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THE AESTHETICS OF METAMORPHOSIS:
OVIDIAN POETICS IN THE WORKS OF MARÍA LUISA BOMBAL
AND ELENA GARRO

A Dissertation

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By

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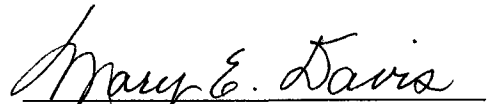
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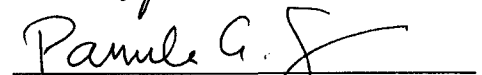
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THE AESTHETICS OF METAMORPHOSIS:
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AND ELENA GARRO

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES,
AND LINGUISTICS


BY

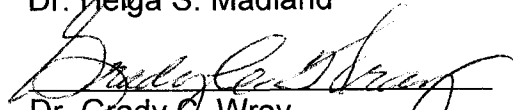

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The threshold experience of metamorphosis carries the seeds of change, renewal, and destruction. Miraculously, we live, struggle, thrive, create, and die on the threshold of chaos. The task of writing reflects, in a sense, an attempt to come to terms with this dilemma by means of the imposition of order through the written word. But as metamorphosis proves, even words become slippery signifiers that often defy order. The creation of order in this dissertation from the linguistic and conceptual chaos that metamorphosis has often presented is due in large measure to the patient guidance of several individuals to whom I owe my sincerest gratitude.

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The Aesthetics of Metamorphosis:
Ovidian Poetics in the Works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro

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Abstract

María Luisa Bombal's La última niebla and Elena Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir represent two models of the evolving tradition of literary myth. Their novels offer examples of enigmatic female characters whose negations of reality are aesthetically rendered as transformations that end in either figurative stasis or literal petrification. Bombal and Garro revise some of Ovid's most fascinating myths in order to draw attention to the aesthetic dimension of their own complex texts, as well as to address fundamental questions concerning feminine subjectivity.

The study begins with an analysis of the Ovidian concept of metamorphosis and its effects on the body, identity, and the *corpus* of the text. Chapter Two addresses the notion of "literary myth," and contextualizes Bombal's and Garro's work within a tradition that allows the authors to reinscribe and transform myths (both Western and Mesoamerican) in their texts. Chapter Three locates Bombal's Impressionistic aesthetic within French Symbolist and Post-Symbolist poetics, and establishes Bombal as one of the first novelists to translate its aesthetic for Latin America. Chapter Four provides an explication of Bombal's La última niebla through the interpretation of the myths of Narcissus,

Orpheus, and Pygmalion—myths that illustrate her protagonist's psychic transformation and reveal a deconstruction of discourses on romantic love through parody and irony. Chapter Five both contextualizes Elena Garro within the avant-garde that characterized post-Revolutionary Mexico, and scrutinizes Garro's critical response to the ideology of liberation. Chapter Six explores textual and temporal transformations in Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir, a work that reinterprets both the Surrealist myth of a golden age and the Mesoamerican myths of cosmic periodicity. The conclusion argues that, through the intertextual aesthetics of metamorphosis, these authors exploit the ambivalence of language in order to subvert essential notions of feminine identity and convey the paradoxes of Otherness, gender, and limitation.

Introduction

Nous disons que le changement existe,
que tout change, que le changement
est la loi même des choses... mais ce
ne sont là que des mots, et nous
raisonnons et philosophons comme
si le changement n'existait pas.
-- Henri Bergson
La Pensée et le mouvant

The Chilean writer María Luisa Bombal and the Mexican Elena Garro present enigmatic female protagonists in their works who often challenge, and even frustrate, the reader's expectations. The conclusions of their novels offer examples of female characters whose gestures of refusal toward reality are aesthetically rendered as transformations that end in either figurative stasis or literal petrification. The recurrence of the theme of metamorphosis in their work draws attention to a web of related questions surrounding the concept of transformation that functions at the heart of their work, such as the vulnerability and integrity of the self, the problem of alienation, and the power of human emotions. In a more profound sense, the dynamic of metamorphosis accentuates the aesthetic dimension of their texts, and the intertextual practices which the authors adopt in order to appropriate and revise myths echo the foundational *über* text of transformation, Ovid's Metamorphoses. The Latin poet's eternally relevant work stands as an irreverent text that resists authority, mocks divinity and death, and transcends alienation and loss through the transfiguring power of art. The trope of Ovidian metamorphosis represents an affirmation of the irrepressible forces of life, and for this reason it denotes a seditious figure.

By its very subject, Ovid's masterful poem incarnates the inevitability of change, and it suggests the necessary destruction and transformation at the heart of renewal. His poem emphasizes mutation at the literal level as it dramatically portrays the interconnectedness and fluidity of all creation, and it trespasses the boundaries between rocks, plants, animals, and humans to bring about marvelous metamorphoses that defy credulity. However, Ovid's playfulness has a serious side, for as he writes about transformation, he demonstrates the *praxis* of transformation in the literary tradition. Through the art of wit and imagination, he unravels the foundational myths of the Mediterranean world in order to reweave them into a new tapestry that reveals its own mode of construction and the creative genius behind it. As he writes about transformation, Ovid enacts the dynamics of intertextual metamorphoses that form the creative principle of his work, and he offers his magisterial poem as an exemplar to be remembered and transformed by future generations of writers.

Bombal and Garro belong to Ovid's artistic legacy. Their groundbreaking works form part of the same spirit of rupture and renewal that informs Ovid's great text. Bombal's novel, La última niebla, which appeared in 1935, abandoned the entrenched literary tradition of social realism that characterized the literature of her time, and her rebellion against this narrative style received favorable reviews from notable authors and critics as Jorge Luis Borges and Amado Alonso, who wrote eloquently about the work's lyricism and the narrative's unusual point of view, anchored in a poetic consciousness that revealed the interior landscape of an individual. Bombal's exceptional text heralded a new

direction for the Latin-American novel, one that facilitated a new style focused on its aesthetic dimension.

Writing several decades later, Elena Garro synthesized the Mexican avant-garde and her own personal vision of it in the unique novel Los recuerdos del porvenir, which she wrote in 1953 but did not publish until 1963. Her text addresses and transforms several important concepts that would later form the core of the Latin-American New Novel as envisioned by Carlos Fuentes, whose elements he designated as “mito, lenguaje y estructura” (20), [“myth, language, and structure”].¹ To these three important components of the New Novel, we should add that of time. Garro fractures chronological time in order to blend different temporal realms which interact concurrently throughout the novel. She enhances the concept of simultaneity not only through the dynamics of textual transformation, but also by denying the text a single protagonist through which the narrative may be mediated. Instead she creates a cast of characters whose voices compose the symphonic score of the novel. Primarily because of the novel's delayed publication, its singular vision did not receive the critical attention which it merited, since works by other novelists, such as Juan Rulfo, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez began to appear in the 1950s and 1960s, and they eclipsed the critical reception of Garro's contribution to the field. The gender factor also influenced the lack of appreciation of Garro and her precursor, Bombal, because their works were considered out of the mainstream of literary production, curious “feminine”

¹ All translations are mine unless indicated in the parenthetical citation.

creations, an attitude clearly communicated in the early criticism of their work. This view discloses the double standard applied to women's texts, a situation which Elaine Showalter describes as "*ad feminam* criticism" (73).

Much critical ground has been covered since that era, especially beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s with the advent of feminist criticism, which began seriously to redress the omissions of the previous decades. Feminist criticism brought literature by women out of the shadows and into the light, granting it the critical scrutiny it had earned. From approximately the 1980s onwards, the criticism that addresses the works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro has mostly viewed these authors' literary production through a feminist lens. It has examined the plight of these authors' female protagonists from a social perspective that appraises them as reflections of the historical realities of Latin-American women, and it has evaluated their texts as authentic expressions of feminine writing. However, such a narrow focus has come at a considerable cost, and feminist criticism, exclusively focused on the "feminine," has overlooked several important aspects of women's literature that become relevant in this study. Notably, such separatist and essentializing criticism tends to keep women's textual production at the margins of a greater tradition, and by so doing, it overlooks or even denies its aesthetic and literary qualities (Purkiss 442). Critical emphasis on the social situation of female protagonists and their authors, has tended to essentialize them by its effort to force them into patterns of dichotomy that do not allow for the expression of their artistic complexity. For example, although Bombal's writing has been universally acclaimed as lyrical,

scarce attention has been paid to the aesthetic component of her work, which she herself valued above other considerations (Gerra Cunningham, "Entrevista..." 126). Instead, criticism often centers on the portrayal of the "feminine" in her work, all too often considered in terms of such either/or paradigms as nature versus culture, female versus male, intuition versus reason, interior versus exterior, and margin versus center. In addition, the passivity of her characters has often been misunderstood as a reflection of Latin-American social realities and, on occasion, condemned for presenting a negative model of women. Diane Purkiss has deemed such criticism problematic, since it reproduces a feminism intent on the positive image of women, while it condemns literature that does not follow this pattern. She maintains that such modes of criticism deny the "literariness of literature" (442), and she argues that women's literature cannot succeed at the expense of its exclusion from the literary tradition from which it springs.

Elaine Showalter voices a similar critique, and in the expanded edition of A Literature of Their Own, she writes: "In the 1990s, criticism of women's writing has to take the fullest possible account of the whole network of literary forces in which each text is enmeshed" (xvii). While she acknowledges the foundational work of feminist criticism, Showalter no longer views the metaphorical "room of one's own" as "meaningful or necessary," especially if it "becomes the destination, a feminine secession from 'male' power, logic, and violence" that leads to an artistic impasse (xxxii-xxxiii). As Showalter observes, this type of criticism reveals more about the "psychodynamics of the feminist critic" than

about women's literature itself, for the "anxiety-ridden terrain" of women writers unconsciously describes the critic's "feeling of alienation from male precursors, an urgent need for a female audience, dread of patriarchal authority, and internalized conflict about theoretical invention and imaginative autonomy" (xvii). In the present study, we will explore the same visceral reaction that continues to operate at the heart of some Latin-American feminist criticism in which issues of authority and power may still seem relevant. While such restricted criticism emphasizes the "Otherness" of women's literary production, it has unwittingly marked that production as separate or "different" from the literary mainstream. In the chapters that follow, we consider the texts of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro from a more universal point of view. In so doing, we remove their texts from "the room" to which they have been consigned by an exclusive, rather than inclusive, criticism centered on the study of female realism (Showalter xiii).

This study, "The Aesthetics of Metamorphosis: Ovidian Poetics in the Works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro," represents an elaboration of Showalter's recommendation, that criticism establish "the continuity and legitimacy of women's writing as a form of art" through the transcendence of the distinctions of gender, nationality, and culture (xxxiii). In addition, this study builds on Nancy Gray Díaz' work on the subject of metamorphosis in Latin-American writers, The Radical Self: Metamorphosis to Animal Form in Modern Latin American Narrative (1988), in which she acknowledges the frequency of the theme in Latin-American literature while addressing metamorphosis only in the texts of male writers. We examine the role of metamorphosis in texts by women

in order to amplify the field of inquiry on this topic. In the first two chapters, which present the theoretical and the methodological ground to be covered in the study, we recontextualize the works of Bombal and Garro into a more comprehensive critical and aesthetic framework in order to free them from national or linguistic limitations. Situating the question of literary transformation within the classical literary tradition represented by Ovid's poem, Metamorphoses, we establish their texts as part of a greater literary continuum. We explore the specific *praxis* of mythical interpretation and appropriation, and we examine the aesthetic framework of these authors' novels through other literary traditions and languages, such as those of French Modernism and Surrealism, in order to reveal how their texts both appropriate these traditions and modify them in order to produce unique artistic expressions.

The themes of metamorphosis, especially those associated with stasis and immobility, appear with frequency in the textual production of women. Alicia Ostriker mentions the increase in revisionist myth in the poetry of American women since the 1960, and she observes the frequency of the motif of "inactivity" associated with mythic female monsters, especially in the work of such poets as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, whose personifications of "evil" share "the common characteristic of passivity." Ostriker observes that "[w]herever in these two poets we find images of compelling dread, there we also find images of muteness, blindness, paralysis" (319-321). This leitmotif also appears in the works of the Latin American women writers under consideration. For Bombal and Garro in particular, the motif of stasis that weaves throughout their texts relates

to the affective and psychological realm of characters in crisis. The threshold experiences relating to desire, sexuality, and fragmentation of the self found in their texts replicate similar topics in the exemplary poem of paradoxical change, Metamorphoses, and for this and other reasons, Ovid's work will serve as the foundation that allows us to explore the subject of metamorphosis and the themes that bring it about, primarily love. With regard to twentieth-century literature in general and our authors in particular, the novelty of Ovid's work in reference to other classical texts of antiquity lies not only in the subject of change, but also in the poet's preference for female characters and the exploration of their interior emotional landscapes. Furthermore, Ovid develops techniques in his work that engage the attention of modern aesthetic sensibilities. Horace Gregory identifies these as the conscious expression of imagination and wit, the rejection of the Aristotelian unities of time and place, a parodic lack of reverence for authority, the heroic, and the divine that exudes irony, a focus on the psychological aspect of change, and, significantly, the development of the interior monologue in order to reveal a character's emotional conflicts and weaknesses (xiv-xxi).

Ovid's poem has proven particularly appealing to twentieth-century art, because its stories of transformation address modern anxieties about the interior landscape of the individual, with the expression of extreme emotional states, the fragmentation of the self, and the depersonalization of the individual in an alienated, chaotic world. Salvador Dali's Metamorphosis of Narcissus (1937) emblemizes this existential situation through an iconic image that

encompasses themes of fragmentation, depersonalization, petrification, dissolution, and transformation through cosmic rebirth. Pablo Picasso's cubist paintings deny the figure its material solidity through a fragmentation that paradoxically conveys the complexity of human beings while it simultaneously depersonalizes them in an artistic style whose dynamism is reminiscent of metamorphosis. However, Ovid's poem of change comprises more than a compendium of myths of metamorphosis. As a poet and artist, Ovid primarily concerned himself with the imaginative opportunities for creative transformation that the mythic tradition offered (Galinsky 4-6). Myths presented the poet with vehicles through which he could artistically weave strange tales of passion into a flowing, seamless continuum that would illuminate the subjective realm of powerful human emotions, especially those centered on the theme of love in all its idealizations and deformations (3). Ovid's work has inspired the ideal of romantic love that lies at the heart of Western artistic tradition (Highet 58-69), and the Roman poet has been imitated through the very processes of intertextual appropriation and interpretation that form the underlying principle and structure of his text. For this reason textual metamorphosis becomes one of the most meaningful characteristics of his artful manipulation of myth (Galinsky 1).

In order to examine the dynamic function of Bombal's and Garro's metamorphic texts, then, this analysis begins with a return to the paradigm of metamorphic transformation, Metamorphoses. In Chapter One, we explicate three emblematic myths of transformation, the stories of Daphne, Narcissus, and Arachne. In order to explore the significance behind these metamorphoses, we

inquire into what they reveal about our ideas of the physical body, the embodied identity, and that other *corpus*, the text.

Just as the body represents the *locus* of the individual's encounter with meaning and the world, the metamorphic body exhibits a fluid and impermanent nature, and it therefore becomes a sign that reveals, according to Charles Segal, the "hidden essence of a personality—longings, desires, fears, needs" ("Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies" 12). The body itself does not exemplify the metamorphic process, but rather its final transformation into another shape either punctuates a character's catastrophic encounter with the divine, or it underscores an untenable existential crisis that brings about the metamorphic event. In so doing, the character's final metamorphosis reveals the fragile nature of an embodied identity. Through the identity's isolation, the trope of change uncovers the subjective nature of all experience, and it exposes the fears and anxieties surrounding the loss of autonomy and the fragmentation of the self. The identity's embodied construct proves precarious, subject to a contingent universe whose central operating logic embodies the Heraclitean notion of *panta rhei*, that all things subsist in a state of perpetual flux. Stories of change illustrate these anxieties by actualizing our deepest fantasies and fears of transcendence through transformation. Metamorphosis exteriorizes the hidden essence of human nature through the literarization and materialization of powerful emotions such as grief, fear, anger, lust, and love. Furthermore, the trope of metamorphosis presents us with our dread of change, while it simultaneously allows us to escape from our anxiety by postponing our greatest fear, death

(Massey 8-9). Finally, as an ambivalent trope metamorphosis reveals language's difficulty in communicating the sorrow or joy of life's most extreme experiences, for the conceptual images evoked through the rhetorical figure of transformation communicate more effectively the idea of radical change while they avoid the closure that liminal experiences entail.

The exploration of the significant ontological issues surrounding the aesthetics of metamorphosis discloses a complex dynamic centered on time, sequence, and process. Neither a metaphor nor a hybrid of two forms, both of which project a static image rather than a process, the trope of metamorphosis oscillates between creative transformation and destructive stasis, a dynamic process exemplified by the iconographic myth of Daphne. As such, Ovid's compendium of change, Metamorphoses, not only provides a mythical framework that structures future texts and offers a rich source of themes and symbolic characters, but its operational trope of transformation also becomes a mirror that reveals the text's own dynamic of mutations, specifically through the operations of intertextuality. Consequently, in the subsequent literary metamorphoses based on Ovid's foundational matrix, metamorphosis functions as an *ekphrastic* device that mirrors the duplicating processes of the transformation at work at the heart of the text.

We explore literary intertextuality and the continuing tradition of transformation of myth in Chapter Two. Here we elucidate the concept of the term "literary myth" as Marc Eigeldinger, Pierre Albouy, Northrop Frye, and Eleazar Meletinsky elaborate it. These critics agree that literary myth embodies

an aesthetic *praxis* of intertextuality that enjoys a long tradition. Through the appropriation of a mythic framework, authors reinscribe its essential themes in the new context offered by their own texts, and they recast the motifs to reflect their own aesthetic objectives, thereby establishing a dialogue with preceding texts through allusion or direct reference.

As an aesthetic goal, intertextuality calls attention to the very act of creating the text itself, to the work of appropriation, transformation, and reinscription that occasions a polyphonic and multi-dimensional narrative world (Eigeldinger, Mythologie et intertextualité 16-17). Related to literary myth, Bruce Clarke's concept of "literary metamorphosis" broadens our understanding of mythical intertextuality. He observes that the metamorphic body can be viewed as a literary device that stands for an allegory of the writing process. By its very nature, it reveals the "duplicitous rhetoricity of language," which exudes irony and parody, encouraging the reader to decode the mythic subtext encrypted in the "disfiguration" of metamorphosis (21).

In addition to these textual considerations, we also examine how the revival of myth in twentieth-century Modernism presents a critical stance toward realism, one which allows authors to express their reaction to the progressive alienation of the individual in an impersonal world through the timelessness of myth, which releases the writer from the bonds of the historical. Two Ovidian myths, those of Narcissus and Orpheus, stand out as exemplars of the heightened interest in the inner gaze, the poetic voice of consciousness, and the autonomy of the imagination, and the myths' implications for twentieth-century

literature are examined in this discussion. We will also present a variety of myths surrounding the cosmic narrative of renewal in order to explore the concept of divine androgyny that lies at the core of the Surrealists' idealization of the golden age, one which similarly forms the central principle of ancient Mesoamerican legends of cosmic creation. These traditions bear significant influence upon the thematic appropriations of both María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro, whose metamorphic texts offer two instructive models of the evolving tradition of literary myth. Their novels, La última niebla and Los recuerdos del porvenir, embody an Ovidian metamorphic practice of writing characterized by a tension of identification with and differentiation from the tradition from which they spring.

In order to contextualize the works of Bombal and Garro within a universal artistic tradition, we analyze the literary and cultural *Weltanschauung* of an era that was instrumental in these authors' aesthetic education and in their formation as writers. In Chapter Three, we address the significance of French culture within the Latin-American literary context by an exploration of the French Symbolist and Post-Symbolist poetics that inform Bombal's aesthetics. Although the French cultural influence on the literary development of Latin-American letters has become an accepted fact in academic circles, significant confusion exists over the extent and impact of the diffusion of the European avant-garde. As Gilberto Mendonça Teles and Klaus Müller-Bergh explain, the political ideology that surrounds this question presents a fundamental problem for the scholar of Latin-American culture, a dilemma compounded by a proliferation of terms and definitions that attempt to nationalize the movement, to authenticate the

originality of its Latin-American expression, and simultaneously to deny the movement's European influence (23-25).

In order to address the misconceptions that surround the appropriation of the avant-garde, we explore how Bombal's condensed lyrical style combines the concision of French Classicism and the lyrical and generic flexibility of Symbolism. The Chilean's meticulous attention to structure, form, and language presents a rigorous aesthetic conception that reveals her roots in the French rhetorical tradition, while the fluid, atemporal perspective of interiority that characterizes her narrative reflects the increased attention to the inner gaze, the poetic consciousness, and the autonomous expression of the imagination that distinguish French Modernism. The intertextual mythical framework that forms the structure of her narratives through the appropriation of the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus, favored by the Modernist authors, also situates her work within a French Modernist tradition, not merely within the Surrealist movement. In a reevaluation of the cultural milieu which shaped Bombal's formation as an author, we provide a new operational perspective from which to view her texts.

The analysis of Bombal's novel, La última niebla constitutes Chapter Four. We examine the myths of Narcissus, Orpheus, and Pygmalion as they are reinscribed in Bombal's novel and explicate their significance for the aesthetic construction of the work. The myth of Pygmalion exemplifies how the conceits of personification, substitution, and misreading provide a means by which the nameless protagonist of the novel may reconstitute her fragmented self through the Narcissistic mirror. By means of the validation of the inner gaze and modes of

substitution provided by the trope of personification, the protagonist creates an Other to substitute for the lack of love, and her compensatory strategies encourage her to undertake an Orphic journey in order to reach the mythical center of unity where she recovers her sensual self. Through transformation, substitution, misreading, and metamorphosis, Bombal privileges the space of consciousness, the vibrant imagination of her protagonist, whose yearning for fulfillment is emblemized in the text of desire embedded within the narrative. Through the literary device of *mise en abyme*, an internal duplication of the narrative that reflects its subject, desire and loss, Bombal validates her protagonist's immersion in an imaginary world. The writer recasts the myth of Narcissus into a narrative that transforms the sublimation of desire into the expression of an aesthetic ideal, which becomes the text of her protagonist's desire and the embedded mirror within the narrative. Through the reinterpretation of the myths of Pygmalion, Narcissus and Orpheus, Bombal posits the superiority of the aesthetic imagination, materialized within the narrative, over prosaic reality. At the same time, her metamorphic text deconstructs the discourse of romantic love through parody and irony, revealing the toxic potency of its beguiling images, which lead to the protagonist's ultimate fragmentation and figurative petrification through stasis. However, the lyrical text that embodies her longing stands as an affirmation of life and the autonomy of the imagination.

A Baroque aesthetic that synthesizes aspects of Surrealism, of Mesoamerican and of Mexican colonial traditions informs the work of Garro. In Chapter Five, we explore the Mexican appropriation, transformation, and

acclimatization of the avant-garde's aesthetics of rupture and renewal, and we consider the ramifications of this cultural synthesis in terms of the style, themes, and ideas expressed in Los recuerdos del porvenir. In order to do so, we examine the cultural influence of such Mexican literary groups as *El Ateneo de la Juventud* and *Los Contemporáneos* and the ways in which they interpreted the European cultural inheritance of the avant-garde. Their enthusiastic reception of the movement initiated the renewal and revitalization of Mexican letters and stimulated a vibrant rebirth of national culture. We also explore the problematic nature of the contested term "Magical Realism" and we speculate as to its origins within Surrealism, while we elaborate upon the differences and similarities between the two styles in order to examine their kinship. Finally, we scrutinize Garro's own critical response to Surrealism as a movement of liberation, in particular her own reaction to the discourse of love that lies at the heart of the movement's cherished myth of redemption through the Other.

Similar processes of mirroring, substitution, and misreading that constitute Bombal's text of desire inform the metamorphic dynamics of Los recuerdos del porvenir, which we analyze in Chapter Six. We examine the means by which Garro blends and transforms different temporal realms through the appropriation and interpretation of the cosmic myth of renewal that inspires the Surrealists' myth of a golden age, as well as the utopian ideals of revolutionary movements. In addition, we interpret traditional stories of renewal within the context of Mesoamerican myths of cosmic periodicity and destruction. Garro makes of time the central theme of her novel by personifying the beginning and ending of the

cosmic myth of renewal with two pairs of characters who represent an androgynous cosmic divinity. The foursome constitutes a *quadrivium* (literally the conjunction of paths and symbolically the embodiments of the Mesoamerican cardinal points) that governs the ascending and descending movements of the novel—the comic and the tragic—a conceit which also structures the specular halves of the novel. In Ovidian fashion, Garro concludes her novel with the literal petrification of one of the characters, Isabel, whose metamorphosis, considered in the context of Mesoamerican legends of cosmic renewal, does not present a punishment in the traditional Ovidian sense. Through the hierophantic properties accorded to mythic oracular stones, Isabel becomes a figurative “talking stone” that reflects the collective guilt of her town, an entity through which the narrative itself comes alive. As a mirror that materializes the text, the stone’s interpretation, reading, and misreading by both a collective narrator and the reader renew the temporal cycle of creation and destruction of the mythic frameworks from which it evolves.

Already accepted as exceptional instances of women’s writing, Bombal’s and Garro’s novels now take their place within the long tradition of literary myth. Through the processes of appropriation, critical revision, and deformation, these texts call into question the accepted interpretations of particular myths, in order to reconstitute them with new meanings informed by the authors’ existential condition. As such, they offer two modalities of the rich Latin-American avant-garde. Having published the majority of her oeuvre in the late 1930s, Bombal became a precursor of the Latin-American New Novel. She has earned a place

among the ranks of authors of the caliber of Miguel Ángel Asturias and Jorge Luis Borges, who abandoned the realist tradition and inaugurated a new era in Latin-American letters. Garro represents an outstanding example of the mature expression of an authentic Latin-American avant-garde, a peer among her contemporaries, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, and Octavio Paz, whose works elaborate the same themes found in her novels and short stories. Both Bombal's and Garro's metamorphic aesthetics establish their position within the Latin-American literary canon, and their literary appropriation of the most enduring myths and themes of Metamorphoses erases the boundaries of culture, language, nationality, and time, and this intertextual practice legitimizes their writing as works of art in the continuum of a Ovidian tradition. The metamorphic aesthetics of Bombal's and Garro's texts embody Ovid's legacy of intertextual metamorphoses, a reiteration that forms part of the "echo" to which Ovid alludes at the conclusion of his vast poem, which encapsulates his desire for immortality through time and affirms the eternal nature of his metamorphic oeuvre for "[a]s long as poetry speaks truth on earth" (452). In the tradition of Ovid's subversive irony and irrepressible creativity, Bombal and Garro offer revolutionary narratives of fractured time and poetic consciousness which present the paradoxical journey of human development through the ancient looking glass of myth. The authors appropriate the mirror's reflections and reconstitute them in disturbing images of deformation and fragmentation. Lovely, enigmatic, multiple, and disquieting, Bombal's and Garro's metamorphic characters stand as signs of the complexity of human identity, and their contradictory transcendences and

gestures of refusal defy social and literary conventions, inviting the reader to decipher the metamorphic texts which they personify.

Chapter One

Ovidian Aesthetics:

The Wellspring of the Metamorphoses

My soul would sing of metamorphoses.
But since, o gods, you were the source of these
bodies becoming other bodies, breathe
your breath into my book of changes: may
the song I sing be seamless as its way
weaves from the world's beginning to our day.
--Ovid, Metamorphoses (Book I)

A study of the concept of literary metamorphosis in the works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro invites us, first and foremost, to contemplate the various connotations of the term before the textual analysis of the dynamics of change in the authors' texts. In this chapter we will address the definition of the word metamorphosis in the context of literature by tracing its Ovidian origins and its connotative transformations through time. Second, we will explore the implications inherent in the notion of transformation through an examination of its relationship to our concepts of the physical body by employing the myth of Daphne as the paradigmatic example of the problematic nature of subjectivity. Third, we consider, through the illustration offered by the myth of Narcissus and his mirror, issues surrounding the concept of identity, and we reflect on the implications of the fascination with becoming Other than one's self. Finally, we inquire into the ways in which texts represent the dynamics of metamorphosis and into what the motif discloses in terms of linguistic constructions of the self. With Arachne as an archetype, we explore how an artist's own creation embodies the process of transformation through the operations of intertextuality.

In order to address the issues in question, we ground this study with the masterwork of the author who created the paradigm that artists have ever since endeavored to imitate, the Latin poet Ovid. The Metamorphoses remains a wellspring that nourishes the rich tradition of metamorphic literature, and a study of the motif of metamorphosis must necessarily draw on its protean waters for inspiration and insight. Historically, the term “metamorphosis” has been intimately associated with Ovid and his poetics of transformation. According to Hélène Nais, the term enters the French lexicon in the fifteenth century, not as a verb or adjective signifying the transformation of one thing or being into another, but as a literary designation for the title of Ovid’s Latin *oeuvre* (15). In the sixteenth century the word *métamorphose* appears in rhyming dictionaries, and its verb, *métamorphoser* begins to designate “transformation” in Renaissance poetics. The term gains currency in the genre of Petrarchan poetry as it comes to designate, initially, the amorous transformation of the lover, and later, a mythological or religious transformation (15-25). The Oxford English Dictionary defines the Greek term *μεταμόρφωσις* and its Latin counterpart *metamórphōsis*, as an “action or process of changing in form, shape or substance; especially transformation by magic or witchcraft,” or “a metamorphosed form” (675). Used scientifically, the word designates the profound metabolic changes in animals and plants, as well as structural changes in organic or chemical compounds. More commonly, the term has come to signify “a complete change in the appearance, circumstances, condition, character of a person, of affairs” (OED 675). Ovid’s metamorphoses describe magical transformations by divine agency

as well as psychological transformations by human agency. His own use of the process also describes the etiology of plants, animals, and words, poetically illustrating the natural history of his time (Ginsberg 18-19). His metamorphoses both underscore the wondrous and often perplexing aspect of the processes of transformation that govern material life, and they render these processes intelligible to the human mind. Myth provides the language of discovery. As Elizabeth Sewall reminds us, “[d]iscovery, in science and poetry, is a mythological situation in which the mind unites with a figure of its own devising as a means toward understanding the world” (20).

