resist. Sacrifice was the everyday reality, as is nothingness. To die and to live: the same verb, as, for example, to laugh. Only that she laughs in order not to die from the excess of compulsory living] (16). Both Patria, the protagonist of Valdés' novel, and "Ella," her character present the philosophical dilemma(s) of living on this island-nation. La nada cotidiana hints at Patria's (and other characters) complicit participation in nation, referring to *la doble moral* the double standards present in contemporary Cuban society. *La doble moral* is a double movement; a doubling that takes precedence in an individual's life. It is an individual and societal hypocrisy, one that helps individuals survive within their contradictory society. *La doble moral* spurs the acting out or performance in between and among individuals within the nation. In "Morir por la patria es vivir", for example, Angel, the angel-like creature, accompanies Ella in Purgatory, and tells her to be leery of all discourses. He exclaims, "[es mejor ser] ignorante que nostálgico", [it is better to be ignorant than nostalgic] (17). And adds, "Me refiero a todas las criaturas igual a usted, inocente y a la vez culpable... Las criaturas conscientes e inconscientes..." [I refer to all creatures like you, innocent and at the same time guilty... Conscious and unconscious creatures...] (18). Innocent *and* guilty, Angel's comment suggests the personal complicity in society. His words suggest caution and hypocrisy as necessary, "uno no puede ser una cosa y otra a la vez. Hay que ser prudente" [one cannot be one thing and another at the same time. One has to be prudent] (18). No one is to be trusted. Thus, characters in La nada cotidiana participate consciously and unconsciously in La Patria, the nation. As a consequence of *la doble moral*, characters are dishonest; they bury their true feelings out of fear. *La doble moral* appears tied to the perpetual violence within nation, the inherent violence found in patriarchal revolutionary and military

societies. In addition, *la doble moral* is yet another example of the doubling that helps structure this novel.

Intricately tied to *la doble moral* and doubling, are the various dichotomies to which La nada cotidiana refers, including good/evil and paradise/hell. In "Morir por la patria es vivir", Angel represents Satan, the fallen angel, and like Ella, Angel finds himself in-between two realms, Earth (the terrestrial) and Heaven (the spiritual). At first, it is unclear as to whether his presence in Purgatory is as representative of "one side or another" (good or evil) or whether he is there to be judged. Ella encounters Angel when she awakens (into a true state). He asks her, "¿usted cayó aquí por accidente? [did you fall here by accident?]" (Valdés 17). Ultimately, Angel falls, presumably to Hell, and La Nada appears, nothingness personified, to judge and decide Ella's fate, and in a sense foreshadowing Patria's life, as well. With fifty points for entry into Heaven and fifty points into Hell, the decision as to where to send Ella (Patria's character and alter ego) falls entirely on La Nada. She orders Ella to leave Purgatory, to return to island. Is La Nada's decision an act of punishment or forgiveness? Is the island Heaven or Hell, Paradise (Paradiso?) or Inferno? The island figure in La nada cotidiana represents, therefore, an in-between state, like Purgatory. The island is a paradoxical space where characters are alive but dead. Yet, paradoxical as well, these apparently dead individuals live out their life in La Patria, the island-nation. These characters live out life on the island, *en espera*; they are in a societal limbo, waiting for something to occur, hoping for a change of venue. In the chapter "Morir por la patria es vivir", those who are dead appear to be given another chance to live out life, a chance to return or be reborn. Yet La Nada decides, their fates lie out of their control. Reflective of the social, political and economic situation on the island, the protagonists Patria and Ella must ultimately follow the designs of those in power in La Patria.

Staying and leaving, *insilio* and *exilio* are intricately tied to doubling and *la doble moral*. In La nada cotidiana, these contradictory terms, or dichotomies, are also associated with life and

death. As the narrator explains in "Morir por la patria es vivir", "En el momento que cree que debe partir pierde las fuerzas, la esperanza... Perderse... Nosotros mismos... Uno debe partir... Allá habrá eternamente un sitio, un país que nos espera... una nada que nos espera... una nada enternecedora" [At the very moment she thinks she should flee, she loses her strength, her hope... to become last... ourselves... one should leave... There we will eternally find a place, a country that awaits us... a nothingness that awaits us... a endearing nothingness] (17). To leave is as painful as staying. And La Nada is present in the lives of those that stay and leave. In "Morir por la patria es morir", la nada offers *esperanza*. To leave represents more than just an exit from Purgatory, or a return to "life", to leave is the painful opening of a wound (or womb?). As La Nada explains: "Estoy aquí para explicarle la razón por la cual debe usted partir. Vacila, no quiere saber. No le gusta conocer, porque conocer para ella significa abrir brutalmente una cicatriz" [I'm here to explain the reason why you should leave. Wake up, you don't want to know. You don't want to know, because to know for her equals brutally opening a wound] (19). Cuban poet Raúl Rivero describes the heartfelt pain of leaving in the essay "Irse es un desastre" ("To Leave is a Disaster"). As Rivero explains, "Irse es un desastre. Una catástrofe íntima. Un derrumbe total en el que se ve cómo desaparecen casas, calles, parques, personas, borradas por una fuerza en progreso que, finalmente, saca del paisaje el entramado de una vida" [To leave is a disaster. It is an intimate catastrophe. A total crumbling during which one sees the disappearance of houses, streets, parks, persons, all erased by an ongoing force which, finally, removes from the scene the structure of a life] (146). The concepts *to stay* or *to leave* are paramount in many works by Cuban writers on and off the island. In La nada cotidiana, there is a focus on exilio and insilio, in particular turning to Patria's personal experiences with friends who left the island (exilio), and others, like herself, that opt for inner alienation (*insilio*) or *aislamiento*. In La nada cotidiana, as in Jardín, and Sangre azul, to *aislarse* becomes both a vehicle of escape, as well as a way to return, *Aislamiento* offers a

space for dialogue, it seeks to bridge the gap between staying and leaving, between those who stayed and those who left. *Aislamiento* seeks to create an imaginary space from which to speak and converse. Despite being apart, friends and family continue to be in tune with one another; each member's pain felt by those in/habiting other spaces. As Raúl Rivero suggests:

Doy entonces testimonio de ese desastre individual que es irse. Y prefiero creer que son los relumbres finales de una luz opalescente que, como diría el otro, agoniza. Ahora sabemos, por todo lo que está pasando Cuba, que en el espacio que existe entre irse y volver hay que fundar la permanencia, porque permanecer siempre será un antídoto contra el desencanto. Y un veneno para el olvido. (1998-1999, 147)

[I give, therefore, a testimony of the personal disaster that is to leave. And I prefer to believe that they are the final dazzle of an opaque light that as the other would say, agonizes. We now know, because of everything occurring in Cuba, that in the space that exists between leaving and returning one must forge endurance, because to endure will always be an antidote against disillusionment. And a poison for forgetting.]

The anthropologist James Clifford writing on migration and culture, describes the "migrant souls" as "traveling/dwelling... in diverse cultural spaces" (Stefanko 50). In the case of Cuba, history has played a crucial role in the development of a trans-island Cuban culture. The concept of staying and leaving has been an important part of Cuban literature on and off the island since before 1959, although more pronounced following the Revolution.¹⁰ According to Cuban novelist and playwright Abilio Estévez, his writing, like Cuban culture, is in the end "an act of faith". Alluding, perhaps to Fernando Ortiz's ideas on *cubanía*, Estévez envisions contemporary Cuban literature as the desire for a common language based on memory and culture and that seeks to reconstruct an "Island of all Cubans, of every time and place" (Behar 1994, 442). This desire to create the personal island, a moveable space within oneself, is what Madeline Cámara refers to as *la tercera opción* (the third option), an area of agreement or dialogue between Cuban and Cuban-American intellectuals on the island and in the Diaspora. The third option attempts to "rescue that other history of our country hidden by the manipulations of political power" of Exile leaders and the

Revolutionary government, and it intends to return to the "origins of culture" without falling into the ideological trap of those discourses that fill Cuban history books (Cámara 1994, 729). In La nada cotidiana, Zoé Valdés suggests, as well, a Cuban culture that lies in between and across multiple spaces, on the island and in the Diaspora.

In chapter one of this study, I posit that in their literature, exiles place great importance on history and its effects on the individual. In La nada cotidiana Valdés, like Chaviano, returns to (rewrite) contemporary history. In addition to focusing on exile and/or insilio, Patria's first person narration centers on two events that are intricately tied: the January 1959 Cuban Revolution, and her birth in May 1959. In "Heroico nacimiento" (Heroic Birth) and subsequent chapters, Patria narrates her life, personal moments that coincide with contemporary Cuban history. Her narration begins with the detailed account of moments before her birth, while still inside her mother's womb. In the vivid narration, Patria discusses her mother's labor pains, as well as the delivery. Her narration conflates the personal and the political, childbirth and Revolution. Hand in hand with Patria's birth comes the birth of "La Patria", or rather, the rebirth of La Patria. Like Patria's protagonist "Ella", given a second chance at life by La Nada, *La Patria* also receives a second chance in 1959 with the triumph of the Revolution. However, for both Patria *and* La Patria, this second chance at life transforms into a slow death, into *la nada cotidiana* (the daily nothingness).

La nada cotidiana conflates Woman (Patria) and Nation (La Patria) early on. A connection between the (re)birth of the protagonist and the nation first appears during a political rally led by Fidel Castro. As occurs with all characters, in this work the Cuban leader is only referred to by his military title, "Comandante". Aída, Patria's mother, begins to experience labor pains while listening to *El Comandante's* famous May Day speech. She goes into labor, appropriately enough, therefore, on Labor Day, *el día de los trabajadores*. There, accompanied by her husband-turned-revolutionary, Aída meets *el Che*, who touches her belly and drapes her in the Cuban flag. In great

pain, however, Aída barely notices the Che's presence. Despite her veneration for him, she simply desires to flee from her body and from her surroundings. *Huir* (to flee) becomes yet another one of the verbs that dominate *La nada cotidiana*, as is *esperar*, with its dual meanings of "to wait" and "to hope". Described as "el dolor de la espera," (the pain of the wait), Aída painfully awaits the arrival of her baby.

In "El arte de la espera," Rafael Rojas posits that Cuban society accustomed to waiting, it is a society "in waiting". He explains: "El que espera, a diferencia del que está esperando, no aguarda por algo edificante o redentor, sino que, más bien, sobrevive en esa oquedad de significados que ofrece el tiempo, en ese abandono desértico que funda la historia" [Those that wait, unlike those with hope, do not await for something edifying or redeeming, rather, appears to survive in the hollowness that time offers, in the desert-like abandonment on which history is based] (146). And Rojas adds, "en la cultura cubana, por ejemplo, el arte de la espera se ha vuelto un oficio recurrente" [in Cuban culture, for example, the art of waiting has become a repetitive experience] (147). According to Rojas, in contemporary Cuban society everyone waits, from Cuban politicians, who see themselves as messiahs and (would-be) liberators, and await the arrival or success of transforming revolutions in other parts of Latin America, to ordinary citizens that await changes (material, economic, political and spiritual) in Cuban society. According to Rojas, "[ellos] aguardan un cambio, para ellos indiscernible, cuyos desconocidos efectos no siempre compensan o alivian su malestar diario," [they await a change, for them indistinguishable, whose unknown effects do not always alleviate or compensate their daily discomfort] (147). I would add that the wait or waiting in Cuban culture goes beyond the socio-political or economic situation to manifest itself in the personal. In "Sala de Espera", Raúl Rivero expresses *la espera* as personal. He writes, "Hace 48 horas que te espero/ aunque sé que no vienes/ Lo importante es que no deje de esperarte/ porque me quedo yo sin esperanza/ y tú sin nadie que te espere en La Habana" [It's

been 48 hours that I wait for you/ although I know that you won't come/ What's important is that I don't cease to wait/ because I'd remain hopeless/ and you'd be without anyone waiting for you in Havana] (Rivero 1998, 109). For Rivero, a society in waiting is tied to the separation of two parts, of those who stayed behind (in Havana) and those who left. *La espera* (the wait) is the reunion of two parts, as Lezama Lima suggests in personal letters to his sisters. In his letters, Lezama stresses that both sides await an ultimate reunion, and suggests that both sides are incomplete without the other. In a 1966 letter to Rosita, Lezama writes "La vida de todos nosotros, los que se fueron y los que se quedaron, es en extremo trágico. A veces me siento como un perro que necesita un poco de amor. Yo tengo la tierra, ustedes la familia, a los dos nos falta la mitad, que nos hace seres incompletos y tristes..." [All our lives, of those who left and those who stayed, is tragic to the extreme. I often feel like a dog that needs a little love. I have the earth, you the family, both of us are lacking half, that make us incomplete and sad beings...] (Lezama 1998, 109). In a July 1965 letter to Eloísa, he writes about his longing to see them again, stressing "aunque espero, espero" [although I wait and hope] (99).

La nada cotidiana represents a Cuban society in waiting, awaiting political or social changes, as well as spiritual or personal ones. Like previous Cuban works, in La nada cotidiana, Zoé Valdés returns to *la espera* to convey various issues regarding nation and gender. On a superficial level, *la espera* refers to desires for political or economic changes. On another level, *la espera* may also allude to the idea of feminine passivity, of women and waiting within nation. And finally, *la espera* relates to the return of the other half, the idea that the Cuban subject is destined incomplete without the return of his/her "other". Various levels of "waiting" appear in La nada cotidiana, but most prevalent is this novel's focus on the personal wait, the ways in which characters are intertwined, unable to function within their inhabited spaces without their "others". These figures continue to be tied to those in (or inhabiting) other spaces. Valdés' obsession with the incomplete exiled self appears in most of her work, including her poetry. In "Ante la correspondencia", from the 1996 collection Vagón para fumadores, Valdés' poetic I expresses the following:

No quiero leer las cartas que vienen de La Habana
 reconozco la firma de la ausencia a trasluz
 Mejor no rasgo los sobres
 no me precipito sobre los duendes
 y me hundo en la bobería de la mañana
 No quiero equivocarme noticias
 recibir tanta alegría de golpe
 que después enseguida se convertirá en tristeza
 o puede estar la muerte acechante en cada línea. (53)

[I don't want to read the letters that come from Havana
 I recognize the signature of absence in the light
 It's better if I don't scratch the envelopes
 I don't hurry over the elves
 and I sink into the silly morning
 I don't want to confuse the news
 to suddenly receive so much happiness
 and then suddenly it will turn into sadness
 or death could be lurking in each line.]

The exiled poetic "I" shies away from receiving news from the island, fearful of suddenly coming

face to face with either extreme happiness or sadness. She then adds, however,

Pero necesito la mala ortografía de mi madre
 leer el mentón las piernas de mi amante
 sus expediciones/ la pelambre de mi gata dejada en un rincón
 Quiero el martirio de mi primo/ sus debilidades en mi parque
 El mar gota a gota ¿entrará en las palabras?
 no peguen sellos sobre él/ cuéntenme qué fue de mis sandalias gastadas
 de aquel Viejo libro de princesas árabes
 y de mi café con leche cuando había. (53)

[But I need my mother's bad spelling
 read the chin, the legs of my lover
 his expeditions
 my cat's fur left in the corner
 I want the suffering of my cousin
 his weaknesses in my park
 Will the sea, drop by drop, enter my words?
 don't place stamps over him
 tell me what happened to my old sandals
 to the old book about Arab princesses
 and of my café con leche when we had some.]

Valdés' poetic voice, like those of her characters in her novels, displays a to and fro movement in regards to her relationship with those remaining on the island. The poetic I, like Patria wishes to flee the island and everything on it, but they can never completely do so. A "personal" part of them still resides in Cuba; they are unable to entirely break free from those that have stayed behind, or from images of their former lives on the island. They realize that they are forever caught in-between these two sides (inside/outside, on/off, exile/insilio), unable to become whole without the other.

In La nada cotidiana Zoé Valdés demystifies both family and personal relationships, as well as patriotic or national elements present in Cuban society. This novel represents and exposes different members in Cuban society, and in doing so points to the inherent doubling and *la doble moral* in which all Cubans participate. Elena Luz, *la doctora guerrillera*, is one of several contradictory revolutionary characters in the work. As a doctor, Elena Luz assists Aída during labor, yet she does so by "batuqueándole la barriga", or hitting Aída's stomach in an attempt to hasten delivery.¹¹ Thus, even before her birth, Patria is introduced to militancy and violence, preparing her for a society at (or waiting for) war. The guerrilla doctor represents life *and* death, peace and war. As a revolutionary, Elena Luz fought side by side with the rebels in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Therefore, she received training in military strategy. As a doctor, specifically an obstetrician, Elena Luz learned to save lives, and bring forth lives. Yet as seen in her treatment

of her pregnant patient, Elena Luz practices "war medicine"; she combines medical training with war tactics. Her presence in the narration is vital for she transports both mother and baby from near death back to "life" (death). Like *La Nada*, Elena Luz chooses life (or decides) for both Aída and Patria. Verbs take on special significance in this novel, as Patria comments, for her mother "se acabó el dolor" [the pain is over], but for her "acaba de empezar" [it has just begun]. To live (*vivir*) and to die (*morir*) are conflated, as are woman and nation. And living and dying become synonymous with (living in) the nation-space (Cuba).

Although in *La nada cotidiana*, the patriarchal family appears intact, it is ultimately deconstructed as in *Sangre azul*. In *La nada cotidiana*, mother *and* father are present in the early life of the protagonist, yet they remain powerless through the narration. Although physically present, they are emotionally absent from Patria's life. And whereas Patria gives her mother Aída a name in her narration, her father, symbol of patriarchal power, remains nameless. In her narration, Patria unveils the constructed nature of patriarchy by appropriating the naming mechanism, mocking her father's macho stance and his desires to be patriotic. The nameless father is not a hero; although supportive of the Revolution, he does so only after its success. Like others in his society, the father's words do not match his actions. He too reflects a doubling, as well societal hypocrisy, *la doble moral* that permeates Cuban society. From the outset, Patria has an ambivalent relationship with both her parents, but more so with her father whose imposing views befall her from the very moment of birth. He scolds her for not having lived up to her filial and revolutionary duty. As she explains, "ya comenzaban a reprocharme el no haber cumplido con mi deber revolucionario" [they had already begun to reproach me for not having carried out my revolutionary duty] (Valdés 26). Her birth minutes into May 2nd, rather than on May 1st, causes her father great distress and he argues, "Debió haber nacido ayer, por dos minutos es hoy, ¡qué barbaridad! ¡Debió haber nacido el Primero de Mayo! No se lo perdono a ninguna de las dos..." [She should've

been born yesterday, by two minutes it's today. What barbarity! She should've been born on May first. I won't forgive either one of you...] (Valdés, *La nada* 26).

Patria's "heroic" birth, then, is far from heroic: her treacherous act is having been born outside the Revolution's established celebrations or dates. Her birth, on May 2nd, just outside the Revolution's teleology, follows her throughout her life. Although positive words from a doctor remind Patria's father of the significance of this date: "No coja lucha, compañero, este día también se conmemora una fecha importante, el Día de los Episodios Nacionales, los Fusilamientos en Madrid, el cuadro pintado por Goya, ¿lo recuerda?" [Don't worry, comrade, on this day we also celebrate an important date, the day of the National Episodes, the executions in Madrid, Goya's painting, do you remember it?] (26), he ignores him. The doctor's words are not persuasive given that the father is unfamiliar with this historical moment in history. The father's main concern is with *his* (patriarchal) Revolution. May 2nd falls into another teleology, pre-1959, in effect, European history, and refers to Spain's battles against Napoleon's forces. This date, alludes to moments before the (re)birth of the nation, to moments before the birth of (La) Patria.

Despite his anger over the birth of his daughter on a non-revolutionary date, the father, nonetheless, names his child Patria. By naming her, the father attempts to place power over her, to decide her fate, like La Nada and Elena Luz. He goes as far as to compare himself to Cuba's previous father figures, including Cuba's first president, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. He exclaims: "...¡Patria! ¡Patria es un nombre muy original! ... ¡Soy el padre, el padre de Patria, de la Patria! El Padre de la Patria! ¡Carlos Manuel de Céspedes! ¡El primero que liberó a sus esclavos! ¡Qué par de cojones, qué toletón!" [Patria! Patria is an original name! I'm the father, the father of the Patria, of the Patria! The father of the Patria! Carlos Manuel de Céspedes! The first to free his slaves! What balls, what virility!] (26). However, Patria's narration reflects a mocking stance toward him: "Y mi padre, emocionado, sollozó creyéndose glorioso" [And my father, emotional, cried believing

himself glorious] (26). First, although the father names his daughter, in *her* narration, Patria does not even bother to give her father a name. In her narration, she ridicules and satirizes his *hombria* (manliness), challenging his power over her. Second, through her portrayal of the father, Patria's narration exposes the patriarchal nature of nation-formation.

In *La nada cotidiana*, as in *Sangre azul*, Valdés plays with time and chronology. As opposed to the first two chapters that follow a chronological timeline, subsequent chapters in *La nada cotidiana* divert from a linear teleology. Patria's narration goes back and forth to focus on her own personal experiences and of those around her. As Trinh Minh-ha asserts, a story need not have a “prefabricated schemata” of a beginning, middle (climax) and an end, as Western (masculine) logic suggests. As Trinh Minh-ha explains,

Life is not a (Western) drama of four or five acts. Sometimes it just drifts along; it may go on year after year without development, without climax, without definite beginnings or endings. Or it may accumulate climax upon climax, and if one chooses to mark it with beginnings or endings, then everything has a beginning and an ending. There are, in this sense, no good or bad stories. (1989, 143)

Indeed, Trinh Minh-ha also points out that, “in life, we usually don't know when an event is occurring; we think it is starting when it is already ending; and we don't see its in/significance” (143). Whereas the first two chapters in *La nada cotidiana* forge a deliberate connection between Patria and La Patria, following chapters sever that connection, to expose both Patria (identity) and La Patria (the nation) as ambiguous constructions. In fact, as Patria, the protagonist's life follows a linear, chronological (Western patriarchal) logic, whereas as Yocandra, once she has named herself, her narration flows freely, contesting masculine narration(s). This novel represents the ambiguous duality, or doubling, subjects experience within the nation. Characters live a duality, what Patria calls *normalidad dual* (double normalcy), and participate in *la doble moral*. Patria and others participate in *la Patria*, often falsely or against her true feelings. They succumb to society's demands, therefore complicit, or choose to escape society by leaving *la patria* either physically or

mentally. Some characters leave, become *idos*, by turning inward into madness or inner exile, while others physically leave the nation-space, becoming exiles. Even those in exile, however, continue to live the nation, no matter in what space they find themselves, *aislamiento* appears in both spaces. To stay or to leave are intricately tied: individuals are unable to sever their union with those in other spaces.

In her narration, Patria turns often to characters and events that reveal *la doble moral*, or societal hypocrisy by which many live. This *normalidad dual* appears in the personal, or the private space, as in the political (public) sphere. In chapter three, "Yocandra, entre el terror y el pudor" (Yocandra, Between Terror and Modesty), for example, Patria narrates her personal life as well as the political/social situation her nation faces. Many of the novel's main philosophical queries, unending questions that reveal both Patria's particular doubts, as well as la Patria's, as a whole appear in this chapter:

Anoche en mi cama durmió un traidor, antenoche un nihilista. ¿Cuánto hace que vivo esta pasión agotadora de alternar mis deseos? ¿Por qué intento continuar con uno lo que no pude terminar con el otro? ¿Acaso necesito vivir subrayando la diferencia? ¿Conviene extenderse en el drama humano del tiempo? ¿Por qué habrá que pensar tanto y tanto en los días que pasan? ¿Será necesaria esta normalidad dual, ese transcurrir de los instintos al análisis, o viceversa, desconfiando de todos modos? ¿Qué es toda esta emoción antigua que invade el silencio cuando me doy cuenta de que aún respiro? ¿O es tan sólo que estoy viviendo la crisis de los treinta y pico de años? (28-29)

[Last night a traitor slept in my bed, the night before a nihilist. How long has it been that I live this tiring passion of altering my desires? Why do I try to continue with one what I couldn't finish with the other? Is it perhaps that I must live underlining difference? Is it convenient to extend oneself into the human drama that is time? Why must we think so very much in the days that pass? Is this dual normalcy normal, this change from instinct to analysis and vice versa, unsure in any case? What is this ancient emotion that invades the silence when I realize that I'm still breathing? Or is it only that I'm living the thirtysomething crisis?]

In El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Daina Chaviano presents two male characters, Claudia/La Mora's two lovers, and their narrations, appear in alternating chapters. Although these men's

narrations appear to be frustrated, endless babble, they do speak through masculine jargon. In La nada cotidiana, men do not speak, rather, what we know of them, comes from Patria/Yocandra's narration. With each narration, Patria rewrites El Traidor and El Nihilista, her two lovers, as well as other duplicitous characters in the novel, to expose their complicit participation in nation, and create a space of her own. According to Jean Franco, women have long been left out of “the Master Narrative” (xxiii). However, their exclusion has led women to resort to other means to contest that narrative, “without the power to change the story or to enter into dialogue, they have resorted to subterfuge, digression, disguise, or deathly interruption” (xxiii). Patria's narration, her recreation, rewriting, and renaming of these contradictory figures becomes a strategy for talking back. Her internal monologue is her way of answering to a society that denies her a space and a voice.

In Talking Back, Debra Castillo contends that to “speak between the lines” offers a “counterhegemonic response to this official silencing” (41). Official silencing implies both the silencing of women in the nation's (national) discourses, as well as in the literary Canon. In La nada cotidiana, Patria adopts hypocrisy, *la doble moral*, as a way of entering into dialogue with those who seek to silence her. Hypocrisy becomes a liberating tactic for her, especially upon encountering contradictory figures from her past. In one scene, Patria runs into La Militonta, a figure from her days at “la escuela del campo” or summer camp. In much the same manner that Elena Luz represents the revolutionary doctor, a figure that combines medicine and war, La Militonta is a composite of *la militar* (military person) and *la tonta* (the dumb one). La Militonta represents and distorts the figure of *la chivata* (ratter), another figure in Cuban revolutionary society. Her figure represents individuals within Cuban society who accuse colleagues of being counterrevolutionaries, of betraying the Revolution. In this scene, Patria recognizes La Militonta while on her way to work. She decides to ignore her, however, to play dumb, or *hacerse la tonta*.