The Ovidian material itself has undergone several metamorphoses in the history of the Western literary canon. Charles Martindale, in Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influence on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century (1988), comments on the “rich and varied response of artists” to Ovidian material, beginning in the twelfth century and continuing to our day, and he affirms that “Ovid has had a more wide-ranging impact on the art and culture of the West than any other classical poet” (1). Ovid was not the first classical author to explore the theme of metamorphosis, for stories of transformation form one of the archetypal motifs of classical and folkloric literature since Homer. For example, in Greek philosophy, Heraclitean concepts of flux are based on the idea of impermanence and change, while beliefs of development and transcendence through transformation form the core of many ancient mystery religions; Hesiod’s Works and Days and the Theogony portray the sequential, cyclical, and unfolding metamorphoses of nature, agriculture, genealogical ages, and the gods (Bakhtin

112-113). Ovid's celebrated compendium of tales of transformation, as Leonard Barkan maintains in The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism (1986), remains "the Bible of a tradition—read, re-read, translated, illustrated, moralized, reborn" (1). The Metamorphoses represents the touchstone of an important literary tradition. Ovid's metamorphic aesthetics, continues Barkan, have exercised a fascination "over two millennia [due] in large part to this paradox: [Metamorphoses] proves the natural world magical and the magical world natural" (19). As he adorns transformation with a sense of the miraculous, Ovid's approach prefigures the contested term "magical realism" by two thousand years.

On a narrative level, recent critical and theoretical interest in the self-conscious nature of texts have also been responsible for the reappraisal of Ovid (Martindale 14). Indeed, Martindale points out that the complex and multifaceted nature of Ovid's works, which invite a plurality of readings that have always resonated with a reader's particular circumstances, generates the reflexivity found in the artistic response to Ovid (2). The Roman poet's construction of a fictive world appeals to modern and postmodern sensibilities, as he mirrors their preoccupation with language and parody in his play with language and myth, as he flouts Aristotelian epic form, and as he "flamboyantly emphasizes the randomness of structure" through innovative narrative techniques that demonstrate self-consciousness (Martindale 16-17). Kai Mikkonen, in The Writer's Metamorphosis: Tropes of Literary Reflection and Revision (1997), elucidates a parallel view concerning the self-awareness of Ovid's text, as he

observes that “[t]he narrative form of Ovid’s epic may be read as a two-way reflection on form and content, on changes between the stories within the text as well as between Ovid’s poem and the myths that it is based on” (4). Mikkonen attributes the Metamorphoses’ continued appeal to the “postmodern preoccupation with formal and rhetorical self-awareness” (4).

The constant reshaping and renewal of the Metamorphoses’ stories, characters, themes, and images testify to their enduring value. While retaining vestiges of their classical origins, literary metamorphoses not only remain fresh and malleable to specific historical circumstances, but they ultimately stand as powerful metaphors for the polymorphic nature of human identity (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 188). Ovid endures as one of the most insightful psychologists of the dark impulses of the human heart transformed by the passions of love (Martindale 17).

Another reason for the attraction to metamorphic themes concerns their synthetic capacity to breach and dissolve fixed physical and social categories in order to create fictive worlds where human imagination can reclaim its primacy over externally imposed distinctions and barriers. Barkan argues that metamorphosis occurs in a context where protagonists rebel against restrictive boundaries and rigid roles, revealing their unstable and often paradoxical nature. The transformation results, then, from a character’s opposition to (and ultimate transcendence) of ostensibly inflexible categories (58-59). In addition, the trope epitomizes the extremes to which human experience may be subjected, and, as such, it becomes a powerful metaphor that harbors a paradox: it holds in tension

order and chaos, society and the individual, masculine and feminine, self and other, magic and reality, the conscious and unconscious, and movement and stasis. While maintaining these binary ideological, biological, cultural, and temporal categories in an uneasy tension, metamorphosis also entails a disjunction that threatens, breaks down, and destabilizes any established notions of order, hierarchy, or category. As a theme and concept standing for the creative act of imminent becoming, it conveys inclusion and permeability of boundaries (Lauter 216, 218). Bynum observes that metamorphosis provides us with images “that do not force us to choose between mind and body, inner and outer, biology and society, essence and agency” (188), but rather, they grant us a means of illustrating the process of becoming and the multiplicity of being that define our existential condition as human beings.

Because at its core metamorphosis discloses the problematic nature of the concept of identity, it ideally illustrates the vulnerability of the self that results from the threshold experiences of women, such as passionate emotion, marriage, and attraction and transgression surrounding ideas of sexuality. Accordingly, as a conceit that signals the rebellion of the protagonist against externally imposed structures, the motif of metamorphosis comprises a powerful means by which women authors challenge existing social, familial, and generic categories in order to illuminate their oppressive nature as well as to challenge the premises on which they are founded.

Memorable Ovidian characters, “powerful but deranged women [and men]” (Barkan 41) who knowingly challenge and surpass the boundaries of

natural, social, and divine categories, serve as mythic mirrors in which we may examine the concepts of identity. Like those Ovidian models, the imaginative protagonists of María Luisa Bombal's *novellas*, and the enigmatic female characters in Elena Garro's novel of the Mexican Revolution, Los recuerdos del porvenir, rebel against and challenge clearly defined oppressive social norms. Their resistance to the constraints of physical, emotional, and social barriers brings about metamorphosis as either a means of escape and evolution, or as a gesture of refusal. Along the way, each character undergoes a symbolic metamorphic process that centers around a becoming, through the discovery of the fluidity of boundaries between body and mind, imagination and reality, self and other, a dynamic change which leads to a transcendence of these artificial barriers. The literal metamorphosis that follows this symbolic transformation punctuates the narrative experience, thereby undermining our belief in received assumptions and expectations, while it confirms our suspicion that paradigms and definitions based on opposition and duality do not provide a satisfactory mode of explaining the world and the self in relationship to this world (Lakoff and Johnson xxviii). In the end, as Michel Beaujour suggests, the poetic language of myth continues to grant us a space of self-discovery more satisfying than any ideological *logos*: "L'espace mythique est l'espace de la poésie, du langage informé par le désir, mais c'est aussi l'espace où se déroule une aventure fondamentale, celle de chacun de nous et de nous tous" (222). [Mythical space is the space of poetry, of language informed by desire, but it is also the space in which a fundamental adventure takes place, an adventure belonging to each and

every one of us]. In this space, by means of myth's universal structural matrix, we may safely imagine, create, and explore the alternate selves that constitute the "I" of the subject.

In the following sections we will explore the theme of metamorphosis as it reveals a profound fascination with concepts of the body and of identity, and what the trope of change signifies in terms of writing itself. Ovid paradigmatically illustrates these aspects in three stories whose metamorphic characters personify a preoccupation with the impermanence of the body, the perplexing nature of human identity, and the ambivalent characteristic of metamorphic texts.

I. Daphne's Metamorphic Body

F.-A. Giraud, who has studied the enduring quality of Ovid's story of Daphne and Apollo from antiquity to the seventeenth century in La Fable de Daphné (1968), observes that the story has endured through time because it addresses the power that love exercises, as well as its capacity to transform the self to the Other (530). In Ovid's beloved and often told story, Daphne entreats her father, the river god Peneus, to save her from Apollo's lusty pursuit, and he obliges the nymph by changing her into a tree:

[...] A soaring drowsiness possessed her; growing
In earth she stood, white thighs embraced by climbing
Bark, her white arms branches, her fair head swaying
In a cloud of leaves; all that was Daphne bowed

In the stirring of the wind, the glittering green
Leaf twined within her hair and she was laurel.
(Ovid 20)¹

Like the enigmatic words of an oracle, her rescue illustrates the equivocal results of metamorphosis: whether for deliverance from an unendurable situation or punishment for a divine or social transgression, the body changed into a new form, estranged from its former shape, characterizes the metamorphic transformation. Although drastically altered, Daphne retains her identity while simultaneously incarnating one of the symbols of Apollo's attributes, the laurel:

Even now Phoebus embraced the lovely tree
Whose heart he felt still beating in its side;
He stroked its branches, kissed the sprouting bark,
And as the tree still seemed to sway, to shudder
At his touch, Apollo whispered, "Daphne,
Who cannot be my wife must be the seal,
The sign of all I own, immortal leaf
Twined in my hair as hers, and by this sign
My constant love, my honour shall be shown....
(Ovid 20)

Daphne's plight reminds us of the fragility and permeability of our corporeal selves subjected to the processes of change and the whims of contingency. Her transformation illustrates the problematics of the body as a contested site of

¹ This and all other quotes from Ovid are from the Horace Gregory translation.

meaning that integrates at once an object of desire and a subject. Unable to exercise her human will against the arbitrary forces of a divine one, her subjectivity is called into question by the body's vulnerability to radical change. The paradox inherent in the predicament burdens the metamorphic body with significance, making it the most recognizable sign of humanity's precarious existential condition.

In his essay "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the Metamorphoses," Charles Segal comments on the importance of the body as a reflection of "the human condition, of art, and of male and female identity" (9). He points out that a realistic depiction of the body, rather than an idealized one, characterizes the Metamorphoses. Segal focuses on the example of the female body, represented from virginal to pregnant to old and decrepit, which becomes a trope in the work that

draws on the classical tradition where physical change and process tend to be marked as female. [...] The female body of the Metamorphoses is the body given us by nature, in all its subjection to the physical processes of change and corruption, rather than the body of elegy, adorned by ars and cultus. (38)

Barkan also notes a marked "female perspective" in the Metamorphoses, which "places the metamorphic myth in a context of powerful inward emotion" (14). In fact, he states that "the whole world of metamorphosis—both Ovid's poem and its tradition—is a world where female emotions, themselves associated with change,

are given special prominence" (14). These emotions relate directly to the senses that Barkan considers as vehicles

[...] by which metamorphic flexibility can enter the human personality. Once this flexibility has entered, then all clear categories are threatened. Not only do the senses blend into each other, but so do single individuals, moral categories, the two sexes, social classes, and parts of the world. (39).

Connected to sensuality and sexuality, the "Bacchic senses" become powerful forces of transformation (Barkan 13, 40). Emotions, sensuality, and sexuality transmute the primary locus of metamorphic change, the body. Segal's view of the "body" and Barkan's view of "inward emotion" as essentially female characteristics reflect the mind/body split that permeates the Western tradition. Within this Cartesian framework, the mind constitutes the active seat of understanding that forms concepts and is governed by rules; the body, in turn, represents the passive material receptor of sensations, which does not actively participate in human reasoning (Johnson xxvi). This split not only problematizes issues of cognition and imagination by separating them from their source, the body, but also, more importantly, it poses questions regarding the physical grounding of individual identity. The body's material instability in the Ovidian world underscores identity's problematic nature. Rather than proscriptive, Ovid's treatment of gender creates ambiguity and frustrates our expectations of truth vested in absolutes (Ginsberg 10-17). Gender itself, as the story of Salmacis and

Hermaphroditus (Metamorphoses Book IV) illustrates, becomes as fluid a category as the fragile material body:

They grew one body, one face, one pair of arms
And legs, as one might graft branches upon
A tree, so two become nor boy nor girl,
Neither yet both within a single body. (Ovid 103)

Metamorphosis abolishes the dualistic framework upon which gender rests, calling into question the rigidity, and even the legitimacy, of the social parameters on which the concept is founded. In addition, the story of Hermaphroditus addresses a secret desire of integration that resides in humans and forms the core of all mythic quests and mystical experiences. The longing for totality emphasizes the self's sense of incompleteness, a sensation that perhaps arises from the individual's dissatisfaction with circumscribed gendered roles which stifle the development of complete human beings. It ultimately points to a fundamental desire to transcend one's historically bound existence in order to recuperate a mythical primordial unity (Eliade, The Two and The One 113). Therefore, the metamorphic body, while blending material and spiritual boundaries, as well as permeating animal, vegetable, and mineral ones, represents the reconciliation of duality inherent in a material world. It becomes the literal expression of a frustrated desire for transcendence. Metamorphosis, then, embodies an ambivalence, because it demonstrates both the attraction and the fear inherent in such a longing.

As Hermaphroditus' fate illustrates, metamorphosis often dramatically manifests itself through physical markings and alterations to the body, thereby becoming the sign (*Séma*) of a process that constitutes a narrative story of destabilization (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 30-31). Segal points out that the body's vulnerable materiality constitutes the "focus for conflict" ("Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies" 9). Therefore, it also represents the site bearing the physical marks that make of it "a story" (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 173, 178).

Peter Brooks echoes these views in his study of the representation of the body in modern narrative, Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative (1993). Commenting on the evolution of notions about the body in literature and art since the Greeks, he notes that the ancients were fascinated with the body "as an essential integer of reality" (4), rendering and describing it in detail in art, literature, and drama. In Greek aesthetics, the body (*Sōma*) bears signs that aid in the recognition of identity upon which many a plot turns. We need only think of Oedipus as the paradigm of this narrative device, for his pierced ankles disclose his identity—as the messenger from Corinth reveals to him, "[t]hat was why you were given the name you bear" (Oedipus Rex 3.982)—and its discovery signals the climax and ensuing reversal of Sophocles' drama. Later, the centrality of the embodiment of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist permeated Christian thought, art, and literature. The aesthetic and thematic emphasis on "the adventures of the flesh" (Brooks 4) reenacted Christian themes of damnation and redemption, rendering the body the site of "spiritual significances" (4). Medieval and Renaissance writers, Brooks observes, perceived "embodiment and spirit" as

the corporeal manifestation of “sign and meaning” (4). After the Age of Enlightenment, the modern preoccupation with the body centers upon the problematic individual identity that arises out of Cartesian dualism, which, as we have noted, excludes the body from the “thinking essence,” thereby making it the object, rather than the subject, of discourse (Brooks 4-5). The nostalgic attempt to recuperate the alienated body, to know it, and to endow it with significance by reinscribing it with “story” in order to reincarnate it in a “linguistic realm,” characterizes modern literature’s preoccupation with the body (8).

Brooks further elucidates the body’s mediating role, through language, in the relationship between the protagonist, the reader, and modern narrative. A desire for the body, which holds “the key to satisfaction, power, and meaning,” may represent a desire to comprehend the symbolic system of the text in order to access “the very creation of significance” (8). This “narrative desire,” as Brooks terms it, lies at the core of the dynamic relationship between “stories and their telling.” Thus, the narrative body inscribed with linguistic signs prompts its metamorphosis into “story” (8). Modern narrative’s eagerness to “know the body by way of a narrative that leads to its specific identity, to give the body specific markings that make it recognizable, and indeed make it a key narrative sign” (26) points to a fundamental fixation with the body as locus of significance. The self-reflexive drive that Brooks elucidates continues the long tradition in Western culture of valuing bodily experience “as place for encounter with meaning” (Bynum, “Why all the fuss...” 15).

Metamorphosis, exemplified by Ovid's stories, underscores the destabilizing power of change, the multiplicity of being, and the vulnerability of the most mutable element of the self, the body. In Ovid's text, the protagonists' bodies are subjected to physical violence and suffering through passions, illicit desires, rape and impregnation, transformation into otherness, expulsion from a linguistic to a non-linguistic state, madness, and death. His realistic stance toward the body renders the metamorphic body a trope for "the instability and vulnerability of the human condition" (Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies..." 38), a notion that parallels modern interpretations of the alienated body:

[t]he body is our clearest hostage to the vicissitudes of fortune and the power of nature. It is the most visible sign of a human being's subjection to forces over which he or she has no control. This is a world [the Metamorphoses] polarized between those who have absolute power (the gods) and those who are powerless to defend their bodies against *force majeure*, whether that comes from an unforeseen storm at sea or a violent passion that suddenly and obsessively takes over one's life. (39)

Such unexpected forces continue to haunt the body within the modern narrative: the body's existential vulnerability manifests itself through its own biological processes, as well as through the continued ravages of wars, revolutions, ethnic cleansings, plagues, violence, illness, and economic instability. Events beyond our control threaten our susceptible form and produce anxieties that bear strange fruit in stories of transformation. While metamorphosis may signify alienation by

revealing the horrors of vulnerability to change through the depiction of grotesque transformations, it may also celebrate its integrative powers through generative imagery that invokes a cosmic Pythagorean unity. In both senses, in this imaginary realm metamorphosis strips our bodies away to unveil identity “as a thing in itself,” thereby exposing the kaleidoscopic complexities that both identify and differentiate us (Barkan 15). Metamorphosis becomes a unique trope that most adequately describes the disorienting and simultaneous process of identification and differentiation. Ultimately, metamorphosis as a trope and a process signifies the individual's conflicted relationship with him/herself and his/her world. In its mythical, thematic, and tropological connotation, metamorphosis remains an inexhaustible source from which to draw the complexity of the human condition, as it continues to pose, in the most radical manner, perennial existential questions about becoming and being in an uncertain world. With its promise of growth and multiplicity, metamorphosis enacts a temporal deferment of the inevitable nothingness that threatens existence.

II. Identity and the Crisis of Becoming

The body (*Sōma*) subjected to metamorphosis, as we have shown, becomes a memorial (*Séma*) that bears the story of its past trauma. Metamorphosis' accent on the embodied nature of the mind, as well as the vulnerability of the body illustrated through its outright replacement, reflects a mode of thinking defined by process: the self conceiving itself in relation to the natural world. This cognitive operation, as Bakhtin points out, betrays a

preoccupation with identity and subjectivity portrayed in emblematic images of transformation that remain deeply rooted in human consciousness and popular folklore:

The themes of *metamorphosis* (*transformation*)—particularly human transformation—and *identity* (particularly human identity) are drawn from the treasury of [...] world folklore. The folkloric image of man is intimately bound up with transformation and identity. [...] The folktale image of man—throughout the extraordinary variety of folkloric narratives—always orders itself around the motifs of *transformation* and *identity*. (111-112)

Metamorphosis becomes a potent and concrete illustration of individual fate and humankind's vital conflict with subjectivity. Often, transformation ominously exposes, as Harold Skulsky observes, the horrifying "ordeal of a persisting awareness" in an alien body (27), and it lays bare "the incurable solitude of the mind" (30), thereby exposing the precarious ontological status of the individual.

Ovidian characters experience the alienating condition of exiles from the linguistic state through a ghastly recognition of the altered self in a pool's reflection and through the profound silence that ensues from transformation. Usually, an act of sexual transgression or violence triggers the metamorphic event that results in the victim's loss of speech. The predicaments of Io, Calisto, and Actaeon, whose contact with the divine elicits a devastating punishment, illustrate this harrowing experience. Consider the plight of Io metamorphosed into a heifer by the jealous Juno and guarded by the monster Argos:

Whenever she tried to stretch her arms toward Argos,
Her arms were forelegs and her weeping voice
Was very like the moaning of a cow
Which frightened her and had no charms for Argos;
At times she wandered where her father's river
Winds through the fields, where once on innocent
Days she walked and played, and now looking
Down as in a mirror she saw great horns
Above her ears and saw a great mouth open
That was her mouth; the apparition ran
And was the shadow beneath her feet, fear
Following fear. (Ovid 23)

Io's transformation, which casts her out of the linguistic realm, is similar to that of Callisto's punishment after Jove robs her of the virginity prized by Diana. For her unwilling transgression the goddess transforms Callisto into a bear, robbing her of the power of speech:

[...] and as the girl raised hands
To plead for mercy, her arms were covered
With bristling black hair, her hands were feet, tipped
By their crooked nails; the lips that Jove once praised
Became a pair of wide, misshapen jaws.
And to prevent her prayers from reaching heaven
Her gift of speech was ripped away and from her throat

Came guttural noises horrible to hear:
Though her emotions were of human kind,
She was a bear.... (Ovid 46)

Further, let us ponder the fate of Actaeon, who stumbled into a glade where the goddess Diana was bathing. His inopportune gaze occasions his transformation into a stag:

[...] but when
He saw himself, his face, his branching antlers
In a stream he longed to say, "O miser-
Able me!" but had no words, nothing but
Animal cries while tears ran down his changed,
Bewildered face. Only his mind remained
What it had been [...].
(Ovid 69)

The predicament of Io, Callisto, and Actaeon exemplifies the paradigm of self-recognition in an alien body followed by speechlessness and silence, repeated in countless other Ovidian transformations. In their focus upon the often problematical connection between the body and the mind, stories such as these call into question the status of subjectivity and the concept of identity (Skulsky 1-6).

Many theorists of transformation, among them Caroline Walker Bynum, concur with this assessment. Bynum, whose Metamorphosis and Identity (2001) explores the motif of metamorphosis, the problem of identity, and the concepts of

wonder and change from a medieval historian's perspective, notes that stories of metamorphosis recur in the literary tradition, because they offer "a profound and powerful way of thinking about what we call 'identity' in all its senses" (180). Metamorphosis not only exposes the core of identity as it threatens the stability of the body and the material world, but it also shatters our notions of boundaries and reality through its revelation of the disorder, flux, and contingency that lie behind an ostensibly objective and ordered architecture of reality (30-31). Transformation calls into question the nature of the objective world, while it privileges the subjective, embodied viewpoint of the transforming subject. The experience of a mind trapped in an alien form foregrounds the problem of subjectivity, the product of the intimate connection between mind and body, as it offers us the closest glimpse of an experience of the world from the unfamiliar vantage point of the Other (Skulsky 5). Perhaps through the distanced mirror of the Other, as the examples of Io, Callisto, and Actaeon remind us, we gain a wider perspective from which to contemplate the self.

As Skulsky elucidates, in stories of transformation from Ovid to Virginia Woolf's Orlando, the "absurdist vision" that arises from the dislocation of perspective has the effect of privileging the "autonomy of the mental" to the point of challenging notions of objective reality and scientific realism. Metamorphosis, he continues, draws on "radical doubts" in order to force "confrontation with some or all of a small cluster of concerns associated with the nature of personhood and personal identity" (6). For if the mental persists in the face of radical transformation, often revealing its interiority as more relevant than material reality

itself, its fantasy of survival discloses a preoccupation not only with the limits of its material embodiment, but also with the complex physical, mental, and spiritual relationships that comprise the subject of consciousness.

As the radical metamorphoses of Io, Callisto, and Actaeon reveal, the most obvious form of identity affected by transformation concerns identity as an embodiment that takes into account the integrity of the individual, the physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics that comprise an entity located in a body that endures over space and time (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 163-65; "Why all the fuss..." 10). More importantly, this sense of identity refers to the self threatened by the death of the physical body. The continuity of the self, intimately tied to the body, has preoccupied Western religious traditions for over two thousand years and lies at the core of our notions of identity (Bynum, "Why All the Fuss..." 33). Bynum indicates that Western religion's particular understanding of identity, as important in contemporary popular culture as it was in the Middle Ages, "is today the least discussed outside of philosophical circles," and she concedes that "it offers the deepest and rawest threat to our grounding as a self. For considering identity in this sense raises doubts about whether anything perdures" (Metamorphosis... 165).

Stories of metamorphosis more often than not affirm the survival of the self in the face of confusion and potential destruction, and they therefore express a universal resistance to change as they ultimately affirm the status of individuality (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 32-33). While Callisto and Io roam the woods and fields as bear and heifer, they nonetheless continue to exist. In other

words, behind the metamorphic trope lies a desire to assert and preserve the integrity of the self through willful resistance to the outside forces that threaten individuality. Paradoxically, the desire for permanence that arises from such a fear of loss can also thwart the search for identity and manifest itself in a paralyzing “refusal to develop” best illustrated in stories of transformation that convey a sense of stagnation (Massey 17). In that case, metamorphosis becomes a refuge from the world and an ironic defense against change (37, 44). Consequently, the drive toward self oscillates between a desire to protect the integrity of the self and identity and a will to transcend the very constructs that make up our identity (Mikkonen 2). Heinz Lichtenstein’s interpretation of the desire for metamorphosis as the dilemma of human identity acknowledges this paradoxical duality. Lichtenstein observes that “human identity gives rise to both a yearning and a profound anxiety to abandon [the superego]”; therefore, “metamorphosis and identity are the two limits of human existence, incompatible with one another, but complementary in that human life exists in a movement between these two limits” (186). The tension between the impulses towards identity and differentiation creates the linguistic, temporal interstice through which bodily metamorphosis may occur, ultimately postponing the destruction of the body through its textual preservation as a sign, memorial, and story.

If metamorphic stories illustrate the alteration of our totality or unity as a body and as a person, how is the self preserved? What becomes of the “self” stripped of its original form? Actaeon, transformed into a stag and chased down by his hounds, continues to perceive himself as “Actaeon”:

Actaeon flying where he was once pursuer,
Now pursued, outspacing those who once were
His own creatures. If only he could speak:
“Look at your master, I am Actaeon, I—”
But words were lost to him; the air was filled
With barking and dogs’ cries.... (Ovid 70)

Transformation, as metamorphosis reveals it, challenges our notions of the self through the loss of the human body. Metamorphic stories illustrate the problematics of personhood by revealing what Henry W. Johnston designates as a paradox that gives rise to the “self.” Asserting that “the self is a hypothesis to explain the person,” and a “theoretical concept” of how a person conceives or symbolizes himself/herself (16, 34-35), he explains that a person’s intellectual and psychological ability to hold pragmatic contradictions in tension and to accept such contradictions by unifying “them into a single perspective” gives rise to the self (20). The unified perspective that results from this tension, he claims, “is the person’s self,” and he adds that

contradiction and self presuppose one another. In the absence of a self, there are no contradictions [...]. In the absence of a contradiction, there can be no self, for the self arises only on those occasions when the burden of a contradiction must be accepted.
(20)

If inconsistency characterizes our psychological makeup, then our ability to “become aware of the inconsistency” gives rise to self-awareness and self-

consciousness. Avoidance of contradiction entails the evasion of truth and of self. Ironically, the genuine self can only emerge to affirm its humanity through the acceptance of its contradictory nature (28-29). This paradoxical bind makes of the self, in Johnstone's words, the "locus of a *contradiction*" (23).

Metamorphosis portrays most effectively the self's paradoxical identity and its determination to become conscious: it literalizes the problem of contradiction within the self that Skulsky calls "the crisis of will," defined as "a catastrophic and arbitrary *transformation* of the self in its most intimate—that is, its mental—aspect..." (39). He reinforces this idea by stating that "[t]he victim of the Ovidian predicament in general is naked to the caprice not only of matter but of mind" (39). Ovid's most famous psychological characters, such as Narcissus, Myrrha, Byblis, Medea, and Scylla, exhibit Skulsky's crisis of will in that they share a common trait: the struggle with irreconcilable desires which place certain absolute categories against each other. Before their transformations, these characters suffer mental anguish from conflicted and contradictory selves. Their soliloquies, riddled with the ambivalence of reasoning by contraries, illustrate the tension of the predicament, and when the dilemma is acknowledged and acted upon, the unresolvable nature of the paradox brings about the protagonist's literal metamorphosis.

Narcissus, who unwittingly falls in love with his own image while gazing into a pool, exemplifies this paradigm. Upon recognizing himself in the reflected image, he ponders the incongruity inherent in his situation:

Look! I am he; I've loved within the shadow

Of what I am, and in that love I burn,
I light the flames and feel their fires within;
Then what am I to do? Am I the lover
Or beloved? Then why make love? Since I
Am what I long for, then my riches are
So great they make me poor. O may I fall
Away from my own body.... (Ovid 78-79)

Narcissus loves that which is, yet is not, himself. The intimate nearness of the desired object ironically renders it inaccessible, and he wishes to separate himself from his body in order to be near it. The belated recognition of his contradictory predicament ultimately confers upon him selfhood, yet the unsolvable dilemma provokes his transformation into a flower, making intelligible the prophecy by Tiresias concerning Narcissus' longevity. The prophecy, "If he never knows himself," ironically refers to the solemn admonition of the ancient Delphic Oracle, "know thyself" (Galinsky 53). To know the self entails Johnstone's acceptance of contradiction, the knowledge and certainty of one's death, and the desire for transcendence which merges with a simultaneous fear of loss. Self-knowledge not only relates to the reflexive relationship symbolized by the pool's reflection, but it also refers to the acceptance of a contradiction that allows the self to emerge. Narcissus' excessive absorption in his own image, coupled with the knowledge of his impossible longing, brings about his transformation and substantiates Johnstone's paradigm: "[t]he self becomes relevant when we are confronted not merely with a reflexive relation, but with an

inconsistent one" (39). Tiresias' prophecy plays on the paradoxical notion of self-knowledge. In the end, neither Narcissus nor we can know ourselves as we might wish, for growth and transformation entail a multiplicity of selves which defies unification under the consoling rubrics of definition. Self-knowledge proves an elusive goal then, for the tendency to strive for it, rather than its achievement, ultimately characterizes the human condition.