But, La Militonta is vehement about speaking to her and follows her and repeatedly calls her name. When she finally catches up with Patria, she asks why she wouldn't answer. Patria's response is that her name is Yocandra, not Patria. La Militonta angrily questions why she changed her name, a name of which she should be proud. Patria/Yocandra answers *humildemente* (humbly), by stating that she doesn't deserve the name Patria. Hence, the protagonist uses hypocrisy as a means of answering or talking back to La Militonta. As Castillo contends, "hypocrisy is the answer that the oppressed give to the oppressor" (1992, 41). In her analysis of Rosario Castellanos' work, Castillo adds that: "...women give the oppressors the response they want to hear but maintain the mental reservations that permit a minimal independence of thought" (41). Although this strategy allows for some "independence of thought", it is nevertheless limited in its power to free Patria/Yocandra from "*la nada*" that appears to decide her fate. I contend that *La doble moral* be perceived as a variation of Castillo vis-à-vis Castellanos hypocrisy as strategy, although it does not achieve any societal change. *La nada cotidiana* suggests that *la doble moral* is a technique to which all Cubans resort, not just women. Individuals participate in this double movement, pretending or performing between and amongst themselves, unable to rid themselves of the various masks they must wear. Characters fail to represent one way of thinking or acting, they display duplicity in their actions. Through the appearance of these stereotypical characters, as well as the various dichotomies, *La nada cotidiana* unravels and contests of any fixed notion of identity.

Following the encounter with La Militonta, Patria turns, once again, to an inner narration. She recalls how La Militonta ruined the lives of many students at the university. In this scene, she appears to push La Militonta out of her way. Despite her dislike for *la chivata*, it is highly unlikely that Patria would physically harm La Militonta. Rather, Patria turns inward, to rewrite (retell or narrate) this scene in her head, permitting herself the "minimal independence of thought" to which Debra Castillo refers, and thus, pushing La Militonta and others like her aside, out of her memory.

Patria recall other painful events, including three failed marriages, and in particular her relationship with El Traidor, and the adoption of the name Yocandra. In *La nada cotidiana*, as in Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*, the female protagonist redefines her identity by renaming herself. In contemporary feminine/feminist narrative, female protagonists often choose alternative names to those given to them by their families. There is a relationship between the female protagonist and the nation, and for the protagonists' the act of renaming becomes a vehicle for escaping reality. For Chaviano's Claudia, the name La Mora is a way of isolating her true self from her profession as a *jinetera*, whereas for Patria, her renaming as Yocandra becomes a means of escaping her mundane existence. In both novels, circumstances within the nation-state cause these protagonists to split and seek isolation from the physical world around them. In the end, however, both Claudia/La Mora and Patria/Yocandra must come to terms with the social, political and economic situation surrounding them, by either physically or mentally fleeing the nation-space, through a self-conscious *aislamiento*. However, as I posit, in the case of Patria and her friends, to stay (*quedarse*) or to leave (*irse*) is ultimately irrelevant, since even when one physically leaves the nation-space, one continues inhabiting it in exile.

Another contradictory character in the novel, is El Traidor, Patria/Yocandra's first husband. His figure, like others in the work, portrays an inherent doubling. Bohemian, on the one hand, yet self-centered, El Traidor is responsible for many of Patria's actions within nation. Like others, El Traidor receives only a nickname in Patria's narration. In fact, she renames him "El Traidor," not for his betrayal or treachery towards her or towards La Patria, but rather for his self-betrayal, his self-delusion leads him to believe himself a philosopher, writer and revolutionary (action) hero. El Traidor is a disjointed version of the Revolution's *Hombre Nuevo*, or New Man. Instead of brave or patriotic, he is a coward and machista. His presence, like the father figure, in the narration,

questions the idea of hero-worship in contemporary Cuban society, to suggest the fallibility (and the *doble moral*) of everyone, regardless of their position in society.

Patria/Yocandra meets El Traidor as a teenager, while going to private typing lessons in Old Havana. Initially, El Traidor rejects her, disgusted with her name Patria; he rejects (La) Patria. Later, Patria renames herself Yocandra after one of El Traidor's poetic muses; she appropriates the name for herself. Despite the new name, El Traidor continues to reject Patria/Yocandra, specifically for her status as virgin.¹² He urges her to lose virginity, to find another man to "deflower" her. She picks Machoqui, a drugged-out hippie she meets at the bus stop, to serve the role of "destupidor". Patria/Yocandra's narration of the sexual act in a dark disco-bar serves to wrestle away masculine power and demystify (the loss of) virginity. Machoqui, as his name indicates, is "el macho que la desvirgue". He is nonetheless drunk and drugged during their sexual encounter. Like other characters in the narration, Machoqui is an ambivalent and contradictory figure, another caricature lacking a true name and personality. Rather than romanticizing the figure of the hippie, Machoqui emerges as a dirty, drunken *peludo*, unaware of his actions. As a matter of fact, the main protagonist Patria/Yocandra "acts" in this scene; she is the *active* one in the encounter, adding that, "costó trabajo, pero lo decapité" [it was difficult, but I decapitated him] (44). Her hymen serves its purpose, that of killing, literally decapitating the male sexual organ. Rather than describe the loss of virginity in mystical or poetic terms, Patria's frank narration presents the sexual encounter as something mundane, an everyday occurrence. Following this experience, Patria/Yocandra returns to El Traidor, bringing him the proof he insists upon, her bloodstained panties.

El Traidor's insistence on her not being virgin is in fact, yet another example of the various contradictions in this novel and within Cuban society. El Traidor's desire that Patria/Yocandra *not* be a virgin points to his selfishness, his desire for maximum pleasure during their sexual relation. In

the traditional concepts of patriarchy and patriotism, El Traidor's request that another man "deflower" Patria would be deemed an act of betrayal toward woman and nation. Hence, in this novel the traditional comes undone, both the purity of nation and of woman are irrelevant. The fact that el Traidor dismisses the importance of tradition does not imply a rejection of patriarchal notions. Nor does this novel suggest a return to the past. El Traidor and his attitude toward Patria/Yocandra, as well as toward nation, point to both a contradictory stance toward woman and nation, as well as to the impossibility of returning to a pre-Revolutionary past. His "treason" reflects revolutionary society's failure to lose its patriarchal attitudes toward women within nation and specifically, the pervasive machista attitudes of the Revolution's New Man.

Zoé Valdés alludes to a double standard toward women in revolutionary society on numerous occasions in her novel, but particularly in those sections focusing on the relationship between El Traidor and Patria/Yocandra. As with Loynaz's Bárbara and Valdés' very own Attys in Sangre azul, the main protagonist of La nada cotidiana also "enters the world" through/during her relationship with *man*, El Traidor. During their relationship, specifically their marriage, Patria/Yocandra graduates, travels abroad, and even learns to type and eat with a knife and spoon. That is, Patria/Yocandra becomes tamed, civilized through marriage. Like Bárbara's husband that "makes her up," El Traidor molds Patria/Yocandra, deciding her future. Despite his claims to be a socialist or a revolutionary New Man, El Traidor perpetuates machismo. He educates Patria/Yocandra, opening up the world to her, but he nevertheless expects her to continue performing domestic chores for him. In ¡No es fácil! : Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria, Isabel Holgado Fernández presents the various problems women face in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Cuba, in particular, the ways in which Cuban women have been expected to be both productive in society and in the home. As Holgado explains in her introduction,

En el nuevo paisaje socioeconómico, son las mujeres cubanas quienes están soportando, en mayor medida, las consecuencias de la crisis. Aportando su trabajo al sistema productivo, participando en múltiples tareas voluntarias, generando redes de solidaridad de un valor incalculable y, sobre todo, como principales gestoras y proveedoras de los hogares, las mujeres en Cuba son la principal fuerza motora para amortiguar las repercusiones de la crisis en la vida familiar y social, además de estar creando y participando en el diseño de nuevos discursos y espacios sociales. Ellas son, sin duda, las verdaderas atlantes en este especial período. (12)

[In the new socioeconomic environment, it is, for the most part, the women that are the ones that are dealing with the consequences of the crisis. They are contributing their work to the productive system, participating in various volunteer tasks, generating a valuable network of solidarity. And above all, as the principal agents and providers in the homes, women in Cuban are a force that cushions the repercussions of the crisis in the family and social life, in addition to creating and participating in the design of new discourses and social spaces. They are, without a doubt, the true atlantes of this Special Period.]

In her study, Holgado interviews numerous Cuban women who comment on the inconsistencies present in contemporary society. As Holgado states, women were the principal supporters of the Revolution. They were active participants in the 26 of July Movement, some of the best-known members include Haydée Santamaria, Celia Sánchez and Vilma Espín. But as Holgado affirms, this early participation in the movement did not guarantee women the right to enjoy higher rank positions upon the triumph of the Revolution (267). That is not to say that women have not participated in political life after 1959, statistically, participation in public life has been higher among Cuban women than their Latin American counterparts. Yet, as Holgado also contends, "pero cuanto más cerca se está del verdadero poder, mucho menor es la presencia de las mujeres" [the closer to real power, the presence of women is less visible] (298). Therefore, women's participation in the Revolution was, as Holgado explains, mostly volunteer work. As Holgado puts it,

...desde sus inicios, las mujeres fueron agentes gratuitas del cambio social y, con posterioridad, han colaborado a su mantenimiento en todo tipo de actividades voluntarias, sin olvidar su máxima responsabilidad en la gestión doméstica. El espíritu femenino de cooperación ha sido eficazmente explotado por la Revolución. Las mujeres cubanas siempre han sacado el tiempo de su no-tiempo para ponerlo al servicio de las necesidades de los demás. Al fin y al cabo, sólo se trataba de ampliar el conjunto de la sociedad una actitud normalizada en sus hogares. (299)

[From its origins, women were free agents of social change, and with posterity, have collaborated in its preservation by performing all types of volunteer activities, without forgetting their maximum responsibility in the domestic sphere. The feminine spirit of cooperation has been exploited efficiently by the Revolution. Cuban women have always taken time out of their lack of time to serve the needs of others. After all, it had to do with spreading to society a normal attitude existent in their homes.]

Despite their active participation in the Revolution, Cuban women were expected to hold the fort, so to speak, in the domestic front, carrying the brunt of responsibilities in the private sphere, including homemaking and childrearing. Furthermore, the Cuban Revolution, as it occurred with other revolutions, quickly became associated with patriarchal power. As Holgado puts it: "Estar con la Revolución siempre ha sido sinónimo de hombría" [To be with the Revolution has always been synonymous with manhood] (317). Revolutionary consigns such as "Seremos como el Che" (We shall be like the Che), imply a compulsory heterosexism, exclusive of women and homosexuals.

Another way El Traidor perpetuates patriarchal power appears in Patria/Yocandra's narration of their marriage. Moreover, through the representation of the marriage ceremony, Valdés exposes particular contradictions present within Cuban society. Patria/Yocandra explains how a distraught El Traidor grabs her while she walks down the street to tell her that they must marry immediately. The reason: he needs a *compañera*, a partner, for a diplomatic post abroad. As the notary performs the ceremony, Patria/Yocandra thinks about what she would like to say but doesn't: "Y lo que hago es lo que él ordene, porque él es un hombre del mundo y sabe lo que hace, y siempre le ha salido bien. El va por el camino correcto y yo detrás. Para eso soy su novia,

o amante, o secretaria, o criada -- no, perdón, la compañera que trabaja en la casa, las criadas no existen desde que la Revolución triunfó -- o..." [And what I do is what he orders, because he's a man of the world and knows what he does, and he's always done well. He goes on the right path and I follow. That's why I'm his girlfriend, or lover, or secretary, or maid, no, I'm sorry. I'm the partner that works at home, maids don't exist since the Revolution triumphed, or...] (Valdés, La nada 55). La nada cotidiana demystifies the marriage ceremony; marriage, like virginity, loses any possible association with the traditional fairy tale. Patria/Yocandra agrees to this marriage, but she does so under rather unusual circumstances, she is literally coerced into the arrangement.

Although she accepts his proposal, El Traidor *decides* how it is done. Without a wedding gown, or her parents, Patria/Yocandra appears:

Despeinada, sudada, vestida-a-lo-como-quiera. Lo importante es el papel, el certificado de matrimonio donde consta que el escritor futuro diplomático posee una mujer, digo, una "compañera". Y las fotos que son la prueba más evidente de nuestro feliz y auténtico casamiento. Yo con una cara de víctima de filme de terror que no la brinca un chivo. Como Mia Farrow en aquella película donde ella es una ciega y matan a toda su familia de la casa y ella se queda solita dentro, trancada con el asesino. (55-56)

[Unkept, sweaty, dressed shabbily. The important thing is the document, the marriage certificate that states that the writer, future diplomat, has a woman, I mean, a partner. And the photos are the clearest evidence of our happy and authentic marriage. Me, with the face of a horror film victim that a goat won't jump over. Like Mia Farrow in that film where she's blind and her entire family is killed in the house and she stays inside all along, trapped with the assassin.]

Patria/Yocandra's narration denotes humor and parody, techniques Valdés uses in La nada cotidiana as a way to unmask and contest the traditional wedding. In her narration,

Patria/Yocandra compares herself to the American actress Mia Farrow, best known for her comedies. Yet, rather than compare herself to Mia Farrow, the actress, Patria/Yocandra refers to one of Farrow's characters. In the marriage photos, Patria/Yocandra dons a look of terror, like Farrow's character in the horror movie. By using humor to mock her own marriage ceremony,

Patria/Yocandra rewrites her own past, molding it in a way as to allow her a way of talking back and "acting" albeit after the fact. Although not faced with a murderer, as is Mia Farrow's film character, Patria/Yocandra appears somewhat trapped into this marriage, and by and large in her society. Yet her narration reveals a degree of complicity, for her willingness to accept marriage to El Traidor in order to gain access to travel, material comforts, and the literary world. At best, she accepts marriage and dismisses her husband's ways, choosing to believe herself in love with him, and therefore easily coerced into a quick marriage. This marriage is, as Patria/Yocandra suggests, a front, convenient to both parties at the moment. For him, the marriage is a necessity, without the certificate, El Traidor could not accept a diplomatic post. He'd be suspicious, perhaps perceived homosexual, by government officials. For Patria/Yocandra, marriage to El Traidor signifies a temporary escape from her surroundings, and access to certain privileges to which she would not have on her own.

Patria/Yocandra's narration of her marriage to El Traidor reveals *la doble moral* or hypocrisy that permeates all aspects of Cuban society. In a sense, the rushed ceremony foreshadows Patria/Yocandra's contradictory married life. Upon their marriage, Patria/Yocandra travels to France with El Traidor to accompany him on official state function. She discovers him to be a *machista-Leninist* who expects his wife to perform both revolutionary and household duties. In public, he claims to be a philosopher, a writer and a man of action, but in private he is none of what he claims to be. Like the father figure, El Traidor's revolutionary actions are fictitious:

... también se describía como un hombre de acción, un Rambo del comunismo, un machista leninista. El durísimo que desde los ocho años de edad había participado activamente en la lucha clandestina como mensajero. A los once había alfabetizado a guajiros brutísimos en la zona más intrincada de la Sierra Maestra. A los catorce casi pierde la vida y se convierte en un mártir -- cualquier hospital podría llevar su honroso nombre -- en las montañas del Escambray, en la lucha contra los bandidos. Después, por supuesto, hizo el Servicio Militar, y todas las zafras habidas y por haber. (Sin embargo, sus manos son las de un pianista, blancas, palmas rosadas, suaves, sin una ampollita. Yo con apenas seis escuelas del campo, tengo las manos y los pies llenos de callos.) También estuvo de reportero en los bombardeos de Nicaragua y de Angola. Se hacía el agentón de la Seguridad del Estado, siempre andaba en una misión complicada. (59)

[...he also described himself like a man of action, a Rambo of communism, a machista Leninist. The tough guy that since the age of eight had participated actively in clandestine activities serving as messenger. At the age of eleven he had alphabetized illiterate country folk in the most remote areas of the Sierra Maestra Mountains. At fourteen he almost lost his life to become a martyr, any hospital could bear his name, in the Escambray Mountains, in the struggle against the bandits. Then, of course, he served in the military service, and all the sugar cane harvests. (However, his hands are like those of a pianist, white, pink palms, soft, without a blister. Me, on the other hand, with participation in six summer camps, have my hands and feet full of corns.) He was also a reporter in the bombings of Nicaragua and Angola. He pretended to be an Agent from State Security, always on a complicated mission.]

For his supposed long list of revolutionary achievements, el Traidor receives the nickname "el misionero rojo" (the red missionary), from Patria/Yocandra's friend, La Gusana. Despite his revolutionary resumé, El Traidor practices *la doble moral*. In her narration, Patria/Yocandra disputes El Traidor as hero and philosopher. According to her, there are neither heroes nor philosophers in a society filled with "daily nothingness". His writing and like his revolutionary activities come undone while they are abroad. While he showers, Patria/Yocandra opens the chest where El Traidor hides his manuscript, and discovers three-hundred pages filled with the lines, "Todos me persiguen. No puedo escribir porque todos me persiguen" [Everyone is following me. I can't write because everyone is following me] (62). Patria/Yocandra also narrates El Traidor's ridiculous actions within Cuban society after their divorce that bares both her husband and society's perpetual duality. Although a philosopher, El Traidor lives in a low income housing unit, or

"solar", and must endure the long lines that all Cubans face to obtain their daily rations.

Patria/Yocandra's ridicules El Traidor's profession, philosopher, and exposes the absurdity of such a vocation in any modern society, but especially Cuba.

Aún hoy el Traidor se presenta como filósofo, sin todavía haber escrito una línea sobre el tema. El otro día, en la cola de pescado, cuando el Traidor quiso adelantarse alegando que un filósofo no podía perder el tiempo en colas, una gorda le dio una clase de pescozón que lo lanzó sobre el charco junto al contén. Y tuvo que zumbarse las seis horas parado, leyendo no sé que librito de Derrida. No sólo aquí, ¿a quién en cualquier parte del mundo actual no le avergonzaría confesar que es filósofo? ¿Para qué sirven? ¿Sólo para pensar? A lo mejor también soy filósofa y aún no me enteré. (58)

[Even today, the Traidor presents himself as a philosopher, without ever having written a line on the subject. The other day, in the fish line, when the Traitor tried to get in front claiming to be a philosopher and couldn't waste his time in lines, a fat lady gave him quite a slap, propelling him to a puddle next to the curb. And he had to spend six lines standing up, reading some book by Derrida. Not just here, but who in the contemporary world would not be ashamed to confess to be a philosopher? What are they good for? Only to think? Maybe I'm also a philosopher and I still haven't realized it?]

El Traidor's profession is ludicrous in a society that depends so heavily on the day to day, on the mundane. Patria/Yocandra's narration also points at her profession, that of writer. Like El Traidor, she spends a great deal of time thinking, rather than acting. Thus, her narration also reveals, her doubts regarding the role of writer within society, suggesting the challenges and pitfalls the writer faces in any contemporary society.

With El Traidor, Valdés creates a character that is contradictory in multiple ways: for his personality, his profession, and his revolutionary activities. Despite his claims of revolutionary New Man, El Traidor treats women as inferior and deems himself superior to the masses. He is hypocritical, saying one thing but doing something else. Although Valdés places great emphasis on El Traidor and his contradictory nature, he is not the only character in this work that reveals duality in the nation and among individuals within the nation. In La nada cotidiana Valdés juxtaposes El Traidor with Patria/Yocandra's other lover, El Nihilista. Whereas El Traidor represents the

Revolution's New Man, *El Nihilista* represents the new man's "Other", the dissident. Before his fallout with revolutionary society, *El Nihilista* was a film director and music video producer. As a result of a screenplay, *El Nihilista* breaks and isolates himself from society. In this screenplay, three young people stroll along the Malecón, and then enter into a verbal discussion. The protagonist hops on a raft and heads for Miami, the others remain on the island shocked. At the end of the story, a young woman, the protagonist's lover decides to pursue him on another raft, but drowns on the voyage. Despite his initial enthusiasm, *El Nihilista* ultimately decides against filming the piece. As Patria/Yocandra explains, "Y claro, es un guión que habrá que re-trabajar, re-escribir, re-pensar, re-modelar, re-cambiar, re-tomar, re-botar. Re-primir. *El Nihilista*, que no es bobo, lo abandonó, se calló, se hizo a un lado. Más paranoico que triste" [Of course, it's a screenplay that will have to be reworked, rewritten, rethought, remodeled, rechanged, retaken, re-thrown away. Re-pressed. The Nihilist is no dummy; he abandoned it, shut himself up, and stepped aside. More paranoid than sad] (136). *El Nihilista*, although *El Traidor*'s "Other", a supposed dissident for his unhappiness with the system, auto-represses himself, he is full of self-doubts and paranoia. He is far from dissidence for he does not openly challenge the government, although he disagrees with it. Patria/Yocandra's two lovers are two sides of the same coin. Whereas *El Traidor* chooses to hide his manuscript in a chest, *El Nihilista* represses his screenplay, and refuses to have it filmed. Neither man is truly what he claims to be; rather they are only fragments of what they should be.

There is an inherent doubling that permeates Zoé Valdés' narrative, as well as the narrative of her contemporaries, Daína Chaviano and Yanitzia Canetti. This doubling appears intricately tied to what Homi Bhabha coins the "Janus faced" nature of nation; it is a double movement, a to and fro, particularly pronounced following 1959. As I argue in the introduction of this study, the relationship between the 1959 Cuban Revolution and Cuban Exile is symbiotic. Neither stands alone, both depend on the other for survival. Thus, the doubling and in-

betweenness present in Valdés narrative also appears in contemporary Cuban-American narrative. As Isabel Alvarez Borland ascertains, novels such as J. Joaquin Fraxeda's The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera (1993), display their characters' "double life" (95). For these Cuban American works, however, duality results from the characters split identities as both Cuban *and* American. In Cuban-American works, therefore, characters come to terms with and face their duality; their condition as hybrid or hyphenated individuals brought about as a result of exile or immigration to the United States. In Valdés, however, doubling stems from present political, social and economic conditions inside the island-nation. She presents a contradictory Cuban society, one where individuals seek refuge by turning inward, and by constructing barriers against reality.

Through deception or hypocrisy (la doble moral), characters in Valdés' La nada cotidiana, transform into actors that perform before government officials, as well as family, friends and lovers. Although the cause of deception and hypocrisy may be traced to the characters' inability to act as themselves within the nation-space. Yet, in La nada cotidiana even in exile, characters continue to double as well as resort to lies and hypocrisy to survive within their *new* space(s). Their inability to change points to a kind of transnationality; the island transcends or is transferred abroad, to accompany the exiled (Cuban) subject. This transcendence is at the root of both the Cuban exile's and the Cuban-American's *double life*.

This transcendence manifests itself in the metaphorical and real concept of leaving (*irse*). In La nada cotidiana, *irse* (to leave), becomes a tragedy for both those staying behind and for those leaving, and contributes to this transnational doubling or duality. By leaving and *in* leaving, characters flee themselves and their circumstances (*su nada*), yet encounter or come across a different, yet similar nothingness. *La nada* becomes an unending paradox; (a)part of/from those inside and outside Cuba. Tied to those whom they have left behind, characters in exile *se doblan*, or divide, as well. They are unable to find wholeness in their new space(s). The exiled and those

who have stayed behind are symbiotically tied, like Revolution and Exile, both playing a game of appearances with each other, as well as with others in their surroundings or space(s). Even from the distance, those on both sides of Cuba are forever tied. In a letter to his sister, Lezama explains, “Si estuviéramos los dos juntos cómo nos consolaríamos en el recuerdo, en tantas evocaciones. ¿Pero es posible que no estemos uno al lado del otro? ¿Es posible que no lloremos con las manos juntas? No te has quedado más sola pues mi cariño por ti llega a lo desmesurado e indecible,” [If we were both together how we would console each other through our memories, in our evocations. But is it possible that we are not next to each other? Is it possible that we do not cry with our hands together? You have not stayed more alone because my love for you is without measure and unspeakable] (1998,169). And he adds, “Yo te sueño todos los días, si no, cómo podríamos vivir” [I dream you every day, if not, how could we live?] (169). Despite the distance and separation, Lezama continues by his loved ones, dreaming or conjuring them in order to survive *his present*.

Doubleness, exile and transnationality permeate La nada cotidiana, particularly in this novel's final chapters where insilio and exilio meet and meld. The sea, as in previous Cuban texts takes on a special significance in this novel, it appears perennially to Cuban identity. As Patria/Yocandra explains:

Despertar y beber un café y mirar al mar, ésa es mi máxima aspiración. ¿El mar nunca se irá? ¿Por qué en lugar de retirarse aumenta, se desborda, borrando el muro, las casas, robando objetos y vidas? ¿Qué pecado de este pueblo está cobrando el mar, cada vez con más encono? ¿Por qué no se va, no se pierde, y en su ausencia crecen flores y nace un inmenso jardín para los niños y los jóvenes y los viejos y todos? (69)

[To awaken and drink a coffee and look at the sea, that is my greatest aspiration. Will the sea ever leave? Instead of leaving, why does it grow, overflow, erase the wall, the houses, and take away our objects and our lives? What sin have these people committed that the sea continues to take on, each time with more anger? Why doesn't it leave, get lost, and in its absence flowers grow, and an immense garden for children, young people, elderly and everyone.]

Like Jardín, in La nada cotidiana the sea takes on both positive and negative characteristics. The sea is a constant, predictable element of daily life; but the sea also separates and destroys. Patria/Yocandra's aspirations, her desire to awake and observe the sea, make reference to the very ambivalence of nation. Like the characters themselves, words (the abstract) and nature (the concrete) double. Stereotypical characters appear to have their "Other", other characters that, in fact, often decide or act for them. There is one character in this novel, however, that does not appear to have a specific other, Hernia, Patria/Yocandra's elderly neighbor. She is the "hernia" of the building, an "other" to everyone, a kind of societal pariah. Virtually alone, Hernia is unable to fit in society. As the neighborhood hernia, she is the painful reminder of the difficulties faced within Cuban society, a reminder of what no one wants to see or remember. The elderly figure of Hernia reminds readers of the witch, a figure excluded from society for her condition as "other", for her apparent madness or irrationality, as well as for her powers of creation.

Valdés' Hernia is not immune from societal doubling. She displays contradiction or ambivalence toward Cuba and her Cuban identity. Hernia's Cubanness is, like her name indicates, a rupture within society. Defined as "a protrusion of an organ or part through connective tissue or through a wall or cavity in which it is normally enclosed," hernias often cannot be reduced or eliminated, therefore resulting in gangrene (Merriam-Webster 543). Only through the removal of part of the organ can a hernia be cured. Hernia, the elderly woman, is a protrusion in society or the nation [the body or organ]. Like others in her neighborhood, she seeks retribution. Hernia seeks wholeness, but as her name, age and gender indicate, she cannot fit into any space(s). Hernia's mental instability, her madness, is a direct result of the sea's vengeance. During a rough storm, the sea goes into her first floor apartment, taking all her belongings with it. As a result, Hernia curses at the sea, as well as at the African orisha Yemayá, for the destruction of her belongings. But just as

often, she places Yemayá offerings so as to appease the goddess and prevent the repetition of the tragedy. An overall ambivalence, a “here and there”, encircles Hernia. She cannot receive aid from the government because she lacks the physical proof of her losses, as her furniture was taken out to sea, yet she cannot spend the money her relatives send her from Miami because as Patria explains:

Cualquiera se preguntaría: ¿y para qué esa señora pasa tanto trabajo por dos miserables colchones, por qué no va a una tienda y los compra por sus medios, y basta? No, no puede, en este país no hay tiendas en moneda nacional, y los colchones cuestan caros en la diplomueblería Le Salon, alrededor de quinientos fulas, digo, dólares. Y entre los huevos, la leche, en resumen, la comida, y los colchones, Hernia necesita la comida, y no va a gastar el dinerito que le manda su familia de Miami en colchones, además de que tendría que esperar cien años para poder reunir toda la plata. (71)

[Anyone would ask himself or herself: And why is this lady suffering so for two miserable mattresses? Why doesn't she go to a store and buy them with her means? No, she can't. In this country there are no stores for those with national currency. And mattresses cost a lot in the furniture store Le Salon, close to five hundred bucks, I mean dollars. And between the eggs, the milk, that is, the food, and the mattresses, Hernia needs the food. She's not going to spend the little money her relatives send her from Miami to buy mattresses. Anyway, she'd have to wait one-hundred years to be able to save all the money.]

Hernia is both a natural and unnatural growth, she represents the paradox present of Special Period Cuban society. She is a part of *and* apart from society, the vital organ, lying just outside it, in-between two worlds and often bordering on madness, she is *una aislada*.

Patria/Yocandra's parents, like Hernia, are also caught in a societal limbo. Having once been a part of Cuban revolutionary society, they eventually fall outside of it. They turn inward, becoming mad and confused. Patria/Yocandra's parents suffer a gradual disillusionment with(in) Cuban revolutionary society. Aida, her mother, for example, first begins to go mad, in 1967 following the assassination of El Che in Bolivia. As father's disenchantment begins in 1970 with the failure of "Los Diez Millones" or the ten million tons of sugar that were expected that year (89). Patria's parents move in-between spaces in nation, beginning with their support for and

participation in revolutionary society, and eventually falling outside or beyond the limits of nation. As time progresses, the mother and father become *idos*, confused and distant. After a series of personal mishaps and disappointments, they turn into helpless, childlike creatures. Unable to cope with their surroundings, Patria/Yocandra must tend to them. By placing the parents under Patria's care, Valdés inverts the family structure, the children become the parents and the parents become the children. Yet by this point, Patria has changed her name to Yocandra, thus it is no longer "La Patria" (nation and daughter) that cares for her parents/citizens but rather they are now under the care of a stranger.

As already alluded, La nada cotidiana reflects the strong bond and interconnection between Cubans residing on and off the island. Through the figures "La Gusana" and "El Lince," as well as the use of the flashback in the narration, Valdés represents the deep, underlying divisions present between those individuals stranded on different sides of the Cuban divide. These characters, and more importantly their names, la Gusana and el Lince, reflect the inexorability of individuals on and off the island. They are forever tied, unable to function without the other. La Gusana, the worm, refers to the nickname despectively used to describe all those against the government and/or those who have left the country. Like other characters, La Gusana's true identity is never revealed, rather she represents all those who disagree with the island's political structure, and furthermore, those who have left. As for El Lince, or the lynx, his nickname refers to someone who is quick or fast, a person who is able to survive even the most difficult situations. El Lince represents individuals capable of functioning in and in-between multiple spaces, both on and off the island. He responds to whatever occurs with quick thinking and determination. Despite the fact that both figures adapt or react to different circumstances differently, La Gusana and El Lince are inexorably tied to one other, as well as to Patria/Yocandra. Neither is able to shake off the island's overbearing La Nada, doubling, and participating in *la doble moral*, even out of Cuba.

Chapter six focuses on La Gusana, Patria/Yocandra's childhood friend who marries an elderly Spaniard in order to leave Cuba, and on how "la nada" continues to dominate her existence. In an interview with Enrico Mario Santí, Valdés says of La Gusana: "Ella es el personaje que más quiero, el más fuerte de ese libro. A pesar de que se llama La Gusana el nombre no significa que sea una persona caricaturesca ni maniquera. Justamente hace el balance. Yo hubiera querido trabajarla más, pero así salió la novela y así se quedó" [She's the character I most love, the strongest in that book. Despite the fact that her name is La Gusana, her name does not imply that she's caricature or Manichaean person] (11). I would take Valdés' statement one step further by adding that La Gusana is the balance because she understands things both on and off the island, she is forever linked to her friends residing in different spaces. La Gusana is the mediator between both sides of the Cuban divide. It is significant that La Gusana lives in Spain, not in Miami, traditional home of Cuban exiles. Her distance from all things Cuban serves to center her character, allowing her to redefine Cubanness.

In addition to serving as a sort of balance in the novel, La Gusana is also important because the memory of her provokes nostalgia in her friends, particularly in Patria/Yocandra. While pedaling home from work, for example, Patria/Yocandra evokes La Gusana. In her internal monologue, she asks La Gusana to recall those moments spent together. Though she desires to see La Gusana, she fears that if La Gusana returned, she would feel out of place, "si regresaras en este momento no entenderías nada. La Habana está triste, desvencijada, hecha leña" [if you'd return at this moment you wouldn't understand a thing. Havana is sad, old, in bad shape] (95). Nevertheless, despite the impossibility of return, Patria/Yocandra insists on asking an absent La Gusana to recall their past on the island. Patria/Yocandra's pleas of "¿te acuerdas?" (do you remember?), asks La Gusana to recall everything from places they frequented as adolescents, to the foods they ate. Some are humorous as in "¿Te acuerdas de las croquetas Soyuz 15, que se

pegaban en el cielo de la boca?" [Do you remember the soy 15 croquettes?] or "¿Te acuerdas del agua e'churre, una variación de la Coca-Cola del bloqueo?" [Do you remember the dirty water, an embargo variety of Coca-Cola] (95-96). While others seem to seek a specific response from La Gusana, as in "¿Te acuerdas de las playas, de las guaguas? ¿Te dicen algo?" [Do you recall the beaches, the buses? Do they mean something to you?] (96). Patria/Yocandra's memories transport her back to adolescence, to happy and sad times. Her evocations seek answers from her distant friend. By incorporating this series of questions into the novel, Valdés evokes nostalgia in the Cuban (exile) reader of her generation, individuals who experienced similar sensations and experiences. Patria/Yocandra's return to the past through her memory is quickly interrupted, however, with Hernia's appearance, bringing a letter from Spain: "Carta de Madrid, debe de ser tuya. Claro que es tuya. Gusana querida, de tanto que te evoqué apareciste, mi fiel fantasma, amigüísima. Espero noticias tuyas con ansiedad medieval. Cualquier cosa que te ocurra, por banal que sea, cuéntamela, no tienes idea de cómo vivo yo, a través de tus cartas, sueños increíbles..." [A letter from Madrid, it's probably from you. Of course it's yours. My dear Gusana, I called so much for you that you appear, my loyal ghost, and my dear friend. I await your letters with medieval anguish. Anything that occurs to you, even the most mundane, tell it to me. You don't realize how I live, through your letters, the most incredible dreams] (98).

Like Lezama, Patria/Yocandra dreams up or conjures her loved ones and a new reality for herself in her narration and internal monologues. Patria/Yocandra transcends the present, the here and now, through La Gusana's letters. She imagines herself in Spain, in the places La Gusana writes about, or she goes recalls past events on the island. La Gusana's letter leads Patria/Yocandra to recall El Lince, La Gusana's former lover that left Cuba on a raft. Yet whereas Patria/Yocandra escapes her present through her friend's letters, La Gusana and El Lince, despite having "escaped", they cannot forget or rid themselves of their past on the island. They retain

certain characteristics, and have changed in other respects. La Gusana admits “estoy más vieja y más realista” [I'm older and more realistic], she is more balanced, although she retains some of her former characteristics, “sigo tan loquita como antes” [I'm as crazy as ever] (106). And she adds, “no siento nostalgia, sólo te extraño a ti y al mar” [I don't feel nostalgia, I only miss you and the sea] (106). Despite losing her nationality with her marriage to the Spaniard, La Gusana adds that she doesn't suffer so as to want to end her life (106). Her Cubanness has nothing to do with the geographic space Cuba; it has more to do with her relationships with her loved ones and with what she feels inside. As she adds, “Yo por dentro soy más cubana que las palmas, eso nadie me lo podrá arrancar. Tampoco soy una patriotera extremista. Yo digo que Martí vivió la mayor parte de su vida en el extranjero, y más cubano que él hay que mandarlo a hacer” [Inside, I am more Cuban than the palms, no one can take that away from me. But I'm not an extremist patriot. I always say that Martí lived the majority of his life abroad, and to find someone more Cuban than him, you'd have to manufacture him] (106). If La Gusana's Cubanness stems from her heartfelt desire to be Cuban, or from what Fernando Ortiz coined *cubanía*, the same is true of Patria/Yocandra's envisioning of identity. For both characters, identity stems not just from birthplace, or homeland, and/or the place where one lives, but is tied to those individuals with whom one has lived, one's loved ones no matter where they may find themselves. Patria/Yocandra's way of seeing herself and those around her has as much to do with what happens to her, as with what happens to others. She and others around practice a "politics of affection," one that allows for dialogue. Despite specific political beliefs, loved ones appear to be more important than official political rhetoric.

These chapters use of the flashback allows readers to discover how this novel plays with narration and construction. The use of this narrative technique in the chapter "La Gusana" exposes the construction of the narration and of the novel itself. It points to El Lince's life, “the quick one”

who skirts nation, escaping or slipping through the chapter, much like the novel itself slips through or escapes the Cuban Canon. Chapter six, "La Gusana", fast forwards to chapter seven, "El Lince", through a statement "flashback al capítulo siguiente" [flashback in the following chapter] and then returns to chapter six through a simple "consulte el flashback" [refer to the flashback]. This back and forth movement between chapters six and seven relates to in-betweenness on several levels. First, as a strictly narrative technique, the flashback serves to tie the narration together. Secondly, the use of this obvious flashback, one which tells the readers of its existence, serves to expose the construction of the narration, as well as suggests the construction of identity itself, particularly in lieu of the stereotypical characters on whom these chapters center. Third, the flashback, in turn, unites these very characters not only to each other (as in the lovers La Gusana and El Lince), but also to the novel's main protagonist, Patria/Yocandra. Thus, the back and forth movement, the autoreferentiality of the flashback in the narration, serves multiple purposes and highlights the in-betweenness that permeates as well as structures this novel specifically and contemporary Cuban culture in general.

In addition to using stereotypes and names, dichotomies, and the flashback, in La nada cotidiana Valdés incorporates consigns, epithets and quotes at the beginning of various chapters. These serve to expose the construction of the novel and the characters, as well as point to the various political and social stances, also dichotomies, dominating contemporary Cuban society, including revolution/ exile, and staying/leaving. The chapter "La Gusana" begins with the statement, in italics, "Sólo los cristales se rajan, los hombres mueren de pie" [Only crystals break, men die on their feet] a popular consign found in billboards across Cuba that makes reference to the patriotic bravery of the Revolution's new men and women. The fact that this saying begins the chapter on La Gusana is significant, because she is a character who chooses to leave rather than die fighting for a Revolution with which she disagrees. Whereas here there is a reference to a

revolutionary slogan, the chapter "El Lince" begins with a quote from Classical History, Ovid's statement "Sueño con Roma, con mi casa, extraño los lugares, y todo lo que queda de mí en la Ciudad jamás perdida" [I dream of Rome, my house. I miss the places, and all that remains of me in the never lost City] (113). This quote points to exile, the condition El Lince and La Gusana assume. Ovid's quote is relevant because although alluding to Ancient Rome, his dreams appear to transcend ancient times to present day Havana. Nostalgia accompanies (the) exile, traversing time and space. In La nada cotidiana, El Lince and La Gusana are plagued by the memories of their city and their past.

Although this novel continuously refers to the nation and the protagonist's movement within this contradictory space, these final sections of the novel contest the notion of national identity, Cubanness, directly. Nation appears most often in these last chapters where Patria/Yocandra makes direct references to her nation and nationality. For Patria/Yocandra, Cuba (nation) is an imagined space, albeit ambivalent in multiple ways. In her narration, Patria/Yocandra exclaims "sería ideal un país ideal" [would be an ideal place], but admits that there are no ideals (125). One finds a nation dispersed, not located solely in one specific place, but present in people's hearts and minds. Even for those who left, and cannot return to the land, "la tierra está donde él está" [the land is where he is] (125). Cuba appears to be in the heart and in the mind. Although La nada cotidiana appears plagued with the protagonist's doubts and fears about the present situation, this novel ascertains that Cubans stand united despite their distance from one another. Reminiscent of Lezama's letters to his sisters, Patria/Yocandra tells the exiled El Lince "estamos muy cerca" [we're very close together] (124). They continue in tune with one another despite their physical separation. The imaginary union of these dispersed individuals is further stressed in the recurrent presence of the sea. The sea's ambivalence returns in this novel's final pages. Although there is negativity associated with the sea, particularly for the lives it has claimed in the Florida

Straits, it continues to appear as an uniting force, metaphorically shipping individuals back and forth from shore to shore. The sea dons the island fluidity, and gives Cubans mobility *and* isolation. As I propose in the introduction, the island's very nature allows for *aislamiento*, the condition by which individuals "se *aislan*", isolating themselves, in order to create a third space. The "third space", moveable and transportable, lies wherever a Cuban finds him or herself, it gravitates toward loved ones on and off the island. In La nada cotidiana, Valdés envisions a Cuban identity, a Cubanness, forever changing but contingent upon each individual's relationship with his/her other halves. Valdés' concept of identity resembles Ortiz's *cubanía*, the heartfelt desire to be Cuban. Moreover, she suggests that individuals, within multiple spaces, create an identity for themselves, in opposition and/or complementary to others.

La nada cotidiana does not suggest Cubanness as an innate quality, but rather, proposes its continual reconstruction, based on countless factors, including historical, social and psychological circumstances. Indeed in this novel, as in Sangre azul, Valdés underscores the idea of all reality as reconstructed, in continual redefinition. Indeed, in La nada cotidiana Valdés exhibits the ways in which reality, and most concretely identity as a part of (a) reality, has been historically constructed in Cuban culture. As I argue throughout this chapter, Valdés deconstructs the hero, and reveals and contests the inherent machismo and patriarchal discourses present in Cuban society. In these discourses, spanning more than a century, Cuban identity has been envisioned as masculine and insular.

As does Daína Chaviano in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, in La nada cotidiana Valdés also borrows from and contests the Cuban Canon. Although there are numerous allusions to various literary texts throughout the novel, Valdés refers the most often to works from the Cuban Canon in this novel's final chapters. In La nada cotidiana, Valdés turns to the various writers that faced difficulties or marginalization with the government following the 1959 Revolution. That is, to

writers who in a sense redefined the Cuban Canon for their marginality, that is for either being homosexual or against the Revolution. This novel refers/returns continuously to José Lezama Lima, his personal letters as well as his novel Paradiso and it ends with an allusion to Virgilio Piñera. Allusions to Lezama are open and direct. In fact, Patria/Yocandra writes "Parece que los capítulos ocho de la literatura cubana están condenados a ser pornográficos" [It seems that all chapter eight's in Cuban literature are condemned to be pornographic] (133). And then she explains that those will be the censor's words if he comes across her novel, "Así se expresará el censor cuando lea estas páginas..." (133) for her use of erotic imagery in her narration. The allusion to Piñera is less direct, although those familiar with Piñera's work and literary life in early revolutionary society would recall Piñera's famous affirmation "Estoy asustado" [I'm scared] in front of high ranking members of the Cuban government and fellow intellectuals in 1962 (Cabrera Infante 1992, 102-103). As many intellectuals have noted, it is not clear whether Piñera's fear stemmed from being before a large crowd, or if it was, in fact, a fear of something greater, of where the country was heading under the new Revolution. There is a remembrance of Piñera in Patria/Yocandra's words "Tengo miedo, coño, eso sí. Por eso hablo de esto y de aquello y de lo otro y de lo más allá. Porque ahora veo miles de balsas repletas de cadáveres en el mar. Porque tengo el miedo más grande del mundo. Por eso, chachareo y chachareo" [I'm scared, yes, that's it. That's why I talk about this and the other and what's beyond. Because now I see thousands of rafts filled with cadavers in the sea. Because I have the biggest fear in the world. That's why I babble and babble] (Valdés, La nada 171). Her fears are found on a personal level as well as on a national level. References to cadaver-filled rafts allude to the *Balsero* crisis of 1994, the moment during which this novel was being written. Patria/Yocandra chooses to *chacharear* (babble) rather than *hablar* (speak) about what is taking place. She prefers babble to official (patriarchal) rhetoric,

choosing to isolate herself, *aislándose*, as a means of escaping what goes on around her, while at the same time creating a space from where to think, create and speak.

Like Chaviano, in *La nada cotidiana*, Valdés chooses to return to works and authors from the Cuban Canon to expose and redefine any fixed notion of nation and the Canon. The Cuban Canon has consisted mostly of male writers, specifically heterosexual men. Authors such as Cirilo Villaverde and José Martí in the nineteenth-century, and Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, in the twentieth-century fall under this traditional canon. What is most important about the traditional masculine Cuban Canon is that these authors have overwhelmingly placed great emphasis on the island. Their work emits the notion of fixity, the idea of an unchanging and necessary island. They emphasize *afincamiento*, the notion of *afincarse* or of putting down roots, as a way of forging identity. Parallel to this Canon, other Cuban authors have queered the canon, to offer yet another vision of Cuban identity. These authors, such as Lezama Lima, Piñera, Antón Arrufat and Reinaldo Arenas, just to name a few, have also centered on Cubanness in their works, yet through their eyes as homosexual men. Despite breaking with the traditional heterosexual Canon, revising the Canon to include the Queer, most of these writers remain insular. They have continued to envision Cuban identity as something firmly rooted in the island. Even though they were often marginalized for their sexuality, and in a few cases exiled, there is a return to the notion of the island as something inescapable. Although the island continues to be representative of identity, Valdés' text, and those by her contemporaries, point to the fluidity of Cubanness. In this chapter, moreover, I suggest that Valdés' work and those by Cuban women writers before and after her, including Loynaz and Chaviano, redefine the Cuban Canon one step further. Indeed, the transient nature of these authors and their work, production, styles and themes, result in a transnational literature, one that is both anchored *and* isolated from the island and its discourses. The island, therefore, continues as center, but now is moveable, a

third space that allows writers, no matter their affiliations, freedom to create. Rather than attempt to integrate their works into the Canon, works such as La nada cotidiana borrow from both the traditional as well as the Queer Canon, in order to expose the very construction of Cuba's various discourses. In this work, I propose, as well, a revision to the Canon that incorporates the varied, hybrid voices of Cuban writers living on and off the island.

Besides various allusions to the writers of the Canon, in La nada cotidiana, one finds auto-criticism by the narrator (and to an extent the author?) that remind us of Debra Castillo's comments on Sor Juana or Nara Araújo's thoughts on Loynaz's "intento deslegitimizador". In these final chapters Patria/Yocandra's thoughts take off in different directions, and she refers to her lack of preparation as a writer. She comments:

Yo sé que no será genial. No me sobrevaloro. Soy un producto semántico de pésimas maestras de español. No me sobrestimo. Tengo dudas con la construcción de frases largas, hago una choricera de palabrería superflua. No soy la campeona de las declinaciones, nadie tiene que decírmelo. Debiera leer más a Lezama y a Proust. (Valdés, La nada 170)

[I know that it won't be genius. I don't overvalue myself. I'm the semantic product of horrible Spanish teachers. I don't overestimate myself. I have doubts when it comes to long phrases. I make a mess of superfluous wording. I'm not the champion of declinations. No one has to tell me. I should read more Lezama and Proust.]

Although referring to her novel, Patria/Yocandra's statement also allude to La nada cotidiana.

Numerous critics that have accused Valdés' work as inferior. Others have argued that this novel's loose ends and lack of literary luster are a product of the author's urgency to narrate experiences.¹³

Zoé Valdés is a controversial writer, and has been criticized by the Right and Left. However, her work sells extremely well in Europe and the Americas. In "El ser cubano y la nada," the novelist Carlos Victoria refers to Valdés' novel as "literatura de urgencia" (literature of urgency) (1996, 142). He explains that in this urgent literature one finds a writer who, "se siente apremiado a relatar sucesos que para él (o ella) tienen una extrema importancia, porque han marcado y cambiado su

vida" [feels compelled to relate events that are extremely important for him or her, because they have marked or changed his/her life] (142). Victoria contends that this kind of writing denotes its own genre, "en el que predomina una voz desafiante, no se detiene en cuestiones de estilo, y parece desmentir el postulado de la escritura, y muy en especial la novela" [one where a defiant voice dominates, does not linger on questions of style and attempts to deconstruct the postulate of writing, and especially the novel] (142). Therefore, despite this novel's roughness, this writing stems from Valdés' (and Patria/Yocandra's) urgent need to narrate. According to Victoria, this urgency redeems La nada cotidiana. In a sense, Patria/Yocandra's statements' on her own writing, on her insufficiency as a writer, reflect Valdés' awareness of her novel's stylistic problems. The fact that Patria/Yocandra's statements appear at the end of the novel, rather than beginning, point to Valdés' and her protagonist's defiance. Valdés and her character, Patria/Yocandra "toman la palabra" (take up the word), and claim the right to narrate, talking back to contemporary Cuban society. The comments at the end, an obvious afterthought and excuse to delegitimize the text, only acts to underscore this novel's message.

In conclusion, despite the continuity between Sangre azul and La nada cotidiana, Valdés' third novel goes beyond her first in its comments on and contestation of nation and gender in contemporary Cuban society. La nada cotidiana points to the doubling that permeates all levels of Cuban revolutionary society. This doubling may be found in the themes, such as the presence of dichotomies, in the stereotypical characters, as well as contributes to structuring the novel. By demystifying idealized views of Cuban society in particular the Revolution, Valdés' work attempts to both talk back to contemporary Cuban society, as well as redefines what it means to be Cuban and woman.

NOTES

¹ Sangre azul was first published in France in a French translation by Actes-Sud. Several months later, Editorial Letras Cubanas published the work in its original Spanish. Emecé Editores first published La Nada Cotidiana in 1995. For more information regarding the writing of these novels, see Enrico Mario Santi's interview with Zoé Valdés that appears in Apuntes postmodernos, 7:2 (Fall 1998), 2-13. Other interviews include: "Conversando online con Zoé Valdés" by Luis de la Paz, appearing in the now defunct online literary journal Nexos on January 14, 2000, "Nunca dejaría de escribir: Entrevista con Zoé Valdés," by Hector Pina, appearing online in Librusa.com in June 2001, and "Conversando con Zoé Valdés," by Mari Rodríguez Ichazo appearing in Vanidades, July 25, 2000.

² For Zoé Valdés' poetry see: Respuestas para vivir, La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1986; Todo para una sombra, Madrid: Taifa, 1986; Vagón para fumadores, Madrid: Lumen, 1996; Cuerdas para el lince, Madrid: Lumen, 1999. Note: Vagón para fumadores first appeared in the collection Cinco puntos cardenales (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1989). This collection includes the work of the five finalists to the Casa de las Américas Prize for 1988. As no prize was given on that year, all five submissions appeared in this collection instead.

³ Zoé Valdés has written and published continuously since leaving Cuba in 1995. Novels include: La nada cotidiana (1995), Te di la vida entera (1996), Café Nostalgia (1997), Querido primer novio (1999), Milagro en Miami (2001), and El pie de mi padre (2002).

⁴ Whereas Jardín was written when Loynaz was between 26-31 years old, Sangre azul was written when Valdés was between 28-32 years old.

⁵ For an insightful anthology on transnational nature of Cuban literature, see A Century of Cuban Writers in Florida, edited by Carolina Hospital and Jorge Cantera (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1996). In the introduction "Florida and Cuba: Ties that Bind", the editors point to the long

history of exchange between Florida and Cuba. Besides an analysis of immigration back and forth between Cuba and Florida, the editors point to the fact that many of the works of the Cuban Canon were, in fact, written outside of Cuba. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat argues for the "translational" aspect of Cuban literature in The Cuban Condition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ Some recent studies on Loynaz's novel Jardín include: Valoración múltiple (1991) by Pedro Simón, with essays by Fina García Marruz and Susana Montero; El alfiler y la mariposa (1997) by Nara Araújo; A Place in the Sun (1997) by Catherine Davies; "Dwarfed by Snow White: Feminist Revisions of Fairy Tale Discourse in the Narrative of María Luisa Bombal and Dulce María Loynaz" by Verity Smith; House, Garden, Nation (1994) by Ileana Rodríguez; and Silencio y destino: anatomía de una novela lírica (1996) by Alberto Garrandés.