In the Ovidian tales the contradictions that create the self are often extreme, and they herald what Barkan calls a metamorphosis of the psyche, a notion that echoes both Skulsky's "crisis of will" and Johnstone's concept of the contradictory self. Barkan distinguishes between the transformation of psyche and that of the form. He relates the transformation of the psyche to the crisis that brings about the self and the transformation of form to a literalization of the unsolvable paradox that confronts the self through the trope of metamorphosis. The crisis of will prevents the narrative from moving forward until the inevitable literal metamorphosis resolves the impasse:

[L]iteral metamorphosis acts as a footnote to the great transformations of the individual psyche. [...] Metamorphosis, then, serves as a special condition, a cosmic *tertium quid* resolving the unresolvable dilemma of the narrative and at the same time yoking together life and death. [...] For such characters [as Myrrha, Scylla, and Byblis] metamorphosis is not a punishment but rather a definition of the extreme state into which they have brought

themselves and a relief from the agony of those extremes. (Barkan 64)

Metamorphosis symbolizes a transcendence of the agony of the crisis of will and promises a renewal. However, as Skulsky claims, this reward can be “sardonically ambiguous” (48); it can herald a destruction of the self through dissolution or transformation into a material object such as a tree or a stone, calling into question notions of personal identity. Skulsky describes this process as the reduction of “life to still life and life to death in motion” (27). Another type of “death in life” involves characters reduced to the essence of their passions or “refined to abstractions” (36), literalized metaphors or personifications that stand for bestial savagery (Lycaon), paralyzing grief (Niobe), and insatiable hunger (Erysichthon), among others. For the protagonists of Bombal and Garro the paradox of metamorphosis proves to be no different. Death in life, a paralysis through stasis or petrification, or the personification of desire, nature, violence, and grief inform the experience of these writers’ female protagonists. Collectively, the difference between transformation as reward and as punishment becomes a matter of degree; metamorphosis remains, either way, a profound gesture of alienation.

Whether the oscillating experience of selfhood and the alienation from the self result from the “experience of annihilation” (Gould 10) at the core of existence, or from the sense of diffusion and multiplicity in tension with socially constructed norms which restrict being and result in contradictions (Lauter 212), metamorphosis forces a menacing confrontation with issues of identity, which

reveals that “our notion of identity itself is inexplicable” (Skulsky 34). The notion of self entails a dynamic, conflictive, and ever-changing relationship between subjects and objects that eludes simple categorization: we embody a multiplicity of selves changing over time, and, paradoxically, we must become Other than ourselves in order to become ourselves (Massey 19). Metamorphosis describes the dynamic movement toward selfhood that involves navigating an intermediate and contradictory state that alternates between a yearning for separateness and autonomy and a desire to abandon the “burden of identity” once it becomes alienating (Lichtenstein 187-88). Submitted to the metamorphic process, the Ovidian character presents, as Skulsky observes, a “claustrophobic portrait of the self: craving belief; dispossessed of criteria; fully at one neither with its mental nor with its physical aspect; apprehensible neither to itself nor to others” (57). In all, the Heraclitean theme of perpetual change becomes a manifestation of cosmic absurdity and doubt that resonates profoundly for readers of twentieth-century literature, and it explains Ovidian metamorphoses’ renewed popularity (Skulsky 56). Stories of transformation, as relevant today as they were in antiquity, offer an imaginative means of posing perennial ontological questions. As we pursue the nature of being in the disciplines of science, philosophy, literature, and art, the question of what constitutes “identity” or “personhood” remains as puzzling as ever.

Metamorphosis imaginatively illustrates the problematic nature of identity, for it provides “images, metaphors, and stories” with which to explore identity in a way that transcends simplistic binary rationales that diminish the true complexity

and polymorphous nature of individuals (Bynum, Metamorphosis... 165-66). Metamorphic tales, Bynum reminds us, “hover in a world whose rules about boundary crossing—about identity—are internally consistent but differ from ours; hence, in part, their power” (167). In a reiteration of Skulsky’s observation concerning the illusory nature of simplistic notions of identity, Bynum finds that essentialist positions that fail to define who we are compel us to consider the imaginary world of metamorphosis, where “boundary crossing” is not considered supernatural but natural, a more attractive and comprehensive metaphor for our problematic selves (187). Likewise, Warren Ginsberg, in “Ovid and the Problem of Gender,” observes that Ovid’s play with the ambiguities of gender in the social, biological, and linguistic senses “suggest[s] that the essence of the thing itself is not simple but multiple” (18), an insight that adds credence to assertions pertaining to the illusory nature of our notions of identity. By defying boundaries and dichotomies, metamorphosis allegorizes the problematics of identity in the context of an unpredictable changing environment, and it negates socially constructed structures of order, classification, and hierarchy. Metamorphic stories fuse mind and body, confuse gender, class, and racial identities, cross boundaries between inner and outer reality, and sunder the veil between life and death, calling into question notions of permanence while affirming the particularities of the self. We change yet retain vestiges of our former selves, whose memories linger in a present of perpetual becoming, as we attempt to resolve the contradiction of our simultaneous multiplicity and singularity. Metamorphosis as a trope allegorizes the journey of self-discovery, which entails

a dynamic process of becoming that encompasses a complex, contradictory, and indeterminate synthesis of all that we “were” and “are.”

III. The Transformations of Language and Text

The previous examination of metamorphosis as a motif that effectively conceptualizes human internal conflicts and the problematics of identity through the body's and the psyche's transformations represents, as Bakhtin reminds us, “a mythological sheath for the idea of development” (113), illustrating in an emblematic fashion the stages of human growth as well as the individual's progress along life's journey. Metamorphosis' mechanics of mutation through juxtaposition, creation, and destruction also mimic the act of writing itself, prefiguring the literary transformations it fictionalizes (Clarke 20). Arachne's story (book VI of Ovid's Metamorphoses), a “parable of the craftsman (or woman) who attempts to rival the divinely inspired artists” (Gregory 146), illustrates this process. Arachne defies the powerful goddess Athena by boasting of her weaving skills, and she challenges the goddess of craft to a contest in order to demonstrate her superior technical and narrative skills. Arachne's “text” appropriates, reinscribes, and reinterprets the official story of the Olympian gods presented in Athena's “text.” In contrast to Athena's classical presentation and heroic narration of the gods' exploits, Arachne produces a dynamic reinterpretation of their deeds, in which she interprets their insatiable sexual appetites from a human point of view, while at the same time she stresses the deception visited on their human victims:

Arachne sketched these figures as they were:

Phoebus as though he lived outdoors, hawk-feathered,
Or with a lion's mane; then as a shepherd:
How he had played with Isse, Macareus' daughter,
How Bacchus hidden in a bowl of grapes
Had tricked Erigone; how Saturn, changed
Into a horse, conceived the man-horse, Chiron—
Arachne weaving swiftly round her loom
Framed the entire scene with flowers and ivy.
(150-151)

Arachne's flawless web reenacts and implicitly condemns the gods' misbehavior towards nymphs and mortal women through a transgressive feat of masterful creation. Her creative endeavor exemplifies intertextuality, in which the operation of textual integration progresses simultaneously along with its transformation. In the practice of intertextuality, an author not only appropriates the original, embedding it within a new context in order to either modify the original's sense or to deconstruct it, but also he/she endeavors to recreate its sense in order to invite a new reading. Intertextuality, therefore, comprises not only an adaptive process of creation, but also an act of memorializing that canonizes the original mythic material (Eigeldinger, Mythologie... 11). While Arachne's weaving exemplifies an intertextual practice, the product of her weaving becomes, in a Barthesian sense, a fabric of "multi-dimensional space" where different and often contrasting discourses blend, becoming, in Barthes' words, "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture"

(Image... 146). Like Homer's Penelope, the reader "disentangles" or unravels, rather than "deciphers" a text's meaning (147), creating a new text with each subsequent reading, enacting a process that perpetuates the text's transformation through time. The unraveling of the multiple text, as Barthes suggests, depends on the reading subject, who is "déjà lui-même une pluralité d'autres textes, de codes infinis" (Oeuvres complètes 561); ["already a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite"] (S/Z 10). Through the "text" of her tapestry, Arachne's dynamic narrative reinterpretation of the gods' deceitful behavior exemplifies not only the poet's mimetic competition with the divine in the creation of a poetic reality, but also a particular practice of reading that adds to the infinite folds of a fabric whose multiplicity contains the potential for destruction and transformation.

Arachne's work, then, exemplifies the intertextual practices of authorship, and she personifies the archetype of the creator whose accomplished weaving symbolizes the act of creation through the joining of disparate realities (Eliade, Patterns... 181). Furthermore, similar to Arachne's textile masterpiece, the literary metamorphic work itself presents a self-mirroring *ekphrasis* that not only fictionalizes transformation, but also reveals the author's mode of writing and the text's production (Culler, Barthes 28).

On a textual level, Arachne's subsequent punishment, her metamorphosis into a spider, replicates a temporal process in which metaphorical language becomes literal in order to actualize the victim's alteration. The text itself becomes subject to a transformation, for the emphasis does not reside in the

victim's terminal condition as a spider, but rather in the linguistic description of the temporal progression between two states, or the half-way state of becoming. Therefore, the motif of metamorphosis represents a figuration of change, and it enacts linguistically a temporal process that places it in the present as a "becoming." Metamorphosis, as opposed to metaphor, enacts a temporal event that depends on a before and an after, and it denotes an image stripped of its figurative connotation, transformed into reality. The introduction of the element of time and sequencing in the process of change distinguishes metamorphosis from the metaphoric relationship, which LeGuern characterizes as atemporal, and an embodiment of an impossible equivalence that necessitates the abandonment of its literal sense in order to preserve the coherence of the original utterance (31). By means of the introduction of a temporal progression between before, Arachne as woman, and after, Arachne as spider, the poet strips the metaphor of its figurative meaning and transforms the image into reality, albeit a distinct poetic reality created only in the reader's mind (32). In "Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*: Metamorphosis of the Metaphor," Stanley Corngold illustrates a comparable dynamic for metamorphosis. The genesis of metamorphosis, he argues, does not lie in the final product, the metaphor made literal, but in the process of literalization, in the space of becoming that exists between the subject of analogy (A) and the unstable figure of the metaphor that refers to that subject (B):

[A]s literalization proceeds, as we attempt to experience in (B) more and more qualities that can be accommodated by (A), we *metamorphose* (A); but we must stop before the metamorphosis is

complete, if the metaphor is to be preserved and (A) is to remain unlike (B). If now, the tenor, as in *The Metamorphosis*, is a human consciousness, the increasing literalization of the vehicle transforms the tenor into a monster.

This genesis of monsters occurs independently of the nature of the vehicle. The intent towards literalization of a metaphor linking a human consciousness to a material sensation produces a monster in every instance, no matter whether the vehicle is odious or not, no matter whether we begin with the metaphor of a "louse" or of the man who is a rock or sterling [sic]. (97-98)

Although the poet or writer destroys the metaphoric figure in order to create the illusion of transformation, an element of the original figure's meaning remains in the transformed body. The dynamic temporal process of becoming that characterizes metamorphosis lies in an intermediate state between sameness and otherness, or in the tenuous third term that begins to take shape in the shifting interstice between the transformed victim's original form and his/her final shape. Bakhtin, whose view of metamorphosis coincides with this process, states that metamorphosis "constitutes a distinctive type of *temporal sequence*" (113), one that becomes a means of conceptualizing "the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis*: for showing *how an individual becomes other than what he was*" (115). The resulting narrative of transformation captures a portrait of an individual's destiny of struggle and rebirth

in the face of obstacle, drawing our attention to the perpetual becoming enacted in both the protagonist and the text.

As LeGuern demonstrates, the introduction of time in the process of metaphor creates a gap within the analogical relationship between two terms. The resulting image, although independent of its kin, shares elements of both terms but destroys the metaphorical relationship of connotation in order to take on the explicit value of metamorphosis. In other words, the stress shifts from the figurative nature of the image to the process of its transformation into literal reality (31). Both LeGuern and Corngold's views complement J. Hillis Miller's definition of metamorphosis as "the literalization of metaphor" (1).

Although Miller concurs with LeGuern and Corngold concerning the literalization of metaphor, he regards the intermediate state between the terms that characterizes metamorphosis as an allegory of the linguistic power of figures of speech. Arachne's defiant tapestry and her subsequent punishment poignantly reveal their "terrible performative power" (1). As Miller observes,

[t]ropes tend to materialize in the real world in ways that are ethical, social, and political. The *Metamorphoses* shows what aberrant figurative language can do. The power of the gods to intervene in human history is the allegorization of this linguistic power. (1)

The text of Arachne's tapestry portraying the gods' intervention in human affairs through stealthy, fantastic transformations illustrates Miller's point. At the same time, Arachne's own transmutation reveals the ethical component inherent in the figurative language that comprises the fantasy of transformation. The

metamorphosis that she experiences at the vengeful hand of Athena literalizes the paradox of her artistic crisis: to attain the perfection of the gods, or to strive to do so, entails psychic despair and destruction. Athena's jealous rage and the vicious beating she inflicts on her competitor compel Arachne to hang herself in desperation. However, Athena spares her life after she grants her an ironic metamorphic fate that condemns her to an intermediary state between life and death. Arachne's transformation, and her reduction to the single talent that defines her, literalizes the metaphorical death-in-life crisis, the typical in-between state that characterizes metamorphosis (Miller 1). She mutates into the essence of her former self, a spider hanging from her web, "[t]he tenuous weaver of an ancient craft" (Ovid 151). In her final metamorphic state Arachne embodies a sign to be read as "a memorial example still present within the human community" of her artistic *hubris* and the gods' arbitrary power (Miller 2).

The movement of Arachne's transformation from the realm of the human to that of dehumanized otherness, through the intervention of time between the shifting terms "Arachne" and "spider," depicts the artist's struggle and the crisis of "becoming" in all the agonizing potentiality of sublime creation, destruction, and despair. This very process of poetic striving through metamorphosis reproduces divine creation, and it self-referentially reveals the text's own dynamics of figurative transformation by pushing the limits of language. However, Arachne's reduction to the non-linguistic state of a spider reflects a paradox that also reveals the inadequacy of language to communicate life's most extreme experiences. Accordingly, the trope of metamorphosis intervenes when words

fail to convey the depths of the despair of existential crises and the conflicting emotions that arise out of singular transforming events in a person's life. We need look no further than Niobe's paralyzing grief over the death of her children as an illustration of this paradox:

Then like a stone the childless matron sat—
Around her the dead bodies of her sons,
Her daughters, and her husband. There no motion
Of the wind stirred through her hair, her colour gone,
Bloodless her melancholy face, her eyes
Stared, fixed on nothingness, nor was there any
Sign of life within that image, her tongue
Cleaved to her palate and the pulse-beat stopped:
Her neck unbending, arms, feet motionless,
Even her entrails had been turned to stone.
Yet eyes still wept. . .

(Ovid 156-157)

Metamorphosis not only conceptualizes an individual's destiny of struggle and perpetual becoming, but, according to Miller, it also memorializes the never-ending grief of those unfortunate souls who, neither dead nor alive, pine away in frozen perpetuity, keeping the memory of their trauma alive (4). In Versions of Pygmalion (1990), Miller interprets this type of metamorphosis as an example of *prosopopoeia* or personification, and he characterizes *prosopopoeia* in Ovid as "the trope of mourning," since the stories in which it appears not only depict

etiological myths personified, but also they illustrate the personification of grief (4). In addition, he states that prosopopoeia compensates for death or absence; it accentuates absence, and it brings the inanimate to life (4).

In Garro's novel, Los recuerdos del porvenir, the personification of grief and violence and the memorialization of mourning occupy a central role. The stony paralysis and subsequent silence of a town, its people, and Isabel's metamorphosis into stone provide the impetus for the narration through the memorial's retrospective interpretation. In La última niebla, Bombal inverts the Pygmalion story and brings to life her protagonist's suppressed erotic desires through the creation of a double as a compensatory gesture for a loveless marriage. Likewise, the ascription of a voice to a dead woman in order to memorialize both her life and her experience of death comprises the plot of Bombal's La amortajada. In all these narratives, the subsequent transformations ending in stasis convey a profound sense of alienation that, like the case of Ovid's Niobe, culminate in silence.

Silence most often accompanies the metamorphic transformation. The literalized metaphor changed into a sign becomes both absence and memory, beckoning the wanderer to transform it again into significance through remembrance, in order to mitigate the sense of nothingness that lies at the center of all experience (Gould 10). As with Ovid's metamorphosed characters, the characters in Bombal's and Garro's novels become immobilized by their resistance to the violence of institutional power, and their lives end in mutism and final silence. Whether the protagonist concludes her days trapped in a death-in-

life situation as do Bombal's characters, or as the stone memorial in Garro's novel of the violent Mexican Revolution, the view of metamorphosis that these authors present resonates with Mikkonen's observation that "the modern metamorphic novel [...] oscillates between the possibilities of creative transformation and revision, petrification, and destruction" (22). Irving Massey points out that, because the process of transformation more often than not entails an experience of annihilation, it "tends to settle in the moments of arrest rather than development," and these usually end in silence (2). Consequently, metamorphosis discloses "a critique of language," because it represents a "desperate choice" and a "protest in defeat" that frequently ends in stasis, paralysis, or petrification (1-2). After the silence, the metamorphosed beings, converted into signs and memorials that bear the imprint of their trauma, invite us to meditate the significance of the metamorphic event, and to keep it perpetually "actual" in a present of becoming through the process of transformation inherent in the act of reading.

IV. Ovid's Enduring Legacy: Literary Myth

The word "metamorphosis" conjures up changes of form that have to do with natural processes: a nymph cocooned in a chrysalis emerges as a butterfly; a cluster of cells becomes an embryo which in turn develops into a body further subjected to the transforming processes of aging. In art and literature the motif of metamorphosis may reveal psychological conflicts, repressed desires, and illicit passions within the subject, which are often expressed through changes of form. Conflicted subjects who find themselves immobilized by a paradoxical

predicament may fall victim to a transformation that literalizes their mental and emotional paralysis, as many Ovidian stories illustrate. A paradoxical predicament in the form of a crisis of will can reveal a character's self and humanity while it instigates a catastrophic change. Furthermore, a protagonist's essential nature may be literalized in a fantastic transformation that reveals the core of his or her identity, as the stories of Arachne and Niobe exemplify. Metamorphosis represents change in a subject's mental and physical status, while it emphasizes a subject's problematic relationship with the self, others, society, and the world. On a textual level, metamorphosis often reveals the linguistic construction of the self, consciousness, and subjectivity, and it illustrates the text's own dynamics of transformation through the mechanics of intertextuality and language's ultimate inability to convey life's most extreme experiences.

Rather than represent merely the unification of two forms as a composite or a hybrid, or the substitution of one form for another (as in metaphor), metamorphosis illustrates the imagination's primary, operational dynamic. With its powers of analogy, it alchemically binds distant and discordant elements to create new and unexpected images that more suitably convey the complexities of the human journey of development. Metamorphosis symbolizes the unstable interval of potentiality and transformation between two terminal states, where neither form stands exclusively for itself nor anything other than itself. Thus, the trope of metamorphosis allows us to explore this mutable territory and consider both the hopeful and horrific aspects of change in a world where random

accidents, chance, and arbitrary forces inexorably override any human conception of an overarching rational plan that might spare us the agony of radical change. Identity, made manifest as a sign in our shape or body, endures, constantly threatened by change and propelled forward towards an active, present, and protean becoming whose potential also entails eventual loss. Death heralds the end of the narrative of our body and the permanent loss of our identity. However, the body transformed into another shape, the metamorphic text, survives to be continued in a time of becoming through intertextual reinscription, revision, and interpretation in order to acquire new life and significance. Metamorphosis, Eigeldinger reminds us, informs the primary dynamic behind intertextuality through the operations of appropriation, referentiality, transposition, and transformation (Mythologie et intertextualité 16-17). The poet of the Metamorphoses, aware of his own potential for transformation through the mirror of his text, affirms his individuality in the face of exile and destruction. His *oeuvre* offers the metamorphic trope as an incantation that resists change even as it embodies it, annuls dissolution, and immortalizes poetic genius and art. Ovid continues to exude confidence in his own immortality through the transforming magic of his textual creation:

And now the measure of my song is done:

The work has reached its end; the book is mine,

None shall unwrite these words: nor angry Jove,

Nor war, nor fire, nor flood,

Nor venomous time that eats our lives away.

Then let that morning come, as come it will,
When this disguise I carry shall be no more,
And all the treacherous years of life undone,
And yet my name shall rise to heavenly music,
The deathless music of the circling stars.
As long as Rome is the Eternal City
These lines shall echo from the lips of men,
As long as poetry speaks truth on earth,
That immortality is mine to wear. (Ovid 452)

Chapter Two

The Mythopoetic Imagination:

Transforming the Metamorphoses

No sooner have you grabbed
hold of it than myth opens out
into a fan of a thousand segments.
-- Roberto Calasso,

Un mythe est sur la grève du temps
comme une de ces coquilles où l'on
entend le bruit de la mer humaine.
Un mythe est la conque sonore
d'une idée.
-- Henry de Regnier

The motifs of metamorphosis that appear in the works of María Luisa Bombal and Elena Garro reflect the early twentieth-century resurgence of the rich mythic traditions that underlie Western culture. According to Eleazar Meletinski, this revival implies both a *Weltanschauung* and an aesthetic approach that transcends the use of mythical themes and archetypes for artistic purposes. The *renewal of myth* that characterizes twentieth-century art and literature reveals three trends: the parallel transformation on the structural level of the novel, the adoption of a “critical stance” toward realism, and a gesture of refusal that signals the increasing sense of alienation and spiritual crisis engendered by modernity (Meletinski 275). In this chapter we explore Ovid’s literary legacy and begin our investigation of Bombal’s and Garro’s incorporation of intertextual practices and of the motifs of metamorphosis, in order to sound the symbolic meaning at the heart of the myths which they appropriate. By means of a poetics of metamorphosis, these two novelists and their seminal works, La última niebla (1935) and Los recuerdos del porvenir (written in 1953, published in 1963), offer

two valuable perspectives from which to explore a specific concept of metamorphosis, one that concentrates on the transformative power of the imagination yet explores a figurative metamorphosis that ends in stagnation, and another which presents an even more dramatic Ovidian “petrification” as a final gesture of refusal.

Ovid's Metamorphoses remains the foundational text whose themes have been appropriated and reinterpreted in art and literature for centuries. In addition to the thematic richness of the work, and the poetic conception of the process of transformation, Ovid also provides a creative model for intertextuality, as his own fluid text exhibits a self-aware virtuosity that blends a variety of ancient sources into a seamless and artistic whole. The Latin poet's polyphonic text exemplifies Marc Eigeldinger's concept of intertextuality, in that Ovid reconfigures ancient myth and legend in order to constitute transformation as a poetic conceit, one that illustrates metamorphosis as a magical process. It also embodies an apt metaphor that depicts the metamorphosis of individuals in crisis (Bakhtin 114). The Metamorphoses presents a self-referential text that exhibits an awareness of its own aesthetic aims. Through humor and irony, Ovid modifies the appropriated matter in his text in order to ridicule occasionally the naïveté of ancient mythic stories and to criticize power and authority through the portrayal of a pantheon of gods and humans both incomprehensible and capricious. Finally, Ovid's text questions rigid social norms by breaking them, and he mocks death and oblivion by postponing an inevitable end through the wonders (both promising and horrific) of metamorphosis. In essence, Ovid's text refuses closure, inviting its

reader to begin it anew in order to perpetuate its transformations. The seductive charm of Ovid's work has inspired authors to imitate his poetics of literary myth. Subsequently, throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Romantic era, and the nineteenth and twentieth-century movements of Symbolism and Surrealism, the Metamorphoses has not only provided a great storehouse of mythical themes and characters, but it has also inspired writers to reenact its aesthetic dynamic of textual transformation in an infinity of prismatic reflections.

Myth provides an author with a legacy charged with recognizable universal codes and polyvalent signifiers which can be manipulated, magnified, embellished, or distorted in order to provide the new adaptation with a complex web of meaning. This not only recasts the original universal themes with a contemporary freshness, but it also expresses the particular interests and individuality of its author (Albouy 301). Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), for example, perceived in myth an inexhaustible source of aesthetic inspiration, and in his review of the "Salon de 1859," he professed that myth offers a means by which the imagination, "la reine du vrai" [the queen of truth] reaches for the infinite (Baudelaire 1038). Under the influence of Wagner, the Symbolist literary stance perceived myth not only as the poet's ideal subject matter (Albouy 102), but also as the perfect medium through which an idea or a state of mind could be symbolically expressed in order to allude to a universal truth (107). Through the long centuries from Ovid to his twentieth-century inheritors, myth has provided a framework of patterns, as well as a storehouse of themes, from which to contextualize and reinscribe aesthetic interests and obsessions. In the process of

appropriation and revision, Albouy claims that myth becomes a vehicle that transmutes the essence of writing itself:

[un] *signifiant* polyvalent et plastique, disant ce qu'il dit et autre chose, se situant toujours sur plusieurs niveaux en même temps, le mythe renferme le mystère et toutes les puissances du langage; emprunté ou inventé, il réanime, chez les grands écrivains, les archétypes les plus profonds, et, par là, permet d'approcher encore du mystère de la création. (304)

[a polyvalent and plastic *signifier*, expressing what it does and something more, invariably situated at several levels simultaneously, myth encompasses mystery and all the powers of language; whether borrowed or invented, it reanimates, in great writers, the most profound archetypes, and by this means, it allows one to reach for the mystery of creation.]

Myth contains a universal structure that permits the reorganization of its particular elements to suit the individual aesthetic aims of the author, while maintaining its core of narrative identity and meaning. Myth encapsulates, as Northrop Frye reminds us, "the whole range of [a society's] verbal expressiveness," and therefore it becomes "the matrix of literature" to which poets and writers continually return in order to draw from its storehouse of themes (33). Myth remains perennially alive by virtue of the stories that embody its core: it retains an inexhaustible meaning which can never be fully rendered into a static canonical form. Frye explains: "A myth may be told and retold: it may

be modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in it; and its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the homiletic life of some illustrated truism" (32). Mythic stories and themes continue to resonate because, as malleable signifiers, new symbolic meanings can be imaginatively grafted onto them without modifying the basic pattern that identifies them. For example, the Euripidean use of myth offers a classic example of how protean these signifiers can become: did the enemies of the Hellenes take the Spartan Helen to Troy, or did the gods keep her in Egypt for the duration of the war? Eigeldinger's remarks on mythic intertextuality coincide with Frye's and Albouy's assessments, for he observes that the mythical material is seldom "emptied," but rather it is metamorphosed and occasionally contested and disfigured; the author may abandon the myth's original context in order to transplant it into a new one, yet its evocative, aesthetic, and metaphoric functions remain (Mythologie... 228). By means of its analogical function, the mythic undertext not only contributes to the coherence of the text, but it also leads to an unraveling of its signification (211). Ultimately, mythical intertextuality calls attention to its own construction in language and its own fictional status, and, according to Eigeldinger, for this reason it becomes a textual mirror:

L'intertextualité mythique est une écriture-miroir où le spectacle du monde transfiguré et le langage conjuguent leur reflets à travers la fulgurance des rencontres les plus insolites. Elle est un levier dont se sert l'imagination pour produire la surprise et le dépaysement, par lesquels elle substitue à l'ancienne cosmogonie une

cosmogonie nouvelle, érigée par la seule énergie du verbe poétique. (Mythologie... 229)

[Mythical intertextuality is mirror-writing in which the spectacle of the transfigured world and language combine their reflections through the resplendence of the most exceptional encounters. It is a lever used by the imagination to produce surprise and bewilderment, through which it substitutes a new cosmogony for the old, fashioned by the single energy of the poetic word.]

In addition to embodying an aesthetic *praxis*, mythic intertextuality plays a key role in the signification of a text, as it establishes a dialogue with preceding texts (a tradition), either through allusion or direct reference (as with, for instance, Apuleius' conscious use of Ovid's famous title for his own work, The Metamorphosis of Lucius Apuleius of Madaura). It also calls attention to the very act of creating the text itself, to the work of appropriation, transformation, and reinscription that occasions a polyphonic and multi-dimensional narrative world.

Related to the concept of literary myth is the notion of literary metamorphosis. For Bruce Clarke, the literary metamorphosis of the body stands for an allegory of writing (1). Derived from classical traditions, it differs from mythic metamorphosis (epiphanic in nature) due to its literariness as an aesthetic device that "conveys the poetic or duplicitous rhetoricity of language and the inescapable chain of translation" (21). Thus, literary metamorphosis manifests a parodic quality that frequently indicates irony, stimulating the reader to discover the pretext encrypted in the "disfiguration" of metamorphosis (21). Clarke does

not deny the seriousness of the trope of literary metamorphosis, however parodic; through the resurrection of the mythical framework that undergirds the text, fictive transformations present compelling figures of the existential crises and conflicts that assail all human beings, and they reflect the tensions inherent in the relationship between the self and Other, the self and society, and the self and the cosmos (2). Textually, literary metamorphosis becomes an aesthetic device charged with a *daemonic* power of intermediation and translation, revealing the ambivalence of language and the disjunctions and potential transformations that lie at the interstice between the acts of perception and acts of writing (2). Literary metamorphosis objectifies the experience of the threshold intrinsic to human experiential crisis, while it objectifies the process of literary creation, and as such, literary metamorphosis constitutes a significant aspect of mythopoetic traditions.