⁷ Of those studies, it is of value to mention the work of Catherine Davies, Verity Smith and Susana Montero, all of which have explored the fantastic elements present in Jardín, and the relationship between fantasy and/or the fantastic and feminism.

⁸ For more about the mythological figures Gnosis and Attis, see The World of Myth by David Adams Leeming (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Leeming explains that Attis is often identified with Jesus because his is a "dying-god" myth, dealing with death and resurrection. This idea of resurrection, including reincarnation, permeates Sangre azul, as other texts by Cuban women, including Daína Chaviano's novel El hombre, la hembra y el hambre. For a recent Cuban novel that touches upon the topic of reincarnation, see Olga Consuegra's semi-autobiographical novel Cuando se desnudan los espíritus (Confesiones íntimas de una mujer), (Madrid: Ediciones Libertarias, 1998).

⁹ For a feminist discussion of the seductive nature of patriarchy, see Chris Weedon's Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁰ The first writer to center on the issue of staying or leaving was Doña Mercedes Santa Cruz, La Condesa de Merlín. See her work La Habana (Madrid: Cronocolor, 1981). Other nineteenth-century writers that have focused on this subject include Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Julián del Casal, José Martí, Juan Clemente Zenea, and José María Heredia. See El laúd del Desterrado, ed. Matías Montes Huidobro, (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1995).

¹¹ Hastening delivery by hitting on the pregnant woman's belly was a medical practice quite common in 16th and 17th century Europe. For more information, see "Death's Arbitrary Empire" by John McManners in the Social History of Western Civilization: Volume II, editor Richard Golden (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1999), 48-59.

¹² Curiously, Valdés' early collection of poems Respuestas para vivir (La Habana: Ediciones Letras Cubanas, 1986) contains a poem entitled "Para ser Yocandra" and is reminiscent of Patria/Yocandra's relationship with El Traidor. Much of Valdés' narrative makes reference to her early poetry, as well as to other narrative, indicating the strong presence of intertextuality in her work.

¹³ Criticism of Zoé Valdés' work has come from diverse individuals. In "¿Scientia sexualis o ars erótica?" (Encuentro de la cultura cubana: 14, Otoño 1999) the Colombian academic Helena Araújo criticizes Valdés' novel Te di la vida entera as "[una] novela que se quiere expresionista y pretende matizar la requisitoria y la incriminación anti-castrista con una parla supuestamente popular, resulta farragosa, redundante y panfletista" (114). Another recent criticism of Valdés and her work came from Abel Prieto, Cuban writer and current cultural minister on the island. While in Spain to launch his latest novel, Prieto was asked why Valdés' works were no longer published on the island. His response was that Valdés was not published in Cuba because of the lack of quality in her work, not for political reasons. (See articles in La Razón, "No publicamos a Zoé Valdés en Cuba porque es un subproducto literario", Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Miércoles 15 de noviembre del

2000, and in El País, "En Cuba, la política no lo es todo", Elsa F. Santos, Jueves 16 de noviembre del 2000.) Curiously enough, criticism to Valdés has also come from Cuban exile academics that have accused Valdés' work of being pornographic. At the Third Cuban Research Institute Conference, held at Florida International University in October 2000, Julio Rodríguez Luis presented a paper entitled "Zoé Valdés en el contexto de la literatura cubana escrita en el exilio". In this paper, he commented positively on Valdés' anti-Castro rhetoric but criticized the use of foul language in her work. According to Rodríguez Luis, Valdés' narrative was aimed at the European tourist, particularly in its use of sexual explicit situations and everyday vocabulary. Despite the negative comments by many critics, Valdés' work continues to gain popularity among European audiences, as well as among young readers in the Cuban exile community. Her readings at the Miami Book Fair International two years straight, in 1998 and 1999, met with massive crowds, indicative of her popularity among readers, particularly among Cubans who left the island in the last decade. According to Valdés, her work also appears to have gained an underground following among many young Cubans on the island. In fact, it is rumored that in the city of Holguín, there is an underground Zoé Valdés fan club. Academics currently researching Valdés' work include: Isabel Alvarez-Borland, Cristina Ortiz Ceberio, Raquel Romeu, Ester Whitfield (Harvard University), Nanne Timmer (University of Leiden), Raúl Rubio (Tulane University) and Morbila Fernández Olivera (Clemson University).

CHAPTER 3

CROSSING BORDERS: REDEFINING IDENTITY IN THE NARRATIVE OF YANITZIA CANETTI

Mi pecado es no estar en ningún lugar, no pertenecer a ninguna nación y sentir que por mis venas corre, promiscua y arrollante, sangre de muchos lugares. Y que... me siento bien así... perteneciendo a muchos óvulos profanados por siglos de semen. Quizás todos seamos parte de las venas de varios continentes existentes y tragados por el mar. Y eso es pecado, ¿no? (Canetti, *Al otro lado*, 199)

[My sin is not being in any place, not belonging to any nation, and to feel that through my veins runs, promiscuously and overflowing, the blood of many places. And... I feel fine this way... belonging to the many eggs fertilized for centuries by semen. Perhaps all of us are part of the veins of various existent continents and swallowed by the sea. And that is a sin, right?]

Unlike her peers Daína Chaviano and Zoé Valdés, whose novels have circulated widely throughout Latin America and Europe, Cuban writer Yanitzia Canetti, as of yet, remains relatively unknown in Latin American, U.S. and European literary circles. Yet, with two novels to her name and numerous published and unpublished short stories and poems, Canetti is a prolific author who writes and translates literature for both children and adults. Her main area of interest has always been literature for children and adolescents. In fact, she has written and prepared numerous bilingual educational materials, including fictional and non-fictional series, teacher's guides, ancillary texts and student guides for publishing companies such as Scott Forsman, Houghton Mifflin Company, Laredo Publishing Company and Steck-Vaughn Publishers. Moreover, Canetti is an award-winning journalist, essayist and literary critic, whose articles have appeared in magazines and newspapers throughout the United States, Cuba, Spain, Italy, and other Latin American countries.⁷ In addition to writing and translating, Canetti is also a successful photographer whose work has appeared in more than fifteen national and international exhibits. Indeed, one may argue that Canetti's success lies precisely in her ability to successfully manage several careers at once. As she explains to me in an e-mail dated July 6, 2000: "Sí, la verdad, parezco un pulpito haciendo

mil cosas a la vez” [Yes, the truth is I'm like an octopus, doing so many things at the same time]. She says much the same to literary critic Carlos Espinoza Dominguez: “Suelo trabajar en “sepetecientas” cosas a la vez, pero siempre le doy prioridad a algún proyecto literario entre los muchos que orbitan en mi cabeza” [I usually work in seven hundred things at the same time, but I always try to give priority to some literary project, among the many that orbit my brain] (Espinoza, 2001). Her dedication to literature, children's education, and the arts is reflected in her voluminous work, some of which still remains unedited and/or unpublished to date.

Born in Havana in 1967, Canetti belongs to the generation “los novísimos”, the phrase coined by the late critic Salvador Redonet to describe Cuban writers born after 1959, in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Some of the best-known members of this group include the novelists and short story writers Ena Lucía Portela, Damarís Calderón, David Curbelo, Antonio José Ponte, Amir Valle, and Verónica Pérez Konina.⁸ Like most members of her generation, Canetti obtained a solid education on the island in the Humanities and received support for her literary work from Cuban cultural institutions. Her education is extensive and includes a Bachelor's degree in Journalism (Licenciatura en periodismo), a Master's degree in Linguistics (Maestría en lingüística) as well as a Doctorate in Hispanic Literatures, all from the University of Havana. Once in the United States, Canetti also pursued studies at Harvard University. Canetti's literary career began, however, long before her higher education. In Cuba, as an adolescent, Canetti received several writing awards, including the National Literature Award in Poetry, three years in a row, in 1984, 1985 and 1986. And in 1994, she was awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura “La Rosa Blanca” (The White Rose). Up until 1994, her literary work, short stories and poems, had appeared only in Cuban literary journals and newspapers. Her luck changed with the publication of Los secretos de palacio (Palace Secrets) by the Cuban publishing house, Editorial Gente Nueva. This collection of short stories for young readers was to become Canetti's first and last book publication on the island. In

these stories, Canetti reworks stories of the fairy tale genre, all of which center on different time periods and empires from around the world. Ironically, precisely when her literary work began to gain recognition on the island, Canetti chose to immigrate to the United States, first settling in Southern California, then Boston, where she continues to reside with her family.

Accompanying Canetti in her voyage across the Florida Straits was the incomplete manuscript of her novel Al otro lado. Begun in Cuba under adverse conditions, Al otro lado was completed in the United States. As Canetti explains in an e-mail dated July 2, 2000:

De las novelas, la primera que escribí fue "Al otro lado". Comencé a escribirla a mano, con un lápiz, en hojas de libreta. Luego conseguí hojas blancas (¡qué privilegio!) y hasta una pluma nuevecita de paquete y seguí escribiendo. Luego me regalaron una máquina de escribir del "enemigo", marca Underwood, que tenía letricas bicolors (negras y rojas... vaya paradoja) y finalmente un buen amigo me regaló una computadora en la que seguí escribiendo la novela. Salí de Cuba con mis disquetes a cuestas. Seguí escribiendo en otra computadora, frente al Pacífico (en California) para crearme que todavía estaba frente al Caribe. Después me mudé a Boston y seguí escribiendo, pero esta vez frente al Atlántico. Y le puse fin a la novela en el bosque donde ahora vivo. Así que ese pobre manuscrito corrió toda clase de suertes. Entre "escribe y tira a la basura y vuelve a escribir" me tomé siete años más o menos.

[Of my novels, the first one that I wrote was Al otro lado. I began to write it by hand, with a pencil, in notebook paper. Then I began to use blank pages (what a privilege!) and a brand new pen, and I continued to write. Then, they gave me an "enemy" typewriter, Underwood brand that had two colors (black and red, what a paradox!) and finally, a good friend gave me a computer where I continued to write the novel. I left Cuba with my diskettes at hand. I continued to write on another computer, in front of the Pacific (in California) to make me believe that I was still facing the Caribbean. Then I moved to Boston and continued to write, but this time facing the Atlantic. I finally finished the novel in the forest where I now live. So that poor manuscript suffered all kinds of luck. Between "write, throw out in the trash, and write again" it took me seven years more or less to finish.]

Set in the 1990s in an unnamed island in the Caribbean, Al otro lado focuses on a nameless young woman's search to understand herself and those around her. Although never openly stated in the narration, several references in the text attest that the island to which the narrator refers is Cuba during the infamous Special Period. Thus, Al otro lado, like Valdés' La nada

cotidiana (1995) and Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre (1998), confronts the issue of identity in present-day Cuba through the narration and experiences of a young, female protagonist. More importantly, in addition to focusing on the complexity of national and gender identity, Al otro lado turns to the process of writing (and rewriting) fiction and the ways in which this process is an integral element in the construction of the self. One may say, therefore, that Al otro lado is a novel "in-process" for the way it is produced, for its structure, and for the themes upon which it centers.

Despite significant similarities between Canetti's novel and those by Valdés and Chaviano, in Al otro lado there are few direct references to Cuba. There are, however, numerous indirect allusions to the island and in particular the political and social situations it faces. As the protagonist explains in the first chapter,

Vivo a finales de siglo en una isla bien poblada y condenada por algún pecado en su otrora encarnación. Somos el pueblo elegido por Dios para competir con el Infierno. Ni Dante pudo jamás imaginar la tan prolifera sarta de diabluras que abundan en esta isla diminuta del Caribe. Dicen que es por la lluvia torrencial y porque los huracanes nos adiestran en transgredir los límites de lo posible. Yo pienso que es porque tenemos dentro ríos de sangre tirando en todas direcciones. Somos una raza de muchas razas. Y por una de las calles de la isla, ando buscándome por aquí y por allá. Yo, ¿dónde estás, eh? ¿Dónde te has metido? Anda, sal, que llevo rato buscándote y no te encuentro. Que estás muy grandecita para estos juegos. Sal de tu escondite, y dime quién eres. (10)

[I live at the turn of the century on a densely populated island condemned for some sin from another incarnation. We are God's chosen people to compete with Hell. Not even Dante would have been able to imagine such a proliferation of evil abundant on this tiny island of the Caribbean. They say it's the torrential rains, and that the hurricanes cause us to transgress the limits of the possible. I think that it's because we have rivers of blood flowing everywhere. We are a race of many races. And through one of the streets of the island, I walk in search of myself, through here and through there. I, where are you, huh? Where have you gone? Come on. Come out. I've been looking for you for a while and I can't find you. You're too big for these games. Come out of your hiding place and tell me who you are.]

Thus, Cuba is the space through which the female protagonist traverses; it is not the central focus of the novel, merely the setting. In a recent interview with Yara González-Montes, Canetti argues

that as a Cuban writer, many expect her to focus entirely on the island. Yet, for her, those that write about Cuba run the risk of falling into a trap. Or in her own words: “La obra corre el riesgo de convertirse en un despilfarro de dolor y rabia, y no precisamente una propuesta literaria” [The work runs the risk of turning into a waste of pain and anger, and not necessarily a literary work] (González-Montes, 119). And although there are writers who Canetti feels have been able to present contemporary Cuban reality accurately, there is undoubtedly a peril in choosing to write about the island. As she adds: “Cuba es, definitivamente, una trampa para cualquier escritor cubano que pretendiendo ser victimario y tomar las riendas del dolor (como quien ya se salvó del bien y del mal), siga siendo víctima de ese dolor” [Cuba is definitely a trap for any Cuban author that in trying to victimize, and take over the reigns of pain (as if having been saved from good and evil), continues to be a victim of that pain] (119). However leery Canetti feels about representing contemporary Cuba, she decides to run that risk to which she refers in *Al otro lado*. And although Cuba does not dominate the novel’s narration, Cuba’s history and its particular situation play an integral role in the life of the narrator and other characters. That is, Cuba becomes a backdrop for the protagonist’s transgressions and her continual re-questioning and exposure of society’s mores and doctrines on identity.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyze the narrative and discursive strategies Canetti deploys in *Al otro lado* in order to contest fixed notions of identity, and to suggest the multiplicity of identity. In this novel, sexuality, gender, and nation intertwine to reveal the various ways in which individuals perennially reconstruct themselves and others within various spaces and particular moments in their lives. In order to focus on the multiplicity of the subject, Canetti draws together several narrative and discursive strategies, such as humor, allegory, intertextuality, the juxtaposition of reality and fiction, and the use of the Catholic confession as narration. Moreover, she borrows from and reworks universal world culture, including myths, historical figures and

religious imagery into the narration, as well as previous Cuban authors and their works, including Reinaldo Arenas, as a means of contesting society's proscriptions regarding acceptable modes of behavior by subjects. In my analysis, I focus on structure, plot, themes and characters, and this novel's portrayal of the nation and the national, to argue the ways in which Al otro lado displays in-betweenness, crossing borders in much the same way as do other novels by Cuban women in the Diaspora. I rely on the work of feminist scholars, such as Trinh Minh-ha, bell hooks, Caren Kaplan, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, as well as Michel Foucault, to argue that in Al otro lado, Canetti represents the exclusionary practices of the nation-state, and the ways in which subjects respond to those practices in and by reconstructing themselves.

Thus, in this novel, Canetti's interest lies in the construction of the subject, yet does so by centering entirely on an abject, marginal character. According to Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, the abject is neither subject nor object (1). And she contends, "the one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging or refusing" (8). By donning a voice to a marginal narrator-protagonist, a figure in continual reformulation, Canetti both exposes the constructedness of personal identity, as well as offers this figure a means of talking back. With each name she takes on, with each change in the narration, the narrator-protagonist in Al otro lado rewrites herself. She is, in a sense, deterritorialized, to borrow from Caren Kaplan, from the national. Canetti's female protagonist is always "other", never "one", rather, she is, like Dulce María Loynaz's Bárbara, always many women at once. In Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex", Judith Butler reiterates the idea, asserted through the years by Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Plato and others, that individuals ultimately construct themselves precisely through the repudiation of the "other", through difference (3). Without repudiation, in fact, the subject cannot emerge. In Al otro lado, Canetti presents us with an individual that does not

repudiate the other, but rather assumes the “other”, reformulating herself, in an attempt to gain an understanding of who she is and what occurs around her. Canetti’s narrator-protagonist never emerges as a fixed subject, thereby pointing to the fluidity of identity, contradictory and paradoxical, but always in motion. Canetti’s work reveals what Caren Kaplan describes in her analysis of third world women’s memoirs as the “inability to remain in any one position – past, utopian, present, minor, major...” (1987, 192). Narrator and protagonist, Canetti’s main character refuses to remain in one position, be it in time, in space, or in her opinions, and in her reformulation makes reference to sexuality, gender and nation, and the ways in which these very concepts are both contrived and disputed by individuals *and* societies, by the personal and the public.

In the second part of this chapter, I briefly turn to Novelita rosa, Canetti’s second novel, to argue the ways in which Canetti goes beyond Al otro lado, by transcending the issue of identity in a Cuban-Caribbean context to focus on the US Latino/a experience. By choosing to write a novel about issues affecting Latinos living in the United States, Canetti assumes the role of US Latina writer, distancing herself from strictly Cuban issues. This short novel, written entirely in the United States, merits analysis, as it represents, in my judgement, an example of the diversification of themes of contemporary Cuban novelists writing both within and outside Cuba. Specifically, Canetti’s novel appears to cross borders in various ways: the plot and narration, the use of parody and humor, and the characters, all of whom cross physical and psychological borders, as well as the author’s choice of the topic, all allude to Canetti’s interest in moving beyond the Cuba divide towards a transnational view of US Latino/a identity.

In Novelita Rosa, Canetti lends her attention on the tragi-comic life of Rosa, an illegal Mexican immigrant living with her family in Southern California, who becomes hooked on TV soap operas. Although written after the completion of Al otro lado, Novelita Rosa was published several months before. Thus, technically Canetti’s second novel, Novelita Rosa is her first work published

off the island and the first to appear in the United States. There are differences between the two novels, particularly in structure and narration; yet, in Novelita Rosa Canetti continues to be interested in the construction of identity. However, in her US novel, she chooses to center on the ways in which gender and national identity take shape in the life of a country-less woman living in the US. Through the use of parody and black humor, Novelita Rosa exposes the construction of identity and turns to the importance of creativity for survival within multiple spaces or locations. Canetti's choice of parody is revealing, for it is a genre that purposely subverts another text. It thus, alludes to narrativity, to the construction of the work. According to Joseph Dane, parody is “an imitative reference of one literary text to another, often with the implied critique of the object text” (4). And he adds, “the possibility of parody is threatening—it is threatening to the poetic community and threatening to the scholarly community as well...” for as he puts it, “parodic texts are at odds with their targets” and thus, parody takes on the form of literary criticism (11). Linda Hutcheon argues that parody is the perfect postmodern form because it “paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies” (11). And Vincent Crapanzano posits, parody stresses difference, and “through the inscription of difference in a literary or artistic tradition, masters it” (88).

This text's parody of Rosa's favorite television soap operas and the use of camp in the narration are significant. Precisely through parody, Canetti is able to expose the various problems the protagonist encounters. Moreover, in addition to parodying television soap operas and commercials, Novelita Rosa reworks Vargas Llosa's La tía Julia y el escribidor. In a sense, this novel parodies a parody, but does so by turning its attention to a woman caught in-between several spaces; her old life in Mexico, her new life in the United States and the fictional world of the soap operas. The protagonist's obsession with numerous television soap operas becomes a substitute for her dreary, drab life, and eventually come to control her very existence; her life and those of the television characters she watches eventually becoming blurred. Thus, although television and

consumerism initially offer the protagonist an escape from her present, they ultimately serve to separate her from those around her. Although Rosa relies on material goods and the media as a means of escape, in effect isolating her own self from the real world and its problems, her experiences do not appear to offer her an authentic voice; rather she continues mute or silenced, trapped in limited, private spaces. Unlike the female protagonists in Chaviano and Valdés' novels, or the narrator-protagonist in Al otro lado, all of whom isolate themselves, *se aislan*, as a way of talking back in a society that has attempted to silence them, Rosa's *aislamiento* appears stunted, doomed to failure. Rosa's growing isolation does not appear to offer her a viable means of talking back, but rather, quite the opposite is true, she is unable to "act" in real life. This failure for agency, sets Novelita Rosa apart from Al otro lado, for despite the fact that the narrator-protagonist in Al otro lado does not overtly "act", there is some degree of agency in her confession as it serves as a means of talking back. Moreover, the contradictory role of the mass media in the reconstructing of subjects, particularly in those individuals crossing borders in the ever-growing, globalized world, is intricately tied to the lack of agency.

As I argue in the last part of this chapter, Novelita Rosa serves as a bridge between contemporary Cuban women's fiction (on and off the island) and the diverse literature of Latinas writing in the United States. By centering on Rosa, Canetti assumes the role of Latina writer, pointing to the transnationality of US Latino/a culture(s). Her sensitivity toward the specific problems of the growing and diverse Latino populations, places Canetti into an entirely different category than many of her fellow Cuban and Cuban-Americans writing in the US. Furthermore, her work points to the future of Cuban Studies. The questions Canetti poses regarding this country-less woman serve as a reminder of the growing number of nation-less individuals crossing borders around the globe.

And finally, as I argue in this chapter, in both of Canetti's novels, the nation and the national are put into question, and identity, be it gender, sexual or national identity, continuously come undone, to reveal the multiple ways identity is reconstructed. Yet, whereas Al otro lado focuses and confronts issues of identity within a Cuban, albeit indirect, context, in Novelita Rosa, Canetti steps away from that paradigm to underscore the very issue beyond the island, within a US context. Undoubtedly, Canetti's narrative, produced both on and off the island, is markedly feminist for its structure, plots, discourses and themes and its espousal of transnationalism. More importantly, in her narrative protagonists take on multiple subject positions, reformulating themselves within their particular surroundings, crossing national and psychological borders in each given situation as they see fit, or as the feminist anthropologist Henrietta Moore explains: "Individuals are multiply constituted subjects and can and do take up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices" (55).

PART I

IN PROCESS – THE NOVEL AS SEARCH IN AL OTRO LADO

Written during a period of seven years, in three different spaces/places, Havana, Southern California and Boston, Al otro lado reflects the sensation of incompleteness or in-betweenness that characterizes much of the contemporary Cuban literature being produced on and off the island. The sensation of novel "in-process" stems not only from the novel's haphazard production, but also from its structure and the themes upon which it focuses. The novel's emphasis is not unusual, per se; there are numerous novels by Latin American women writers that revolve around the first person narration of a female protagonist. Indeed, as I assert in the third chapter of this study, there is a strong correlation between feminine/feminist narrative and autobiography, or what I call pseudo-autobiography. In this respect, Canetti's first novel resembles Zoé Valdés' La nada cotidiana. Like Valdés' novel, Al otro lado centers on the life of a twenty-something, young woman and her search to discover what lies "on the other side". Like Valdés' *Patria/Yocandra*, Canetti's nameless protagonist searches for answers to many of life's questions. For both female protagonists', there is a desire to transcend the present, the here and now, escape from what *Patria/Yocandra* coins *la nada cotidiana*. For these women, their narration, transmitted either textually or orally, becomes a means of purging oneself and of "talking back" to those in power. As is the case in La nada cotidiana, in Canetti's novel there are various scenes that hint at the autobiographical, forging a connection between author and narrator. In Al otro lado, this is especially evident at the end of the novel, when the narrator-protagonist chooses to leave her island-home for another land, describing travels very much like the ones Canetti, the author, took upon leaving Cuba. Indeed, Canetti appears to write herself into her text, pointing to the constructedness and transient nature of both literature and identity: "Me muevo hacia el Pacífico o hasta el Atlántico. Lo sé por la posición del sol, que unas veces se duerme de lado, y otras de

frente. Ahora estoy de cara al Atlántico. Las olas van y vienen y juegan a inventar la espuma" [I move toward the Pacific or toward the Atlantic. I know it by the position of the sun. Sometimes it sets on its side, at other times on its front. Now I face the Atlantic. The waves come and go and they pretend to invent the foam] (216).

This novel, therefore, follows the pattern of other works by Cuban women writing on and off the island by donning the female protagonist the power of the word, the power to *talk back* to those that have attempted to silence or marginalize them. Yet, one way this novel differs from those by other authors is in *the means* by which the female protagonist chooses to narrate her life story. Narrated in the first person singular, the novel revolves around the narrator's confessions to Jonathan, the young priest of a local church. On the surface, the novel appears to have a conservative or traditional theme, particularly in view of the presence of a Roman Catholic priest, a Baroque-style Church, the ritual of confession, and the abundance of religious imagery in the narration. Yet, these religious, specifically Catholic images are soon contrasted or juxtaposed with the narrator's risqué narration, through a confession of her life. That is, the narrator-protagonist in this novel is a transgressor, not solely for choosing speech over silence, but also for "making faces" to construct her identity while simultaneously donning different "masks". In *Making Faces/Haciendo caras*, the Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa explains, "when she transforms silence into language, a woman transgresses", and adds that there are multiple ways for women to subvert the status quo via creative acts such as writing, painting, performing and filming, as well as through political activism (xxi). In *Al otro lado*, Canetti uses the *confession as narration* as yet another way of questioning and subverting the status quo. The use of the confession as narration is quite significant as the confession serves as a viable means of speaking for the marginal narrator-protagonist, as well as a way of exposing inconsistencies within her society. In the most traditional sense, the Catholic confession is a ritual that intends to cleanse the soul from sin and in

doing so receive forgiveness from (the male Christian) God. Yet forgiveness for one's sins is *only* possible through (the male) Priest's mediation, it is only "HE" (God and/or Priest) that is able to determine or dictate what sin is, as well as prescribe the requirements needed to cleanse the soul from sin and temptation.

In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault describes the function of the ritual of confession, its relationship to power, and its contribution to the policing of sex. Foucault contends that in the seventeenth century, the ritual of confession, became a way of "controlling sex" by transforming it into discourse. The policing of sex, via its transformation into a discourse, ultimately transformed the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behavior, most pronounced in the nineteenth century (Foucault 26). Moreover, "since the Middle Ages, at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (58). According to Foucault, the confession,

...plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public or in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves... One confesses-- or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat... Western man has become a confessing animal. (59)

Thus, Canetti returns to a rather pervasive form of "telling", the confession, in order to reveal and challenge traditional discourses of nation and gender. One of the most striking characteristics of Canetti's novel is that it continuously undermines the confession's original intent, it undermines the priest's role in that ritual, and ultimately transforms the confession into a means of "talking back" for her nameless narrator-protagonist. In fact, the narrator-protagonist's confession does not seek to establish a "Truth"(or a discourse) about sexuality and gender, rather quite the opposite. Each telling/retelling through the confession undermines previous tellings, previous "truths". In "Talking

Back" bell hooks posits that the act of speaking is not merely an act of resistance, rather, "[True speaking is]... a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. It is a courageous act, as such, it represents a threat to those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced" (210). Thus, the nameless protagonist's confession-narration not only confronts and subverts orthodox religious doctrines or political/social discourses, but also more importantly allows her to challenge her oppressors; those who attempt to silence her. These include family members, lovers, and persons in the position of power. In addition to serving as a way of talking back, the *confession as narration* also reveals the ways in which identity is in continual process, often contradictory and in motion, yet determined or mediated by whom or what surrounds the individual during particular moments in her/his life. I return to this point later in the chapter, in particular to focus on the positioning of Canetti's narrator-protagonist's abject status within contemporary Cuban society. I turn to Judith Butler's work on the exclusionary matrix in the formation of identity in my analysis of Canetti's novel to argue that in Al otro lado the narrator-protagonist's refusal to adopt a fixed identity. Her on-going adoption(s), or better yet appropriation of various names, reflects not only the complexity and constructedness of identity formation, but ultimately leads to an undoing of fixed notions of nation and national identity.

From the outset, then, the narration-confession transgresses or moves beyond *what should be* confessed to a Catholic Priest and delves into even the most decadent and sordid moments of the young protagonist's life. The transgression not only lies in *what* the protagonist confesses but in *how* she does it; she is without remorse for any of her so-called deviant actions. That is, although all sins may (and ought to) be confessed to a priest, there needs to be an awareness of one's sinfulness, as well as remorse and penitence, in order to receive absolution. Yet in her narration the protagonist continuously upsets the traditional Catholic confession,

wrestling away its original intention and modifying it for her own purpose. She takes joy in retelling her sins to the Priest, her confession becoming a form of liberation. Moreover, rather than simply confessing recent sins, committed as an adolescent or adult, the nameless protagonist returns to her earliest moments, starting before her birth, while still a fetus in her mother's womb. Once again, therefore, this novel reminds readers of Zoé Valdés' novels, *Sangre azul* and *La nada cotidiana*, by narrating moments preceding the birth of the protagonists. The narrator-protagonist of *Al otro lado*, in fact, goes as far as to confess her earliest childhood desires, which include vanity, gluttony, and sexual desire, referring perhaps to the seven deadly sins. She admits that from an early age she sought constant pleasure:

Conocí el placer físico antes de ningún otro placer y nunca privaría a otro ser de ese don que Dios puso en nuestros cuerpos... porque, ¿no dijo usted hoy en la misa que Dios nos creó a su imagen y semejanza? ¿Y por qué nos dispuso para el placer, si no quería que lo sintiéramos? ¿Para torturarnos? ¿Para obligarnos a ganar una vida mejor... sin placer? ¿Y por qué iba a querer yo una vida sin placer? (28)

[I knew physical pleasure before any other pleasure and I would never deprive another being from this gift God put in our bodies... because, didn't you say in Mass that God created us in His image and likeness? And why did he create us for pleasure if he didn't want us to experience it? To torture us? To force us to earn a better life... without pleasure? And why would I want a life without pleasure?]

Throughout her confession as narration, the young woman reveals that she is aware of her transgressions, but more importantly, is not remorseful of them. She is conscious of the society's expectations regarding behavior and beliefs, and despite this, continues to transgress, finding a way to talk back, often through humor, and by appropriating the Catholic confession to do so. Although she attends mass, confesses regularly, and prays to Christ and the Virgin Mary, the narrator-protagonist does not follow Catholic orthodoxy. She rejects God's intentions, as the previous quote reveals, and rejects most of the Church's doctrines, including the belief in Mary as virgin. She explains:

No estoy segura de lo que estoy haciendo en este lugar. No me acostumbro a estar escoltada por estatuas sufrientes ni a pisar una alfombra de terciopelo falso. No creo en la santidad de los apóstoles ni en la virginidad de la Virgen. Creo en la virginidad de su alma callada. Veo más casta su maternidad consciente, que su coito con un espíritu alado. ¡Qué perversión han admitido durante siglos! Y después de todo, ¡qué dulce perversión! (29)

[I'm not sure what I'm doing here in this place. I don't become accustomed to being guarded by suffering statues, or to step on a false velvet rug. I don't believe in the sanctity of the apostles or in the virginity of the Virgin. I believe in the virginity of her quiet soul. I find her conscious maternity purer than her intercourse with a winged spirit. What a perversión they've admitted for centuries! And after all, what sweet perversión!]

The protagonist, in fact, goes as far as to admit, "No creo en nada y creo en todo. No quiero creer en lo que creo y creo en lo que no quiero creer" [I don't believe in anything, and believe it all. I don't want to believe in what I believe, and I believe what I don't want to believe] (30). This paradoxical statement reveals the way in which individuals continually reconstruct their beliefs, therefore hinting in yet another way at the idea of novel and identity "in-process".

Through her *confession as narration*, the narrator-protagonist transgresses from the limits imposed upon her by society. As mentioned, like Valdés' Attys, from Sangre azul, Canetti's nameless protagonist turns to an unconventional narration of her earliest moments, including her parents' sexual relations while still in her mother's womb. And also like Attys, the protagonist of Al otro lado describes her birth in her confession to Father Jonathan, using humor to explain her initial entry into the world.

¡No digo yo si lloré después del susto que me hicieron pasar y de aquel golpe que me dieron que casi me mata! Me agarraron por los pies y empezaron a reír mientras yo clamaba a gritos que me pusieran en una posición más digna. ¿Qué es eso de andar patas arriba?, pensaría. El médico me sostuvo con fuerza y me registró cada fracción del cuerpo. Pretendía hallar mis dolores y alegrías al solo tacto de sus ásperos y nudosos dedos. (16)

[I cried so much after the scare I suffered and from that blow that almost killed me! They grabbed me by the feet and started to laugh while I explained screaming so that they'd place me in a more dignified position. I must have thought, "What is this about being feet up?" The doctor held me by force and examined every inch of my body. He attempted to find my sorrows and joys by touching me with his rough and knotty fingers.]

According to the sociologist Michael Mulkey in his study On Humor, "Humor furnishes a realm of safety and release from [these] problems. The existence of the humorous mode enables participants periodically to enter a domain in which the features suppressed with difficulty under normal circumstances are allowed free rein" (215). In a literary text, such as Al otro lado, humor serves a double function. On the one hand, the humor within the novel serves to free the narrator-protagonist from certain societal restraints; on the other hand, humor clears reader(s) from particular expectations or ideas regarding acceptable individual behavior as well as particular modes of narration. As is the case with parody, the use of humor serves to expose particular contradictions within society and as a means of escape, via laughter, from that society. In Al otro lado, the incorporation of humor is significant for various reasons. First, the narrator-protagonist incorporates humor within a context where it is not normally used -- during the ritual of confession. In addition to confessing transgressive actions without any apparent remorse, mostly narrations on her various sexual encounters, the narrator also adds humor in her narration of these actions. Secondly, the use of humor appears in those confessions/narrations focusing on traumatic experiences, including her trial and incarceration by government officials. Thus, humor, within the confession, becomes an option for the narrator-protagonist, a personal recourse that allows her to *talk back* to a restrictive society.

Using much the same humor, no doubt as a means of undermining those in a position of power, the narrator-confessor continues, from confession to confession, chapter to chapter, to narrate events from her childhood, puberty and early adulthood. She narrates both her specific

visits to the Church, as well as those actual confessions of her life to the young priest. The veracity of her multiple confession(s), however, is continuously undermined from chapter to chapter, there is a blurring of reality and fiction, a blurring that has as much to do with the textual or literary, as well as with the reconstruction of the self by the individual subject. Thus, each individual confession appears to produce truth as Foucault contends, yet, this "truth" is but one version, not *the* version. The confession reveals continual ambiguity regarding the narrator-protagonist's acceptance of the dominant discourses regarding what is acceptable and transgressive. In fact, the confession as narration reveals the protagonist's difficulty with accepting the "Truth" as well as distinguishing reality from fiction. She exclaims, for example, "Me temo haber dicho demasiada verdad, padre. Aunque yo no tenga bien claro los límites entre lo cierto y lo incierto de la vida" [I fear that have said too much, Father. Although I'm not too clear about what is real and what is not in my life] (32). At other moments, she laments mixing different events in her head, unable to order events chronologically in her mind, and even less, transmit that order in her confessions to the priest. Thus, again, she appears to create "truth" with each confession/narration. And as in Sangre azul, by the end of the novel, most of what the narrator-protagonist has confessed/narrated to the priest is exposed as a fiction rather than "Truth". Her confession as narration places into light the multiple ways society expects individuals to believe and conform to a pre-determined thought or behavior.

According to Foucault:

[The obligation to confess] is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at a price of liberation. (60)

In Al otro lado, the narrator-protagonist is well aware of how society and those in power seek to control her and her deviancies. She is aware of what society considers "deviancies", although her words and actions reveal that she does not suppress her "deviant" thoughts and behavior. She

confesses that as a child she was punished for telling lies. As she says: "Quizás mi mente nunca quiso ver la realidad. Quizás. Y fui castigada por eso hasta que finalmente aprendí la lección: debo decir la verdad de los demás y no mi propia verdad; debo decir lo que los demás esperan y no alterar su noción exacta de las cosas; debo creer en lo que veo y no lo que imagino" [Perhaps my mind never wanted to see reality. Perhaps. And I was punished for that until I finally learned my lesson: I should tell the truth to others and not my own truth; I should tell others what they expect and not alter their exact notion of things, I should believe in what I see and not what I imagine] (32). However, despite having learned to say what others expect, appearing to conform to what others believe, the narrator's *confession as narration* does quite the opposite of what she had promised in the previous statement. What the narrator confesses/narrates to the priest is *her* interpretation of truth, her own creation or fiction, she produces "truth" with each confession. Yet, she does not control her proper confession, or self-censor, as a way of hiding those actions deemed subversive or unacceptable in society. That is, the narrator is silent and silenced "outside", censored in the public spaces. Yet, within the space of the confessional, she creates, speaks and more importantly, *talks back* to a society that attempts to place limits on her and other like her.

Like Chaviano and Valdés, in Al otro lado Canetti draws a fine line between truth and fiction, as well as between "aquí y allí", here and there, to comment upon the variability (and construction) of identity. Indeed, as suggested above, Al otro lado contests and confronts any notion of identity, be it gender or national, as fixed, envisioning identity as fluid and ever-changing, as feminist scholars have long argued. The novel's structure, the confession as narration, the plot and themes, and the ideas upon which it focuses, point to the in-betweenness of the narrative, and in doing so, underscore Canetti's worldview regarding identity. I return to the plot and structure shortly, but I would like to briefly add here that the characters are also important indicators of this so-called in-betweenness, not solely the narrator-protagonist, but also those around her, including

Father Jonathan, the protagonist's numerous lovers, and her inquisitors or victimizers. One of the ways the female protagonist displays her in-betweenness is by taking on different names or identities throughout the narration, mythological, classical and religious names such as Julieta, Juana de Arco, La Virgen de la Caridad, and Santa Teresa de Jesús. Many of these names allude to mystics or channelers, women with the ability to transcend time and space, speak to those in the spiritual realm, and/or are knowledgeable in the art of magic. These names, taken at different moments in the narration, act as masks that hide the protagonist's true identity from both Father Jonathan and the readers, as well as underscore the variability of identity, the impossibility of finding/being the true self. The protagonist, in a sense, represents extremes; she is, like Loynaz's Bárbara, no one and everyone at once. She lacks a fixed identity, in continual reconstruction through the adoption of different names. Judith Butler contends that the act of naming serves to set boundaries, as well as reiterate established or acceptable norms within society (1993, 8). Thus, the act of naming serves in the construction of sexual and gender identity. Significant, therefore, is the fact that in this novel the narrator-protagonist names herself, thereby setting her own boundaries, and challenging what is deemed acceptable in society. Moreover, on a literary level, the appropriation of the names is intricately tied to the novel's in-between structure, revealing its intertextuality and helping to underscore the juxtaposition of reality and fiction. Besides the protagonist's adoption of multiple names or identities, her numerous lovers also don the names of famous warriors, historical leaders, and classic literary characters. Yet, these characters receive their names from the narrator-protagonist, who baptizes those around her in much the same manner as Valdés' Patria/Yocandra. Thus, the narrator-protagonist not only reconstructs herself, but also those around her in her *confession as narration*. She "produces" what she names, as Foucault contends, via the confession. Indeed, the construction of identity appears paradoxical and problematic. For one thing, one must ask the question: Who constructs whom? Or as Butler puts it,

"If gender is a construction, must there be an "I" or a "we" who enacts or performs that construction?"(1993, 7). Some feminists, like Nancy Chodorow, contend that identity, specifically gendered subjectivity, is personally and socially constructed (517). In Al otro lado, the narrator-protagonist appears to construct herself, yet her construction is always mediated by circumstances around her. And, yet, she too constructs others. Certainly, her entire confession is a retelling of her life and of those near her. On speaking of the construction of identity, therefore, there is a certain allusion to fiction. And although in a literary analysis, such as this one centering on Canetti's Al otro lado the construction of identity, in this case the narrator-protagonist's, does point to fiction on several levels, there need be an awareness of the problem associated with using this term. There is a risk involved in stressing this nexus between identity construction and fiction, for as feminists contend identity, no matter how constructed, is in fact real, lived, enjoyed and suffered.

Tied to the suppression of authentic names and the appropriation/donning of alternate names, is the adoption of various sexual identities by the narrator-protagonist and other characters in the work. First, as Foucault argues, the use of the confession lends itself to the discussion of sex and sexuality, and is "the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (63). In fact, in addition to particular "confessions" on "deviant" sexual relations, characters in Al otro lado continuously cross gender, sexual, and national borders through both the adoptions of various names, as well as through their movement through various spaces. I return to this idea later in this chapter, but at present, I'd like to explore one of these characters, Father Jonathan, the only figure in the work that maintains the same name and apparent identity throughout the narration. Jonathan's presence in the novel is paramount, for although he is a silent character, not much delved into; he is the narrator's sole confessor, albeit starkly different from most Catholic confessors. He does not play the traditional role of mediator between the protagonist and God. Rather, he is the narratee who listens to the protagonist's wayward *confession as narration* within

the fixed space of the confessional. He is a neutral, stable figure who remains asexual and/or androgynous, not solely for his condition as priest, but for his ability to listen to his confessor's tales without judging her. Indeed, the confessional discourse does not come from above, rather, as Foucault explains comes from below, from he/she that confesses (Foucault 62). And moreover, the veracity of the confession lies in the bond between the one who speaks and what h/she is speaking about. But on the other hand, "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained) but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know" (62). Yet, Father Jonathan does not speak, nor does he question the protagonist's actions, as would a typical confessor. He in fact, appears unchanging, although he does evolve in the narration. What we know about him comes directly from the protagonist as she progressively constructs him, while simultaneously reconstructing herself. He is fictionalized, as are others in the work, by the narrator-protagonist. He appears to her as a multiple figure, donning feminine and masculine characteristics, to reveal the constructedness of gender identity. As the narrator explains, Jonathan is not simply a man, nor for that matter a priest:

Usted es un hombre y lo sé. No crea que no lo sé. Pero a veces pienso que no tiene sexo alguno. Que no es ni hombre, ni mujer. Es cura. Yo nunca supe hallar la diferencia entre hembra y varón. Ni creo que nadie haya nacido con tan acertado instinto. Nací con el instinto de amar y con la certeza de que el placer existía en algún lugar del amor. Muchas veces quise besar a mi madre en los labios... y a mi abuela y a mi padre y a mis amigos. Los amaba tanto que quería llenarme de ellos completamente y coserlos a mi piel de algún modo mágico. Por aquí, por allá, esto no, esto sí. Entonces, comencé una de las escuelas más difíciles: encontrar las diferencias, adivinar qué era correcto y qué era incorrecto, hasta dónde llegaba el bien y hasta dónde llegaba el mal, qué cosas serían aprobadas y cuáles no. (39)

[You are a man, I know. Don't think that I don't know. But sometimes I think that you don't have a sex, at all. That you are neither man, nor woman. You're a priest. I've never been able to find the differences between man and woman. Nor do I think that I was born with such an instinct. I was born with the instinct to love, and with the knowledge that pleasure exists in love in some way. At many moments I wanted to kiss my mother on the lips... and my grandmother, my father, and my friends. I loved them so much that I wanted to fill myself up with them, and sew them onto my skin in some magical way. Here, there, this yes, this no. Then, I started one of the most difficult schools: to find differences, figure out what is right and wrong, good and bad, and what would be approved or not.]

The narrator-protagonist, Jonathan, as well as other characters in this novel all reveal the various ways individuals receive *and* adopt identity, as well as "acceptable" forms of behavior. In her work on the acquisition of sex and gender, Judith Butler argues that identity formation is intricately tied to what she coins performativity. As she explains:

Performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names. (13)

In *Al otro lado*, the unnamed narrator-protagonist, in her *confession as narration*, continually produces what she names. Not only does she reconstruct her past, rewriting and erasing events at whim; she also recreates those around her, *their selves* and *her selves*. This continual recreation of the self or selves not only results in a blurring of actual events; as a result there is gender confusion. Indeed, as I already stated in my discussion of Father Jonathan, characters in *Al otro lado* display polymorphous sexual and gender characteristics. Multiplicity appears on various levels, in their borrowed and transient names, as well as in particular actions. As Henrietta Moore posits: "[the] multiple nature of subjectivity is experienced through practices which can be simultaneously physical and discursive" (81). Therefore, what matters is not the polymorphous nature of the characters or the narrator-protagonist's experiences, rather what is

more important is the very act of re-telling, re-creating those experiences. The narrative itself, the first person confession/narration of a nameless woman who (self-) baptizes herself and others with the names of historical and fictional characters, becomes the means by which Canetti comments upon the fluidity of identity, the intricate relationship between nation and gender, and between sex and the State. As Moore contends: “[the] process of constructing the self has as much to do with the fiction of narrative” (119). Thus, the in-betweenness of the narrator-protagonist’s narrative and the confession as a whole, including its intertextuality, become an even more important element of *Al otro lado*, for on the one hand it displays the process of creation/fiction, and on the other the reconstruction or adoption of [a] identity.

Another way that *Al otro lado* conveys in-betweenness, or the idea of novel *and* identity in process, is through the novel’s structure and stylistics. That is, although narrated entirely in the first person singular, the author opts for two distinctive typefaces to indicate the narrator’s location at the moment of narration. With the exception of the final two chapters of the novel, moments when the narrator is abroad, all other chapters begin with the female protagonist narrating her present location and actions. The introductory sections in each chapter center on the narrator’s doubts, as well as narrate her movement toward the Church and confessional. These introductory narrations, in Italics, are differentiated from the actual confession(s) to Jonathan, which appear in regular typeface. Whereas the sections in italics are descriptive, in many cases baroque in style, and hinting, perhaps, at elements of the neo-Baroque in 20th century Cuban literature, the confessions in regular typeface are often colloquial, and contain descriptions permeated with mundane and eschatological imagery. Thus, the typeface becomes a means for the author to separate the present from the past, and more importantly exhibits in yet another way, the construction of the novel, its fictional condition and by extension the fabrication of identity by way of self-narration. The structure of the individual chapters also points to the novel’s juxtaposition of fiction and reality, for

whereas the italics point to the narrator's creativity, the narration in regular typeface reveals the narrator's jump between events in her life, in a sense, reality, including contradictory beliefs and actions. Moreover, toward the end of the novel, there is an indication that the introductory sections are, in fact, parts of a novel the narrator-protagonist is writing. The use of two distinct typefaces, the use of titles rather than numbers to demarcate chapters, and the incorporation of several literary genres into the narration, for instance songs and poetry, all denote the idea of novel and identity in process.

In addition to the style and construction of the novel, the plot, the characters, and their experiences also expose the idea of novel and identity in process. Characters in this novel take on different names from history and fiction, and in some cases crossing gender and sexual boundaries by doing so. They are in continual redefinition, remaking their selves from situation to situation. The novel is, in fact, an exposé, via the confession, of the protagonist's search and continual reconstruction of herself and others. As alluded previously, through her confession as narration, and by appropriating different names for herself and others, the narrator not only reveals the construction of the self, but also seeks to rewrite history and the literary canon, talking back to past and present societies that have silenced those like her. This apparently simple literary choice to adopt classical references, such as mythological names, takes on several important meanings. On one level, classical references not only reveal the novel's intertextuality; they also aid in conveying the novel's ideas on identity. Secondly, and intricately tied to this novel's take on identity, the adoption of classical names is a conscious effort on the part of the author via her narrator-protagonist to appropriate universal culture for her (their) own specific purpose. Classical and historical figures are appropriated and transformed by an abject narrator-protagonist for an altogether different purpose, thus losing the original attributes, or events, ordinarily associated with them. That is, these new characters have nothing to do with their "originals" but, rather, quite the

opposite. In this novel, the characters, donning classical names, lack in-depth or extensive characteristics or qualities. Moreover, the usual purpose of naming, that of setting boundaries and inculcating norms as Butler contends is lost and undermined in Al otro lado. Names do not make the person, or the subject, but rather individuals *choose* their names and their distinct personalities; classical or historical names are not necessarily indicators of the specific personalities of those characters who happen to bear them. Indeed, it may be noted that as occurs in Valdés' La nada cotidiana, the characters, and more specifically the main character in Al otro lado appear to hide behind multiple masks. The narrator-protagonist puts on and takes off (subject) identities, depending on particular situations thereby aiding like does the novel's structure, in exposing the continual reconstruction of both novel and identity. And in a sense, by putting on and taking off these masks (identities), the main character is able to act, talk back, giving her some form of agency, albeit not as significant as one would hope.

Al otro lado begins with "El Principio" (The Beginning), and the first person narration of its protagonist, in search of herself and of what lies beyond, on the "other side". Confused as to who she is and where she's headed, she only knows that on this side there is "una yo, vestida con una blusa de algodón y una falda plisada con tres botones, al frente. Del otro lado: no sé. Quizás un no sé que con tres botones también" [an I, dressed with a cotton blouse and a pleated skirt with three buttons in the front. On the other side, I don't know. Perhaps an "I don't know what" with three buttons too] (9). Rather than achieving resolution, the protagonist does not appear to discover her identity, nor unearths what lies "on the other side". Instead, at the end of her confession and voyage, most of the initial questions remain unanswered. The plot is a continuum, forever in-process/in-progress, revolving around the life of the female protagonist through her methodical confession to the priest. The chapters are the moment-to-moment confession/narration of her life, starting with events prior to her birth and up to the present.

In the novel's first chapters, the narrator-protagonist centers on her childhood, narrating her desire for attention at an early age, her early instincts and transgressions, and her entry into school, up through the divorce of her parents. Thus, from the outset, the female protagonist reveals her interest in transgressing, in going beyond the limits of "right and wrong", and beyond what society expects or condones. Even more important than her actual actions and experiences is the fact that she has the audacity to tell or confess her life story, including those childhood desires laden with sexual overtones, to a clergyman. And again, although as Foucault contends the confession lends itself to a discussion of sex, the protagonist does not seek penance through her confession. In fact, in her confession, she appears to reinforce her transgressive ideas and actions, contesting particular mores regarding sex within her society. Those centering on her adolescence, for example, are transgressive and humorous at the same time. "Fruta Madura" (Ripe Fruit) is perhaps the most revealing as it focuses on the protagonist during puberty, commencing with her first menstruation, through her first sexual encounters. Using humor, the protagonist begins the chapter with a description of her entry into Church wearing her mother's provocative red dress and high heels, connoting the sexual imagery of the confession to follow. Her flamboyant entrance contrasts heavily with the seriousness of the other Churchgoers who glance as she enters the temple:

La gente me mira porque la gente va muy lenta y yo voy muy rápido. ¿Adónde quieren llegar estos pies apurados? El vestido se me encarama por las caderas. Bájate, vestido --le digo--, bájate, vestido que todos te están mirando. Mis tacones tacatacatataca. Con tanto pica y repica van a ensordecer el tránsito. Cállense, tacones --les digo, pero ellos no obedecen, ellos siguen con su tacatacatataca. La gente me mira y mi vestido se sube y mis tacones tacatacatataca. Ya quiero llegar. Sólo unos pasos y ya estaré dentro. (51)

[People stare at me because they go slow and I go very fast. Where do these feet want to go so quickly? My dress rises up to my hips. Go down, dress, I tell it, go down dress, everyone is staring at you. My heels go tacatacatataca. With so much noise, they're going to deafen traffic. Shut up, heels, I tell them, but they don't listen, they continue tacatacatataca. People stare and my dress goes up and my heels go tacatacatataca. I want to arrive. Only a few more steps and I'll be inside.]

By inserting humor into the narration, *Al otro lado* breaks with traditional, patriarchal, molds and expectations regarding woman's behavior in Church and in society as a whole. The introductory narration, in Italics, prepares readers for the deviant confession/narration to follow. In addition to describing the provocative red dress and heels, the protagonist also describes the Church's thick red carpet, the crucified image of Christ and Father Jonathan's cut hand. In Italics, the narrator comments:

Mi vista vuela hacia las heridas del Cristo crucificado. Lágrimas de sangre corren por su cuerpo de hilo. Estoy llorando sin saber por qué. El Padre entra al confesionario. Yo caigo de rodillas y dejo que mi llanto desemboque en mis labios. El Padre suspira. Tal vez soy yo quien suspira. No sé. Cristo y el Padre siguen goteando lágrimas de sangre e inundan la iglesia. La sangre llega a mis rodillas. ¿O sale? (53)

[My eyes go toward the crucified Christ's wounds. Tears of blood run down his straight body. I'm crying and I don't know why. The priest goes into the confessional. I fall on my knees and let my cries flow out of my lips. The Father sighs. Perhaps I'm the one that sighs. I don't know. Christ and the Father continue dripping tears of blood and it floods the church. The blood reaches my knees. Or does it come out?]