The process of mythopoesis, the aesthetic creation and re-creation of myth, illustrates a literary phenomenon that occurs most significantly in periods of crisis and cultural change (Slochower 15), as with, of course, the period in which Ovid lived. Since myth appeals to our yearning for identity, origins, and destiny, its themes and mythopoetic transformations rise to the forefront of consciousness when questions of identity become most acute (Ibid 15). In the Modernist tradition, the re-creation of myth through mythopoesis entails a response to an individual's threshold experiences of estrangement and alienation from the depersonalizing forces of modern society, and it represents an escape from the discomfort of history in order to regain a measure of authenticity in an idealized

realm of ahistoric time (Meletinski 276-77). For instance, common themes of detachment, exile, and solitude abound in the poetry of Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and in Gide's early prose works, creating, as Wallace Fowlie notes, "a new mythology of poetic purity and human absence" (21). In the works of Proust, the sense of unease created by dramatic social change expresses itself through the repetition of leitmotifs, which not only contribute to the symbolic value of the text, but also become a structuring aesthetic device that mitigates against the fragmentation of daily life in order to thread memories into a coherent aesthetic whole that crystallizes into a work of art (Meletinski 276).

In the texts of women or of other marginalized groups, the experience of alienation becomes even more acute, and this stance renders their intertextual mythical appropriations and textual transformations particularly significant. Feminine mythical intertextual practices have historically allowed women writers to participate in the high culture of literary communities, albeit at its periphery (Purkiss 441). Their intertextual practices have addressed gender inequalities, not only through appropriation and revision, but also in order to call forth critical revisions, deformations, and displacements that call into question the accepted significance of particular myths (Lauter 11-12). The textual practices of many women authors often constitute a questioning and a rebuttal of conventional mythic discourse, and women's responses to the mythic tradition may often place greater emphasis on the metamorphic aspect of intertextuality. The original myth may undergo more radical transformation, to the point of deformation, in an attempt to create rupture within the tradition.

María Luisa Bombal's strategies of mythic appropriation represent a measured response that places her work within the intertextual practices of the Post-Symbolists who participated in the renewal of mythical traditions in modern French literature. She transforms the aesthetic practices of the Symbolists to achieve an exceptional degree of lyricism in her text, while she foregrounds the subjective world of her protagonists by borrowing particular myths that lend themselves to the exploration of the inner gaze—the *daimons* of consciousness, such as those found in the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus.

Her particular renditions of these myths place her squarely within a tradition of authors who have historically reenacted the mythical quest for self-actualization and consciousness in poetry and prose alike, in order to confront both personal demons and societal dilemmas in crucial moments of crisis. In particular, Bombal's works reflect the Modernists' adaptation of the Symbolist poetics of the Narcissistic inner gaze, a gaze turned inward to explore the depths of the psyche in order to access the inherent solitude of the individual in an increasingly depersonalizing modern world (Fowlie 18, 21). Albouy observes that such Narcissistic introspection transformed the structure of the Modernist novel into the form of a mythical quest (131). As the subjects of consciousness, interiority, and subjectivity became fertile ground for artistic exploration, writers began to extol the site of consciousness itself. The vibrant resurgence of the myth of Narcissus exemplifies this preoccupation with the inward gaze, as it emerges in the early twentieth century as an intriguing emblem for society's emergent fascination with the psychology of human consciousness and the

philosophical, existential solitude of all human beings. For Julia Kristeva, the contemporary Narcissus:

...est un exilé, privé de son espace psychique, un extra-terrestre aux allures préhistoriques en manque d'amour. Enfant trouble, écorché, un peu dégoûtant, sans corps et sans image précis, ayant perdu son propre, étranger dans un univers de désir et de pouvoir, il n'aspire qu'à réinventer l'amour. (356)

[... is an exile, deprived of his psychic space, an extraterrestrial with a prehistoric air, wanting for love. A disturbed child, tormented, somewhat disgusting, without a precise body or image, having lost his own essence, a stranger in a world of desire and power, he aspires only to reinvent love.]

Those familiar with Salvador Dalí's iconic image in his painting, Metamorphosis of Narcissus (1937) can appreciate Kristeva's characterization; she recognizes the myth as one of the foundations of Western subjectivity (104-105). The myth's association with the problematics of self has lead Albouy to classify Narcissus as the twentieth century's myth of knowledge par excellence (173). In French prose and poetry of the same era, Narcissus signifies self-reflexive, aesthetic contemplation as well as self-conscious awareness that exuberantly celebrates a love of self, even as it announces the reversal of the tradition of Narcissistic pathology (Albouy 175-177, 184). As is the case of Valéry's Narcissus, the myth also becomes emblematic of "the contemplation of self pushed to its mortal

extreme" (Fowlie 21), and it captures the themes of solitude, detachment, and exile that are prevalent in Post-Symbolist French poetry (21).

In French women's literature of the 20s and 30s, the same decades as Bombal's literary apprenticeship and production, Narcissistic exploration often takes the form of fictionalized autobiographies whose principal characteristic, according to Jennifer E. Milligan, centers around the exigencies of female identity (109). In addition to aesthetic reflexivity and the exploration of identity, Narcissus also represents the desiring body, whose self-knowledge, as a material being subject to limitations and death, induces self-consciousness. Narcissus and his mirror symbolize the paradigm of the metamorphic transaction itself, in that they represent the paradoxes of selfhood through specular images that illuminate the self in its idealizations and deformations, as the many victims of Ovidian metamorphosis portray (Barkan 46). The aspect of mirroring, so eloquently portrayed in the solipsistic lament of the Ovidian Narcissus—"Look! I am he; I've loved within the shadow / Of what I am"—becomes emblematic of a metamorphic process that ironically forces a radical separation between the self and the body, in order to compel an examination of the self from the perspective of otherness that may engender consciousness and self-discovery. Through the metamorphic mirror, then, Narcissus and his Ovidian counterparts reach a bittersweet recognition of the inexplicable nature of subjective identity. Through Narcissus' looking glass and its refracted images, rather than through Narcissus himself, we find the most imaginative aesthetic representations of the modern crisis of alienation.

As one of the most representative and captivating characters from the Metamorphoses, Narcissus provides an important example of a character beset by a crisis that triggers a transformation, exposing the fragility of identity; he leads the entire cast of Ovidian characters whose similar punishment of dissolution into image or petrification occurs as a result of a forbidden form of love, one of Ovid's most cherished themes. While the Ovidian Narcissus represents the ultimate sterility of self-love, his adventure reflects our own fascination with the power of the insubstantial image, "simple produit d'une erreur des yeux" (Kristeva 102); ["simple product of the eyes' mistake."] The myth of Pygmalion, the artist who falls in love with his own creation, depicts another variant of Narcissistic self-love, while it suggests incestuous love. Other personifications of aberrant love include Myrrha, who lusts after her father, Byblis, who covets her brother, and Scylla, who falls in love with her father's enemy. Barkan presents them as "figures in the mirror," and their stories imply the themes of loss and discovery of identity in the refraction created by their metamorphic transformations (90). Individually, they stand for projections of the will in crisis, subjected to transformation at the mental rather than physical level. As Harold Skulsky observes they are defenseless "to the caprice not only of matter but of mind" (39). Bombal's protagonist in La última niebla suffers a similar fate, that of a dislocated being dispossessed of a name and a sense of selfhood, who, in accordance with Kristeva's contemporary Narcissus, "aspires only to reinvent love" in order to validate herself. Ultimately Bombal's protagonist fails to create a unified identity from the fragments refracted by the Narcissistic mirror.

María Luisa Bombal weaves the mythic into a poetic prose that distances her narrative from realism, while her protagonists embody the themes of alienation and the Narcissistic inner gaze characteristic of literary myths of the twentieth century. The Chilean critic Alone (pseudonym, Hernán Díaz Arrieta) accurately perceives in Bombal's prose the resonance of both an ancient literary tradition and the modernity of a new age. In a brief entry in Historia personal de la literatura chilena (1962), he writes of Bombal: "[a]ntigua y moderna, tiene antepasados en la antología griega, en los remotos líricos, no menos desnudos e inocentes, al par que se codea con las escuelas vanguardistas, mezclada a sus filas sin sorpresa" (238). ["Classic and modern, she has antecedents in the Greek anthology, in ancient poets, no less naked and innocent, while at the same time she rubs shoulders with the avant-garde schools, blended in its ranks without surprise."] While Alone acknowledges Bombal's affiliation with the Modernist tradition, he also rightly discerns in her work the ancient mythical material that underlies its lyricism. Although some Bombalian criticism recognizes the mythical motifs that inform her narratives, this body of criticism interprets her work primarily from a Jungian, archetypal point of view, and it focuses on the archetype of the "eternal feminine" (both in the negative and positive connotations) that essentializes her female characters. Few critics proceed beyond the dichotomizing and essentialist position to explore the intertextual mythical patterns and motifs that Bombal appropriates, reworks, and ultimately transforms within her narratives. Albouy designates works such as Bombal's as "mythes littéraires," because such authors appropriate mythic material in order to

reinscribe it with their own individual interpretations (292). In so doing, Bombal participates in a process that Meletinsky calls “mythification” (275), a distinguishing trait that characterizes twentieth-century literature in general and French Modernist literature in particular.

In her poetic narratives Bombal reinterprets some of the century’s most intriguing and frequented myths: Narcissus and Echo, Orpheus, Pygmalion, Daphne, and Persephone, and these and other mythical characters are reincarnated in the literary space of her texts. She reinterprets the Ovidian myths of Narcissus and Pygmalion in La última niebla, and in this novel, as well as in La amortajada, the protagonists experience an Orphic journey to the underworld that forms the structural and thematic core of the narrative. Moreover, in the short story “El árbol,” she reverses the myth of Daphne, so that the protagonist reaches self-awareness only after the destruction of the tree that serves as her double. By means of an intertextual dialogue with Ovidian myths, Bombal explores her protagonists’ innermost struggles with the forces of desire, self-realization, and self-awareness. An examination of Bombal’s reinscription of these myths reveals a disturbing pattern of paralysis and immobility that assails her primary characters. Often brought about by threshold experiences that reveal their alienation and solitude, the resulting stasis is portrayed as a figurative metamorphosis of petrification that articulates poetically the protagonist’s search for identity and its eventual fragmentation. In keeping with the aesthetic imperatives of Modernist authors, Bombal does not offer her female protagonists any consoling resolutions, nor does she comment explicitly on their situation.

Naomi Lindstrom observes that this technique frustrates certain critics who have endeavored to study the social content of Bombal's work (147-148). It has motivated certain among them such as Linda Levine to consider the poetic evocation of the protagonists' stagnation as an endorsement of the restricted lifestyle of the social class which they represent (161) or as a disturbing portrayal of feminine alienation "to the point of abnormal behavior" (Meyer 10). An approach that expects "positive" portrayals of female protagonists denies the aesthetic and literary quality of Bombal's works, and it represents a phenomenon that Purkiss terms "'images of women' feminism," a form of feminist criticism that demands "that literary texts both reflect reality or experience" without considering the literary context of their production (442). Guerra Cunningham's critical work, La narrativa de María Luisa Bombal: Una visión de la existencia femenina (1980), represents the most comprehensive work to date on Bombal. In it she examines Bombal's protagonists from a feminist sociological perspective that portrays their problematic subjectivity as a product of a stifling patriarchal economy and ideology. At the same time, using the Jungian theory of archetypes, she considers the protagonists from an essentialized feminine point of view which places them in dialectical opposition to such forces, even as they are its victims. While she recognizes the groundbreaking novelty of Bombal's aesthetic practices, Guerra Cunningham attributes the author's aesthetic of subjectivity and ambiguity to feminine narrative practices of the Modernist era, a limited view which we amplify in Chapter Three, as Bombal's literary heritage grows out of the wider tradition of French Symbolism and Modernism.

Bombal's narrative strategies depend on the duplicity of her text, a text that uses myth and poetic language paradoxically, both to obscure and to reveal in an Heraclitean fashion. Bombal's work exemplifies the metamorphic text, not only because it elaborates the themes of the double, transformation, and figurative petrification through stasis, but also because it oscillates between transcendence and destruction, directly challenging the social values within which her protagonists live. As she elevates the plight of her protagonists to a universal level, Bombal presents a vision of alienated humanity through the reelaboration of myth and a poetic aesthetic, thereby creating a unique poetic vision of human exile.

Bombal's text, in its lyricism, mythic protagonists, and self-conscious stance, exemplifies the aesthetic practices of the Modernist era. Her text also represents a model of the restrained appropriation of the European avant-garde that occurred in the southern cone of Latin America, due to the movement's early arrival on the continent, to its steady appropriation and transformation through time, and to the moderating influence of Apollinaire's *Esprit nouveau* (Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh 30, 71).

In contrast to Bombal's Modernist practices, which manifest a decidedly European flair, the Mexican writer Elena Garro's aesthetic reflects the more strident and revolutionary transformation of the avant-garde in Mexico. Garro's style represents a Baroque synthesis of European, pre-Columbian, and colonial cultures (Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh 77-80), and her text evolves from the Surrealist avant-garde tradition, whose ideology of rupture and revolution

found expression in the fervor of aesthetic renovation that gripped post-Revolutionary Mexico. Garro appropriates and transforms the Surrealists' most cherished themes within her own fiction, and she modulates the simultaneous existence of multiple realities, the coexistence of mythic time and linear time converging in an eternal present, and the motif of the quest for a lost paradise or golden age. She develops these themes by locating them within Mexican mythic tradition and reinscribing them into a context of Baroque aesthetics.

Reminiscent of Baudelaire's praise of imagination as the "queen of an authenticity through which the infinite may be reached" (1038), Garro's own views on the imagination share an affinity with the privileged position accorded to it by the Surrealists, for whom it becomes the gateway to the marvelous as well as to a descent into madness. In her fiction, the myth of the quest for unity in a paradise of origins, the Surrealists' transformation of a universal millenarist theme, remains a constant nostalgic refrain, while the impossibility of its achievement, especially for female protagonists, becomes a veritable leitmotif. According to Méndez Rodenas, Garro portrays this failed venture through her own form of Magical Realism, which captures submerged feminine desires and foregrounds the "efímero y siempre en peligro universo femenino" ("Magia y pasión..." 19); ["the ephemeral and always endangered feminine universe."] In addition, recalling the feminine intertextual practice of appropriation and deformation of myths, Garro deconstructs the ideology of revolution itself, posited by the Surrealists and experienced by the Mexicans as a historical trauma, and she illustrates its failure through her fiction. Revolutionary ideals and their

insistence upon freedom implode under her fictional scrutiny to reveal a dialectic of cruelty rather than the spirit of liberty which, more often than not, informs the actualization of such ideals. As Michèle Muncy points out in "Elena Garro and the Narrative of Cruelty," Garro's fiction presents the theme of liberty and its inverse, oppression and cruelty, in order to testify to the brutality of the human species. More pointedly, Garro directs this scrutiny towards persons, groups, ideologies, and institutions whose revolutionary claims to liberty prove hollow as they corrupt their own ideals in order to protect their elite status.

The motif of time reiterates another cherished Surrealist theme that reappears in Garro's fiction, and her treatment of time and memory has been widely recognized by critics such as Robert K. Anderson, Rhina Toruño, Sandra Messinger Cypess, Anita K. Stoll, and Patricia Rosas Lopátegui. Anderson notes Garro's rejection of linear chronology in favor of a Proustian narration "orientada por la memoria" ["oriented by memory"], one that portrays the simultaneity and kaleidoscopic experience of reality ("La realidad temporal..." 25-26). In Garro's narrative practice, linear time blends into the circular time of both indigenous Mexican culture and Western mythic traditions (26). History itself becomes condemned to repetition in an eternal present, as if trapped in a circular hell (Anderson, "Myth and Archtype [sic]..." 214). The title of Garro's novel, Los recuerdos del porvenir [Recollections of Things to Come] reflects the narrative conceit of past and future converging into a static present, mediated by memory, that at times stands still as if petrified.

Both the structure and plot of Los recuerdos del porvenir center upon a cluster of mythological allusions to European and pre-Columbian myths which enable Garro to develop a mythological concept of cyclical time. The novel fits within the parameters of the Latin-American modern novel delineated by Carlos Fuentes, a form structured by “mito, lenguaje y estructura” [“myth, language, and structure”] (20). Garro’s novel especially reflects the aesthetic concerns of the Surrealists with their emphasis on the confusion and blending of binary categories. Therefore, as Joan Marx points out, the author of Los recuerdos del porvenir has earned her place among the ranks of Latin-America’s greatest authors of “mythological novels” (170). These works, which conform to the definition of “literary myth,” appropriate mythological symbols and mythic frameworks in order to universalize twentieth-century problems (170). The Latin-American authors whose novels and poetry exhibit characteristics of the “literary myth” include Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Juan Rulfo, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar, and Gabriel García Márquez, and their texts fuse the Latin-American quest for identity, contextualized through a utopic mythical framework, with historical and national concerns in order to explore their continent’s reality. Most of these novels share common universal themes such as the notion of cyclical time, the oppression of the marginalized, the alienation of modern life, and the nostalgic quest for a utopia or paradise that often fails to materialize. They depict an apocalyptic vision of modernity through the oscillation of the forces of destruction which themselves carry the seeds of renewal. Garro incorporates the tensions of destruction and regeneration through the

appropriation of cosmogonic myths that personify mythical concepts of time and periodicity through a divine androgynous pair. The divine couple, who reconciles all opposition and duality, also comprises the erotic pair of the Surrealists' myth of the golden age, and the lovers' cosmic union abolishes time and all duality to reveal the paradoxical instant of eternal bliss. In Garro's novel, the pair inhabits an incestuous relationship between siblings that conveys the myth's symbolic charge of contagion and inversion, the principal characteristic of mythical sacred time.

Cosmogonic myths of regeneration traditionally embody a universal nostalgic desire for indivisible unity and totality that encompasses all opposition and dissolves all duality. Such myths anthropomorphize totality through the concept of androgyny (Eliade, The Two and the One 108-111). As a means of personifying a singularity that encompasses all of totality, bisexuality offers an intelligible model for the creative and destructive powers of gods who create offspring alone and who preside over both creation and destruction (109). The procreative androgyny of the divine may also be vested in an anthropomorphic sibling pair whose incestuous unions often are considered to engender all of creation itself. In Greek myth, Chaos represents a neuter totality that begets a feminine Earth, who in turn generates a masculine Sky. The union of Zeus and Hera, who, according to Calasso "enjoyed the most extravagantly drawn out amorous childhood of all time" (23), offers another illustrative example. Dionysus, designated by Eliade as "the most bisexual of the gods" (109), offers a more complicated instance of divine androgyny, since in many myths he presides over

the carnivalesque confusion of opposites. Associated with the rituals of Eleusis (Jiménez 38) and those that gave birth to Attic theater, Dionysus presides over the metamorphic transformation that connects the initiate to its Other, in order to experience a transcendence of the body and a unification with the divine (Jiménez 38, 51-52). Likewise, the loss of self experienced as a death, a darkness, and an alien Otherness links the god to the chthonic realm (45). Presiding over transcendence that frees the spirit, Dionysian liberation may also precipitate its opposite, a transformation into the material realm, as many metamorphic stories illustrate. The duality held in tension in the god's divine figure heightens his symbolic ambivalence.

In Ovid's Metamorphoses, tales of Dionysus' transforming powers abound. Notably, the god's followers tear Orpheus limb from limb in a frenzied Bacchic orgy (297-299). Orpheus, whose duality parallels that of Dionysus, also intones the most notable tales of Book X, whose "theme is pretty boys whom gods desire, / Of girls who could not sleep unless they sinned— / All paid the price of loving far too well" (274). In these stories of "intimate contagion," as Barkan terms the theme of incest that runs through them, the confusion of gender which expresses itself in homosexual relationships and the crossing of familial boundaries, often bring about transformations that depersonalize the protagonists into material objects. As stories of substitution, the tales represent instances of misreading which contain the seeds of their own destruction (Miller 127). The story of Pygmalion becomes Miller's paradigmatic model for the figure of prosopopoeia, an example of misreading (127). From Pygmalion's substitutive

mistake of taking a statue for a woman springs a long line of descendants who will repeat his error of misreading: his great granddaughter Myrrha falls in love with her father, disguises herself as a village girl in order to sleep with him, and metamorphoses into a myrrh tree. The fruit of her transgression, Adonis, beloved of Aphrodite, symbolizes an Orphic figure of death and resurrection (Graves 69-70). The story of Byblis who “had immoderate heat for her twin brother” offers another instance of Ovidian incestuous love (Ovid 254). Her agonized *psychomachia* presents a justification for her passion based on the example of the gods’ divine androgyny exemplified by the divine sibling couple. Ovid quotes her:

“Yet many gods were glad to sleep with sister.

Ops became Saturn’s wife; Tethys shared bed

With Oceanus, Juno, the wife of Jove, and he

The king of all Olympus. True, the gods

Have other laws than ours; how can I balance

My human Fate with theirs?” (256)

In the New World, Mesoamerican cosmogonic myths exhibit similar principles of an undifferentiated divine often portrayed anthropomorphically as a divine sibling pair. The mythology of Mesoamerica is as heterogeneous as Greek mythology, and its contamination by post-conquest European recorders and ethnographers, whose Christian and classical perspectives often distorted the Mexican mythical tradition, contributes to its rich complexity (Carrasco 11). Nevertheless, Mesoamerican mythology posits the cosmic origin of the world in a

supreme spirit, Ometéotl, whose divine being incorporates all duality. This all-encompassing divinity manifests its masculine and feminine aspects in divine semi-anthropomorphic pairs and foursomes who become the founding divinities of the heavens, earth, and underworld (Rostas 367-68). However, Ometéotl's offspring also retain their androgynous nature, as do the gods of Greek myth, and they engender the first humans and all of creation. The incestuous relationship between the pairs, often made up of brother and sister, emphasizes the dual nature of the divinities who often embody both masculine and feminine attributes. For example, Quetzalcoatl, a Promethean god associated with cosmic harmony and human industry and creativity, incarnates both the male and the female, as symbolized by his attributes, the quetzal bird (masculine), and the serpent (feminine) (371). Likewise, the telluric goddesses, whose terrifying aspects recall the Indo-European "Great Mother," preside over the cycle of fertility, death, and rebirth, and they represent a creative and destructive female principle. Aggressive masculine features, such as eagle's talons, and the feminine, represented by multiple coiling serpent bodies and heads, symbolize their fearsome duality. Rostas points out that the Aztecs emphasized "the more negative characteristics of those goddesses most in the public eye" in order to exert social control (380). Associated with the chthonic and cosmic forces of life, their bodies provided the "the raw material for creation" (370, 381-83).

Garro appropriates and transforms both Western and non-Western myths through the mechanisms of intertextuality, whose functions, as Eigeldinger notes, consist of strategic as well as referential aims. Besides having a descriptive and

aesthetic function that evokes a particular setting or mood through comparison with a prior model, the appropriation of mythical elements enhances the metaphoric value of the text. The assimilation of other mythic models serves as a referential authority that, once integrated into a new context, functions as a device that enhances the text's significance. The principal function of the borrowed material lies in its metamorphic qualities, since the act of transposition into a new context changes the material's semantic value by conferring upon it a new significance (Eigeldinger, Mythologie... 16). Garro's intertextual practice, then, becomes an act of subversion as it "empêche le sens de se figer dans le discours ou le récit, en le réanimant et en lui insufflant de nouvelles énergies" (Ibid 16). ["prevents the sense from becoming fixed in the discourse or the narrative by reanimating it and infusing it with new energies."] Garro presents her readers with an ambivalent text, objectified through the metamorphosis of its character, Isabel, which demands multiple readings and denies a strict sense of closure.

Both the physical body and the body of the text, made manifest through their discovery, transformation, and disappearance, occupy a central role in the narratives under consideration in this study. Recalling Ovid's tales of Narcissus and Pygmalion, Bombal's protagonist in La última niebla awakens to her suppressed desire through the discovery of her body while gazing at herself in a pool of water. She conjures up an imaginary lover, her desire personified, and as her double, he becomes the catalyst for the expression of feminine autoeroticism. Through the personification of her desire and the Narcissistic inner gaze,

Bombal's protagonist embarks upon an Orphic journey of self-discovery that creates the textual space of the narrative itself. At the other end of the metamorphic spectrum, the *dénouement* of Garro's novel, Los recuerdos del porvenir, centers around the confusion, appearance, and disappearance of people and corpses, signs whose possession and interpretation determine the fate of an entire town. Her narrative culminates in Isabel's stony transformation into a memorial, a roadside marker to be read as an account of a family's and a town's tragic destiny. Therefore, both Bombal's and Garro's intertextual practices incorporate universal myth, cosmic time, and nostalgia for an unrecoverable Eden in narratives that offer two distinct modalities of the Latin-American avant-garde. They are heralds that incorporate all three of the elements, "mito, lenguaje y estructura" (20), that characterize Carlos Fuentes' description of the Latin-American New Novel. The fluid, Ovidian aesthetic of appropriation, transformation, mutation, and innovation that has inspired authors through the ages offers an aesthetic mode of questioning and transforming a literary tradition which has conventionally excluded women from its community. However, mythic revision has offered women a strategy through which to participate in this community, if only recently (Purkiss 441). Bombal's and Garro's metamorphic texts offer two exemplary models of the evolving tradition of literary myth. Informed by the principles of mythical intertextuality, their texts embody an Ovidian metamorphic practice of writing characterized by a tension of identification and differentiation with the literary tradition from which they evolve. This dynamic highlights the ambivalence of language, to the act of translation

inherent in the process of writing, reading, and its effect, misreading. As one senses in Pythagoras' meditation in Ovid's Book XV, the metamorphic body stands for the figure of the changing text, itself searching for a balance between incorporation and transformation in order to reemerge as a unique particularity:

Nothing retains the shape of what it was,
And Nature, always making old things new,
Proves nothing dies within the universe,
But takes another being in new forms.
What is called birth is change from what we were,
And death the shape of being left behind.
Though all things melt or grow from here to there,
Yet the same balance of the world remains. (430)

In the following chapter, we explore the French influences in Bombal's work, and we consider how the author balances and transforms the inherited material of this rich tradition, in order to develop a personal style whose lyricism remains as peerless as Ovid's.

Chapter Three

María Luisa Bombal: Echoes of Post-Symbolism

[L'homme] cherche ce quelque chose
qu'on nous permettra d'appeler la *modernité*;
car il ne se présente pas de meilleur mot
pour exprimer l'idée en question. Il s'agit,
pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu'elle
peut contenir de poétique dans l'historique,
de tirer l'éternel du transitoire.
-- Baudelaire "Le Peintre de la vie moderne"

Of critical importance to an understanding of María Luisa Bombal is an evaluation of her aesthetic apprenticeship in the cultural milieu that gave rise to French Modernism and the traditions of Post-Symbolist poetics. We begin with an examination of the early reception of Bombal's work in the South American continent and its groundbreaking novelty. We trace the latter back to the aesthetic influences that Bombal experienced while living and studying in Paris, the cultural capital of the early twentieth century. Second, we demonstrate that Bombal's unique poetic style is grounded in the enduring traditions of Symbolism, whose immeasurable influence radically transformed the modern novel into an art form that celebrated the autonomy of imagination and emphasized the aesthetic value of the novel as a self-conscious linguistic artifice. Third, in order to elucidate Bombal's narratives of interiority and her critical response to the spirit of liberation inherent in the avant-garde, we examine Paul Valéry's "Orphic" poetics of consciousness, as well as Marcel Proust's groundbreaking narrative innovations. We will argue that Bombal's work not only represents a worthy example of French Modernism, but that it provides a meaningful model of the appropriation and transformation of the avant-garde in Latin America.

Invited to Buenos Aires in 1933 by Pablo Neruda, whom Bombal had met earlier in Chile, the twenty-three year old Chilean writer arrived in the midst of the city's literary and cultural renaissance (Alegria, "María Luisa Bombal" 1112). There, she met the prominent writers of the *grupo Florida* and the *grupo Sur* who gathered around Victoria Ocampo, the founder and editor of the influential literary magazine Sur. Bombal quickly established a rapport with such diverse literary figures as Jorge Luis Borges, Oliverio Girondo, Norah Lange, Conrado Nalé Roxlo, Ricardo Molinari, Leopoldo Marechal, Eduardo González Lanuza, Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Amado Alonso, and Alfonsina Storni (Bombal, "Testimonio..." 329). With Neruda's encouragement, Bombal wrote her first *novella*, La última niebla, at his kitchen table, as she resided with the writer and his wife. She published it in a limited edition in 1935 through a small publishing house in Buenos Aires, F.A. Colombo, with the help of Girondo and Lange. Victoria Ocampo's editorial press, also named *Sur*, subsequently bought the novel, and published it again that same year (Alegria, "María..." 1112).