These images of religious significance in conjunction with the chapter's title, "Fruta Madura" (Ripe Fruit), all point to protagonist's sexual maturity. She begins her confession to Father Jonathan:

Descubrí la sangre entre mis piernas. La toque. Roja. Oscura. Con olor a volcán. Ya estaba preparada, pero incluso así, sentí que el corazón me empujaba de un lado a otro. Tenía sangre en las manos, en la cara, en la boca, en el pelo. Sentí la sangre que corría lenta desde el interior de mi cuerpo y desembocaba entre mis muslos. Me habían dicho que aquello era una señal: ya era mujer. (53)

[I discovered the blood between my legs. I touched it. Red. Dark. With the smell of a volcano. I was prepared but even so, I felt my heart pushed me from side to side. I had blood on my hands, my face, my mouth, and my hair. I felt the blood flowing slowly from the inside of my body and exit through my thighs. They had told me that this was a sign: I was already a woman.]

In her confession as narration, therefore, the protagonist describes both the bodily changes she experiences, as well as her first sexual encounters. According to the narrator-protagonist, her initial sexual experimentation begins with her neighbor Donaciano Sade, ten years her senior and nicknamed "el marqués" (the marquis) for his mother's special place in society, "una de las consentidas del gobierno en mi isla" [a privileged individual in my island's government] an indirect allusion to Cuban revolutionary society (56). Sade seeks to engage in sexual relations with the twelve-year old while both are on the elevator of their apartment building, yet his attempts fail. Her second and more in-depth sexual relationship is with Romeo, her first boyfriend, on whom she centers in "Posesión del lirio" (Possession of the Iris). Whereas Sade appears to be an early adolescent temptation, Romeo alludes to patriarchal, heterosexist notions of happiness, those accepted and promoted in society.

I shall return shortly to these male figures, but first I'd like to turn briefly to the names that the narrator-protagonist dons during her sexual trysts with these two men. Whereas in the chapter "Fruta Madura", the narrator-protagonist dons the name of a religious figure, Teresa de Jesús, in the following chapter, "Posesión del lirio", she takes on the literary name Julieta. As for the name Teresa, with this name and her confession as narration, the narrator-protagonist once again undermines Catholic doctrine at various levels. Like Teresa de Jesús's autobiography Libro de su vida, the narrator-protagonist chooses to narrate her life, from childhood to adulthood. Yet, whereas Teresa's narration focuses on her spiritual evolution, the narrator-protagonist in Al otro lado centers on her sexual evolution, commencing with childhood desires up through various sexual relationships. For one thing, although the narrator as "Teresa de Jesús" is a virgin, as was

the sixteenth century Spanish Carmelite nun, she thoroughly enjoys the forbidden. Indeed, she appears to fall into ecstasy during her encounter with Sade. Thus, unlike the historical Spanish Carmelite nun whose meditations caused religious fervor in her, the narrator-protagonist's ecstasy is a result of her adolescent sexual desire. Therefore, the name Teresa de Jesús loses its original Catholic association in this novel, and serves as yet another mask for the narrator-protagonist during her confession as narration. The narrator-protagonist as Teresa de Jesús, is an adolescent who toys with the attention of an older man, rather than seeking God's divine grace. Furthermore, Teresa de Jesús' desire is for a transgressor, for Donaciano Sade, a figure bearing the name of the 18th century French writer, Donatien-Alphonse-Francois de Sade, best known for his sado-erotic literature. Once again, with her deviant confession, the narrator-protagonist breaks with established codes of behavior not only for her actions, but more importantly for narrating them, and adopting the name of a Catholic saint, and no less the only female Doctor in the Catholic Church, to do so.

Whereas "Fruta Madura" focuses on the narrator-protagonist's early adolescent sexuality, in "Posesión del Lirio", the protagonist-narrator turns to her concrete relationship with her first boyfriend, Romeo. Incorporating several genres into this chapter, including songs and verses, the protagonist alludes to the innocent and happy moments of her adolescence, moments when she and female classmates wrote love poems, drew hearts and arrows in their notebooks, as well as discussed boys. She describes her romance with Romeo, a young man, "blanco como una salamandra", as white as a salamander, that appears to be her Prince Charming. Yet by comparing Romeo to a salamander, a reptile best described as slippery or slimy, the narration strays from the traditional narration of the fairy tale. Despite the reptilian comparison, however, Romeo and his presence do appear tied to a certain adolescent innocence. As occurs in Shakespeare's play, the couple promise to remain lovers forever, "novios para toda la vida". And as also occurs in Shakespeare's tale, the apparent innocence of Canetti's young couple is ultimately shattered. But,

whereas in Shakespeare the tragedy stems from the impossibility of love due to a generations-long family rivalry, in Al otro lado "the tragedy" is not death, but rather breakup and stems from Romeo's incomprehension and jealousy. As the narrator-protagonist explains, Romeo invites her, Julieta, to his home while his parents are away. There they engage in sexual relations for the first time, but although Romeo initially appears as a sensitive young man, he immediately turns on Julieta, becoming infuriated because she does not bleed. As she confesses to Father Jonathan:

Mi novio (el primero) me miraba casi furioso, y mi cuerpo obediente fue acuchillado una y otra vez, deshojado, mutilado, mordido, y, finalmente dominado y vencido. El silencio se quebró en mil pedazos con mi grito, pero la sangre no llovió, no brotó cual fuente inaugurada no escapó cual mar encarcelado. Temblé. Lloré. El no dejó de mirarme fijamente ni un solo momento. Y sentenció:
--- ¿Quién estuvo antes? (65)

[My boyfriend (the first) looked at me furiously, and my obedient body was knifed again and again, deflowered, mutilated, bitten, and finally dominated and vanquished. My silence broke the silence. Yet the blood didn't flow. The trapped water didn't escape from the recently inaugurated fountain. I trembled. I cried. He didn't stop looking at me for a moment. And he demanded: -- Who came before?]

In Al otro lado, the adolescent Romeo is possessive, *un machista*, who seeks to control *HIS* Julieta. In the narration-confession, the protagonist's first sexual relations resemble a rape rather than consensual sex. And although, according to the protagonist, she had never engaged in sex with any man before Romeo, she chooses to respond to him by saying: "Ni te creas que fuiste el primero" [Don't even think that you're the first] (66). Her reply obliterates his supposed (sexual) control over her. Moreover, not only do her words uttered in that moment act to disempower Romeo, but in the act of retelling, or confessing, this experience, to Father Jonathan, the narrator "talks back" once again. Each retelling acts as a catharsis and empowers the protagonist, or as bell hooks asserts moving from silence is "a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (hooks 211). Through her words, the narrator-protagonist, as Julieta, is able to unmask Romeo as the *machista* he is.

The name Julieta is particularly significant, as it appears to make reference to two distinct texts. The direct and obvious allusion is to Shakespeare's character, Juliet, from the drama Romeo and Juliet. However, the name Julieta may also refer to another literary figure, less known than Shakespeare's but more transgressive as well, the protagonist of Sade's erotic novel Histoire de Juliette. Like Canetti's novel, in Sade's novel a transgressive female also narrates her story in the first person. According to Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, Sade's parodic and intertextual text is "one of the rare eighteenth-century novels to be narrated from beginning to end (except for two interpolated stories) by a heroine who has freedom of movement, a freedom which at this period was inseparable from libertinism and transgression" (1). What is significant about Canetti's Julieta, is that although possibly alluding to two distinct figures in Western European literature, she appears to hold her own. She is neither Shakespeare's Juliet, nor Sade's Juliette, but rather her own "Julieta". She is transgressive, yes, but on her own, appropriating that which serves her best, reconstructing herself with each confession, and in doing so, talking back, in her own way, to both individuals and society that have sought to silence her.

The issue of talking back, therefore, permeates Al otro lado, especially in those chapters focusing on the protagonist-narrator's confinement. In talking back, there is a reformulation of what constitutes identity, not merely sexual/gender identity but also national identity, for sex and gendered identity cannot be analyzed separately from the national. Indeed, as I explain at the beginning of this chapter, subjects and subjectivity are as much a product of individual or private circumstances, as of societal or public ones. If, indeed, the subject is a fusion of individual and societal circumstances, as Nancy Chodorow argues, then it is undeniable that any construction of gender as well as sexuality must be construed with the nation in mind. Anne McClintock argues, for example, "all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender" (61). And adds that nations

overwhelmingly envision the citizen as "male" and the representation of male national power depends on the prior construction of gender difference (62).

As I have reiterated throughout the chapter, one of the main interests in *Al otro lado* precisely lies in the reconstruction of gender identity, and in the ways this reconstruction is intricately tied to nation and national identity. I would argue that in Canetti's narrative, as with Chaviano and Valdés, there is a rewriting of the nation, and a turn towards a transnational view of national identity. Before turning to this novel's treatment of transnationalism, however, and the ways in which nation and national identity are represented, it is imperative to focus on those chapters that center on the protagonist's university years. It is precisely in these chapters, where the national first begins to appear in more detail. In these chapters, the female protagonist confesses her social and political problems, including her arrest by government officials following her relationship with Calígula, a dissident and fellow university student. These chapters are crucial for they are at the crossroads of the novel, tied to the "in-between" nature of this work, and more importantly, reveal this novel's representation of nation, specifically, the political/social situation facing Cuba. Indeed, the protagonist-narrator's incarceration is paramount for it serves as a catharsis, in much the same way as her confession. According to the protagonist, she first meets Calígula at the university, or El Alma Mater. As she explains "Subía la escalinata. El Alma Mater siempre tenía los brazos abiertos y entre sus piernas se plegaban los aceros de su vestido" [I climbed the staircase. The Alma Mater always had her arms open and the steel of her dress clung between her legs] (72). Although not mentioned by name, the allusions are to the University of Havana, with its famous steps and the Alma Mater statue, welcoming students to her doors. But again, despite indirect allusions to the island-nation, in a sense, the national appears displaced in these chapters focusing on Calígula's relationship with the narrator-protagonist. That is, there are references to the island, and its particular history, but they are all indirect; the island appears

"masked", like the characters themselves. For one thing, the young man is given the name of a crazed Roman emperor, Calígula, a historical figure belonging to another time and place. According to the narrator-protagonist, Calígula belongs to a family once powerful that became "heredero del proletariado" (heir of the proletariat) (73). Calígula's family, therefore, belonged to pre-Revolutionary Cuba's bourgeois elite, individuals who lost their power following the Revolution. Therefore, although donning the name of a former Roman ruler, the figure of Calígula makes reference to post-1959 Cuban history. In addition, there are also various allusions to the French Revolution in these chapters, for it is the topic the protagonist and her classmates study at the university. Thus, although the Cuban Revolution is not ever mentioned by name, it appears masked under the name of the European one.

As for the adoption or appropriation of names, whereas Calígula maintains the same name throughout her narration, the protagonist adopts multiple names from classical mythology, including Venus, Daphne, Cleo, Perséfone, Artemisa, and Minerva, during their romance. By appropriating these names from classical literature, figures created by men, the narrator-protagonist not only reconstructs herself, but also sets out to rewrite the universal (male) Canon. As she says to Jonathan, "Fui muchas cosas y otra vez yo; y muchas cosas más y otra vez, yo" [I was many things, and then myself again; and many other things, and then again myself] (75). The narrator-protagonist is all these women, and at the same time, none, adding, "Me multipliqué para ti, me deslicé para ti, me hice hombre para ti, envejecí para ti..." [I multiplied myself for you, I slipped for you, I became a man for you, I aged for you...] (75). In this novel, Canetti alludes to the universal woman, in much the same way as Loynaz or Valdés, on whose work I focus in the second chapter of this study. The idea of the universal woman in *Al otro lado* is significant because it suggests that both the personal and social situations that the protagonist experiences also occur to other women (within nation).

As already mentioned, the protagonist's relationship with Calígula leads her into trouble with the government. On the day following Calígula's imprisonment, a state police officer comes to her History class to take her into questioning. Once more, although there is no direct reference to Cuba, several indicators point to the island as the protagonist's home. First and foremost, the officer that leads her away from her history class, dresses in green fatigues and carries "un carné rojo" (a red identity card), hinting at the national, specifically at the members of Cuba's military brigades. He threatens her and insists: "--Préstame atención, muchachita, si hablas, todo será fácil y no tendrás que pasar por esto. Sabemos que eres muy inteligente y que tus padres son gente cabal, honrada y sobre todo revolucionaria. Ya ves, lo sabemos todo -- suspiró como lo haría un inquisidor frente a su más apetitosa víctima" [Listen to me young lady, if you talk, everything will be simple and you won't have to go through this. We know that you're very intelligent and that your parents are straight, honest, and overall revolutionary. You see we know everything-- he sighed as an inquisitor would do before his most appetizing victim] (78). Thus, he intends to force her into "confessing", yet she does not. Rather, what we have is her subsequent "confession" to Father Jonathan of what she experiences, her "retelling" that seeks to both narrate what took place, as well as to challenge her victimizers.

In addition to his clothing and identification card, the officer's words allude to revolutionary Cuba, specifically through his mentioning that he is aware of her family's involvement and agreement with the system of government. His words are aimed at threatening her and coercing her into "confessing". More importantly, with his words, the man intends to display his (masculine) power, and more importantly, the (masculine) Nation-State's. Yet through her words, via her confession/narration, the protagonist ultimately unmasks him and his power, as she does with Romeo and his efforts to sexually control her:

Observé entonces al señor de traje verde. Era un fragmento de hombre que luchaba en vano por superar mi también pequeña estatura y quien disimulaba la incomodidad que le producía tener que levantar los ojos hacia mí. Quise armarlo de un solo vistazo pero aquel conjunto incoherente y anómalo me remontó a un Picasso en plena fase creativa del Guernica -- aunque si el pintor hubiera visto a este maledeficado señor, habría desecho en mil pedazos su encubrada obra y la hubiera sustituido por el desorden estructural y fisionómico del hombrecillo verde que ahora no me quitaba los ojos de encima: pequeño, ancho, pies cortos, dedos gordos, hombros apretados contra un cuello escamoso, piel de calamar, pelo color tabaco, ojos de pulpo, sonrisa de nicotina, nariz de alcantarilla y aliento a mil demonios. Muy simple y muy chato. Muy apertrechado y muy ridículo. Con una voz que pretendía ser grave y aguda al mismo tiempo, pero que sólo alcanzaba el tono de un locutor radial principalmente que emite en frecuencia modulada a través de un artefacto artesanal. (78-79)

[I then noticed the man with the green uniform. He was a fragment of a man that fought in vain to overcome my just as small frame, and that sought to hide the discomfort raising his eyes toward me produced in him. I tried to assemble him in one look, but that incoherent and anomalous being reminded me of a Picasso during his most creative Guernica phase--although if the painter had seen this maladjusted man he would have ripped his hidden painting, and he would have substituted it with the structural and physical disorder of that little green man that now did not remove his eyes from me: small, wide, little feet, fat fingers, narrow shoulders against a scaly neck, squid skin, tobacco colored hair, octopus eyes, nicotine smile, sewer nose and bad breath. Very simple and very short. Very narrow and very ridiculous. With a voice that pretended to be deep and piercing at the same time, but that only achieved the tone of a radio personality that emits in modulated frequency through a crafted artistic fixture.]

Here, the narrator-protagonist uses humor, as well as the grotesque, to poke fun at the man that seeks to place power over her. Her description transforms him into a ridiculous, deformed shadow of a man. Humor becomes a way of narrating an extremely traumatic event in her life, and serves to transform horror into something manageable. In addition, the confession, the retelling, of this event offers her a means to "talk back", albeit after the fact. Through her narrating, she recreates him into an animal-like creature, and does to him what he wanted to do to her. The incorporation of humor, laughter, as well as the use of the grotesque in *Al otro lado*, seek to unmask the powerful, serving as another means of catharsis for the narrator-protagonist.

In addition to humor, the protagonist also chooses to appropriate the name Juana de Arco, the name of a historical martyr, to confess her troubles with the authorities. During "Operación X + Y=?", the name given to the investigation, the officer and his cohorts drive her, as Juana de Arco, through several miles and in various cars, in an attempt to confuse and force her confess what she knows. When the officers eventually escort her home, they search her house, and finally lead her away to jail despite her grandmother's screams and her father's protests. Once in jail, Juana de Arco is given a number and forced to share a cell with insects and rodents. The sections on her incarceration are quite revealing, for through them, the protagonist reveals the most about contemporary Cuba. And more importantly, there is a return to previous Cuban works that helps contest traditional notions of identity. Indeed, Juana de Arco's confession as narration, which includes her sympathy for the tiny creatures that share her cell, remind readers of Reinaldo Arenas's 1969 novel El mundo alucinante. Juxtaposing historical facts with elements of the marvelous real, in Arenas' novel the main character, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, is jailed for his unorthodox beliefs, and for his support of Latin American independence from Spain, and part of his narration tells of his escape and flight across two continents. During his incarceration, Fray Servando, shares his cell with various animals, including a crab, and later rats, all of which are able to speak and communicate with him. Canetti's subtle allusion to El mundo alucinante is extremely significant; in particular because Arenas' novel lies outside the traditional Cuban Canon. Indeed, Arenas may be considered one of the most important members of what may be dubbed Cuba's Queer Canon in so far as the text is considered the work responsible for triggering Arenas' troubles with Cuban authorities in the late 1960s.³ The novel's controversial quality lies in its theme -- one man's struggle for freedom -- as well as in the way in which it was published, off the island and without the consent of the government. In his memoir Before Night Falls, Arenas describes how he was placed under surveillance by State Security for his irreverence toward and disdain for authority

in his novels El mundo alucinante and Singing in the Well but also for having the “nerve to smuggle his manuscripts out of the country and having them published without the authorization of Nicolás Guillén, president of the Writers and Artists Union (UNEAC)” (119). Canetti’s Al otro lado hints at Arenas' controversial work, displaying in yet another way, intertextuality *and* fictionality, in addition to focusing on a marginal individual that is jailed for transgressing, for not conforming to societal expectations. Canetti's protagonist-narrator dons the name Juana de Arco, that is, the name of an authentic historical figure. Like Arenas, Canetti returns to a figure tied to both religious and political history. Although Fray Servando was never canonized, as was Joan of Arc, they are both similar in various ways. For one thing, both historical/fictional figures struggled against foreign rule, seeking freedom for their respective nations, France's freedom from England in Joan of Arc's case, and Mexico's independence from Spain in Fray Servando's. Like Arenas does in El mundo alucinante, in Al otro lado Canetti fictionalizes the life of a controversial historical figure as a way of commenting on the particular social and political situation the main protagonist faces within society. Canetti's main protagonist, as Juana de Arco in this case, and as other figures in other moments, is a marginal figure like Arenas' Fray Servando. Both travel back and forth in time in their narration, as well as across physical spaces. Additionally, the texts themselves travel, taking on a life of their own following their particular publications, and the authors themselves likewise appear to “follow” their texts and characters into the Diaspora.

Another indirect allusion to Arenas and his novel lies precisely in the narrator-protagonist's persecution by authorities for her activities, for her dissidence, as well as for her association with homosexuals. Like Fray Servando, Juana de Arco, is taken to her inquisitors, to Captains Aquino and Torquemada. These men request that she “behave herself”, cooperate with authorities in order to obtain her freedom. They reiterate that they could be her father, “podría ser su padre”, and as the protagonist explains to Father Jonathan, “Qué manía tienen todos por ser mi padre, pensé”

[What an obsession they all had to be my father, I thought] (85). Whereas Captain Aquino (Aquinas) appears to take pity on her, Captain Torquemada chooses to condemn her, in particular for her open views on sexual preference. In his interrogation, he asks what she thinks of homosexuals, when she fails to answer he insists: "Por lo visto estás muy de acuerdo con la mariconería y la corrupción -- concluyó--. ¿Te parece bien que un hombre, lo que se dice un hombre, esté pensando en falos en vez de ayudar la patria, haciendo deportes o cortando caña?" [From what I see, you agree with homosexuality and corruption, he concluded. Do you think that a man, or what we call a man, should be thinking about phalluses instead of helping the fatherland, practicing sports or cutting sugarcane?] (86). But as the protagonist explains to Father Jonathan, "Yo no sabía que tenían que ver los falos con la patria, con los deportes o con la caña, ni por qué el Capitán mezclaba aquellas cosas como si todas estuvieran atadas por un denominador común y procesadas en el mismo central azucarero" [I didn't know why phalluses had anything to do with the fatherland, with sports or sugarcane. Nor did I understand why the Captain mixed all these together as if they all had a common denominator and were processed in the same sugarcane mill] (86).

This section is extremely important for various reasons. First, Captains Torquemada and Aquino, as inquisitors, take on the role of confessors, and seek to coerce the protagonist into "confessing" her deviancy in order to be set free. Unlike Father Jonathan who does not question or condemn the protagonist, Captain Torquemada does ask, and seeks to control her. His words regarding homosexuality set the "standards" for acceptable behavior in society. And as Foucault explains, the confession is the discourse by which sex is presented. Yet here, the narrator does not confess to Torquemada (he who "sets" the standards), rather, the narrator confesses the interrogation itself (an attempt to force a confession out of her), that underscores the intricate relationship between sex and the State. Torquemada's words "claim to speak the truth", to

paraphrase Foucault, and by doing so warn that sexual deviancies are a threat to the individual and society. In discussing the role of scientific discourses on sexual deviancy, Foucault contends: "furtive customs of the timid, and the most solitary of petty manias, dangerous for the whole society; strange pleasures, it warned, would eventually result in nothing short of death: that of individuals, generations, the species itself" (53-54). These discourses were incorporated into national discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to regulate sex. There was an insistence on the "moral cleanliness of body" for the good of the state. In fact, new institutions of public health, in conjunction with evolutionist myths "promised to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations" in the name of "biological and historical urgency, it justified the racism of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in "truth" (54). Thus, Torquemada's reiteration regarding homosexuality, his insistence on speaking of sex is an attempt to eliminate/erase deviancies and deviants conceived as threatening to the nation-state, as well as established a "norm" about proper sexual behavior. Sex, therefore, becomes a public issue between the State and the Individual, as Foucault contends, one that creates a regime of discourses regarding appropriate behavior. The State not only dictates what is appropriate, must not only know what goes on in each individual's sexual life, but also seeks that the individual "control" his/her proper behavior (26).

Despite the lack of direct references, there is ample evidence to suggest that the space in which the narrator-protagonist lives is Cuba. Torquemada's comments regarding homosexuals perhaps refers to the Cuban government's 1960s/1970s campaigns against homosexuals, as well as dissidents and the clergy. In addition to the UMAP camps (Military Units for Aids to Production), designed to rehabilitate those individuals discrepant with revolutionary society and its ideals through hard labor, there were other campaigns specifically designed against homosexuals. These campaigns against gays are well documented in Arenas' Before Night Falls, Brad Epps's "Proper

Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro and the Politics of Homosexuality" and in the documentary "Conducta Impropia" directed by Néstor Almendros (Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba* 178). The homosexual male was viewed as unpatriotic, not fitting into the ideals of the Revolution, for the model citizen was the heterosexual *Hombre Nuevo*, or New Man, symbolized by heroes, such as Che Guevara. Torquemada's disdain for the homosexual stems from their feminization, from their apparent "lack of patriotism". They go against the patriarchal, notion of the family, the one needed for the sustenance of the nation-state and its rhetoric.

For her refusal to view homosexuality as criminal, Juana de Arco is labeled "one of them", "una espía del imperialismo," an imperialist spy, by Captain Torquemada. Although the charges against her are eventually dropped, she, nevertheless, serves thirty-three days in jail for her supposed crime, where she is subject to endless abuse, including injections and sexual abuse by doctors and prison guards. The narrator-protagonist's troubles continue, however, and four years after her initial imprisonment, she is jailed again under the orders of Torquemada. On this second occasion, she is accused of being a danger to society, labeled a deviant for her beliefs, again for her tolerance of homosexuals. During this imprisonment, she is taken to a woman's prison and placed among the most dangerous prisoners, with those women who have killed their husbands. Remarkably, however, the narrator-protagonist is accepted by these deviant women, who include Vesta, Eva, Judit, and Clitemnestra, and she is crowned "la Virgen de la Caridad", the Virgin of Charity (117). Despite her supposed deviance, she is christened "Mother". As she explains to Father Jonathan in her confession:

Corrió la voz por toda la prisión. Se me acercaron no sólo las asesinas, sino también las ladronas, las homicidas, las pervertidas sexuales, las malversadoras, las cómplices, las conspiradoras, las prostitutas, las malasmadres, las hijas de... en fin, las marginadas del Paraíso y las violadas por Lucifer. Todas acudían con la mirada mansa y las carnes rotas. Escuchaba con atención cuanto les decía. Les leía cuentos, les recitaba versos, les cantaba canciones y ellas se quedaban embelesadas, sumergidas en un sueño. (118)

[The news spread throughout the prison. The assassins came near me, as well as the thieves, the killers, the sexual perverts, the embezzlers, the daughters of... in any case, those marginalized from Paradise and raped by Lucifer. They all came to me with a soft look and broken bodies. I listened attentively to what they told me. I would read them stories, recite verses, I would sing to them and they would watch spellbound, submerged in a dream.]

In a sense, the protagonist is initiated into adulthood through her confinement. As she explains to Father Jonathan, "Lo que leí en los rostros de las reclusas, Padre, no lo he leído en ningún libro. Y lo que allí aprendí, no lo hubiera aprendido aunque me hubiera leído todos los libros del mundo y si hubiera vivido mil años. Es una lección que no se puede transmitir porque se queda sembrada dentro y no sabe uno cómo sacarla" [What I read in the faces of the prisoners, Father, I had never read in any book, nor would I have if lived thousand years] (122). Yet despite having "learned", she does so with a price, her trauma is so great, that following her imprisonment her only wish is to die. She negates life and appears to narrate her own death, lamenting, "Adiós, niña muerta, joven muerta, adiós semilla, adiós árbol, adiós fruto" [Goodbye young dead girl, goodbye seed, goodbye tree, goodbye fruit] (127). Her grief alludes to her own death, the death of her youth and spirit following her imprisonment. Haunted by figures from the literary past and history, the protagonist struggles between life and death. Time seems to stand still for the protagonist during her moments in jail and following her release. During these moments, there is a lapse in the confession and a break in the narration that ultimately leads, once again, to a reformulation of identity. Yet, eventually the narrator-protagonist returns or resurrects like Lazarus, and her confession as narration shifts to the multiple ways in which sexual and gender identity are reconstructed, to argue for a transnational view of nation and national identity.

Whereas the first part of the novel focuses on the protagonist's childhood and adolescence through her imprisonment, the second part turns to her adulthood, centering extensively on the acquisition of a polymorphous sexual identity. In "La Resurrección de Leda" (Leda's Resurrection),

the narrator-protagonist delves into the multiple possibilities of sexual identity, confessing the various sexual possibilities offered her to suggest an androgynous construction of self. The construction of identity, in this case one's sexual orientation, as well as gender, is intricately tied to fiction and writing. As before, the narrator-protagonist in *Al otro lado* appropriates a name from classical mythology, Leda, to narrate a particular moment in her life. Like Leda, the mythological figure best associated with poetry and rebirth, the narrator-protagonist is reborn with the help of literature. Literature and fiction save the protagonist, not only reading and writing, but also through opting to retell her life via the confession as narration, something that she had ceased doing following her imprisonment. Fiction and creativity, specifically to write, offers a means of isolating oneself from others, not only to escape trauma, but also as a way of centering the self, as well as a way of reorganizing before taking action. As Leda, the narrator-protagonist chooses to isolate herself, *aislarse*, to then reconstruct her own self and talk back via her confession. She attributes her return to life to a white swan: "Un cisne me devolvió al mundo de los vivos. Un cisne blanco me resucitó cuando su cuello, también blanco, se enrolló en mi cuerpo y lo apretó con suavidad. Desde su posición de cisne, me suplicaba y me ordenaba que resucitará definitivamente y sin pretextos" [A swan returned me to the world of the living. A white swan resurrected me when his neck, also white, rolled itself around my body and squeezed softly. From his position as a swan, he asked and demanded that I resurrect permanently and without excuses] (133). Following her resurrection, Leda chooses to once again narrate/recreate her life stories, stories that transgress the expected. Her narration as confession to Father Jonathan, now, turns to multiple sexual experiences, and indeed, recreates and assumes divergent sexual identities. The first deviant sex act she participates in appears in "El ruedo romano" (The Roman Round). Here she narrates her participation in an orgy, and as with earlier narrations, there appears a sharp contrast between the introduction in Italics and the narration that follows.

Whereas in the introduction, the narrator-protagonist makes reference to Christ's Last Supper, the confession that follows focuses on an orgy that commences following a banquet. Thus, as with previous confession-narrations, a religious event is transformed into an irreverent narration. It is important that the protagonist's first sexual deviant behavior be an orgy, for it is perhaps the most depersonalized of sexual acts. As Lucienne Frappier-Mazur explains in Writing the Orgy: Power and Parody in Sade,

The orgy scene may be defined as the presentation of a collective act focusing on excess-- be it of sex, of food or of language--and on confusion: mingling of bodies, hybrid foods (such as fish and fowl), blurring of the line between natural and artificial décor. At one and the same time, orgy connotes the hybrid, repetition, and equivalence, and constitutes a scene. (1-2)

Frappier-Mazur also adds that "all the figures of the orgy hint at the (Lacanian) phantasy of the "fragmented body" (16). Thus the incorporation of an orgy scene in Al otro lado is significant. For one thing, the lack or apparent loss of a fixed identity in an orgy reveals the constructive nature of identity. In an orgy, participants lose a sense of their selves, names and nationalities are absent, as sexuality takes precedence. As the narrator-protagonist explains in her confession, "era un sexo mas. Un cuerpo más. Una hembra más de las tantas que allí había. Simplemente una más" [I was more sex. One more body. One of many women there. Simply one more] (142). And then adds, "nadie me llamaba por un nombre" [No one calls me by name] (142). And indeed, gender and sexual orientation also change in the orgy, for participants take on alternate roles that they would most probably not assume at other (sexual or non-sexual) moments. Thus, the description of this sexual act reveals the various positionalities taken by the subject in society. Unlike other moments in the narration, where she assumes a specific classical or mythological name, during the orgy scene, the narrator-protagonist remains nameless. She is one of many individuals, she is abject for participating in a deviant act, abject within the act itself, as it is an act that depersonalizes, and finally abject for narrating her participation to a Catholic Priest. As I stated earlier in this chapter,

by abject, I refer to that which is neither subject nor object, and in fact, "the abject has only one quality of the object -- that of being opposed to the I" (Kristeva 1982, 1). Through her participation in the orgy, as well as throughout the novel, Canetti's protagonist is always "other", neither subject nor object, yet both. And her abject status is anchored in a desire to transgress, in particular society's sexual limits; she is mindful of her transgression yet willing to participate in them in order to "talk back". In Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Kristeva contends, in fact, "the abject is related to perversion. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (15). Moreover, abjection, according to Kristeva, "accompanies all religious structurings" (1982, 17), as is the case of this novel's emphasis on Catholic Baroque imagery, the rite of confession (as rule or law), and the role of Father Jonathan. The orgy scene in this novel, therefore, reveals, in yet another way, the protagonist-narrator's abject status, and is but one of countless examples of this novel's take on identity formation. Through her confession/narration of the orgy to Father Jonathan, the narrator-protagonist reveals an awareness of her abject status; she corrupts, to paraphrase Kristeva, the confession, "taking advantage" and "denying" its purpose, in order to reconstruct her self and her identity as she sees fit.

In addition to "El ruedo romano", subsequent chapters center on the protagonist's sexual transgressions, all of which are viewed as dangerous, a threat to society, including her involvement with pornography, her acceptance of male homosexuality and lesbianism, and her relationship with an androgynous hermaphrodite, Catalina/Antonio de Eraúso. One of the most interesting characters in the novel, Antonio de Eraúso was formally a nun who was baptized Catalina at birth. As Catalina de Eraúso this figure lived her life as a woman until electing to leave the convent. Outside the convent walls, Antonio/Catalina chose to live her life as she saw fit, as neither man nor

woman. As the narrator-protagonist explains: "Sí definitivamente era un hombre con cuerpo de mujer, pero a partir de ahora creería que así fue siempre, que algunas personas andan en el cuerpo que no les pertenece. Y tampoco renunciaría a esos ademanes blandos y a esa ambigüedad que lo hacía igual de apetecible para hombres y mujeres" [Yes definitely he was a woman with the body of a man, but from this moment forward he would believe he was always like that, that some people go around with a body that they don't belong in. And he would no longer renounce those bland gestures and that ambiguity that made him desirable to men and women] (180). His/her particular condition as a woman with male and female genitalia, mark him/her as marginal, h/she is an ambivalent figure, neither male nor female, yet both. His/her sexual orientation is also suspect, for in addition to subverting the already complex (and constructed) category gender, he also subverts the categories, gay and straight. In fact, this figure crosses the gender and sexual divisions, perhaps pointing to a bisexual concept of identity. As both Antonio and Catalina, h/she manages to seduce individuals of both sexes, individuals that always deny falling for his controversial charms, "haber sucumbido a tan efimeros y controversiales encantos" (180). The protagonist, in fact, also succumbs to Antonio/Catalina, choosing to call him/her Catalina, "como la habían bautizado su madre y su abuela y su bisabuela" [as his mother, grandmother and great-grandmother had baptized her] (184). In her study on drag, Butler contends that identifying with a gender under what she calls "contemporary regimes of power", deals with "identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated" (1993,126). And she also posits that "being a man" and "being a woman" are "internally unstable affairs", or ambivalent. And this ambivalence stems "precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of the norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine

us completely" (1993, 126-127). The figure of Antonio/Catalina is caught, then, in between genders, as well as in between sexualities. His/her presence is crucial because his/her extreme ambivalence reveals the constructedness of identity through various means, including personal or individual reasons, as well as a larger societal one. Furthermore, his/her presence, like other sexual "deviancies", appears to be a threat to the State. As Foucault explains, "For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime's offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union" (38). Thus, in addition to narrating/confessing her personal sexual indiscretions, the narrator-protagonist in Al otro lado accents various sexual deviancies, such as homosexuality, condemned by traditional religions (the Church) and the State. Far more profane than narrating these acts, however, is the fact that she ties the sexual with the sacred. In fact, besides the confessions of these sexual acts, the protagonist also reiterates the idea that sex, no matter what kind, is a crucial element of life. And her resurrection, her return to life, is in fact only possible through her return to both sexuality and literature.

For most of this chapter, I have centered my attention on the ways in which Al otro lado touches upon the construction of identity, specifically gender/sexual identity. Now, however, I would like to finally turn my attention to the ways in which this novel redefines the nation and the national to suggest a transnational view of identity. This novel, as occurs with the narrative of other Latin American women, is strongly influenced by feminist theory, and thus, seeks to portray identity as fluid and multiple. As shown, from the outset, this novel tackles the issue of gender and sexual identity to suggest their construction, and continual redefinition. Although, throughout this chapter, I have commented upon the role of nation-state and the national in the life of the protagonist, in particular, I have done so by focusing on gender and sexuality, and the ways in which these forms of identity are mediated by the national. Although the nation and the national appear throughout the

text, the novel's more concrete ideas on the national appear in the final sections of the novel, especially when the narrator-protagonist finds herself abroad, away from her island. However, it is important to first turn to moments earlier in the narration that also offer glimpses into Canetti's ideas on national identity.

There are various ways that *Al otro lado* turns to the issue of national identity. One of the ways is through its representation of the family, and most importantly the father figure. Although there are references to the protagonist's real parents, especially during her imprisonment, these figures are never much delved into. The protagonist's parents divorce early in her life, yet this event does not appear to traumatize her. Both parents remarry and she takes turns living between her father and her mother's homes. Like in other novels this study analyzes, in this work, there is the presence of a grandmother figure. Yet she, like the parents, does not play an active role in the protagonist's life. The family, in this novel, as occurs with other works by contemporary Latin American women, appears fragmented and powerless. Although there is a caring father figure, he remains powerless; unable to prevent his daughter from being jailed and tortured under the hands of the authorities. As for the mother figure, she is mostly absent in the life of the protagonist and in the narration. In those few moments when she does appear, she seems to minimize the seriousness of what occurs to her daughter. The lack of power and interest on the part of the protagonist's family with regards to her troubles is crucial, for it points to the nation-state's power over the individual family structure. That is, the family structure appears subservient to state power. The protagonist's continual comments regarding Captain Aquino and Captain Torquemada's insistence that they "could be her father", for example, points to the replacement of the biological father figure with the military state (*Patria*). It is the "Father-State that knows best" rather than the protagonist's biological father. Yet as I have shown throughout this chapter, the protagonist

continually transgresses or disobeys the Father-State's mores on what is acceptable behavior. Her transgressions, as I mentioned, are deemed a danger in and to this society.

One of the most important transgressions and one that undermines both the traditional, patriarchal family as well as the state's hold over individuals lies in her replacement of the father figure with Father Jonathan. Indeed, it is this transgression that allows the narrator-protagonist free license to "talk back". Yet as mentioned earlier, Father Jonathan is not a traditional father figure, he is a complex figure; he becomes her confessor albeit not in the traditional Roman Catholic sense of the word. Jonathan is *her* creation, an androgynous figure that represents the figures of Father, Brother, Lover, Mother, Man-Woman, and Angel. His home, the Church, and more importantly the confessional, become spaces that allow the protagonist to talk back, far away from the limits imposed by society. That is, the nation-space, the space in which the narrator-protagonist *lives* is limiting. It does not allow a freedom of movement or ideas, and thus, only by finding alternate spaces is the narrator-protagonist able to talk back. It is significant that the narrator-protagonist always find herself "inside" small spaces. First, she inhabits an island, in her words "isla diminuta del Caribe", or minute Caribbean island. Within that already limiting space, she seeks further isolation, choosing a Church, and then, the confessional, in order to speak. Thus, she not only seeks small spaces; she appears to be perennially trapped in small spaces. Later in the narration, she discusses other spaces, including the jail cell and her small apartment once abroad. Although apparently limited or trapped in these spaces, as in the island or in a jail cell, the narrator-protagonist opts to use her "isolation", as a means to recreate her world, as a space to talk back. Although movement also is limited, it is not impossible; for in a sense, via her transgressive confession, the narrator-protagonist is able to cross multiple borders. Indeed, the Church and the confessional ultimately appear as safe spaces, places that paradoxically allow for movement within an already enclosed space. Moreover, the novel's emphasis on space(s) as with Loynaz's Jardín,

appears tied to the place of woman within nation. Although limiting, the protagonist contests the nation and its discourses, and reinterprets the very idea of national identity, suggesting a transnational view of identity, of Cubanness.

Finally, in addition to centering on the immediate family as a way to comment upon and contest nation and the national, the narrator-protagonist also focuses upon the larger (extended) family, as a way of representing the larger nation. In the chapter "El árbol caído" the narrator-protagonist confesses the story of her family and comments on the Cuban *ajiaco*, a hybrid Cuban nation, that could very well be any Caribbean island. Thus, in the final moments of this novel, the narrator-protagonist switches her narration from sexuality to nationality. She ceases her discussion of her sexual history to discuss her family history; a family made up of individuals from around the world. She affirms: "Mi familia ha volado siempre en invierno como las aves migratorias, Padre. Yo debí haberle dicho esto desde el principio. ¿No tendrá que ver mi origen con lo que soy? Algo tendrá que ver, pienso. No lo suficiente, no obstante" [Father, my family has always flown during winter like migratory birds. I should have told you from the beginning. Could my origin have something to do with who I am? It must have something to do with that, I think. But not enough, however] (197). Travelers through distant lands, the protagonist's ancestors finally settled in the Caribbean, "[donde] nació mi padre. Y sin viajar mucho, nací yo. He permanecido en esta isla por más de dos décadas y no sé hasta cuándo" [where my father was born. And without much travel, I was born. I have remained on this island for more than two decades and I don't know for how much longer] (198).

In chapter two "Contrapunteo de aquí y allí: Cuban Identity in Transit in the Narrative of Daína Chaviano", I comment upon Ortiz's ideas regarding Cubanness. As I explain, in El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Daína Chaviano rewrites Cuban history and the Cuban nation by integrating ghosts from Cuba's past to represent a new Cuban family. As I posit, the notion of a

national family tree composed of Cuba's traditional ethnic and racial groups has dominated numerous Cuban discourses, including Cuba's canonical nineteenth and twentieth-century texts. In *Al otro lado* Canetti also chooses to return to the notion of the Cuban national family. Indeed, in this novel, a tree appears as metaphor for both the individual family and the larger nation. Yet in *Al otro lado*, this family tree appears fragmented, its members scattered across the globe. The narrator-protagonist describes herself as a branch belonging to a tree that has keeled over. On a personal level, the narrator-protagonist's comments make reference to the dispersion of her own private family, including her parent's divorce, and the migrations abroad by several of her family members. However, the tree also metaphorically represents the nation, and her comments allude to the tumultuous history of Cuba and the Caribbean. Thus Canetti's text although never once mentioning Cuba by name, makes reference to Cuba's large Diaspora, including exile and the separation of families following 1959. Canetti's text suggests, the various ways the personal is tied to the national, and thus, no matter how much one tries to separate oneself from the political, it does ultimately affect the individual.

The final chapters of this novel center on the narrator-protagonist's decision to leave her island-nation following her discovery that her Church is gone and her priest dead. In her final confessions to the priest, before his disappearance, she calls herself "un personaje", a character, and admits that "se inventa a si misma y a los demás" [one invents oneself and others] (207). Thus, there is an admission that one's identity is always in transit, in process, like the novel itself. Once abroad, the narrator-protagonist realizes that there are no answers to her doubts, and that her life itself is a search, she chooses to write as a way of talking back. In fact, it becomes evident that the sections in Italics, as well as, the greater part of the narration as confession have been a creation, her novel-in-process. As she explains: "Miro el mar -- un plato erizado-- y trato de empatar el último capítulo. ¿En dónde me quedé? Ah, ya sé. *Vivía en una isla y un día embarqué*

rumbo al norte en busca de mí. Me encontré sentada frente al mar y con más miedo y más preguntas que antes" [I look at the sea, a plate standing on ends, and I try to tie the last chapter. Where did I stop? Ah, yes, I know. I lived on an island and one day left north in search of myself. I found myself sitting before the sea, with more fear and more questions than before] (224).

In the last chapters of this novel, the narrator-protagonist turns to transnationalism, vis-à-vis her new situation abroad. Once abroad, the narrator-protagonist appears caught in between spaces, "Tengo un pie aquí, y otro allá" [I have one foot here and another one over there] (216).

She observes her old photographs, of moments on the island, in a narration resembling Loynaz's

Jardín:

Acudo a los álbumes de fotografías otoñales. Les quito el polvo y asusto a las arañas que recién se iniciaban en el oficio de Aracné. Cargo con los álbumes y el corazón vuelto a su zozobra habitual, aunque más cansado y triste. Abro un álbum. Una niña envuelta en pañales me guiña un ojo. ¿Soy yo? ¿Mi madre? ¿Quién? Paso la página. Están todos: mis bisabuelos, mis abuelos, mis padres, mis tíos, mis primos, mi hermano, los demás. Sonríen a la cámara. Y yo les devuelvo la sonrisa. (218)

[I turn to photo albums of past autumns. I take out their dust and scare the spiders that had begun the profession of Arachne. I carry the albums and my heart returns to its usual anxiety, although more tired and sad. I open the album. A baby girl in diapers winks at me. Is it me? Is it my mother? Who is she? I turn the page. They're all there: my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my parents, my uncles, my cousins, my brother, and the rest. They smile at the camera. And I return the smile.]

Rather than look at this photograph from her home on the island, she does so from abroad. They appear alive, for she continues to inhabit the island or rather the island continues to inhabit her, although she is physically in another space. This *aislada*, this nameless woman, continues to recreate herself, her life, and those around her in other spaces. Although lacking the Church and confessional in her new space abroad, the narrator-protagonist continues to "create" and talk back through her fiction. Although there is a degree of nostalgia, a longing for the island left behind, the narrator-protagonist is well aware of it, aware of the various ways in which individuals assume their

own selves. Although in another space, she continues to construct her self and others, and furthermore, adopts the idea of always being "on the other side", beyond what is accepted in any society, both appropriating and contesting societal expectations, as she sees fit. Aware, as she explains: "Al otro lado, estoy simplemente. Al otro lado, vuelvo a estar yo infinitivamente" [On the other side, I am simply. On the other side, I am once again infinitely], she is *una aislada*, an island-body, able to move perennially from one side to the other, assuming (an) identity as she pleases, wherever she pleases (250).

In conclusion, this novel, produced in different spaces, manages to portray in-betweenness in various ways, and in particular serves to portray the ways in which identity is in process, perennially reconstructed by individuals and societies. That is, this novel centers on a subject caught in between spaces, and who appropriates several different identities in her continuous reconstruction of the self by way of her narration as confession. Moreover, this novel's production, its narrative style, its adoption of humor and intertextual references also aid in the transmission of the notion of identity and novel in process, in the dismissal of "Truth" and the acceptance of [multiple] "truths".

In addition to focusing on the construction of gendered and sexual identity, this novel, by way of the confession as narration, also comments upon the role the nation-state plays in the formation of the subject. In this novel, the nation and the national, specifically Cuba appears masked, like the characters, yet always underlying the narration. Indeed, through the transgressive narrations, this novel confronts national rhetoric in various ways, suggesting the variability of gender and national identity. Moreover, this novel alludes to the various discourses the nation-state uses and promotes in order to police sex among its citizens and to institutionalize an acceptable [heterosexual] sexuality. Finally, this novel goes beyond the traditional nation, for although the nation continuously appears, what the protagonist seeks is a personal(ized) nation, one that is

transportable and in continual construction. This new nation, like the family, is put together by the individual via writing, and/or with each personal *confession as narration*. Thus, Al otro lado suggests a transnational view of identity, one where the nation, as construction, may be carried within oneself no matter where one finds oneself, crossing spatial and imaginary borders, in order to construct the self.

PART II

TRANSCENDING THE CUBA DIVIDE: LATINO/A IDENTITY IN NOVELITA ROSA

The notion of mass culture arose when societies were already massified. In Latin America the transformations promoted by modern communications media are interwoven with the integration of nations. Monsiváis states that on the radio and in film Mexicans learned to recognize themselves as a totality beyond ethnic or regional divisions: ways of speaking and dressing, tastes and codes of behavior that previously were distant or disconnected are now joined in the language with which the media represent the masses that are invading the cities and give them a synthesis of national identity. (García Canclini 185)

In his now classic study, Hybrid Cultures, Néstor García Canclini analyzes the struggle between tradition and modernity in the cultures of Latin America. In addition to focusing on the role of art, in particular public art and architecture, in the homogenization of individual Latin American nations, García Canclini also centers on the role of the media in creating or transforming national cultures. According to García Canclini, it is through the mass media, in particular television, that modern goods and services are converted into icons to be promoted by the media (185). And it is through the media that popular art wins diffusion and social legitimacy (185). Moreover, García Canclini contends that the mass media, including film, radio and television, integrates and disintegrates, on the one hand uniting consumers, offering them the same access to goods, on the other, disintegrating them by moving individuals from public spaces to private ones (210-211).

The paradoxical role of the mass media in altering or shaping national subjects becomes even more complex in spaces/places where various culture(s) interact, in those spaces deemed (the) border(s). Individuals living in/on the border(s) continually cross from one side to the other, maintaining personal relations on both sides and in fact, conflating the two sides into one, or as García Canclini observes "unable to conceive of the two wholes as separate communities" (231). Border culture is a hybrid one, it is a "culture of mixing," García Canclini contends (242). In addition, the role of the mass media in reinforcing or altering beliefs or attitudes, in those that

crossing borders is further complicated. How does the non-citizen respond to mass media, including advertising? In what ways are traditional beliefs altered or reinforced by modernization? And what role does gender play in the interaction between the traditional and the modern? That is, how does a country-less woman, a woman caught in the borderlands, deal with the various "isms" (racism, sexism, consumerism) she faces in the new spaces she traverses?

It is these questions and more that Yanitzia Canetti asks in her second novel Novelita Rosa, her first work written and published entirely in the United States in 1997. Unlike Al otro lado, in Novelita Rosa Canetti opts to focus on a non-Cuban subject and a non-Cuban topic, going beyond the Cuban divide to focus on the US Latino/a experience. Indeed, in Novelita Rosa Canetti explores the complex life of an illegal Mexican immigrant, Rosa, living with her husband Teodoro and their seven children across the border in Southern California. Although there are similarities between Canetti's two novels, particularly each novel's use of humor and parody, emphasis on the structure and narration, and a focus on the acquisition of identity, Novelita Rosa takes a more open social stance than Al otro lado. In Novelita Rosa, Canetti opts to comment on the ways in which the mass media and, more specifically, consumerism affect immigrants like Rosa. Through parody and black humor, Canetti recreates Rosa's life; a life dominated by the Spanish-language soap operas she watches. Through the use of various narrative and discursive techniques, including the incorporation of Latino popular culture, diverse vocabulary and Spanglish, Canetti's work envisions a transnational identity, one that moves beyond particular Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexico and Cuba, towards a hybrid Latino identity. In fact, I would argue that the significance of Novelita Rosa is found in its uniqueness; it is perhaps the first novel written by a Cuban-born author from *los novísimos* generation, and only recently migrated to the US, to focus on a non-Cuban subject. By choosing this topic, Canetti inserts her work into a broader US Latino/a literary canon. Indeed, Canetti's interest in the Mexican experience unites her to a growing number of

Chicana/Latina writers who reflect the various struggles Latinas face in the US As Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains in her analysis of the work Cuentos: Stories by Latinas:

As women whose daily existence confronts institutionalized racism, class exploitation, sexism, and homophobia, the US Third World woman does not enjoy the luxury to privilege one oppression over another. While recognizing that Latinos are not a homogeneous group, the editors acknowledge that "as Latinas in the US, our experience is different [from that of white people]. Because living here means throwing in our lot with other people of color. (207)

Thus, Canetti does not limit herself to the Cuban experience on and off the island, rather, her work reflects a new sensitivity, one that seeks to connect all those who have "crossed" borders, individuals who share similar and different stories, struggling with life "on the other side".

As mentioned, Novelita Rosa's main focus is on the various problems Rosa, the main character, and others like her, face following their decision to cross the border into the United States. Beginning in the first chapter, "Rosa enciende el televisor" (Rosa turns on the television), this novel presents readers with a look into the immigrant's growing obsession with the make-believe world of television, as well as with the consumer goods that appear in TV commercials. Narrated in the third person, by an omniscient narrator, this novel flows back and forth between Rosa's present and past, her "real life" and the soap operas she watches. The narration is the key to this novel's ideas on US Latino culture. In fact, one of the ways this novel transcends Cuban/Cuban-American literature to become a Latino/a text, is via its narration, specifically, through the role of the narrator. Through the narration, Canetti presents the growing transnational and transcultural nature of US Latino populations. Early on in the narration, following a description of Rosa's camp décor, there is the interjection by the narrator. This interjection is the first of several by the narrator, indeed, although he remains unnamed, he too is a character in this novel, and his presence serves to underscore the construction of this novel, as well the continual reconstruction

of identity. In Canetti's Novelita Rosa the first-person narrator presents himself to the readers as follows:

A mí me toca ser el narrador de esta novela gris... ¡con lo que me gustaría estar narrando la novelita rosa que miraba Rosa por su televisor! MI padre también fue narrador. Narrador de radionovela.. El me adiestró en el arte de narrar: voz nocturna, grave, borrascosa, que ponga los pelos como muelles reventados...Pero cuando yo nací, ya había llegado la televisión y los narradores no quedaron muy bien parados con la revolución audiovisual. Mis sueños de enloquecer a los radiooyentes con el tono melancólico-almibarado de mi voz se ahogaron en mis propias lágrimas... (14)

[The narration of this gray novel falls on me... how I would love to be narrating the rose-colored soap opera that Rosa watches on her television! My father was also a narrator. He narrated radio soap operas... He trained me in the art of narrating: nighttime voice deep, crackly, that puts hairs on end like broken bridges... But when I was born, television had arrived and narrators didn't fare well with the new audiovisual revolution. My dreams of maddening radio listeners with the melancholic-sweet tone of my voice drowned in my own tears...]