The auspicious year of 1935 represents a milestone in Latin-American letters, and it heralded a dramatic change in course. The publication of La historia universal de la infamia launched Borges's career in fantastic prose literature, and the publication of Neruda's Residencia en la tierra II (1931-1935) charted the evolution of Latin-American poetry in the direction of Surrealism (Guerra Cunningham, "María Luisa..." 42). Bombal's emergence as a writer in the heady Buenos Aires literary scene of the 1930s must have caused a surprise. If the review of the noted Iberian critic and philologist Amado Alonso, "Aparición de

una novelista" (1936), provides any indication, the puzzled question that opens his critique reveals the perplexed silence that characterized the reception of the publication of her first work, La última niebla (1935): "¿Por qué la crítica local no habrá anunciado La última niebla como un libro importante?" (241). ["Why hasn't local criticism announced La última niebla as an important book?"]. In part, the answer can be found in the gender biases of the era insofar as Bombal, a recent Chilean arrival, was a young, unknown woman writer. In addition, her *novella* presented a radical departure from the established fictional conventions of her time; therefore, it was consigned to the extra-literary category of "feminine literature." However, Bombal's *novella* did attract Alonso's attention, since it departed radically from the contemporary style popular in Chilean letters, dominated by *criollismo*, a Positivist, Naturalistic prose style primarily focused on regionalism. Shortly after the *novella*'s publication, Alonso was the first to register Bombal's break with tradition in the review of her work that appeared in the journal Nosotros in 1936. He ironically observed that "el arte de la Bombal queda extraño al de sus compatriotas. Los novelistas y cuentistas chilenos, con sorprendente disciplina, se han aplicado y se siguen aplicando a cumplir una concepción naturalista del arte de narrar" (242). ["Bombal's art is foreign to that of her compatriots. Chilean novelists and short story writers, with surprising stubbornness, have applied themselves, and continue to apply themselves in carrying out a naturalist conception of the art of narration"]. The Argentinean Fernando Alegría confirms Alonso's assessment, and he elucidates the differences that separated Bombal's creation from the Chilean tradition:

The book was totally alien to the traditions of Chilean regionalism, strongly and sometimes brilliantly sustained by the likes of Mariano Latorre, Eduardo Barrios, and Fernando Santiván. It showed no relation to the slow-moving, solidly documented, dramatically inclined type of fiction written by Marta Brunet and her disciples. Bombal's brief novel had a mysterious and poetic aura about it, a conciseness and adroitness in its fast-moving descriptions, and at the same time a self-conscious ambiguity of language that certainly did not derive from Spanish peninsular novels. Bombal's roots were of a different and distant world. ("María Luisa..." 1112)

Indeed, Bombal's distinctive style developed and crystallized in Europe, especially in France, where she was educated.

Born in the Chilean seaside resort town of Viña del Mar on June 8th, 1910, Bombal was the first daughter of an upper-class family of German and French origin. Like many children of the Latin-American upper class, Bombal received a European education, and she attended the school of the French nuns of the Sacred Heart in Viña del Mar. Shortly after her father's death, when she was nine years old, Bombal and her family moved to Paris, eventually settling, coincidentally, in Proust's neighborhood of Passy, on the Rue La Pérouse. Her French education continued at the Convent Schools of Notre Dame de l'Assomption and Sainte Geneviève where she and her sisters boarded. The strict atmosphere, discipline, and solitude of this austere environment encouraged her development as a reader of great literature. She read the French

classics, especially the great authors of the French nineteenth century: Stendhal, Mérimée, Balzac, Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé (Gligo 30). Through her mother's influence, she immersed herself in the German Romantics, reading Schiller and Goethe's Faust and Werther in French, as well as the Nobel Prize winners Knut Hamsun and Selma Lagerlöf, who enjoyed popularity in Paris in the 1920s (Pardiñas-Barnes 40-42). Bombal also surreptitiously read Colette's popular novels, which circulated clandestinely among the convent school boarders (42), and the French writer's exploration of the senses and sexuality certainly influenced the themes of Bombal's future novels.

While at the Lycée La Bruyère, Bombal studied philosophy and read Pascal's Les Pensées (1670), a text to which she would return many times, attracted to its concision, logic, and order, and to the lyrical persuasiveness of its maxims (Gligo 37). She also developed a taste for the Symbolist poetics of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Valéry (Bombal, "Testimonio..." 324), poets whose concern for the poetic, melodic, and suggestive values of language inaugurated a movement of synthesis of prose and poetry in the late nineteenth century. Such a synthesis made room for formal as well as thematic experimentation, which allowed for the expression of oneiric and subjective inner states that privileged mental and imaginative faculties over external description so as to express a personal vision and a quest for a metaphysical universe accessible through the magic of language (Bernard 764-766). The melancholic fatalism, eroticism, and the undercurrent of opposition that characterize nineteenth-century, post-Romantic French prose, exemplified by such authors as

Nerval, Baudelaire, and the later Flaubert (Chambers 9), resonate throughout Bombal's fiction (Pardiñas-Barnes 47). In the 1938 review he wrote for Sur, Jorge Luis Borges observes that Bombal's second *novella*, La amortajada (1938) exudes "[una] triste magia, deliberadamente *suranné*, libro de oculta organización eficaz, libro que no olvidará nuestra América" (81); ["a sad magic, deliberately old-world, a book of secret and efficient organization, a book that our America will not forget"]. Significantly, Borges, who had written an avant-garde manifesto in 1921 which delineated the *Ultraista's* poetic practices (Promis 68), does not mention the avant-garde with respect to Bombal's work in this review. This omission is largely due to the avant-garde's early association in Latin America with poetry and art rather than with prose. Instead, attracted by the deliberate ambiguity between the real and dream-like interiority of Bombal's work, Borges highlights its melancholic, or its gothic quality, by the use of the French term "*suranné*." The poetic strain of her fiction, in which she manipulates image, symbol, and language to express a restricted optic of subjective experience, charted a new course for the Latin-American novel.

After completing the baccalaureate in 1927, Bombal began her studies in 1928 at the Sorbonne where she hoped to earn a degree in literature. There, she continued to nourish her passion for French letters. She studied under Ferdinand Strowsky and distinguished herself in the first year of French literature with a story written in the manner of Charles Perrault, which earned her a first prize (Pardiñas-Barnes 45). She completed the second year of French literature with a thesis on Prosper Mérimée, whose work she admired for its precision and tight

dramatic concision (Gligo 38). In fact, Mérimée pioneered the technical innovations that led French nineteenth-century short fiction to its mature stage (George 102, 120); these innovations undoubtedly influenced Bombal. Mérimée both exploited and subverted the commonplaces of the Romantic short story of his era through the following: the use of satire and irony as an antidote to the sentimentality of French Romantic short fiction, the introduction of ambiguity in the endings of stock plots, the exploitation of the tension inherent in the dramatic compression of incidents, and the experimentation with psychological time to vary the treatment of incidents (George 102, 131-134). The concise nature of Bombal's fast-paced narrative art derives in part from her studies of Mérimée's work.

According to Agata Gligo's biography, María Luisa (1984), Bombal as a young student lacked the necessary discipline and interest to complete the remaining minor requirements for her degree in Spanish literature, comparative literature, and literary history, the completion of which would have granted her a terminal degree (37-38). Bombal chose instead to attend courses that she found interesting and ignored those that held little appeal for her (38-39). Further, the intellectual and bohemian distractions of Paris in the midst of a cultural revolution proved irresistible to a newly independent young woman. Drawn to the dynamic transformations taking place in the French theater during the 1920s, Bombal participated in a revival that saw theater regain its standing as a major art form through the efforts of a select group of directors, including Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet, Gaston Baty, and Georges Pitoëff (Brée, Littérature française... 239).

Bombal enrolled in Dullin's *Atelier*, where she counted among her fellow students a new generation of playwrights, including Antonin Artaud and Jean Louis Barault (Gligo 39).

Artaud, Barault, and Jean Giraudoux formed part of a movement that conceived of a "poetic theater" that returned to the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, reinterpreted through Nietzsche and Mallarmé, in order to restore theater to its roots in ritual and catharsis. This would allow for a greater participation in the essential drama of the human condition through the evocation and renewal of myth (Brée, Littérature française... 242, 249). According to Birket and Kearns, the future director Artaud, Bombal's classmate, later conceived of theater as a symbolic form which used a mythical framework not only to evoke myth's darker aspects, but also to appeal to the unconscious through the senses (263).

While Artaud emphasizes the ritual aspect of drama over the importance of words, Giraudoux's work, which dominated the French stage for almost two decades, relies on the power of words to create a "theater of language" that, much like a "spider's web, spun by intelligence," captures "reality and sur-reality and the supernatural" (Guicharnaud 19-21). His classical conception of drama centers on perennial debates and universal conflicts that bring clarity to the muddled inconsistencies of daily life (22, 29). To that end, as did other playwrights and fiction writers of the era, Giraudoux turns to the anthology of Greek myth and tragedy. The return to classical sources enables the playwright to escape the conventions of Realism and to create a poetic theater that

encourages inventiveness. The protean quality of myth and mythical characters allows for creative adaptations that incarnate moral and metaphysical preoccupations, bring to light psychological depths, test aesthetic concepts, and ventilate contemporary problems (Carlier and Grandjean 45-53). Giraudoux's Siegfried, a groundbreaking drama that inaugurates the flowering of French theater, premiered in 1928, the year Bombal entered the Sorbonne. Bombal's experience with the theater honed her imaginative and lyrical narrative style, one of the most salient features of her work, and it inspired the use of myth for the poetic enhancement of her narrative. In fact, Pardiñas-Barnes considers Bombal's immersion in the French theater essential to the formation of her poetic universe (50).

In light of Bombal's literary education and her demonstrated predilection for an aesthetic that emphasizes the suggestive, sensory, and musical qualities of language, interior psychological states, and the use of natural imagery to create an ethereal mood, it comes as no surprise that the Symbolist aesthetic informs her work. Pardiñas-Barnes, who has examined the fantastic aspect of Bombal's work in depth, briefly mentions its affinity to the late nineteenth-century French aesthetic movement (50). Similarly, Alegría questions current appraisals of Bombal's work as related to a Surrealist avant-garde, and he observes that although the ambiguity and subjectivity present in her text may be mistaken for a Surrealist aesthetic, Bombal's intuitive, psychological approach distances her from that movement ("María Luisa..." 1114). Both of these critics' assessments disagree with accepted appraisals, exemplified by that of the noted Bombal critic

Guerra Cunningham, which place Bombal's work firmly within the Surrealist avant-garde tradition (La narrativa...15).

The disagreement between these critics points to an apparent confusion of what constitutes the avant-garde in Latin America, where Surrealism is often considered synonymous with the avant-garde. The mistaken identification may be due to the process of this movement's diffusion throughout the continent. According to Gilberto Mendonça Teles and Klaus Müller-Bergh, the overwhelming influence of the French avant-garde in Latin America has been historically minimized in order to establish the authenticity of each nation's assimilation and transformation of its aesthetic. Several countries developed their own, often conflicting, terminology for the avant-garde, leading to a veritable paroxysm of terminology throughout the continent (23-25). Adding to the confusion of terminology is the term *Modernismo*, a designation for the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Latin-American poetic movement initiated by Ruben Darío, an aesthetic that shares some affinities with the French Parnasian and the Symbolist styles. The term does not refer either to French or Anglo-American Modernism, or an equivalent in Latin America. With regard to the style of Bombal's fiction, although critics generally acknowledge its poetic emphasis, that aspect often continues to be considered as part of the Surrealist aesthetic. In addition, most critical exegesis of the last two decades has inadvertently minimized the importance of her aesthetic practices in favor of a primary focus on the social realities portrayed by her protagonists, as refracted through a feminist critical lens (Guerra Cunningham, "María..." 50).

Critics unanimously acknowledge the poetic accent of Bombal's *oeuvre*. In fact, few prose authors in Latin-American letters, with the possible exception of Juan Rulfo and Borges, rival Bombal's lyrical expression. Rulfo himself read Bombal's work, and afterward he claimed that it affected him profoundly (Bianco 241). Guerra Cunningham points out that there exist significant intertextual echoes between Rulfo's Pedro Páramo (1955) and Bombal's La amortajada (1935) ("Introducción" 7). But if some, such as Carlos Fuentes, can regard Bombal as "the mother" of the 1960s Boom generation of writers (Cit. in Guerra Cunningham, "María..." 42), tracing the ancestry of Bombal's meticulous style and narrative themes offers another perspective from which to analyze her elegant work.

Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman laments in the introduction to her study The Lyrical Vision of María Luisa Bombal (1988), that few critics have given Bombal's poetic discourse the extent of critical attention that it deserves (1-2). Among those critics who celebrate Bombal's lyrical style, the appraisals of her lyricism describe characteristics that share affinities with Symbolist poetics. For example, Marjorie Agosin praises the melodious qualities of her language, and she asserts that "[h]asta la fecha, no existe escritora en la lengua española que capture, por medio de la narrativa, el ritmo, el misterio y la sintaxis a veces convulsionada de sus oraciones" ("María Luisa Bombal..." 251). ["To date, there exists no female writer in the Spanish language who captures, by means of the narrative, the rhythm, the mystery, and the often convulsed syntax of her sentences."] Arthur Natella has noted the sensorial elegance of Bombal's prose

with its effective use of chromatic adjectives to convey light and darkness, the repetition of nouns and adjectives, and the use of synaesthetic auditory and sensory imagery to enhance rhythm and musicality. He also recognizes the contrast of simple, short, and fragmented phrases with rhapsodic sentences to create an almost hypnotic effect (175-180). Andrew P. Debicki, acknowledges Bombal's expert use of imagery and "evocative vocabulary" (129), and he observes that the "poetic" quality of her prose derives from "its exact use of structure and image to embody a multi-faceted experience, to make it alive to the reader and at the same time use it to point to a universal vision" (129).

Kostopulos-Cooperman, whose monograph represents the most comprehensive study to date on the topic, examines the fundamentally "lyrical texture" of Bombal's narrative style, which comprises the sensory and suggestive qualities of language and image, its rhythmic cadences and repetitions, and the distant mythic chords intoned through motif patterns and nature imagery (1-2). She marvels at Bombal's ability to manipulate poetic imagery:

the hand of the artist is not too distant and [...] Bombal's protagonists are often nothing more than literary masks behind which the poet, as concealed author, creates her lyrical world.

A fundamental characteristic of this world [...] is a poetic imagery that compresses individual scenes and experiences into significant moments and also contributes to the richly suggestive texture of the prose. (3)

Indeed, Bombal's passionate concern for the lyrical and stylistic aspects of her work is evident from the many interviews she gave in which she emphatically reiterates a concept of herself as a poet who wrote prose (cit. in Velasco 20). Further, she attributed the reduced extension of her *oeuvre*¹ to her perfectionist fixation on style, which compelled her to rewrite and polish her manuscripts obsessively prior to publication (Agosín, "Un recuerdo..." 405). Her preoccupation with the style, form, and the musicality of her prose bears an affinity with the Mallarméan quest for purity and perfection that characterized the French Symbolists' poetic aims.

Bombal's uniquely lyrical narrative style, foreign to the Chilean literature of her era, eventually drew the attention of her early critics. Chilean writer Alone (Hernán Díaz Arrieta) pays tribute, albeit in the characteristically patronizing "*ad feminam*"² literary criticism of another era, to the poetic foundation of Bombal's prose in the following rhetorical question: "¿Dónde aprendió esta joven de sociedad, en qué escuela, con cuál maestro, su arte inmemorial y leve, esa lengua que lo dice todo y no se siente, que hace ver, oír, saber de una manera como milagrosa, entre angélica y diabólica?" (238). ["Where did this young society lady learn, in what school, with what teacher, her immemorial, delicate

¹ In addition to her *novella*, *La última niebla* (1935), Bombal published another *novella*, *La amortajada* (1938), as well as the novel *The House of Mist* (1947), which she wrote in English. She also published short stories in a variety of literary magazines: "Las islas nuevas" (1989), "El árbol" (1939), "Mar, cielo y tierra" (1940), "Las trenzas" (1940), "Washington, ciudad de las ardillas" (1943), "La historia de María Griselda" (1946), "La maja y el ruiseñor" (1960), "Lo secreto" (1969). She wrote a screenplay, "La casa del recuerdo," for Argentinian director, Luis Saslavsky. Unpublished manuscripts include the plays *Believe Me, Love* and *The Foreign Minister* (written in English), *Dolly and Jeckyll and Miss Hyde*; a collection of short stories, *Noche de Luna*; a novel, *Embrujo*; and *El señor de Mayo*, an account of an earthquake in Chile.

² Elaine Showalter coined the term "*ad feminam* criticism" to describe Victorian criticism of female authored texts in "The Double Critical Standard and the Feminine Novel," in *A Literature*

art; that language that says everything yet is unassuming, that makes one see, hear, know in a miraculous way, somewhere between the angelic and the diabolic?"] His question reflects the early twentieth-century literary historian's practice of what Brée describes as the "ironically indulgent 'eternal feminine' approach" to the criticism of women's literature (Women Writers... 12-13). In the same vein, Amado Alonso praises the poetic construction of Bombal's work from which the lyrical atmosphere emanates, while he attributes the poetic emotion of the work to a feminine mode of personal expression (253). On the other hand, Borges (intimately familiar with the European literary tradition) hints at Bombal's literary inheritance in his 1938 review of La amortajada, as he both acknowledges the poetic character of Bombal's prose and stresses its singularity within the Hispanic literary tradition of the era. Borges states that "[i]nfiel a esa tibia tradición, los libros de María Luisa Bombal son esencialmente poéticos" (81). ["Unfaithful to that lukewarm tradition, María Luisa Bombal's books are essentially poetic"]. He adds with characteristic ironic understatement, "[i]gnoro si esa involuntaria virtud es obra de su sangre germánica o de su amorosa frecuentación de las literaturas de Francia y de Inglaterra...." (81). ["I do not know if that involuntary virtue is due to her Germanic blood or to her loving encounters with French and English literature"]. In conclusion, many critics stress Bombal's affinity with the European Surrealist avant-garde, but there are a few, such as Borges and Alegría, who recognize the Romantic and Symbolist wellspring that

of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing, Expanded Edition. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) 73.

informs the musicality of her prose as well as the thematic of love that echoes through her narratives.

Bombal's lyrical style betrays her fascination with the rhythmic and sensory qualities of words, as she herself affirmed. She chose words judiciously, weighing their rhythmic, tonal, and evocative qualities over their semantic value, and she rejected those that did not fit the rhythmic flow that she envisioned for her narrative. She considered rhythm to be the most important aspect of her narrative, and, at the same time, she realized the painful cost exacted by this anguished Mallarméan search for perfection:

[...] aunque me guste una palabra y sea la palabra precisa, la rechazo si no entra en el ritmo. Siempre busco un ritmo que se parezca a una marea, una ola que asciende para luego despeñarse y volver a ascender. Yo en el fondo soy poeta, mi caso es el de un poeta que escribe en prosa. Soy poeta pero como tengo una educación francesa también soy la lógica personificada. Para mí es muy doloroso el oficio de escribir. Me exijo siempre más y más. (Cited in Guerra Cunningham, "Entrevista..." 126)

[even if a word pleases me, and it is the precise word, I reject it if it doesn't fit the rhythm. I always look for a rhythm that flows like a tide, a wave that swells and later falls to rise again. Deep down I'm a poet, but my case is that of a poet who writes prose. I am a poet, but since I have a French education, I am also logic personified.

The craft of writing is very painful for me. I demand more and more of myself.]

Bombal's description of a rhythmic prose that follows the movements of a rising and falling wave discloses a sensory aesthetic of fluidity deeply rooted in French Symbolism. Since Bombal's aesthetic goal bears a significant resemblance to Symbolist poetics, elucidation of this movement's artistic aims and its influence on the modern novel serves to place her work in a more suitable literary context, as well as to establish the importance of this remarkable author's groundbreaking work in the development of Latin-American letters. Indeed, the literary and lyrical qualities of Bombal's prose elevate her work to the status of canonical literature.

Suzanne Bernard, in Le Poème en prose de Baudelaire jusqu'à nos jours (1959), a study of Symbolist prose poetry, characterizes Baudelaire's prose as "undulating," and she employs Bombal's metaphor of a swelling and falling wave to describe the rhythmic prose developed by the Symbolists:

[...] les Symbolistes (toujours sous l'influence de Baudelaire) ont utilisé à l'extrême la double possibilité offerte par la prose: d'une part, à la différence du vers, d'étirer un groupe logique [...] jusqu'à lui donner plusieurs lignes, pour obtenir des effets particuliers de fluidité ou de compacité; d'autre part, à la différence de la prose oratoire, de hacher ou de saccader la phrase, pour obtenir des effets de dynamisme ou de rupture. Baudelaire, à la suite de Sainte-Beuve, offrait surtout des modèles de prose "ondulatoire."
(426)

[the Symbolists (still under the influence of Baudelaire) have manipulated to the furthest extent the double possibility offered by prose: on one hand, in contrast to verse, stretching a logical group [...] into several lines to obtain particular effects of fluidity or compression; on the other, in contrast to oratory prose, breaking up or producing a staccato effect of the phrase, in order to obtain dynamic effects or breaks in rhythm. Baudelaire, following Sainte-Beuve, especially offered examples of “undulating” prose.]

Arthur Natella observes the same rhythmic cadences in Bombal's prose, with its careful contrast between long, lyrical passages and short, fragmented staccato phrases (180). The effect creates a fluidity that underscores the sensory perceptions of a first-person narrator through whom we apprehend a subjective view of the world, as the following passage illustrates:

Esta muerta, sobre la cual no se me ocurriría inclinarme para llamarla porque parece que no hubiera vivido nunca, me sugiere de pronto la palabra silencio.

Silencio, un gran silencio, un silencio de años, de siglos, un silencio aterrador que empieza a crecer en el cuarto y dentro de mi cabeza. (12)

[This dead woman, over whom I could not think of inclining myself to call her because she looks as if she had never lived, suddenly suggests to me the word silence.

Silence, a vast silence, a silence of years, of centuries, a terrifying silence that begins to expand in the room and in my head.]

In this passage, with an accent on the uncanny reminiscent of Gothic fiction, a long phrase ends with the evocative image of silence whose meaning not only will be emphasized through its repetition in the following paragraph, but will also be amplified as more qualifiers are aggregated to each short phrase in which it occurs. The effect creates a sensation of cascading intensification in waves that enhances the sensory and emotive weight of the word in order to convey its crushing presence. The author accentuates the interior nature of the subject's experience by slowly evoking the negative aspects of the word, and by transferring it gradually from the dead woman to the protagonist, bringing about the transformation that foreshadows the death in life that will eventually befall her. Bombal's blend of poetry and prose creates a singular, interior landscape free from historical reality and time, one that echoes and pays homage to her Symbolist antecedents, Rimbaud and Baudelaire, who not only expressed themselves in verse, but who also wrote beautiful poetic prose.

The synthesis of prose and poetry offered the Symbolists a greater range of possibility within which to explore the musical, rhythmic, and suggestive qualities of poetic language. While merging poetry with the formless fluidity offered by prose, the poet could create oneiric effects that convey in a more authentic manner the essence of an idea and the natural rhythms and patterns of thought (Bernard 402-403). The blend of genres resulted in the creation of a

complex poetic reality, a distinct universe that hints at a metaphysical actuality quite distinct from worldly existence (444-446), one which vindicates the poet's individuality by liberating the poetic voice (488). Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud, not the first to explore the potential of combined genres and to celebrate the poet's power over language, became the best representatives of this tendency.

How then do the Symbolists directly influence the literary avant-garde of the twentieth century? On the cusp of the old and the new centuries, in 1891, Symbolism reached its apogee and its maximum diffusion in other artistic mediums as well as its diffusion into Symbolist subgroups seeking new modes of expression and exploring new ideas (Sabatier 196). Sabatier characterizes this "effervescent" period as "une des belles périodes de la poésie" (196) ["one of the beautiful periods of poetry"]. While Symbolism as a formal school appears to decline shortly after its apogee, Sabatier points out that its aesthetic actually becomes preserved and transmitted through many metamorphoses (196). In addition, the out-of-print works of Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud were rediscovered, published, and made accessible to a wide reading public (Bernard 488).

Exposure to the innovative ideas of these figures circulated in numerous small literary reviews and coincided with a desire for the renewal of poetic language and an impetus to surpass overused literary genres. Mallarmé in particular inspired a new generation of young writers to rethink language itself (489). In effect, the reemergence of these literary icons at the dawn of the

modern age motivated a new generation of twentieth-century writers, including Gide, Claudel, and Valéry, whose works manifest an eagerness to discover an authentic language that would better represent the operations of the mind and spirit (491). In Bernard's words:

Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Rimbaud: trois prophètes d'un nouvel âge littéraire, trois messages différents sans doute, mais convergeant vers une même idée essentielle: à savoir que la poésie n'est pas seulement oeuvre d'agrément, perfection formelle ni même musique suggestive, mais encore tâche spirituelle et création d'un univers. Le refus de passer sous les fourches caudines de la versification classique, l'utilisation de la prose non tant comme une "formule" artistique susceptible d'effets inédits, mais comme un langage nouveau, plus authentique et plus propre à l'action spirituelle, s'affirme ainsi comme une attitude métaphysique. (491)

[Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Rimbaud: three prophets of a new literary age, three different messages, without a doubt, but converging in a common essential idea: that poetry is not only a work that pleases, or that aims for formal perfection or even suggestive music, but it actually involves a spiritual endeavor, the creation of a universe. The refusal to submit to the severe rules of classical versification, the use of prose not so much as an artistic "formula" susceptible to original effects, but as a new language, more authentic and more

suiting to spiritual action, is asserted here as a metaphysical attitude.]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the synthesis of poetry and prose created a polymorphic, fluid text that better suited the “rythmes de la pensée” [“rhythms of thought”], to borrow Mallarmé’s succinct phrase, which became a hallmark of modern literature (Bernard 512-513). This historic moment in literary history emerges as the touchstone that guided a new generation of French novelists intent on exploring the undiscovered territory of the subjective with a reinvigorated language that could capture the ineffable essence of the interior landscape. It enunciates the silence of the irrational and mysterious continent of the self, and it articulates the seemingly discontinuous operations of thought, emotion, memory, and mind.

The “rediscovery” of the three masters, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud, during the transition of Symbolism into mannerism inspired a new tier of writers who celebrated the vitality of life, who rediscovered lyricism and mysticism in nature, who embraced the irrational incongruities of the world of dreams, and who renewed their interest in classicism (Bernard 538-541). Among them, Claudel, Valéry, and Gide, all of whom were Mallarmé’s disciples, significantly influenced modern writers, and they directed the novel away from narrative Realism based on description and logical development toward a new aesthetic that explored the mysteries of reality through an Impressionistic optic conceived in Symbolist lyricism and art (Albérès, Histoire... 138-139). Although Gide, Claudel, Proust, and Valéry share a common background in Symbolism,

they soon transcended their Symbolist roots, and the movement's aesthetic itself became transformed in their own individual textual responses to it (Fowlie 20). Within the ranks of these modern artists, André Gide stands out as one of its most influential and groundbreaking writers, and in a journal entry from 1935, he meditates on the importance of the rhythmic and emotive qualities of language and its capacity to express thought. His observations echo uncannily Bombal's own remarks on the significance of rhythm in her work, revealing the same classical discipline that informs the work of both authors:

J'ai beau faire et lutter contre ce qui peut me paraître (et bien à tort, sans doute) une servitude injustifiée: le nombre domine ma phrase, la dicte presque, épouse étroitement ma pensée. Ce besoin d'un rythme précis répond à une secrète exigence. La scansion de la phrase, la disposition des syllabes, la place des fortes et des faibles, tout cela m'importe autant que la pensée même et celle-ci me paraît boîteuse ou faussée si quelque pied lui manque ou la surcharge. C'est ainsi que la pensée ne vaut pour moi que lorsqu'elle participe à la vie, qu'elle respire, s'anime et que l'on sent, à travers les mots et dans leur gonflement, battre un coeur. (1223)

[It is of no use struggling against what may seem to me (and quite wrongly, no doubt) an unjustified servitude: rhythm dominates my sentence, almost dictates it, clings closely to my thought. This need of a precise rhythm responds to a secret exigence. The scansion of

the sentence, the placing of the syllables, both strong and weak, all this matters to me as much as the thought itself, and the thought strikes me as halting or distorted if it lacks a foot or has one too many. Thus it is that thought is worth nothing to me unless it participates in life, unless it breathes, becomes animate, and one feels, through words and in their swelling, a heart beating.] (The Journals... 318)

Gide's meditation on the capacity of words to capture the inner workings of a dynamic consciousness also reflects the poetic theories of his contemporary, Paul Valéry, who explored in great depth the relationship between language and consciousness. Valéry's insight not only demonstrates a preoccupation with the signifying potential of words in relation to both sound and sense, but it also sheds light on the challenges of the craft of writing:

Voilà le poète aux prises avec cette matière verbale, obligé de spéculer sur le son et le sens à la fois; de satisfaire non seulement à l'harmonie, à la période musicale mais encore à des conditions intellectuelles et esthétiques variées, sans compter les règles conventionnelles...

Voyez quel effort exigerait l'entreprise du poète s'il lui fallait résoudre *consciemment* tous ces problèmes.... (Théorie... 1328)

[So the poet is at grips with this verbal matter, obliged to speculate and sense at once, and to satisfy not only harmony and musical

timing but all the various intellectual and aesthetic conditions, not to mention the conventional rules....