After explaining that he never lost his vocation as narrator, he adds,

La autora de esta novela gris estaba buscando un narrador como yo que, en medio de dos aguas, lograra interpretar los sentimientos de Rosa, la protagonista, y los de ella, que --con su autorización-- me ha permitido llamarla "una autora despiadada e insensible al rosado mundo de las telenovelas". Yo, ni para allá ni para acá; lo mío es narrar. (15)

[The author of this gray novel was looking for a narrator like me, one in between two waters, one that could interpret Rosa, the protagonist's feelings, and hers, that, with her permission, she has allowed me to call her, "a ruthless author, insensible to the rose-colored world of the television soap opera". I don't go that way or this way; what I do is narrate.]

Through humor and parody, Canetti creates a narrator that is "entre dos aguas", caught between her words and those of the protagonists, such as Rosa. I would add, as well, that the narrator is also "in-between" various Latino cultures. He narrates Rosa's thoughts and actions, but also continuously interjects into the narration to reveal his own opinions regarding the story he tells. His Spanish is hybrid, incorporating Mexican and Cuban dialects as he sees fit in the narration, pointing not only to the hybridity of this novel, but also to the hybridity of US Latino/a culture. He is,

therefore, "entre dos aguas", not only for his situation vis-à-vis the Cuban author and the Mexican characters, but also in-between for his ability to cross linguistic barriers, barriers which Latinos in the US often face for their nationality or ethnicity, as well as for their class. Indeed, the narrator of Novelita Rosa, like Rosa, the main character, is on the border, yet he crosses back and forth continuously as he sees fit. He is, in a sense, a negotiator between various cultures, the Mexican culture of the main character, and the Cuban culture of the author. And by speaking to the readers, acts as the mediator between the author's intentions and the reader's interpretation. Moreover, he is also in-between reality and fantasy, narrating both what happens to Rosa as well as the characters on the television soap operas. The narrator is always at the crossroads, in-between various cultures, speaking for both the author and the character. As he puts it, "Yo, ni para allá, ni para acá; lo mío es narrar" [I don't go that way or this way; my duty is to narrate] (15). His position as narrator "en medio de dos aguas", as he himself calls himself, is reminiscent of Trinh Minh-ha's ideas on what it means to live at the borders. As she explains:

Living at the borders means that one constantly threads the fine line between positioning and de-positioning. The fragile nature of the intervals in which one thrives requires that, as a mediator-creator, one always travels transculturally while engaging in the local "habitus" (collective practices that link habit with inhabitation) of one's immediate concern. (1997,12)

In addition to serving as a nexus between various cultures, the narrator is also important for his presence alludes to another work from the Latin American Canon. Canetti's narrator reminds readers of Pedro Camacho, Vargas Llosa's radio soap opera announcer in La tía Julia y el escribidor. There is, in fact, a strong correlation between Canetti's novel and Vargas Llosa's work. First, both texts are parodic. In the case of Novelita Rosa, there is double parody, for this novel appears to parody a parody. Yet the parody here serves another purpose: to expose the real problems Latinas, like Rosa, face in the United States. Secondly, both novels reveal their construction, through their structures and narrations. And finally, both novels appear to transcend

particular nations, crossing borders in various ways. Within each novel, characters and narrators appear in transit, crossing linguistic, cultural and national borders. Indeed, both the narrator in Novelita Rosa, and Pedro Camacho in La tía Julia y el escribidor, cross cultural borders. Camacho is a Bolivian living in Peru who reads Cuban and Argentine soap opera scripts for a living, and who often continues to use, the specific vocabulary of these particular countries. Canetti's narrator, although never stated, appears to be Cuban, yet his choice of words appears pan-Hispanic, integrating various Latin American voices and respective vocabularies into his narrations. While narrating one soap opera, for example, he states that the character Rosa Margarita Abril Primaveral betrayed everyone and "acabó con la quinta y con los mangos", a colloquial Cuban expression meaning she had done away with everything. Yet at other moments while narrating the same soap opera, he uses Mexican vocabulary, such as "*guajalote*" (turkey) and "*calzón*" (underpants), rather than Cuban ones. Through the adoption and mixing of both Mexican and Cuban jargon, and by reminding readers of Vargas Llosa's work, this novel exposes, in yet another way, its in-between quality. For in a sense, Canetti's novel lies in-between the Latin-American tradition and the US Latino/a literary tradition. Although written in the United States, and focusing on Latinos in the US, Novelita Rosa is in Spanish and makes reference to a broader Latin American tradition. In that sense, too, this novel is a hybrid, caught at and focusing on, the crossroads of various traditions.

Novelita Rosa appears to be a novel about novels, or to be exact, a novel about "*novelas*", television soap operas, yet its aim is not to entertain but to comment upon the various problems plaguing Latinos, especially illegal immigrants, in the US. This novel is a statement about the way in which individuals, such as Rosa, are multiply victimized in their surroundings, yet at the same time, participate in their victimization. Rosa is the perennial other, and must assume at least "two exiles", as Trinh Minh-ha and Gloria Anzaldúa contend, if she is to live life on her own (Minh-ha

1997, 13). According to Anzaldúa, "La mojada, la mujer indocumentada, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but also like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain" (12-13). Having crossed the US/Mexican border, for presumably a better life with her family, Rosa arrives with certain expectations regarding the "American Dream", yet she soon encounters the various problems of immigration, including discrimination, a language barrier, and violence. At the same time, she begins to encounter the fictional life of television, a total contradiction to the reality of life in *el barrio*. Her desire to assimilate is also a desire to erase the problems she and her family face in California. From the outset of the novel, although the reader knows nothing about the protagonist, there is an awareness of Rosa's compulsion for material goods, objects that she first encounters in television commercials and on store shelves. Her growing obsession for material goods, mediated by the television programs she never misses, clouds her judgement. As the narration progresses, Rosa becomes unable to distinguish between reality and fiction, inserting herself and her family into the world of the soap opera, and thus participating in her proper victimization. Her desire to transcend her present is overwhelming, leading her to organize her life and her family's around the various television programs she watches. As an illegal Mexican immigrant and as a woman, Rosa lies outside the nation, as "mojada" she is doubly threatened, and must contend with varying degrees of violence, as well as a sense of physical helplessness. As Anzaldúa posits, her home is a "thin edge of barbwire" (1987, 13).

Rosa's growing obsession with, or better still, dependence on, the Spanish-language soap operas, becomes the means by which Rosa copes with her everyday surroundings, trying to escape discrimination, violence, harassment, and cultural and linguistic barriers. Rather than deal with the problems facing her and others in the real world, Rosa opts to live her life through the

characters that share her name in the TV world. Thus, although Rosa is united to other Latinos through the television programs she watches, and in fact, superficially appears to learn about politics via the news, she is ultimately separated, isolated, from others like her. Indeed, as García Canclini contends, television integrates *and* disintegrates. Rosa's isolation, although allowing her a form of escape from her dismal surroundings, in particular the violence of *el barrio* where she lives, and the exploitation and discrimination she and others like her face, she remains mute. That is, Rosa's form *aislamiento* does not offer a space, or allow for a means to talk back, as one finds importantly in *Al otro lado*, or with the characters in Daína Chaviano's and Zoé Valdés' novels. Quite the opposite is true, television, and Rosa's growing dependence on it, acts as a means of escape but also renders Rosa silent, more invisible than before. Her words are those of the television characters, not her own. She adopts their looks, their style and their words but remains invisible to the public space, circulating only around the TV. And even during those moments when Rosa assumes a more public role, she continues to frequent limited spaces, such as the supermarket and the gym. Ultimately, her growing estrangement from her dismal present, and her past, leads to a breakdown. And, Rosa must come face to face with the present, by turning off the television, in the hopes of someday being able to talk back, to turn her "aislamiento" into agency, or as Trinh Minh-ha contends to assume her doubly exiled condition in order to live life on her own.

I have barely scratched the surface of *Novelita Rosa*. Indeed, this novel deserves a more in-depth analysis; in particular to look at the ways this text represents the multiple problems of being Latina in the US, caught in the perennial borderlands. Rather than focus on Cuban-Americans living in the United States, this novel opts to discuss the life of a Mexican woman. I would like to stress, however, that *lo cubano* does appear in this work. As already mentioned, there is a certain degree of hybridity in this text as the narrator uses both Cuban, Mexican and Spanglish slangs. Moreover, there is also the appearance of a Cuban-American family, specifically Mileidi, a

Cuban woman Rosa befriends at the gym. By presenting readers with a Cuban character such as Mileidi, hispanicized from of My Lady, a reference perhaps to The Three Musketeers or perhaps, La Condesa de Merlin's work on Havana, Canetti parodies the Cuban American Princess. Through the juxtaposition of Mileidi's family and Rosa's, Canetti presents both the similarities and differences of various Latino groups living in the United States. Mileidi, a Cuban exile living in the US since the 1960s, represents "the assimilated Latino" for Rosa, and living proof that the Latino is able to succeed in the US. Mileidi, however, represents *la picuencia*, Cuban camp at its most exaggerated, and despite her material wealth, the figure of Mileidi is clearly unassimilated, in a sense an outsider, continuing to live in a pre-Revolutionary Cuba, long-gone.

In conclusion, although basic in style and plot, Novelita Rosa serves as a bridge between the contemporary work of Cuban women on and off the island and the diverse literature of Latinas writing within the US. In this novel, Canetti assumes the role of Latina writer, critiquing capitalism and globalization, exposing the discrimination and violence women of color still face in the US, to suggest a transnational view of US Latino/a culture(s). Despite the fact that the narrative of Yanitzia Canetti has not received the same amount of publicity as have Daína Chaviano and Zoé Valdés, she is, nevertheless, a prolific young writer whose work reflects an interest in the issue of identity. In Al otro lado and Novelita Rosa, Canetti uses various narrative techniques, such as parody, humor, confession as narration, to represent and at the same time contest traditional notions regarding identity. The crossing of real and imagined borders serve as a means of reformulating and transcending identity in these works. Indeed, like Chaviano and Valdés and their characters, Canetti, and her characters, have also crossed borders. Yet it is important to stress that of the three writers this study analyzes, Canetti is the only one that has chosen to go beyond strictly Cuban issues. In fact, in addition to Novelita Rosa, Canetti has also written dozens of children's books and stories, a literature which, in and of itself, goes beyond the national. I would

argue that Canetti's work reflects not a permanent move away from an interest in Cuba, but rather, the future of Cuban studies and Latino Studies in the United States. That is, in addition to works centering on Cuba or the Cuban-American experience, Cuban and Cuban-American authors, may very well begin to incorporate other Latino subjects in their works, as may be the case with other Latino/a authors, as well. That is, as the Latino populations continue to grow in this country, so will the exchange, and friendships across ethnic lines. In particular areas of the country, this is already evident, including Miami, New York or Los Angeles, where the influx of Latin American immigrants has created Pan-Hispanic communities. Spanish television has already seen the hybridization of Latino culture, in shows such as "Sábado Gigante" or "Cristina", where Spanish-speaking guests come in all shades and all linguistic variations. The term "border cultures", therefore, is no longer limited to Mexican-American or Chicano culture, but rather, helps define growing numbers of individuals that have "crossed over" into other spaces, ultimately creating the twenty-first century Latino *ajjaco*.

NOTES

¹ In 1997, Canetti received an Honorable Mention from the National Association of Hispanic Publications, of California, for her journalistic writing.

² For more information about the literary production of this group, see Salvador Redonet's anthology titled Los últimos serán los primeros, (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1992). Although Canetti's work does not appear in this collection, others from her generation, including short stories by Ena Lucía Portela, Amir Valle, and others, do. In addition to literary writers, I would argue that some of Cuba's most prominent essayists, art and literary critics writing on and off the island belong to this generation. Some of these include Omar Valiño (b.1968), Emilio Ichikawa (b. 1962), Rafael Rojas (b. 1965), Ronaldo Menéndez Plasencia (b. 1970), Iván de la Nuez (b. 1964) and William Navarrete (b. 1968).

³ For more information about the Queer Cuban Canon, please see the work of José Quiroga, Tropics of Discourse: Interventions From Queer Latin America (New York: New York University Press, 2000). University of Miami doctoral candidate César Sierra is also pursuing research on Queer Cuban literature.

CONCLUSION

ISLANDS, BORDERS, BRIDGES: WHAT'S NEXT FOR CUBAN WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA?

Yo vi un puente cordial tenderse generoso
de una roca erizada a otra erizada roca,
sobre un abismo negro, profundo y misterioso
que se abría en la tierra como una inmensa boca...

Yo vi otro puente bueno unir las dos orillas
de un río turbio y hondo, cuyas aguas cambiantes
arrastraban con furia las frágiles barquillas
que chocaban rompiéndose en las rocas distantes.

Yo vi también tendido otro elevado puente
que casi se ocultaba entre nubes hurafñas...
¡Y su dorso armonioso unía triunfalmente,
en un glorioso gesto, dos cumbres de montaña!...

Puentes, puentes cordiales... Vuestra curva atrevida
une rocas, montañas, riberas sin temor...
¡Y que aun sobre el abismo tan hondo de la vida,
para todas las almas no haya un puente de amor...! ⁹

[I saw a cordial bridge extend itself generously
from a spiny rock to another spiny rock,
over a black, deep and mysterious abyss,
that opened like a great mouth in the ground.

I saw another good bridge unite the two sides
of a turbulent and deep river, whose temperamental waters
dragged the fragile logs with fury,
and would crash and break apart against the distant rocks.

I also saw another elevated bridge
that was almost hiding between the timid clouds...
And his harmonious back, with a glorious gesture,
triumphantly united two mountain tops.

Bridges, cordial bridges... your daring curve
unites rocks, mountains, rivers, without fear...
If only, in the deep abyss of life,
there existed a bridge of love for all the souls!]

I purposely conclude this study as it began, with a poem by Dulce María Loynaz, in this case "Los puentes" (Bridges). As I argue in the introduction, "Diving into Current Debates on Contemporary Cuban Literature," and then again in chapter two, "Feminine Spaces and Transnationality: Gendered and National Identities in the Narrative of Dulce María Loynaz and Zoé Valdés," Loynaz serves as a precursor to contemporary Cuban women's literature for her vision of a fluid Cuban identity. Her figure embodies *aislamiento*, the notion of isolation that Cuban women, and I would go as far as to argue Caribbean and Latin American women, adopt as a means of forging a space, as well as way of talking back to those in power. Both the poem "Isla," with which this study begins, and "Los puentes", with which it ends, serve to enclose this study, and underscore the ideas I have argued throughout this study on contemporary Cuban women's narrative. "Isla," however, does not merely serve as an introduction to this study, or even to *aislamiento*, rather, by choosing to begin with "Isla," I propose a connection be made between Loynaz's literary work and that by Cuban women writing in the Diaspora. These women, including Daína Chaviano, Zoé Valdés and Yanitzia Canetti, on whom I've focused throughout this study, began their literary careers on the island, but have managed to move beyond it, crossing borders in multiple ways, yet without completely losing sight of that island-space. Indeed in the narrative of these Cuban women, produced in and out of Cuba, there is a strong interest on the island's particular situation, including the contemporary problems and contradictions it faces. Quite startling, in fact, is that these writers and the female characters who inhabit their work, ultimately adopt the island as part of themselves; they become islands, *se hacen islas*, taking in or adopting the island's paradoxical qualities. Instead of merely isolating, *al hacerse isla* (in becoming islands) these women actually cross imaginary borders, or better yet, bridges. In their narrative, there's a move away from the traditional notion of the island as a fixed, geographical entity, to one that appears transportable, taken across (and which crosses) various spaces. These writers and their characters resemble moveable island-bodies, caught in-between spaces; they are *isla-puentes* (island-bridges), resembling, perhaps, Eliana Rivero's notion of the border-islander. The literature of these Cuban Diaspora women writers neither belongs on the island or off, in a sense they and

their novels encompass the island from within as a way of talking back. There is certainly a *return* to the island in their narrative but in order to rewrite or contest national and canonical discourses. The island "within" is a personal entity, taken with them wherever they go. Moreover, they not only cross borders (or bridges) in their literature, as well as personal lives, they and their narrative may be thought of as bridges for moving back and forth between various spaces. In addition, the notion *aislamiento*, the condition these women adopt for themselves, ultimately exposes the intersection and interdependence of gender and national identity, both of which are in continual reconstruction, mediated by both personal and societal mores.

In large measure, therefore, the narrative of contemporary Cuban women displays an interest in the acquisition and reconstruction of identity, including its underlying ambivalence or in-betweenness. Indeed, in all the novels I analyze in this study there is a perennial search for the self, characters are caught in a perennial search for (both personal and collective) identity. This search manifests itself in the narrative of Cuban women in various ways, including an emphasis on travel, (re)writing or storytelling, as well as the use of autobiography and/or confessions. In all cases, there is a focus on creation, or creativity, as a way of understanding the self, as well as a means of survival within specific spaces and particular situations. Moreover, creation, through oral or textual storytelling, for example, becomes a way of "talking back," a way of contesting dominant discourses on nation and gender, and serves, as well, as a way of rewriting history. In the narrative of contemporary Cuban women writing in the Diaspora, narrative and discursive techniques, including first-person narrations by female or marginal protagonists, the incorporation of fantasy, science fiction, parody and allegory, as well as the juxtaposition of reality and the fantastic, become ways of talking back. For example, in Chaviano, science fiction and fantasy narratives allegorically serve to represent the nation, expose inconsistencies in society, and permit characters access to the past and escape from the present. In Valdés and Canetti, there is also an emphasis on fantasy, as well as a return and references to the fairy tale, classical myths, and universal literature, which again undermine dominant discourses regarding the role of women in society. Thus, the incorporation of the fantastic, as well as the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality in these novelists'

works reveal a tension that is tied to a woman's place in the nation, and ultimately assist in destabilizing and questioning societal norms regarding gender and national identity.

As suggested above, one of the most important ways Cuban women's texts contest and confront dominant discourses on identity is through the narration itself, most specifically through the use of an autobiographical style. Indeed, the use of an autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical mode becomes a way of breaking the silence to which women have been long subject, as well as permits them a way of re-inserting themselves into both text and nation. First person narrations, as found in Chaviano's El hombre, la hembra y el hambre, Valdés' Sangre azul and La nada cotidiana, and Canetti's Al otro lado, convey and interrelate issues of ethnic, national, gender, and/or sexual identities. Moreover, the pseudo-autobiography, in conjunction with other narrative techniques, such as the incorporation of the fantastic and genre-crossing, or the use of various genres in the narration, serve to break open the construction of the narratives and thus expose inconsistencies present in contemporary (Cuban) society.

One may add, therefore, that creativity, or the act of creation, in all these novels, is not merely an artistic gesture, but serves as social commentary, as well. In Cuban women's narrative, (re)telling, via writing or rewriting, storytelling, or confession, achieve several important objectives. First, through the process of telling or retelling within the narration, these authors and their texts rethink personal identity. There is an awareness of identity, be it gendered, sexual or national, as personally (and perennially) reconstructed by the individual. In addition, however, there is also a deep awareness that identity, although constructed by the individual, is always mediated by outside sources, most importantly the family and the nation-state. Thus, in these narrations, identity is exposed as multiply constructed through various ways, including the (re)presentation of the family and nation in disarray or decay. This leads us to the second objective, these texts, serve not only to expose personal identity as constructed, "rewritten" if you will by the self, but rather these texts also rewrite both family and nation, envisioning a national identity, specifically Cubanness, quite distinct from those (re)presented before. In their rewriting these authors often seek to offer a voice to beings previously marginalized, erased or mythologized by dominant discourses, including

history and the literary canon. In fact, as I argue in the introduction of this study, in their narrative contemporary Cuban women both borrow from and contest previous discourses, including works from the Cuban Canon, and in doing so expose the construction of both identity and the nation. These Cuban women writers not only move beyond fixed notions of identity, their work also questions the idea of the literary canon. In her monumental study Foundational Fictions, scholar Doris Sommer posits that literary history, more specifically national canonical works from the nineteenth and early twentieth century used the family trope in order to represent and construct nation. Thus, the foundational texts, and in a sense, the idea of the Canon, serve to forge or instill certain values beneficial to the nation-state. In the narrative of contemporary Cuban women, and Latin American in general, there is a return to the Canon, to those foundational texts, if you will, but for a completely different purpose: that of exposing or revealing the nation as construction. There is, therefore, often a return to the canonical texts, in order to break open or undo what was inscribed at the "source". Thus, the third objective of contemporary Cuban women's writing appears to be the rethinking of both nation and Cuban national identity, one that is fluid and perennially in motion, (re)constructed ad infinitum. By choosing to (re)write from inside the island, and from the Diaspora, these women undoubtedly rewrite the nation, the island and the Diaspora. In fact, the Diaspora itself transforms itself into the island, an island that is transportable, personal, rethought/rewritten within the individual, no matter where he/she may be.

While this study is the first to center exclusively on both the insular and Diaspora writing of Daína Chaviano, Zoé Valdés, and Yanitzia Canetti, and perhaps because of this, the topic requires further exploration. In a sense, my study has barely scratched the surface regarding the writing of contemporary Cuban women currently writing in the Diaspora. The authors and their texts studied here, however, do offer us a glimpse into possible connections between these narratives, and other feminist/feminine literature being produced in other places, including Europe, the United States, Latin America as well as within Cuba. One possible study could include a delving into the narrative, as well as poetry, of other Cuban women writing in the Diaspora, including literature by Chely Lima, Rita Martín, and Verónica Pérez Konina, for example. In addition to comparing and contrasting

works produced by the same women on and off the island, it would also be fruitful to analyze the various contemporary Cuban women living on the island who are currently publishing abroad, such as Ena Lucía Portela and Marilyn Bobes. As mentioned in the introduction, in the last decade, the market has been favorable for Cuban writers on and off the island. As in the case of Diaspora women writers, in the narrative of Cuban women currently living in Cuba, there is also an interest in exposing contradictions found on the island, including, but not limited to, the role of women and gays within post-Revolutionary society. Like the work of women writers in the Diaspora, Cuban women on the island also envision a more fluid view of national and gender identity.

Finally, as I posit in chapter three, contemporary Cuban women writing in the Diaspora also need to be analyzed with their present location in mind. In the United States, some writers have moved beyond exclusive Cuban topics toward an interest in Latino/a studies. Thus, although scholar Isabel Alvarez Borland contends that Cubans and Cuban-Americans have most often refused identifying with the terms Hispanic or Latino, I would posit that recent publications suggest the opposite to be true (Alvarez-Borland 150). Among Cuban-Americans, the interest in Latino/a Studies has been most notable, as is the case of Achy Obejas' work, which often centers on Cuban-American protagonists and their relationships with other U.S. Latino/as. Among Diaspora women writers, as I explain in chapter three, only Yanitzia Canetti has forged a connection with U.S. Latino/a literature, choosing to become a Latina writer, by focusing her novel on a Mexican woman living in Southern California in *Novelita Rosa*. Yet, as I also suggest, this trend will no doubt continue as Cubans and Cuban-Americans in the U.S. develop more relations with other Latino/a groups around them.

As I suggest in the introduction, Cuban literature can and should no longer be dichotomized, divided into "here and there", "inside/outside," "exile writer/revolutionary writer," as was the case for many years. The political and personal phenomenon of the Cuban Diaspora has resulted in the existence of various Cuban groups within various spaces, and often with quite divergent ideas regarding Cuba and Cuban identity. I would venture to say that the growing number of Cubans calling themselves Diaspora writers, in conjunction with recent anthologies an

studies being published on the subject, are a solid indicator of the future of Cuban Studies. In the United States, in particular, Cuban-Americans have long been inserting themselves into the American Ethnic literatures, as I point out in the introduction of this work. Yet, as I also argue, new Cuban writers, belonging to the Diaspora group and to Cuba, have begun exploring non-Cuban themes, moving beyond Cuban issues altogether, as is the case of Antonio Jorge's Me devolverán las mareas. Thus, although it is difficult to predict the future, as with all artistic endeavors, Cuban literature, and interest in it, will most likely continue to grow and expand in the near future.

In conclusion, in this study, I posit that contemporary Cuban women writing (in) the Diaspora, de-center nation and position themselves from an imaginary borderlands-island. Although writing from the Diaspora they continue to follow in the footsteps of Cuban women writers on the island, the corpus of insular writers to which they once belonged. There is a "double movement", a back and forth notion between here and there. On the one hand, there's a continual movement in these works (in theme) between the geographical space "Cuba" (the insular) and the outside (the exilic), and on the other, there's a movement in and out of Cuba's literary history. In their works, one finds the interplay of "inside/ outside," not as an essentialist dichotomy but rather as a fluid, coming together of diverse elements. These works question the idea of a fixed "identity", be it national or gendered. The constant crossing of geographic, as well as psychological borders, that is double exile, is present in the works of these Cuban women writers, portraying the fluidity of identity itself.

By choosing to analyze both insular and Diaspora texts by Cuban women writers, I attempt, like others, such as Ruth Behar, before me, to suggest the transnational nature of Cuban literature, and the fluidity of Cubanness. These women writers, all of whom began literary careers on the island, and now write from outside, may be viewed as bridges, as well as their literature crosses genres and spaces in multiple ways. And finally, I would hope that this study contributes to this growing interest in Cuban studies, and that it helps in some way "*unir las dos orillas*" ("unite the two shores") as Loynaz suggests, serving as "*un puente*," a bridge for scholars interested in Cuban literature, no matter where they may find themselves.

NOTES

¹ Dulce María Loynaz, "Los puentes," Homenaje a Dulce María Loynaz, ed. Ana Rosa Núñez. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1992) 34.

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