You can see what an effort the poet's undertaking would require if he had *consciously* to solve all these problems....] (The Art... 68)

The observations of Gide and Valéry are reminiscent of Bombal's own exacting aesthetics, and they illustrate the theoretical connection between her work and the Symbolist movement that both Gide and Valéry not only inherited, but which they also transformed and modernized. As Albérès postulates, Valéry's development of a poetics of consciousness had a profound influence on the evolution of the modern novel (Histoire... 138). Further, he states that the French Modernist "revolutions" of the twentieth century, which culminate in Proust's great *oeuvre*, À la Recherche du temps perdu (1919), derive from the "systematic amplification" of the Symbolists' aesthetic claims for "Art" from 1870 to 1900 (Histoire... 138-39). In the genre of the novel, this transformation meant rendering the real with an emotive lyricism that enhanced reality's mystery while breaking with the restrictive conventions of the narrative (Histoire... 139). Albérès firmly grounds in Symbolism the novel's break with Realism, with its outmoded accent on social analysis, description, and motivation.

Bombal participated directly in the Modernist "revolution." In 1931 she attended Valéry's conferences on poetics (Guerra Cunningham, "Entrevista..." 122), where she refined her Modernist, lyrical sensibilities through the poet's unique meditations on the relationship between consciousness and poetics. The period of 1929 to 1933, historically characterized as "les années folles,"

witnessed an imperative for change and transformation in literature, coupled with an ambiguous desire for the continuity of tradition and a return to order and balance, qualities exemplified by the eminent literary figures of Claudel, Gide, and Valéry (Brée and Morot-Sur 8, 22).

During the interval between the two World Wars, Valéry became one of the greatest living poets and intellectual thinkers of the twentieth century (Brée and Morot-Sur 210-212). His influence, not limited to the European continent, extended to the other side of the Atlantic where Victoria Ocampo, editor of Sur, not only lectured on his poetry, but also published essays on Valéry's works in Testimonios, a nine-volume collection of essays published between 1935 and 1977. The Mexican essayist and thinker Alfonso Reyes, founding member of the *Ateneo* group and occasional contributor to Sur, also wrote essays, such as "Paul Valéry contempla a América" (1938), in which he mentions Valéry, disseminating the great poet's ideas on consciousness and poetry to a wider audience (103-105). The inheritor and exponent of nineteenth-century Symbolist poetics, Valéry developed an "Orphic" poetics of consciousness and self-discovery that combined Mallarmé's conception of a hermetic poetry based on formal beauty and musical correspondences with Valéry's own theories of "poetic voice." The term "poetic voice" sought to give expression, through the poet's craft of language, to the dynamic articulations that exist among the elements of thought, individual consciousness, and being. By "voice," Valéry meant not only the production of human sound and its reception, but also its potential to stimulate the mind through its phonic qualities, as well as to awaken emotions in

order to elicit affective states. The poetic voice intones a conscious internal monologue—in reality a “dialogue” between thought and the listening self—through the craft of language and poetry in order to create a mindfulness that not only discloses a desire for expression at the heart of the interaction of mind, voice, and world, but whose reflexive action of self-discovery also leads to self-identity (Crow 44-46). In other words, Valéry intended to capture in language the instance of the mind thinking itself into being and knowing. The harmonic expression of this complex interaction of mind, spirit, and body through language and the human voice, at once sense *and* sound, becomes a transforming “poetic” act capable of inducing a genuinely self-aware state of sensibility both in the poet and the reader, more enduring than random, fleeting intuition (Crow 47-48, 57-58). Essentially, Christine Crow affirms that for Valéry this act of “Poésie”

[...] is no less than to render eloquent the creative sensibility itself, a universal virtuality to be awoken and played on in the reader, and one which is also that of the poet in the process of composition. His own sensibility provides the chords of the lyre on which the poem must play. (51)

Valéry postulates that even though the poet and the reader bring the poem into being, the conscious, speaking presence of the poem must be allowed to sing for itself (Crow 60). The expression of the flowering of an immanent consciousness becomes the true subject of the poem itself, rendered in its human voice of language and song, requiring, as Crow observes, “all the different range of tones and attitudes which themes, sounds, syntax and rhythms converge to provide”

(63-64). Valéry describes an experience of aesthetic insight and epiphany that occurs on a physical as well as a metaphysical level. His poetics of consciousness and internal monologue must be kept in mind while examining Bombal's poetic prose of interiority, for her style fits well within the tradition of the Impressionistic novel that evolves in France, culminating in its greatest representative, Marcel Proust.

Albérès, among other critics, credits Proust with the transformation of the modern novel, and he explicates two points in particular that revolutionize the genre. First, the change in the optic to the consciousness of a narrating "I" through which the reader participates in the story becomes paradoxically restrictive and kaleidoscopic, giving the reader a feeling of both myopia and expansiveness. Second, the novel's architecture is radically altered, away from its former chronological structure, in order to convey the adventures of the spirit. It becomes, in Albérès' terms, "une épopée intime" ["an intimate epic"] (Métamorphoses... 14-15). Here imagination and subjective perception are privileged in order to recreate the world through memory, which weaves a complex fabric of multiple entwining threads that increase the polyvalent nature of the novel while escaping the prison of chronology and time. Albérès points to the dream-like quality of À la Recherche du temps perdu, as it centers on the insomnia evoked in the first opening lines. The narrative flows uninterrupted by disjunctures of time, place, and events, and it submits to the peculiar exigencies of memory in order to create a multi-dimensional narrative reality (22-24).

Albérès explains the Proustian modifications to traditional prose, while he emphasizes the dream-like or interior quality of such prose:

Proust ne s'éloignait pas du domaine de la prose romanesque, mais il en modifiait les perspectives. Il renonçait aux fatalités et à l'intérêt superficiel d'une intrigue continue, et son roman échappait à cette progression dramatique obligatoire que le genre romanesque avait hérité de la tragédie. Tout s'y composait sous forme de rêve, avec toutes les précisions du rêve, et sous forme de musique, avec toutes les rigueurs mathématiques des développements musicaux. Bref, le roman s'ouvrait à toutes sortes d'enchantements, et se libérait de la supersition de l'intrigue. (Métamorphoses... 23-24)

[Proust did not distance himself from the realm of novelistic prose, but he modified the perspectives. He renounced inevitability and the superficial interest of a continuous plot, and his novel escaped the dramatic, obligatory progression that the genre of the novel had inherited from tragedy. Everything was composed in the form of a dream, with all the precisions of the dream, and in the form of music with all the mathematical rigors of musical development. In short, the novel was opened to all manner of enchantments, and was freed from the superstition of the plot.]

Marcel Raimond comments on the symphonic quality of Proust's masterpiece and notes a narrative technique founded on "la reprise et l'orchestration des

thèmes" (157); ["the repetition and orchestration of the themes."] He also points to the pivotal importance of the experience of "demi-réveil," the twilight state of consciousness characteristic of memory in which discontinuous images float more readily to the surface of the mind in order to induce the experience of atemporality that characterizes the novel (157). While for Proust memory translated to art abolishes time, it also maintains a dialectic relationship to it, for its images elicit the passage of time through its inexorable transforming properties: characters evoked not only change with time but also metamorphose through the relative perception of an evolving point of view, contributing to the multi-perspectivism that creates the organic whole of the novel (Raimond 159). Thus, in an elaboration reminiscent of Valéry's ideas on consciousness, Proust shows "l'évolution de la pensée" ["the evolution of thought"] in which an individual's impressionistic senses and perceptions eventually lead to the discovery of truth (Raimond 160). The emphasis lies not in the objectification and enunciation of these truths, but rather in the artistic process of interpretation and elucidation of signs and appearances that form the mosaic of reality (160). A very similar aesthetic program informs the narratives of Bombal. As Herbert E. Craig points out in Marcel Proust and Spanish America: From Critical Response to Narrative Dialogue (2002), the optic of dream-like interiority and sensation, as well as the reliance on memory that informs Bombal's narratives, show her significant debt to Proust. He specifically notes "the importance attributed to physical sensations and the consciousness of the narrator" as distinctly Proustian characteristics that "make [her] works fine examples of modernism" (81). Craig's

observation would support the argument that the context of Bombal's literary creation lies not in Surrealism as has been surmised, but in French Modernism.

The 1920s and 1930s, the approximate years of Bombal's literary apprenticeship in France, witnessed the continued evolution of the novel from its Symbolist roots to Post-Symbolism or Modernism. As elucidated above, the Impressionist novel rejected the rules of Realism, embraced its poetic roots in Symbolism, and at times acquired a distinctly modern ironic edge. Innovative in nature, and heterodox in genre, its general characteristics include an absence of plot, a rupture with the established rules of the novel, a preference for poetic evocation rather than objective sociological and psychological description, an exploration of the quotidian as a worthy literary subject, and a vague irony arising from the evanescence of unexpressed truth (Albérès, Histoire... 140-145). The Impressionist narrative sought to evoke, rather than to describe or explain, intimate sensations and emotions as well as the nebulous quality of incongruent life (Albérès, Histoire... 147). In order to become polymorphous, it fractured the structural architecture of its predecessors by redefining the notion of plot and chronological time, and by placing the point of view of the narration within a subjective "I," consequently metamorphosing into an "énigme," to borrow Albérès' term (Métamorphoses... 16).

However, the Impressionist narrative continued to explore the psychological realm. Rather than rely on psychology's authority as a scientific tool for the presentation, analysis, and explanation of human passions and disorders, the new wave of novelists became fascinated with the psychology

inherent in the discontinuous, the illogical, and the incongruous aspects of life and human nature (Albérès, Histoire... 148). Proust, for example, explored the psychological evolution of characters in time, portraying the metamorphic quality of their evolution (Raimond 159). With the publication of Proust's monumental À la Recherche du temps perdu beginning in 1919, and continuing through Gide's Les Faux-Monnayeurs in 1926, authors rejected the conventional Realist novel based on the sociology of sordid human affairs. Instead, they embraced the novel as a potentially revolutionary art form and imprinted it with their own individual stamp. Suffusing the novel with music, poetry, and a very personal style, they restructured its architectural framework in order to create a unique symbolic and artistic universe, much as the Symbolist poets of the prior century had endeavored to do within the realm of verse.

Undoubtedly, this rich cultural legacy not only nourished Bombal's poetic sensibilities, but it also provided the right climate within which a female author could find legitimacy for the expression of her own experiences and interiority. Herbert Craig goes so far as to credit Proustian "subtlety and sensitivity" for encouraging Latin-American women writers to find their own voice, thereby contributing to the introduction of French Modernism in the New World (84). Alegría, one of the few critics to recognize this cultural legacy in Bombal's work, confirms her affinity with French Modernist writers when he states that

en los años que vivió en Europa, absorbiera los mecanismos sutiles de la narrativa impresionista y su densa carga sexual

dándole vueltas a la parábola de Gide, Julien Green o, lo más seguro, de Virginia Woolf. (Nueva historia... 269)

[in the years when she lived in Europe, she probably absorbed the subtle mechanisms of the Impressionist narrative and its dense sexual charge, transforming Gide's and Julien Green's parable, or more certainly that of Virginia Woolf].³

Significantly, in 1977, many years after the publication of her ground-breaking novels, having been denied the Chilean National Prize of Literature on six occasions, Bombal found it necessary to distance herself from this tradition, and she formulated an *apologia* for her fondness of French culture and language in a speech presented upon accepting a prize from the *Academia Chilena de la Lengua*:

El francés [era] la lengua que fuera entonces en la que yo viviera, hablara, escribiera, la lengua que yo amara y creyera habría de ser la mía en mi anhelo de futuro escritor.... Aunque sin embargo en todo aquel tiempo un impulso natural, un interés algo así como un segundo secreto amor me llevara a seguir leyendo y escribiendo en ... castellano, fuera y aparte de mis estudios obligatorios. ("Discurso..." 315)

³ Albérès mentions in his *Métamorphoses du roman* that Virginia Woolf's influence is not widely felt in France until after 1938, well after Bombal's departure from Europe (25). Additionally, while Bombal has stated in interviews that she admired Woolf's prose for its poetic language, it is unlikely that she read it before her own novel had been published in 1935, as Woolf's work appeared in translation in *Sur*. It is clearly French Modernism, and not Surrealism or anglophone Modernism that informs her style.

[French (was) the language in which, at that time, I lived, spoke, wrote, the language that I loved and thought would be mine in my aspiration as a future writer.... However, in all that time a natural impulse, an interest almost like a second secret love led me to continue reading and writing in ... Spanish, outside of and apart from my formal studies.]

Bombal's earliest self-concept as a writer was clearly formulated within the venerable tradition of French letters. The title of her first novel, La última niebla (1935), with the figure of disorienting and ambivalent "mist" as the organizing and thematic principle, epitomizes the new Post-Symbolist, or Modernist, polymorphic poetics of blending, evasion, irony, and ambiguity.

Bombal's subtle narrative of interiority provides a meaningful example of the varied modalities of the avant-garde that manifest themselves in twentieth-century Latin-American literature. Characterized by an unmistakably French accent, Bombal's vision of the avant-garde provides us with an avatar of the reception and transformation of the European aesthetic in the southern cone of the American continent. As shall be seen in Chapter Four, Bombal also explores some of the Modernists' most cherished topics, such as the paradox of selfhood, the inner gaze, and the quest for identity, through the reinterpretation of the Ovidian myth of Narcissus, which emerges as the twentieth-century's most intriguing emblem for the existential solitude of human consciousness.

Chapter Four

Ovidian Myth in María Luisa Bombal's Oeuvre:

The Personification of Desire in La última niebla

Narcisse. N'est-ce point penser à la mort
que se regarder au miroir? N'y voit-on pas
son périssable? L'immortel y voit son mortel.
Un miroir nous fait sortir de notre peau,
de notre visage.
Rien ne résiste à son double.
-- Paul Valéry

Le rêve est une seconde vie.
-- Gérard de Nerval

Narcissus's dark pool becomes the mirror through which the protagonist of María Luisa Bombal's novel, La última niebla both actualizes her desire and fills the absence of love through the projection of her imagination in a compensatory strategy of personification. In order to do so, Bombal appropriates three Ovidian myths, those of Narcissus, Pygmalion, and Orpheus, whose common Narcissistic threads link a cluster of universal concerns centered around the paradox of selfhood, the inner gaze, and the quest for identity. We will demonstrate that Narcissus's mirror represents a paradigm of the metamorphic transaction in both the narrative and the text. Second, through the pattern offered by the myth of Pygmalion, we will demonstrate that Bombal exploits the theme of the mistaken reading of a projected image in order to create a narrative space in which her protagonist writes her text of desire. Third, we will examine how Bombal conceives of the feminine quest for desire by means of her reinterpretation of the myth of Orpheus, and how it demonstrates that her portrayal of woman's sensual self-image momentarily contradicts and cancels, in the fictional space, the

images of passivity and perfection imposed by marriage and social convention. Through the interpretive framework of myth, Bombal evaluates the problematic nature of her protagonist's conflicted identity. In the process of mythic reinscription, she also undermines the romance of marriage as well as the discourse of courtly love in order to prove its paralyzing effects on the development of feminine identity and autonomy. While her protagonist's quest for identity proves unsuccessful, the remaining text of desire defends and affirms the authentic life of the imagination, positing the superior nature of its reality over the prosaic material existence of daily life.

As delineated in the previous chapter, French Modernist authors condemned the social content so visibly represented in the Realist novel. In addition, Pierre Albouy points out in Mythes et mythologies dans la littérature française (1969) that the mythic content of poetic works, which Bombal's *oeuvre* clearly represents, remains inseparable from the thematic web of the imaginary, the marvelous, and the mysterious within their narrative universe (13). More recently, in the comprehensive, multi-volume Vanguardia latinoamericana: Historia, crítica y documentos (2000), Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh question literary interpretations of avant-garde works based on socio-economic factors observing that, in highlighting the social aspects of a work, scholars often "minimizan la libertad de imaginación y de expresión" (24) ["minimize the freedom of imagination and expression"] of Latin-American authors, inadvertently obscuring the literary specificity of the work in order to neutralize the influence of European Modernism (23). They add that:

[s]e le entrega al lector, no la materia, no la esencia de los textos que fundaron una nueva realidad literaria, sino sólo una visión externa, contextual, e ideológicamente, un remedo de lo que se considera un elemento motivador de la literatura y las artes. Invierten los términos de la cuestión: en lugar del texto, el contexto; en lugar de la individualidad creadora, exclusivamente las condiciones económico-sociales. (23)

[the reader is given, not the matter, not the essence of the texts that founded a new literary reality, but rather only an external and contextual vision, and ideologically, a poor imitation of what is considered a motivating factor in literature and the arts. They invert the terms of the question: in place of the text, the context; in place of the creative individuality, only the socio-economic conditions.]

As such, given an author's expressed rejection of social content in favor of stylistic and poetic innovations, as well as a mythic intertextual content that reveals and explores an interior and subjective universe, it becomes more appropriate to examine such works on their own terms, rather than engage in efforts to extract a social commentary from them, as has been the case of much Bombalian criticism in the past two decades.

Validating this observation, recent scholarship has begun to question essentialist and sociological interpretations of Bombal's work. Adriana Méndez Rodenas, for example, believes that the key to unraveling the mysteries of Bombal's and Juan Rulfo's "impossible" narratives "lies in their mythical subtext"

("Narcissus in Bloom..." 109), and she objects to such interpretations, noting that "habría que cuestionar la validez de estudiar la obra de Bombal desde una perspectiva estrictamente sociológica o inclusive desde un feminismo que aboga únicamente por los derechos de la mujer sin considerar su universo afectivo" ("El lenguaje de los sueños..." 935-936 n.1). ["One must question the validity of evaluating Bombal's work from a strictly sociological perspective, or even from a feminist perspective that only argues for woman's rights without considering her affective universe."] Another critic, Gabriela Mora, also recognizes the mythical foundation that underlies Bombal's texts, and she finds interpretations that rest on reductionist and essentializing theories of the "masculine" and the "feminine" inherently problematical ("Rechazo..." 171 n.2). In fact, notions of a feminine essence allied to the "irrational" domain of the imaginary, the sensual, and the instinctive as advocated by Hernán Vidal (53), or as deeply rooted in a primordial realm of origins permeated by the marvelous as argued by Guerra Cunningham (La narrativa... 198), reflect modern permutations of a Romantic notion that regards woman as "instinctive" and, therefore, more closely allied to the irrational forces of nature and the psyche (Brée, Women writers... 43). Alicia Borinsky notes the sensuality of Bombal's protagonists and their link to nature, but cautions against a "metafísica del 'eterno femenino'" (189) ["a metaphysics of the 'eternal feminine'"] applied in a homogenizing way to women. The observations of Méndez Rodena, Mora, and Borinsky prompt the consideration of alternatives to these positions, such as a return to the poetic, inexhaustible storehouse of

myth, which, as Henry de Regnier so eloquently muses, holds “the clamor of the human ocean.”

“The mind,” Skulsky muses, “is a palimpsest of embodiments” (28). His remark aptly sums up the mind’s ability to project itself in images, reflections, and doubles that compensate for its desires and wishes, while they confront it with its worst fears. Such compensatory gestures form the basic web of Bombal’s narrative. Suzanne Jill Levine suggests that the characters in La última niebla appear as “mirror-images of one another” (“House of Mist...” 144). They represent personifications or supplements of the protagonist’s desires, self-reflexive performative gestures of creation that give shape to the protagonist’s identity, and they function as catalysts of transformation. Following the Narcissistic paradigm, which Levine believes that Bombal appropriates (140), they compensate for absence, and they mirror various aspects of desire. The dynamic recalls Pygmalion’s compensatory gestures, variants of the theme of Narcissistic self-love. Very much like Pygmalion, who created “[a] miracle of ivory in a statue, / So charming that it made him fall in love” (Ovid 278), the protagonist in Bombal’s novel creates an ideal lover in order to fulfill a need and fill an absence, a process which literalizes and personifies her desire. This imaginative gesture allows her to create a vibrant sensual identity through the mirror image of a perceived beloved. Pygmalion’s story proves instructive in that his creation satisfies the emptiness and emotional distance that result from his rejection of mortal women. He creates a supplemental simulacrum, a sculpture that materializes his ideals: he prays to Venus to “[g]ive me a lady / Who is as lovely

as my work of art," (278-279). His invocation of the divine completes the substitution, and his heart's desire becomes animated with the spirit of life. However, his acceptance of the substitution has serious consequences: Pygmalion's act becomes, as Miller observes, an "error of taking a figure of speech literally" (11), and his "substitutive mistake" consists of an instance of mistaken identity that leads to a case of "misreading":

[T]hese substitutive mistakes [taking a similarity as an identity] are not just any sort of misreading, nor are they the filling of the blank of death with just any sort of figure. They project into the gap a fictive person. They are therefore examples of Pygmalion's error, the projecting and the taking literally of personification. (125)

Narcissus also commits this error of misreading. As does Pygmalion, he spurns the affection and love of those who pursue him, and he turns away from the material world to lose himself in the shadow world of images. Even before Narcissus rejects Echo, Ovid makes note of his emotional distance: "...proud Narcissus had little feeling / For either boys or girls" (75). Instead, Narcissus misreads his own reflection in a pool of water for that of an "other," exclaiming "...I am entranced, enchanted / By what I see, yet it eludes me, error / Or hope becomes the thing I love" (78). In this instance the ideal is not materialized; rather, it becomes unattainable by virtue of its insubstantial consistency. His "error" enacts Miller's "gesture of prosopopoeia," and it enacts "the projection of a human figure into the emptiness of ultimate loss" (Miller 127). In the end, as Narcissus's story illustrates, the gesture proves "eternally unsatisfactory,"

because “it contains the seeds of its own undoing” (127). His misfortune results in the metamorphic reduction of the body into bodylessness, a condition that Barkan deems analogous to petrification (90). In the mistaken reading of projected images, Bombal's protagonist will fall prey to the errors of Pygmalion and Narcissus, and she will suffer their same fate. Particular instances of this misreading and its consequences of stagnation and paralysis will be examined in detail.

Following the Narcissistic paradigm of reflection, a mirroring recurs at the structural level of Bombal's narrative. The narrative follows a specular pattern in which the characters and agents that activate transformation in the beginning of the narrative also appear at the end, in order to trigger a reverse transformation and so close the narration. Images of stagnation and death bracket the space of the imaginary, which comprises the core of the narrative where erotic desire and creative imagination unfold in their maximum expression. Outside this inner space, brief allusions to chronological time appear. In stark contrast, the space of the protagonist's daydream remains almost timeless, like Narcissus's watery mirror, and only natural images convey the changes of season and hint at the passage of time, while the poetic lyricism and imagery serve to intensify the atmosphere of subjectivity and unreality. The natural world in this novel functions as a locus amoenus which stands for the mirror region, similar to the sacred sylvan landscapes in which Ovidian transformation takes place (Barkan 90). In this watery space of ambivalence and undifferentiation, Bombal's protagonist suffers the “confusion and contagions,” in Barkan's terms, of the mirror world,

whose misreading leads the protagonist into paralysis. Yet, through the affirmation of imagination's autonomy, this very misreading creates the lyrical text of the novel.

The figure of mist that pervades the narrative and gives the novel its title becomes the paradigmatic emblem of the specular nature of the narrative itself; it denotes the shifting mirror within the mirror world. On the one hand, it reflects Bombal's narrative and the lyrical practice of the blending of the subjective and the objective, dream and reality, and time and space. On the other, as an image characterized by its own ambivalence, it symbolizes the protagonist's interiority, and it captures her subjective drifts from reality to the imaginary. As Levine observes, it also dematerializes the narrative's landscape while it materializes the protagonist's poetic imagination ("House of Mist..." 143). Significantly, mist usually appears in the text at moments of crisis, and it frequently portends the protagonist's metamorphic transformation. Ultimately, the vaporized form of water embodied in mist denotes the process of transformation itself, because it hovers in the atmosphere in a state of literally undifferentiated suspension. The already ambivalent nature of water, as both giver of life and harbinger of death, suggested in the tragic story of Narcissus and many other metamorphic stories involving water, becomes magnified in the figure of mist. Therefore, mist, in both its dynamic and effacing quality, emerges as a perfect motif for a poetics of metamorphosis.

La última niebla's plot centers around a nameless bourgeoisie protagonist who has entered into a loveless marriage with her cousin to escape the social

stigma of spinsterhood. The protagonist's acute sense of dislocation and loneliness within the marriage manifest themselves ironically through the theme of incest, which foreshadows the fruitlessness of both the marriage and the Narcissistic fascination with the shadowy other. Much like Narcissus and his reflection, or Byblis's unnatural attraction to her brother, the couple's very familiarity with each other accentuates their existential distance from each other. Unlike the Ovidian incestuous characters, Bombal's creations exhibit disaffection and a marked lack of interest for each other. The protagonist, in fact, stands in for her husband's deceased first wife, an idea underscored by her namelessness and by her husband's directive that she imitate the deceased woman whom he considered perfect in bearing and semblance (13). Dispossessed of a firm identity and lacking control over her own destiny, her life unfolds in solitude and boredom on a remote country estate surrounded by a mysterious natural landscape regularly shrouded in fog, mist, and rain. In the autobiographical first person, she narrates a series of critical events in her married life by means of a very restricted and subjective view of a world mediated by her imagination. Her perceptions and disparate thoughts reveal themselves through vivid, poetic images, impressions, and sensations, as they convey a sense of fragmentation that also reflects itself in the text's discontinuous narrative form. As Kostopulos-Cooperman observes, an intimate, reflexive relationship exists between the natural world and the protagonist's inner landscape that evokes emotions and psychological states often left unarticulated (9-10). Images of water in all its forms, a thematic that Saúl Sosnowski catalogues in detail and analyzes from a

Jungian point of view in his article “El agua, motivo primordial en La última niebla,” mirror and externalize her interiority. These aqueous images constitute a symbolic constellation that represents a *leitmotif* of potentiality and transformation in both its positive and negative aspects. Naturally inclined toward poetic reverie and daydream, this active imagination mitigates her boredom and frustrated desire, and she creates, paralleling Ovid’s Pygmalion, an imaginary companion. Through this idealized image of love, she engages in an illusory double life of sensuality and autoeroticism centered on her lover. His presence proves so real to her and is so convincingly suggested by the deliberate ambiguities of the text, that the reader hesitates as to his existence until the end of the narrative. Ironically, the sensuality and vibrancy that transform her focus on his absence, specifically on his imagined gaze, and on his invisible presence, for she has woven the tapestry of her illusion from a single chance encounter. While the illusion lasts, the protagonist’s poetic imaginary becomes a privileged space in which she invents a self true to her human needs and desires. At the same time, the enunciation of her desire in the form of the text and its narrative reflection—the letters she addresses to him—become the body of the text, fixing the record of its exaltation and frustration, and enabling the reader, in a Barthesian act of *jouissance*, to enact the pleasure ultimately denied its protagonist through its reading.

As a “texte de plaisir” [“text of bliss”] in the Barthesian sense, her narrative embodies the text “qui met en état de perte, celui qui déconforte [...], fait vaciller les assises historiques, culturelles, psychologiques, du lecteur, la consistance de

ces goûts, de ses valeurs et de ses souvenirs, met en crise son rapport au langage" (Le Plaisir du texte 1501); ["that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts..., unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (The Pleasure of the Text 14).] While Bombal's works do not overtly challenge specific cultural values or explain the apparent passivity of her protagonists, a position that has frustrated many feminist critics, the ambivalence at the heart of her texts, as Lorna V. Williams reminds us, undermines any notions of the eternal feminine presented in the text (21). The radical form of Bombal's text, coupled with the ambivalence configured by the figure of mist, marks her narratives as duplicitous texts as well. According to Ross Chambers, who describes such texts as "melancholic," their duplicity lies in the discrepancies of meaning between their narrative and textual functions, a characteristic that complicates their reading and interpretation. Such texts exhibit a "problematic identity [that] resides in a 'silent' protest, a 'vaporized' anger that can be perceived only through the act of reading" (211). It remains for the "right" reader, Chambers adds, "to penetrate textual duplicity in order to uncover the text's 'truth'" (212). In other words, the disturbing yet fascinating metamorphic qualities of Bombal's text dwell in its duplicity, in its underlying opposition to the narrative it presents, and in the artfulness that keeps the reader who tries to penetrate its mists off balance.

In keeping with the specular structure of the narrative, a scene that prefigures the paralysis, immobility, and figurative petrification that will beset the

protagonist at the end of the narrative occurs near its beginning. It appears in the form—or illusion, since it confronts the reader with its ambiguity—of a dead woman whom the protagonist observes lying in a casket. The corpse's stillness and her expressionless face suggest to her the word *silence*, yet a silence that she perceives as a growing personal threat: "Silencio, un gran silencio, un silencio de años, de siglos, un silencio aterrador que empieza a crecer en el cuarto y dentro de mi cabeza" (12). ["Silence, a great silence, a silence of years, of centuries, a terrifying silence that begins to expand in the room and within my head"].¹ As the first mirror image that she perceives, death represents the extreme state of alienation that she feels in her marriage. The terrifying silence symbolizes the inability to articulate a sense of identity that might begin to voice its claims for authentic selfhood. Consequently, Bombal demythifies and rewrites the romance of marriage to show its atrophying aspect in that it negates any possible means of achieving an autonomous identity. The natural landscape to which the protagonist flees in order to escape the deathly vision suggests and reinforces this notion. Outdoors, she perceives her house as a tomb flanked by cypresses, a tree common to cemeteries, where they appear as static silhouettes, and where a silent mist dissolves the contours of the landscape, disorienting her and clouding her sense of reality. The images of the claustrophobic house combined with the dematerializing mist reveal the protagonist's irresolute identity and its potential dissolution into nothingness.

¹ This and subsequent translations of *La última niebla* are mine. All other translations are mine unless parenthetically indicated.

The figure of mist accentuates the feeling of dread that overtakes the protagonist, which she acknowledges as a persistent and growing anxiety provoked by a recurring dream: "desde hace mucho, flota en mí una turbia inquietud. Cierta noche, mientras dormía, vislumbré algo, algo que era tal vez su causa. Una vez despierta, traté en vano de recordarlo, Noche a noche he tratado, también en vano, de volver a encontrar el mismo sueño" (12). ["For a long time now, an unsettling disquiet drifts in me. One night, while I slept, I became vaguely aware of something, something that might be its cause. Once awake, I tried in vain to recall it. Night after night I have tried, also in vain, to recapture the same dream."] The deliberate ambiguity of the passage amplifies the mystery of the unexpressed threat. As Bombal purposely breaks the rules of chronological sequence throughout the narrative, the passage and its motif of mist represent a foreshadowing of the protagonist's eventual immobility. The nagging dream that she cannot quite remember seems a prescient memory of the illusion she will create to fill her emptiness, and it may even designate a self-referential allusion to the text itself, conceived as the protagonist's elusive dream. Consequently, echoing Elena Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir, the uneasy dream signals the "memory" of events yet to come. The incongruous episode occurs in the text without warning or explication, and its inclusion, as María Luisa Bastos surmises, functions as a "sinister epiphany" (559) that contrasts with the erotic scene that follows.

The incident reflects the concept of Narcissistic mirroring in that its characters constitute the mirror images of the protagonist's repressed desire, and

they prove equally instrumental to her sensual transformation. In Ovid, human contact with the divine initiates all metamorphoses, which at their core share an element of the exotic. The linking of the sexual with the divine defamiliarizes the erotic and places it within the realm of the uncanny, as many Ovidian stories illustrate. Amplifying this idea, Leonard Barkan observes that “[m]yths of magical change, again and again, will be stories celebrating the unfamiliar forms of the sexual impulse, with all their terror and allure” (13). For the Ovidian character, sex becomes what Barkan terms “a threshold experience,” the first encounter with the intense emotions associated with passion and the exotic, which signals and activates profound change. Bombal’s anonymous protagonist experiences such a threshold experience and is transformed by a mysterious couple who visit her, Regina (her sister-in-law) and her companion. As her name implies, the young, regal woman and her consort incarnate divine forces of androgynous sexuality, and they enact a dynamic of desire that initiates the protagonist to the mysteries of her own repressed sexuality in order to transform her into a fully sexual, vibrant self. Following the paradigm of the Narcissistic mirror, the couple represents projections of the protagonist’s repressed self, as Méndez Rodenas suggests, and the pair reflects the “compound” figure of the protagonist’s newly projected sexual self, as it simultaneously provides the inspiration for the imagined lover whom she eventually creates (940-41). In a transgressive gesture reminiscent of Tiresias’ fateful gaze upon two entwined “love-joined serpents” (Ovid 74), the protagonist surprises the lovers in a forbidden embrace. The verb “mirar,” to watch, look, or gaze at, is repeated several times in conjunction with

the protagonist's observations of Regina and her gestures toward her lover, as well as of Regina as she sleeps.

The protagonist renders a portrait of Regina, which she deliberately contrasts with the pale and still face of the dead woman of the previous scene, in order to highlight the differences between herself, mirrored in the lifeless corpse, and a potential vital "other," reflected in Regina. She describes her as having a face "de una palidez que no es en ella falta de color, sino intensidad de vida, como si estuviera siempre viviendo una hora de violencia interior" (14); ["of a paleness due not to lack of color but rather to an intensity of life, as if she were always living through a moment of interior violence."] Guerra Cunningham calls attention to Regina's likeness to the "vampiresas de cine," the movie sirens of the 20s and 30s, an observation that accentuates her function as unattainable specular image, as the following passage reiterates ("Introducción" 32). On an occasion reminiscent of an episode in Proust's La prisonnière (Craig 80), when she watches Regina sleep, she ascribes to the slumbering woman mysterious sexual powers that awaken an anguish that she cannot articulate:

Me la imagino dormida así, en tibios aposentos alfombrados donde toda una vida misteriosa se insinúa en un flotante perfume de cabelleras y cigarrillos femeninos.

De nuevo en mí este dolor punzante como un grito. (16)

[I imagine her asleep like this, in warm carpeted rooms where an entire mysterious life is insinuated in a floating perfume of feminine hair and cigarettes.

Again within me this pain sharp as a scream.]

She spies on Regina in the company of her lover, and she surreptitiously watches Regina's sinuous movements as they elicit her lover's intense desire, an erotically charged moment that awakens the protagonist's repressed sensuality. The dynamic exchange of sexual energy between the two lovers proves so overpowering that she flees outdoors, overcome by a strange intoxication that she compares to a fire overtaking her body: "[p]arece que me hubieran vertido fuego dentro de las venas" (14). ["I feel as if fire had been poured into my veins."] The image of Regina, now obsessively burned into her mind, intrudes into her dreams, with her "mirada de fuego y sus labios llenos de secretos" (16); ["fiery gaze and her lips full of secrets."] The specular quality of these scenes further underscores the transforming powers of the mirror aimed at the susceptible unconscious self.

Clearly, then, Regina represents a mirror being, the projection of a desired ideal upon which the protagonist concentrates all the longing for sexual and emotional fulfillment denied her in real life. Typical of many metamorphic stories, the forbidden gaze directed at the divine presence denotes a taboo that often portends catastrophic transformation. One need only think of Tiresias, or the stories of Actaeon, Orpheus, or Narcissus, whose inopportune gazes serve as catalysts of their unfortunate transformations. From the point of view of the metamorphic story, both Regina, rendered as goddess of love and sensuality, as well as her consort, represent a composite Bacchic figure responsible for awakening the protagonist's sensuality and initiating her into the sublime

confusion of the senses that triggers transformation. The figure of Bacchus, or Dionysius, incarnates the “quintessential metamorphic divinity” (Barkan 38). In his androgynous dimension, he presides over the delirium and trance associated with Dionysian ritual that drives the initiate to experience both the divine and bestial within him/herself, embodying the self and “other” dialectically held in tension in metamorphosis (Jiménez 38, 51-52). Amply demonstrated in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the Dionysian experience induces a delirious, prophetic madness that, more often than not, ends in catastrophic transformation or destruction. As the stories of Pentheus and Orpheus illustrate, neither the Bacchic celebrants nor the god’s apostates can harness the power of the god, for, as Barkan reminds us, “the transformative power of Bacchus tends to exert itself in an atmosphere of sublime confusion” whereby “[r]eason, intellect, and clarity are overcome by an excess that is associated with the senses” (38). The senses, then, provide the gateway to a “metamorphic flexibility” which allows transformation to take place (39). As the stories often portray, either a complete surrender to, or the denial of, the powers of the essential life force can result in the individual’s metamorphic transcendence or self-destruction.

The anonymous protagonist’s encounter with Regina and her lover becomes intelligible in light of the androgynous divinity’s metamorphic powers. Having gazed into the mirror at the divine, a flood of sensations overtakes the protagonist, and she is overcome by a feeling of fire coursing through her, a terror that causes her to flee into nature. Here, Bombal sets the scene for her character’s transformation by rendering the natural scenery in images that recall

the sylvan settings of Ovidian transformation. These stylized settings, as Segal maintains in Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses (1969), often include shaded woods, magical grottoes, allusions to light and darkness, and magical pools of water, the symbol of the transforming mirror. The protagonist finds herself in the propitious Ovidian environment of transfiguring and personified nature: "[m]e interno en la bruma y de pronto un rayo de sol se enciende al través, prestando una dorada claridad de gruta al bosque en que me encuentro; hurga la tierra, desprende de ella aromas profundos y mojados (14). ["I penetrate the mist and suddenly a ray of sun lights it up obliquely, lending the forest in which I find myself the golden aura of a grotto; the earth stirs and exhales damp and deep aromas."]

Consistent with her poetic style, Bombal's lyrical use of nature imagery taps into a rich poetic tradition of natural settings to frame and enhance human actions and states of mind (Segal 71). Therefore, like Ovid, Bombal uses suggestive imagery to create a poetic framework that heightens the mystery of the story, while it adds a structural framework that unifies the discontinuous elements of the narration which oscillate between the protagonist's perceived world and her imaginary realm. She gives her protagonist a sensuous *locus amoenus* in which to develop her repressed sensuality and to expand the horizon of the imaginary that, in turn, are reflected in the external landscape of mist, rain, water, and greenery. The woman's entry into these magical zones of transformation not only signals her disorientation, but also it highlights her fundamental isolation. In keeping with the protagonist's yielding to Dionysian pleasure and sensuality, Bombal describes her experience in this natural realm in

terms of bodily sensations that convey a surrender to an altered state, the sublime confusion alluded to above, through terms such as “languid,” “abandon,” “fainting,” and “drowsiness.” The protagonist’s awareness of her growing torpor recalls Daphne’s transformation:

Me acomete una extraña languidez. Cierro los ojos y me abandono contra un árbol. ¡Oh, echar los brazos alrededor de un cuerpo ardiente y rodar con él, enlazada, por una pendiente sin fin...! Me siento desfallecer y en vano sacudo la cabeza para disipar el sopor que se apodera de mí. (14)

[A strange languor overtakes me. I close my eyes and abandon myself against a tree. Oh, to throw my arms around an ardent body and roll with it, entwined, down an endless slope...! I feel faint and in vain I shake my head to dissipate the torpor that overcomes me.]

Intoxicated by the Dionysian pair and acutely aware of the absence at the center of her existence, the woman reenacts Narcissus’s self-discovery in a pond in which, newly aware of her body, she marvels at its sensuality. She immerses herself in the ambivalent waters of the mirror and discovers the desired and desirous other in herself. Notably, she uses the verb “saberse” [“to know oneself”] to express this newfound knowledge:

No me sabía tan blanca y tan hermosa. El agua alarga mis formas, que toman proporciones irreales. Nunca me atreví antes a mirar mis senos; ahora los miro. Pequeños y redondos, parecen diminutas corolas suspendidas sobre el agua.

Me voy enterrando hasta la rodilla en una espesa arena de terciopelo. Tibias corrientes me acarician y penetran. Como con brazos de seda, las plantas acuáticas me enlazan el torso con sus largas raíces. Me besa la nuca y sube hasta mi frente el aliento fresco del agua. (14-15)

[I did not know I was so white and beautiful. The water elongates my shape to unreal proportions. Before, I never dared look at my breasts; now I look at them. Small and round, they seem like diminutive blossoms suspended on the water's surface.

I sink to my knees in thick, velvety sand. Warm currents caress and penetrate me. As if with silky arms, aquatic plants embrace my body with their long tendrils. The water's fresh breath kisses my neck and reaches my forehead.]

The mirror space of the pond becomes the site of the encounter with the desired other, portrayed through the personification of nature. The erotic aspect of her self-encounter, suggested through the imagery of penetrating waters and caressing aquatic plants, underscores the metamorphic nature of the mirror experience, while simultaneously it demonstrates, in self-reflexive fashion, its affinity with the mythical subtext that informs it. Consonant with the metamorphic tradition that inspires the passage, Bombal capitalizes on the profoundly evocative quality of water, whose “sinuosidad de las ondas, su tranquilo o tempestuoso fluir, consituían para los antiguos [...] el signo más profundo de la metamorfosis” (Jiménez 25). [(S)inuuous billows, tranquil or tempestuous course,

comprised for the ancients (...) the most profound sign of metamorphosis.”] Particularly in the Ovidian fantasy, the unstable and ambivalent realm of water represents an obvious symbol of sexuality, yet its changeable quality often makes it the agent of gruesome and violent transformations, symbolizing its power to destroy (Segal 25-38). While Narcissus’s pool, untouched by man or beast, represents the purity, but also the sterility, of the unattainable ideal, Salmacis’ pond proves the means through which the lovely nymph ensnares her heart’s desire through the seductive powers of its water. Bombal’s evocation of the body seen through the deforming lens of water echoes Ovid’s description of the nymph’s Narcissistic self-involvement. Shunning the world, as do Narcissus and Bombal’s nameless protagonist, Salmacis relaxes by her pool, taking baths and gazing “at her lovely arms and legs in water” (101). When she spies Hermaphroditus in her waters, she clings to him like a vine, penetrating him through a metamorphic fusion, the two literally becoming one. In Barkan’s view, the “romantic confusion” illustrated in the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus attests to the transforming power of sexual desire over those who experience it, while it proves the deforming power of the “mirror of passion” which “distorts the clarities of gender, or identity, and of reason” (58). The mirror of water offers La última niebla’s protagonist the enticing illusion of union with the imaginary other, but at the price of her entrapment in its distortions, and the eventual dissolution of self through the destruction of its chimerical image.

However, despite the dangers, the mirror world offers the anonymous protagonist an imaginary and vibrant alternative to the repetitive tedium of an

empty existence. She represents a character who, in search of an autonomous life, achieves a virtual triumph through the powers of the imaginary in order to resist the atrophied life in the actual narrative world she inhabits. Rather than represent an escape from reality, her stance justifies the free exercise of the imagination through which she gains a measure of freedom, while it also calls into question the preeminence of reality over the imaginary, a notion implicit in the poetics of metamorphosis. Her Orphic lyricism enacts Valéry's notion of "poetic voice," in that the expression of her desire not only evokes a self-conscious awareness in her, but it also intones the internal monologue that constitutes the text of her desire. These ideas are compatible with Marjorie Agosín's opinion that Bombal's protagonists, "que sueñan, que se ensimisman no representan un escape sino un estar en el mundo, un sentir del mundo desde el código de la invención imaginativa" (8). ["who dream and daydream do not represent an escape, but rather a way of being in the world, a way of perceiving the world through the code of imaginative invention."] Skulsky examines a similar dynamic that operates at the heart of Virginia Woolf's Orlando, and he observes that in the work "the dethronement of the actual is part of the same subversive libertarian program as the dethronement of the real" (207), a notion that befits Bombal's textual practice of privileging the imaginary over the real. Agosín's insights support this idea, as she finds Bombal's "absolute defense of the imagination" one of the greatest merits of her work (18).

In addition to representing an emblem of the dynamics of metamorphosis, the figure of mist also symbolizes the imagination's inward trajectory and its

growing independence from the real. The mist that permeates the landscape naturalizes and exteriorizes the protagonist's psychic state of repressed anger and despair, most frequently expressed in terms of a sense of dizziness and suffocation. With its characteristic of undifferentiation, mist hints at the instability of her identity and its growing dependence on the mirror world of illusion that supplements it. The recurrence of mist in the text not only announces the protagonist's deepening despair, but it also signifies her continued penetration into the mirror world of the imaginary:

La niebla se estrecha, cada día más, contra la casa. Ya hizo desaparecer las araucarias cuyas ramas golpeaban la balaustrada de la terraza. Anoche soñé que, por entre rendijas de las puertas y ventanas, se infiltraba lentamente en la casa, en mi cuarto, y esfumaba el color de las paredes, los contornos de los muebles, y se entrelazaba a mis cabellos, y se me adhería al cuerpo y lo deshacía todo, todo... (16)

[The fog draws nearer to the house every day. Already it has erased the araucarias whose branches brushed against the railing of the terrace. Last night I dreamed that, through the cracks in the doors and windows, it filtered slowly into the house, into my room, and rendered indistinct the color of the walls, the contours of the furniture, and it entwined itself in my hair and clung to my body, and dissolved everything, everything...]

The mist dematerializes form, and absorbs its victim, while it figuratively conveys the protagonist's sense of fragmentation. The figure also signals its victim's susceptibility to another metamorphic event, while, textually, it allows a transition to the next scene: the encounter, through the mirror, with the protagonist's lover, a composite figure created from her continued fascination with Regina and her companion. On the occasion of a trip to the city, itself shrouded in mist, the woman leaves her room and wanders the streets to escape insomnia and a feeling of suffocation. While she walks, she ponders the monotony of her drab existence, and this random stroll evokes the disorienting descent into a labyrinth whose hidden center harbors the desired other of her longing, whom she will meet for the first time:

La tristeza reaflye a la superficie de mi ser con toda la violencia
que acumulara durante el sueño. Ando, cruzo avenidas y pienso.
[...] Vago al azar, cruzo avenidas y sigo andando.

No me siento capaz de huir. De huir, ¿cómo, adónde? La muerte
me parece una aventura más accesible que la huida. De morir, sí,
me siento capaz. Es muy posible desear morir porque se ama
demasiado la vida. (18)

[Sadness rises to the surface of my being with all the violence it
would accumulate during sleep. I walk, cross avenues, and I think.
(...) I wander at random, cross avenues, and continue walking.

I don't feel capable of escaping. Escape, how? where? Death
seems a more accessible adventure than escape. Of dying, yes, I

feel capable. It is quite possible to wish for death because one loves life too much.]

The protagonist's musings on the desirability of death in the face of an unfulfilled life, coupled with her aimless wandering through empty streets, rewrite the Orphic descent into the underworld. Her suffering, not unlike Orpheus', compels her to roam in search of the lost Eurydice. Orpheus, Ovid writes:

Came weaving through the tall gates of Taenarus
Down to the world of Death and flowing Darkness
To tell the story of his grief again.

[...]

I have not come, a curious, willing guest
To see the streets of Tartarus wind in Hell,
Nor have I come to tame Medusa's children,
Three-throated beasts with wild snakes in their hair.
My mission is to find Eurydice... (269-270)

The Orphic descent into the underworld, where the "lost oneness of being, scattered in a multiplicity of desires, is rediscovered," symbolizes the search for lost unity (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 644). As Albouy explains, the myth of Orpheus paradoxically unites humanity's greatest strengths and weaknesses in its struggle to come to terms with the conflicts of love and death through the magic of the human voice expressed in song and lyric poetry. In the myth, Orpheus conquers death with the magic of his voice, but he falls victim to the Dionysian sensual frenzy of the Bacchantes whom he scorns (187-188), thereby

illustrating the perils of either the denial or the surrender to passion. Accordingly, the myth of Orpheus enacts figuratively a descent into the subconscious and into the dark night of the soul. As a myth of desired integration, it represents another variant of the quest of self-knowledge (Albouy 191, 197); as a spiritual adventure it includes the surpassing of the conflicts inherent in the extremes of love and death in order to conquer the unity of the self (196). Orpheus' descent into Hades in search of Eurydice can also be compared to the initiate's journey to the center of a labyrinth, where she will encounter her innermost being. As with the Narcissistic self-discovery of the sensual body in the pool, the image at the center of the labyrinth represents another reflection in the mirror.

The protagonist's Orphic journey leads her into a central space, a small plaza, characterized by its penumbral qualities of light and darkness. In a passage that deploys the mystical conceits of contrast and antithesis to increase the sense of mystery and ambiguity, the protagonist describes her encounter with a strange man, the personification of her unfulfilled desires:

Entre la oscuridad y la niebla vislumbro una pequeña plaza. [...]

La luz blanca de un farol, luz que la bruma transforma en baho [sic], baña y empalidece mis manos, alarga a mis pies una silueta confusa, que es mi sombra. Y he aquí que, de pronto, veo otra sombra junto a la mía. [...]

Un hombre está frente a mí, muy cerca de mí. Es joven; unos ojos muy claros en un rostro moreno y una de sus cejas levemente arqueada, prestan a su cara un aspecto casi sobrenatural. (18)

[Between the darkness and the mist I discern a small plaza. (...)]

The white light of a street lamp, light that the fog transforms into vapor, bathes and turns my hands ashen, and elongates a confused silhouette away from my feet, which is my shadow. And it is then that, suddenly, I see another shadow next to mine. (...)

A man is in front of me, very close to me. He is young; a pair of very bright eyes set in a dark face and a slightly arched eyebrow lend his face an almost supernatural aspect.]

She describes the event as a meeting of shades and shadows bathed in a light and mist that both transform and deform. The lover's supernatural aspect underscores the chimerical nature of the episode. He guides her to a house enveloped in complete darkness, into a room where she consummates the union with the beloved, which represents the contact of the numinous and the human that initiates metamorphosis. The protagonist conveys the erotic scene in language that emphasizes the sensory experience of bliss mediated by her perception, while at the same time all dialogue is suppressed. As Guerra Cunningham observes, the scene's novelty lies in the unabashed description of the sexual act from a female point of view, a first in Latin-American feminine literature, one which represents a perspective that rewrites the Don Juan myth of conquest ("Introducción" 18).

Curiously, the protagonist restricts the description of the lover to fragmentary images that depersonalize him, an effect that underscores his value as symbol and artifice, increasing the sense of the uncanny while forcing the

reader to supplement his characterization. His fragmentation into parts that substitute for the whole also compels the protagonist to read and decipher the “enigmatic” image, an act that exemplifies her Pygmalian compensatory gesture. While she abandons herself to pleasure, the protagonist also becomes depersonalized, as Alicia Borinsky perceives: “En su placer, la narradora ha sido *nadie*” (191). [“In her pleasure, the narrator has been *no one*.”] Consequently, the protagonist anticipates the metamorphic moment that lies in the interstice occasioned by the erotic encounter in which the subject paradoxically yearns for identity while desiring to relinquish it. Heinz Lichtenstein interprets this longing for metamorphosis as inherent in the dilemma of human identity: “metamorphosis and identity are the two limits of human existence, incompatible with one another, but complementary in that human life exists in a movement between these two limits” (186). Ovidian metamorphoses frequently occur during sexual encounters. In addition, Borinsky’s comments on the protagonist’s desire to abandon subjectivity echo Lichtenstein’s findings:

[s]in nombre para su amante, olvida también su propio cuerpo para perderse en la corriente de una sexualidad que la envuelve más allá de la especificidad del hombre [...]. Así, estar con el hombre en esa experiencia que signa todas las demás es haber estado en la vecindad del olvido [...]. El mejor amante para la narradora es quien logra hacerle olvidar quién es. Su ser sujeto en el acto sexual es haber alcanzado un momento de privilegio donde se siente arrastrada fuera de su identidad, hacia un terreno que ella

desconoce. La protagonista narradora de La última niebla [...] añora ser llevada, dejar de ser quien es. (191)

[Without a name for her lover, she also forgets her own body in order to lose herself in a current of sexuality that envelops her more importantly than the specificity of the man (...). Therefore, to be with the man in that experience that gives meaning to all others is to have been in the proximity of oblivion (...). The best lover for the narrator is someone who manages to make her forget who she is. Being the subject in the sexual act indicates having reached a privileged moment in which she feels swept away, far beyond her identity, toward an unknown terrain. The protagonist narrator of La última niebla (...) longs to be carried away, to abandon who she is.]

To abandon oneself means to experience the otherness of the oblivion that signifies the metamorphic moment. Having cast aside her old self in the transforming episode of sexual initiation, she becomes free to reinvent a new self whose existence no longer centers on the lack experienced by the old self, but on the Pygmalian creation supplemented by her imagination.

The protagonist alludes to the labyrinth motif once again when she leaves her lover, whose only proof of existence remains a lingering aroma that stands for the privileged metamorphic moment of both her abandoned subjectivity and her recently discovered unity:

Subo corriendo la callejuela, atravieso la plaza, remonto avenidas.
Un perfume muy suave me acompaña: el perfume de mi

enigmático amigo. Toda yo he quedado impregnada de su aroma. Y es como si él anduviera aún a mi lado o me tuviera aún apretada en su abrazo o hubiera deshecho su vida en mi sangre, para siempre. (21)

[I run up the narrow street, cross the square, retrace my steps through avenues. A subtle perfume accompanies me: the scent of my enigmatic lover. I have been impregnated by his aroma. And it is as if he still walked beside me or still held me in his embrace, or as if he had dissolved his life into my blood, forever.]

The enigmatic friend's scent represents a metonymic substitute for the whole, the longed for and recuperated unity of being, a Proustian stimulus of a secret memory that will sustain the vibrant, yet imaginary life in which she subsequently immerses herself in order to evade the "tyranny of the real," to borrow Skulsky's words (221), of her monotonous existence. The motif of "impregnation" in the passage suggests the concept of totality, and it underscores the experience's symbolic value as initiation, which Calasso defines in The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony (1993) as "a physiological metamorphosis" in which "the circulating blood and thought patterns of the mind absorb a new substance, the flavor of a secret wisdom. That flavor is the flavor of totality" (250). Bombal's character expresses the feeling of totality that remains with her by imagining the constant presence of her lover. Her gesture of refusal and turning away from the world, in imitation of Narcissus, not only legitimizes the autonomous existence of her imagination, but it also completes the self-enclosure of her world.

Sexual initiation allows her to reinvent herself and to create a new beginning, sustained by the memory of the “secret wisdom” obtained at the center of the labyrinth. She expresses this idea in the chapter following her initiation, which reveals that years have passed since the event, yet its memory grows more persistent in spite of time: “Pasan los años. [...] ¡Qué importa que mi cuerpo se marchite, si conoció el amor! [...] Yo tuve una hermosa aventura, una vez... Tan sólo con un recuerdo se puede soportar una larga vida de tedio” (22). [“The years go by. (...) What does it matter that my body withers, if it has known love! (...) I once had a beautiful adventure... With nothing but a single memory one can endure a long existence of tedium.”] Illustrating Massey’s assertion that one’s “sense of identity is probably at all times sustained by an imaginary interlocutor” (162), the lover becomes the secret “interlocutor” of the protagonist’s imaginary world, a relationship that allows her to redefine herself as an active creative subject, rather than passive object. She entertains a dialogue with him in the form of imagined scenes, as well as through letters to him, embedded textual mirrors of the narrative itself. Although only two letters are presented, their inclusion implies the practice of writing, and it establishes the protagonist’s authorship. As desire personified, the supplemental lover parodies Pygmalion’s substitutive relationship to his sculpture, and he becomes both the compensation for absence and, significantly, “the inaugural trope of narration” (Miller 221).

From this point forward, the protagonist constructs her “text” in which we witness the invention of a life and an identity as reflected through the imagined existence of the lover. The core of the narrative represents this virtual life, as

seen through the looking glass of her imagination. Bombal's character lives in a state of "exaltation," often overcome by an "absurd happiness," as she secretly hopes for some unexpected miracle to break up the monotony of her life (23). The solitude that she seeks allows her the freedom to indulge in the fantasy life in which she invents scenes between herself and the lover, as revealed in this passage: "Mi único anhelo es estar sola para soñar, soñar a mis anchas. ¡Tengo siempre tanto en qué pensar!" (23). ["My only desire is to be alone so I can dream, dream at ease. I have so much to think about!"] Her memory becomes dependent on the conscious evocation of the elusive lover: "Hay días en que me acomete un gran cansancio y, vanamente, remuevo las cenizas de mi memoria para hacer saltar la chispa que crea la imagen. Pierdo a mi amante" (24). ["There are days when a great weariness assails me and, in vain, I sift the ashes of my memory to coax the spark that creates the image. I lose my lover."] Finally, she wills the imagination to create the text of her longing, imposing on it the rhythm of peregrination—perhaps the figure of writing itself—which mitigates against the stillness of confinement. Walking and dreaming retrace the steps of the Orphic journey that unlocks her imagination: "es sólo caminando que puedo imprimir un ritmo a mis sueños, abrirlos, hacerlos describir una curva perfecta. Cuando estoy quieta, todos ellos se quiebran las alas sin poderlas abrir" (24). ["Only by walking can I imprint a rhythm to my dreams, unlock them, make them describe a perfect circle. When I am still, their wings break and cannot unfurl."] She becomes Bachelard's ideal poet, living her dream through her own poetic creation, through which she achieves a natural unity (On Poetic Imagination and Reverie 77).

Within the framework of this invented text the letters she writes serve as reflexive mirrors of the text, in which she plays the sensual heroine of her own invented romantic story. They help her to sustain a virtual identity through the dialogue implicit in the epistolary form; therefore, they also serve as mirrors that reflect, through their reciprocal nature, the protagonist's newly discovered sensuality. Significantly, the melodramatic tone of the first letter, which she writes and destroys, gives off the scent of literary parody. Her exasperated "Escribo y rompo" (23) ["I write and tear up"] underscores the parodic nature of the production, and the implicit meaning conveyed through the destruction of the letter creates an ironic fissure of doubt and distance through which one detects the presence of an author. Because the letters reflexively point to the production of fiction, they also suggest the fictive nature of the lover and undermine the heroine's romantic fiction.

The second letter exhibits more successfully her Orphic talent for storytelling, and it contains one of the novel's most poetic passages, evoking to the fullest extent the thematic aquatic imagery in sentences reminiscent of Proust. The letter results from the protagonist's unintended sexual reconciliation with her husband, an encounter which accentuates the crisis engendered by the discordant dual selves which she embodies, as Daniel's substitute wife and the desired sensual woman reflected through the beloved. The conflict illustrates Skulsky's "will in crisis," so characteristic of metamorphic victims who experience change where they are most vulnerable: the alienated mind. It expresses itself in a contradictory dilemma rather than in a transforming event (Skulsky 36-37). The

narrator presents the problem as a forbidden deed, treason to her most intimate self, and, therefore, to her lover. Yet her subsequent refusal to act, stemming from a sense of deep shame and conflicting pleasure, deepens the crisis. Her contradictory acknowledgement and denial of the situation articulate the conflict, which she wishes to avoid through the forgetfulness of sleep and memory:

Hacía años que Daniel no me besaba y por eso no me explico cómo pudo suceder aquello.

Tal vez hubo una leve premeditación de mi parte. ¡Oh, alguien que en estos largos días de verano lograra aliviar mi tedio! Sin embargo, todo fue imprevisto y tremendo y hay un vacío en mi memoria hasta el momento en que me descubrí, entre los brazos de mi marido. (28)

[Daniel had not kissed me in years and for this reason I can't explain how that could have happened.

Perhaps there was some slight premeditation on my part. Oh!, if someone could relieve my boredom in these long summer days! Still, everything was unexpected and appalling, and there is a void in my memory up until the moment when I found myself in my husband's arms.]

The protagonist desires to forget the deep shame of serving as a substitute for Daniel's first wife in the marital bed after years of mutual abstinence. The substitution dehumanizes her and dispossesses her of any identity save that of the absent, deceased wife, whose memory possesses the husband. As Borinsky

points out, the protagonist is forced to participate in the act as “other,” and to lend her body to the task of conjuring the absent beloved: “estar allí es testimoniar su propia ausencia, vaciarse de identidad, dejarse invadir por el deseo de su marido quien al mismo tiempo que la posee, la rechaza” (190). [“To be there is to witness her own absence, to empty herself of identity, to allow herself to be invaded by her husband’s desire, while he rejects her even as he possesses her.”] The ensuing crisis leaves her literally denuded of self, exposed to an existential vacuum:

En el lecho, yo quedé tendida y sollozante, con el pelo adherido a las sienes mojadas, muerta de desaliento y de vergüenza. No traté de moverme, ni siquiera de cubrirme. Me sentía sin valor para morir, sin valor para vivir. Mi único anhelo era postergar el momento de pensar.

Y fue para hundirme en esa miseria que traicioné a mi amante. (29)

[I remained stretched out on the bed, sobbing, my hair clinging to my wet temples, dying of despair and shame. I did not try to move, not even to cover myself. I felt no courage to live, no courage to die. My only wish was to postpone the moment of thought.

And it was to sink in such misery that I betrayed my lover.]

The letter, then, embodies an attempt to repair the humiliation, guilt, and dispossession of self through their substitution with fiction in which she rewrites the event in a more positive light. Distanced from her lover/self by the “infidelity,” she writes to clear up this “misunderstanding:” “Hace ya un tiempo que no

distingo las facciones de mi amigo, que lo siento alejado. Le escribo para disipar un naciente malentendido" (29). ["For some time now I have been unable to distinguish my lover's features, I feel he is distanced from me. I write to him to clear up a growing misunderstanding."] She diffuses the psychic damage by explaining her husband's renewed sexual interest in her as "un breve capricho de verano" ["a brief summer whim"], one that occurred with the first cooling rains of summer. The letter represents a parenthesis of pure magic and delight in which the protagonist writes of an erotic hedonism and satisfaction that compensate for the despair of her real situation. The distance created by the embedded letter coupled with the unreliability of its first-person narrator call into question the meaning of the text, and the distinction between its manifest meaning and its possible meanings becomes blurred when considered contextually. The reiterated poetic use of water imagery in all its sensory, sensual, and fertile valuations and variations, such as in the fluidity, sound, and scent of the river, rain, mirrors, puddles, and cool mysterious beverages, evokes an aquatic dream world to which the protagonist absents herself not only to compensate for her humiliating experience, but also to validate her essential being through an act of poetic imagination.

This self-referential gesture within the text faithfully reproduces the notion, traceable back to André Gide, of *la mise en abyme*, an internal duplication of the narrative that bears a dialectical relationship to both the narrator and the narrative: not only does *mise en abyme* represent a work within a work, but it also must reflect the subject of the narrative itself, as well as the reciprocal

influence that the embedded work exerts on it (Dällenbach 12-19). In this instance, the embedded letter represents the fulfillment of desire which is denied the protagonist in the narrative itself. In other words, the protagonist's letter duplicates her sexual encounter with her husband, but it reflects a positive, rather than a negative, mirror image in which she writes herself in the role of desiring subject and desired object in order to rewrite the role of absent substitute that she plays in the narrative. In addition, she transforms the husband into the desired other of her imaginary world. Thus, she achieves a fulfillment of desire by proxy, through the therapeutic action of writing the letter which restores her lost subjectivity. In her rewritten version of the encounter, she becomes the legitimate recipient of her husband's passion, thereby transforming the outcome of their encounter. Thus, the *mise en abyme* consists of a narcissistic doubling that deepens the protagonist's integration into the imaginary (Dällenbach 16). Additionally, Bachelard articulates this rendition of the Narcissus myth as enacting a transformation by means of aesthetic practice:

le narcissisme n'est pas toujours névrosant. Il joue aussi un rôle positif dans l'oeuvre esthétique, et par des transpositions rapides, dans l'oeuvre littéraire. La sublimation n'est pas toujours la négation d'un désir; elle ne se présente pas toujours comme une sublimation *contre* les instincts. Elle peut être une sublimation *pour* un idéal. Alors Narcisse ne dit plus: "Je m'aime tel que je suis", il dit: "Je suis tel que je m'aime." (L'Eau et les rêves 34-35)

[Narcissism is not, in fact, always a source of neurosis. It has also a positive part to play in art and, by means of rapid transpositions, in literature. Sublimation is not always the negation of a desire; it is not always to be seen as sublimation against instincts. It can well be sublimation *for* an ideal. Here, Narcissus will cease to say "I love myself as I am" and say instead "I am as I love myself."] (Jones McAllester 121)

In the fluid space described within the letter, its narrator becomes an incarnation of Narcissus's reflection in the pool, for she sublimates the real for the ideal. The passage articulates and celebrates her innate sensuality through the highly charged symbolism of the fecund waters that drench the moist outdoor landscape, and which stand for the narrator's sense of well being, happiness, and plenitude. The discordant marital bedroom becomes a hermetic space of otherworldly tranquility through the magic transforming qualities of water: "La alcoba quedó sumida en un crepúsculo azulado en donde los espejos, brillando como aguas apretadas, hacían pensar en un reguero de claras charcas" (30). ["The bedroom became submerged in a blue twilight in which the mirrors, shinning like watery enclosures, made one think of a trickle of clear pools."] The blue twilight of the room refracts and echoes the watery imagery outdoors with its cool and murmuring rains. The passage is notable for both its musical rhythm and Proustian poetic imagery, so difficult to capture in English:

Fuera crecía y se esparcía el murmullo de la lluvia, como si ésta multiplicara cada una de sus hebras de plata. Un soplo de brisa hacía palpar las sedas de las ventanas.

Daniel volvió a extenderse a mi lado y largas horas permanecimos silenciosos, mientras lenta, lenta, se alejaba la lluvia como una bandada de pájaros húmedos. (30)

[Outside the murmur of the rain swelled and dispersed, as if it multiplied each one of its silver strands. A soft breeze made the window curtains flutter.

Daniel lay down by my side again, and we remained silent for hours while slowly, slowly the rain moved away like a flock of humid birds.]

The readers discerns in this passage a narrator who is not only an author of Proustian sensibilities, but who is perhaps also a reader of Proust, as revealed in the intertextual reference comparing the rain to a flock of birds: “les gouttes d’eau comme des oiseaux migrants qui prennent leur vol tous ensemble, descendaient à rans pressés du ciel” (À la Recherche... 148). [“Its drops, like migrating birds which fly off in a body at a given moment, would come down out of the sky in serried ranks”] (Swann’s Way 164). In the protagonist’s letter, the contentment induced by the falling rain clearly alludes to her sexual pleasure, indicated at its conclusion. The embedded letter, then, becomes an *apologia* for the shame and guilt of self-betrayal, as well as the validation of the narrator’s idealized sensuality. Since the lover represents the personification of the ideal,

referred to in the letter by the Proveçal, courtly-love term, “amigo,” she transfers these qualities to the husband in her fictional account, thereby permitting her to claim that she has not betrayed him: “Oh amigo adorado, ¿comprendes ahora que nunca te engañé? Todo fue un capricho, un inofensivo capricho de verano” (31). [“Oh, my beloved friend, do you now understand that I have never betrayed you? It was all a whim, a harmless summer whim.”]

The letter exemplifies her self-affirming dialogue with the imaginary interlocutor, and through it, the protagonist restores her fractured and effaced self. The parenthetical insertion of the letter between two episodes of personal crisis, both of which relate to the dispossession of self caused by substitutions, points self-referentially to its fictive nature and, therefore, undermines its veracity. If the first crisis brought to light the protagonist’s role as substitute for Daniel’s deceased wife, it underscored the tenuous nature of her identity by virtue of her husband’s “misreading.” The second crisis, which follows the letter, also relates an instance of misreading, in that another reading of the situation, also supplied by the husband challenges the protagonist’s belief in the existence of the lover. The play of substitution, texts within texts, and erroneous readings heighten the irony of the text and underscore its duplicity, as the text deliberately blurs various discourses with its metamorphic practices.

Another instance of the duplicitous practice of misreading occurs when the author rewrites the myth of Echo, and in so doing, deepens the breach between the heroine’s romantic dream and the prosaic reality that surrounds her, sharpening the irony and the distance between the protagonist’s narration and

the author's text. The full impact of this distancing depends on the knowledge of the mythical subtext to which it refers. Condemned by Juno to repeat "but the poor / Brief noises of the fewest words" (Ovid 75), Echo falls in love with the unattainable Narcissus, who rejects her:

So she was turned away
To hide her face, her lips, her guilt among the trees,
Even their leaves, to haunt caves of the forest,
To feed her love on melancholy sorrow
Which, sleepless, turned her body to a shade,
First pale and wrinkled, then a sheet or air,
Then bones, which some say turned to thin-worn rocks;
And last her voice remained. (76)

Just as Echo hides in nature to "feed her love on melancholy sorrow," our protagonist wanders in the forest because it is there that she best evokes the lover's presence:

La aldea, el parque, los bosques, me parecen llenos de su presencia. Ando por todos lados con la convicción de que él acecha cada uno de mis pasos.

Grito: "¡Te quiero!" "¡Te deseo!", para que llegue hasta su escondrijo la voz de mi corazón y de mis sentidos.

Ayer una voz lejana respondió a la mía: "¡Amooooor!" Me detuve, pero aguzando el oído, percibí un rumor confuso de risas

ahogadas. Muerta de vergüenza caí en cuenta de que los leñadores parodiaban así mi llamado. (27)

[The village, the park, the forest seem to me permeated by his presence. I walk everywhere, convinced that he tracks my every step.

I shout: "I love you!" "I want you!" so that the voice of my heart and my senses finds him in his hiding place.

Yesterday a distant voice answered mine: "Looove!" I stopped, but after listening closely, I perceived the muffled sounds of repressed laughter. Mortified, I realized that the woodsmen were mocking my lament.]

Although aware of the woodcutters' discordant and comic echo to her pleas of love, she ignores the mockery and reinterprets it to suit her romantic narrative. She deliberately misrepresents the derisive echo as the reflection of the lover's thought, or "el portavoz de su pensamiento" (27); ["the spokesman of his thoughts."] Her intentional misreading of the situation perpetuates her growing entrapment, just as the case of Echo and Narcissus, "in imitation and reflection" (Barkan 48). Like her mythological counterparts, she looks inward to become enraptured by the artifice of her own creation, yet its very fluid materiality, so likely to change and disappear, underscores its ephemeral nature.

The textual irony created by the letters and the protagonist's continued misreadings not only undermine her invented narrative romance, but also fictionalize her to an even greater degree; her projection as actor in her own story

reinforces her status as mimetic image, and calls into question a subjectivity based on an artificial construct. The fact that she remains nameless throughout the account proves her status as a shifting signifier threatened with transformation and dissolution, like Narcissus and Echo, into shadow or stone. This paradox is implicit in a problematic identity that sees itself as both subject and object of its own desire, reminding us of Narcissus's plaintive inquiry, "Am I the lover / Or beloved?" (Ovid 78).

On the other hand, just as Pygmalion wills his own creation into existence (Ovid 278), she dreams her creation into being through the conscious reinterpretation of events, in order to become both the author and principal player in her own story. Suzanne Jill Levine reaches a similar conclusion:

While the repressed woman of Bombal's novella may confirm womanhood's imprisonment in the mirror, a pluralistic reading of this fluid text(ure) may reveal the (re)creation of woman not only as an object *seen*, but as subject and *seer*, of woman as Poet, that is, as Maker. ("House of Mist..." 140)

The letters the protagonist authors are emblematic of this notion. Like Pygmalion and his statue made real, her belief in the veracity of her imaginary construct, which on the textual level represents a similar belief in the transforming powers of aesthetic creation, transforms her Narcissistic, specular world into real substance, temporarily suspending her final paralysis into shadow. The tension that ensues between the protagonist's deliberate misreading and the ironic subversions of the implied author fosters the environment of metamorphosis for

the protagonist, while it confronts the reader with a duplicitous metamorphic text: one that conceals and reveals at the same time. The sentimental discourse that Guerra Cunningham discerns in Bombal's work ("Introducción" 32) conceals an ironic subtext of parody and demythification that rescues the text from a descent into melodrama.

The protagonist's imaginative practice can perhaps be characterized as a double movement of inwardness, represented by Narcissus and his reflected image, and expansiveness, exemplified by Pygmalion's projection of aesthetic delight in an object of his creation which causes it to come alive. The notion of inwardness and expansiveness, borrowed from Bachelard's reflection on poetic imagination (On Poetic Imagination and Reverie 91), adequately describes the protagonist's creative task of imagining herself a different identity and reality. As illustrated above, and in the following significant passage, nowhere is her imagination materialized more profoundly and succinctly than in the image of water.

In the second episode at the pool, the protagonist gives herself over completely to the task of dreaming, and her immersion in water allows her imagination the greatest range of freedom to create, illustrating Bachelard's poetic intuition that "[d]ans nos yeux, c'est *l'eau* qui rêve" (L'Eau et les rêves 45); ["within our eyes, it is *water* that dreams"] (On Poetic... 78):

De costumbre permanezco allí largas horas, el cuerpo y el pensamiento a la deriva. A menudo no queda de mí, en la superficie, más que un vago remolino; yo me he hundido en un

mundo misterioso donde el tiempo parece detenerse bruscamente, donde la luz pesa como una sustancia fosforescente, donde cada uno de mis movimientos adquiere sabias y felinas lentitudes y yo exploro minuciosamente los repliegues de ese antro de silencio.
(25)

[I usually remain there long hours, my body and my thoughts adrift. Often there is nothing left of me, on the surface, but a vague eddy; I have sunk into a mysterious world where time seems to stop, where light weighs like a phosphorescent substance, where each one of my movements acquires a knowing and feline gracefulness and I explore intimately the folds of that cavern of silence.]

The watery mirror has a naturalizing effect on the Narcissistic image, as Bachelard points out, in that it captures an innocence and naturalness that mitigates against the prideful gesture of intimate contemplation. It becomes “l’occasion d’une *imagination ouverte*” (L’Eau et les rêves 32) [“the occasion of an *open imagination*”], and an invitation to contemplate, create, and complete the idealized image. Significantly, the vaporous image of the protagonist’s double, the idealized lover, emerges from the depths of the luminous waters to appear to her for a second time. The combination of the highly charged images of water and mist, which prefigure transformation, and the iteration of words such as “luminous” and “apparition,” enhance the phantasmagoric value of the image:

Emergía de aquellas luminosas profundidades cuando divisé a lo lejos, entre la niebla, venir silencioso, como una aparición, un carruaje todo cerrado.... [...]

Tras la ventanilla estrecha del carruaje vi, entonces, asomarse e inclinarse, para mirarme, una cabeza de hombre.

Reconocí inmediatamente los ojos claros, el rostro moreno de mi amante. (25-26)

[I was emerging from those luminous depths when I spied far away, through the mist, an enclosed carriage, approaching noiselessly as an apparition... (...)]

Through the carriage's narrow window I saw, then, a man's head appear and lean forward, in order to gaze at me.

I recognized immediately the light eyes, the dark countenance of my lover.]

The carriage stops at the water's edge, and the horses drink without forming ripples on the water's surface. She perceives a man's face staring out from the carriage window, a dematerialized and fragmented form which she supplements with the features of her lover, and when she tries to call him, he disappears as if swallowed by the mist (26). The aqueous mirage, which appears at the moment of her imagination's greatest susceptibility and expansiveness in the watery mirror, represents the clearest example of the materialization and personification of her desire. Her description of the effaced vision to which she ascribes a particular face and identity bears the marks of Miller's notion of prosopopoeia:

The law of personification is that for a sharp reader it uncovers as it covers over. Prosopopoeia effaces, defaces, and disfigures even as it confers, ascribes, or prescribes a face and a figure. That defacing reveals the linguistic artifice by which the trope operates, projecting a wholeness extrapolated from parts, pieces, and fragments—a face, not a whole body; [...] a voice that is imagined to speak certain words; a proper name that is both idiosyncratic and at the same time the ascription of putative wholeness. (227-228)

The protagonist believes that she has seen her lover, and she attempts to corroborate the apparition's materiality by eliciting a verification from the young gardener's son, who happens to be in a small raft skimming the surface of the pond for dead leaves (26). However, through the deformation implicit in the narrative description, the reader perceives in the first person account a subtext that undermines the vision: a carriage appears and disappears "sin provocar el menor ruido" ["without creating a sound"], its horses drink at the pond's edge without breaking the water's surface, and she sees a face, framed by a window and enclosed in a carriage to which she attributes the features of the desired other. The youth, another reflection of Narcissus, witnesses an event that, in true Jamesian fashion, is not described from his point of view: we do not know what he has seen. Significantly, he skims dead autumn leaves from the water. The text, like the mist that materializes and dematerializes the lover, uncovers and conceals at once, and confronts the reader again with its ambiguity and irony. Nevertheless, since the first-person narrator does not consciously express irony,

the reader discerns the implied author's ironic subtext slipping through the gaps of the text to undermine the narrative, again subverting the protagonist's romantic plot and frustrating the reader's attempts to determine meaning.

Additionally, the passage's ominous and funereal images further destabilize the protagonist's narrative version of events, while they enhance the passage's inherent duplicity. The narrator perceives the lover as a fragmented image, a head without a body, within a frame. The image of the carriage and the horses evokes death because of its association with the underworld. Although a potent emblem of unrestrained libido, the horse also denotes a chthonic symbol that ominously foreshadows death, and has represented, in European folklore from classical antiquity onward, "the manifestation of the power of the Underworld and of death" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 519). Significantly, in its negative value, it is associated with water. All of these elements may be found in the Ovidian myth of Death and Proserpina, which serves as our example. Hades surprises the young woman by a lake collecting Narcissi, a narcotic flower named in honor of Narcissus that is linked to the underworld (Jiménez 35), and he carries her away in his horse-drawn chariot: "He who had raped her lashed his horses on / To greater speed, crying the names of each, / Shaking black reins across their backs and shoulders" (Ovid 134-135). The water, which to this point has proved a shifting and ambivalent symbol of life and death, the flower symbolizing death, which evokes the Narcissan theme by metonymy, and Death personified in Hades and materialized in his powerful steeds collectively present themselves to the reader and interpreter of the protagonist's vision of the lover as

images foreshadowing destruction. The carriage scene recalls Emily Dickinson's famous poem, "The Chariot," whose occupant, Death, she personifies as a gentleman caller: "Because I could not stop for Death, / He kindly stopped for me;" (138). The discrepancy between the protagonist's delight at seeing her lover again and the ominous subtext that points to another implicit meaning calls for an ironic reading of the protagonist's claim of happiness: "Vivo agobiada por la felicidad" (26); ["I live overwhelmed by happiness."]

Further, the embedded second letter follows the episode of the pool, and it illustrates another instance of textual obfuscation. Because of its parenthetical insertion between two moments of crisis, it deliberately conceals and delays the protagonist's tragic recognition of the illusory nature of her creation and its destruction foreshadowed in the funereal imagery of the pool. The conflict is further heightened by a doubt, planted by Daniel's own interpretation of the evening of the protagonist's first encounter with the lover, which begins to erode the protagonist's belief in his existence. The husband's "reading" of an evening in which the couple consumed copious amounts of wine substitutes for her "misreading" of the Orphic descent into the labyrinth where she meets her lover: "Esta duda que mi marido me ha infiltrado; esta duda absurda y ¡tan grande!" (32). ["This doubt that my husband has infiltrated in me; this absurd and enormous doubt!"] In fact, the woman's created fantasy will be systematically deconstructed through the fragmentation of the very mirror images that helped to construct it, replacing the reality of the dreamer's poetic imagination with the reality of a monotonous prosaic life characterized by repetition. From this point

forward the looking glass reflects only deathly images that illustrate the destructive nature of the double, for to follow Narcissus's example is to surrender to the beguiling call of otherness that leads to the destruction of the self, as Valéry suggests in the poem, "Avec soi seul" ["Alone"]:

Narcisse. N'est-ce point penser à la mort que se regarder au miroir? N'y voit-on pas son périssable? L'immortel y voit son mortel. Un miroir nous fait sortir de notre peau, de notre visage.

Rien ne résiste à son double. (Mélange 332)

[Narcissus. Is not to look in a mirror to think of death? Does not one gaze at one's perishable part? The immortal sees its mortal. A mirror takes us out of our skin, away from our face.

Nothing can bear its double.]

Consistent with the tragic ending of the myth of Narcissus, the narrative includes an instance of drowning that portends the dissolution of the image world. The Narcissus youth who skimmed dead leaves from the pond, Andrés, drowns in its now deadly waters. Significantly, as a witness to the carriage's phantasmagoric appearance at the water's edge, he represents, in the protagonist's mind, the only means of authenticating her experience. His death initiates the shattering of images that brings the protagonist back to an objective reality. The return to the material world begins with the imaginary interlocutor's disappearance, and foreshadows the death of imagination and writing, which brings about the conclusion of the text. The alter ego responsible for bolstering the protagonist's identity evaporates, and she is left to confront her ultimate

solitude. She communicates this disorienting turn of events through references to the lover reified in objects and gestures and an allusion to the unstable nature of reflections which must be replaced with new ones:

Mi amor estaba también, agazapado, detrás de cada uno de mis movimientos. Como antes, extendía a menudo los brazos para estrechar a un ser invisible. Me levantaba medio dormida para escribir, con la pluma en la mano, recordaba, de pronto, que mi amante había muerto.

--¿Cuánto, cuánto tiempo necesitaré para que todos estos reflejos se borren, sean reemplazados por otros reflejos? (35)

[My love lay also, concealed, behind each of my gestures. As before, I often extended my arms to embrace an invisible being. I would rise half-asleep to write, and with pen in hand, I would remember, suddenly, that my lover had died.

--How long, how much time will it take to erase all these reflections, to replace them with other reflections?]

The protagonist acknowledges the double's illusory nature, yet her meditation on the apparent nature of the real persists; she insists on the substitutive nature of all readings. Whether grounded in the imaginary or the real, they retain some element of the projected image. Indeed, the text reflects this concept in that all of the mirror characters of the first part of the narrative, refractions of the protagonist's tenuous identity, become fractured images in the second part of the narrative.

Regina, the mirror image of the protagonist's idealized sensuality, becomes the first image to be shattered. She attempts suicide due to a failed love affair. The protagonist envies her predicament, because her pain, stemming from the havoc of a real passion, underscores the fictive nature of her own illusory passion. Narcissus's tardy recognition of the chimerical nature of the reflected image, his "I've loved within the shadow / Of what I am, and in that love I burn, I light the flames and feel their fires within" (78), signals his sudden *anagnorisis*. The protagonist's contemplation and envy of Regina reveal an awareness that her own experience can neither be construed as real nor legitimate, but rather it remains a fiction kept alive by the sheer force of memory and imagination. She reflects:

Tras el gesto de Regina hay un sentimiento intenso, toda una vida de pasión. Tan sólo un recuerdo mantiene mi vida, un recuerdo cuya llama debo alimentar día a día para que no se apague. Un recuerdo tan vago y tan lejano, que me parece casi una ficción.
(38)

[Behind Regina's gesture there is an intense feeling, an entire life of passion. Only a memory sustains my life, a memory whose flame I must feed day by day lest it go out. A memory so vague and remote that it seems to me almost a fiction.]

As her double, Regina's potential death foreshadows the figurative death of the protagonist's passion and the artificial identity constructed around it. She discloses this idea in her reassessment of Regina's idealized beauty: "Regina

está tan fea que parece otra" (41). ["Regina looks so ugly that she seems another."] Ironically, Regina's suicide motivates another trip to the city, and the narrative returns full circle to the site of its initial adventure. It provides the protagonist with another chance to dispel her doubts by reenacting another Orphic journey, retracing her steps through the labyrinth in search of the beloved and the truth.

The dreamlike nature of this Orphic return to the underworld can be ascertained by its parenthetical positioning in the text. Preceding the episode, the protagonist visits Regina in the hospital. Overcome by the shock of seeing the idealized Regina reduced to such a lamentable condition, the protagonist is given a bitter drink, perhaps a sedative. Following her visit to the center of town in search of the lost beloved, she once more finds herself in the hospital, although the lack of chronological referents deliberately obscures the logical sequence of events. The first line of the Orphic journey hints at its fantastic nature: the metamorphic mist, which dematerializes everything, pervades the scene and a fever overcomes the protagonist. Her Orphic journey represents a descent to an interior hell (Albouy 191). Wandering through labyrinthine streets, she searches for the narrow street that led her to the maze's center, the small plaza, but the ubiquitous mist obscures her vision and disorients her:

Pero esa misma plazoleta, tampoco la encuentro. Creo haber hecho el recorrido exacto que emprendí, hace años, y, sin embargo, doy vueltas y vueltas sin resultado alguno. La niebla, con su barrera de humo, prohíbe toda visión directa de los seres y de

las cosas, incita a aislarse dentro de sí mismo. Se me figura estar corriendo por calles vacías. (39)

[But neither do I find the same small plaza. I believe I have retraced the exact path that I undertook years ago, and, still, I keep going in circles to no effect. The mist, with its smoky barrier, prevents any clear vision of beings and things, and it impels one to withdraw deep inside oneself. I imagine that I am running through empty streets.]

The mist's emblematic doubleness and ambivalence magnify the fantastic aspect of the scene, and self-referentially point to the duplicitous practices of the text, which frustrate both the narrator's quest and the reader's interpretation. Just as the mist prevents the protagonist's clarity of vision, causing her to misread the situation, the reader becomes equally disoriented by the text's deliberate ambiguity. The imagery of death pervades the narration, underscoring the mythic Orphic intertext of the poet's descent into Hades. A deathly silence reigns, save for the narrator's echoing footsteps which suggest the palpitations of a heartbeat, revealing the inward nature of the quest. Overcome, the protagonist rests on a bench and suddenly finds herself in the desired center, which, however, depicts the center of an underworld. Death and decay pervade the scene: water no longer runs through the plaza's fountain; the lover's house has a dark facade, and in its abandoned garden loom two trees twisted in "convulsed" shapes; the rusted iron gate creaks. Yet the protagonist deliberately misreads these ominous signs, and she reacts with an incongruous delight at having reached the center of

her heart's desire, confirming the materiality of her experience: "Me aprieto a las frías rejas para sentirlas muy sólidas contra mi carne. ¡No fue un sueño, no!" (39). ["I press myself against the cold iron bars of the fence to feel their solidity against my flesh. No, it was not a dream!"] The house becomes an integral part of a metamorphic dynamic because it represents a metaphor for the body and is central to the protagonist's transformation. According to Clarke "[t]he metamorphic house signifies an allegorical cosmos often aligned with the scenic or subordinated body" (78), and thus denotes a symbolic center where borders are erased, unity is achieved, and where the protagonist recovers her sensual body.

Her return to the center of the maze foreshadows another transforming event. Inside the house, a dazzling light blinds her, causing her to avert her gaze from its symbolic truth (40). The word she uses to describe her reaction, "deslumbrada," conveys a double meaning. A past participle derived from the verb "deslumbrar," the verb is formed from the prefix "des-," which negates or inverts the term that follows it, and "lumbre," which signifies light, fire, clarity, sight, and reason; it literally denotes to un-sight, or un-reason. It signifies to dazzle or blind, but also to be puzzled, confused, or bewildered by a passion.² The unfamiliar surroundings, which do not conform to her "dream," in fact, constitute a final, dazzling epiphany that confronts her with the unsubstantial nature of the dream of the lover, her Eurydicean double. It proves the artificial construction of her sense of identity, and it foreshadows its subsequent dislocation. In the center of this new phantasmagoric dream she encounters

² Diccionario de la Lengua Española, Real Academia Española, XXI edition.

other doubles that symbolically replace the lover and signal her confrontation with reality. Fittingly, she discovers that a blind man, now deceased, was the former occupant of the house. Now, a child, who plays the violin, occupies the room where she and the lover consummated their union. The ambivalent symbolism inherent in the two figures is congruent with the expected revelation to be found at the center of the maze. The allusion to the dead blind man, the universal figure of the poet and a paradoxical symbol that denotes both ignorance and prophetic inspiration, implies here the death of her own inner sight, her poetic imaginary life, which depends on her turning away from prosaic reality for its vitality (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 99-100). The lover's replacement by the innocence of the child symbolizes a resolution of her personal conflict and the sobering attainment of an inner truth (190). Thus, her "deslumbramiento" represents another initiation at the center of the labyrinth in which the protagonist experiences a double process of blinding and revelation, death and resurrection: stripped of her numinous, poetic inner sight, she awakens to the awareness of the same essential solitude and amorphous identity offered by her dull existence which threatened her at the beginning of the story. She faces the inescapable truth conveyed in Valéry's verse, "Mystérieuse MOI, pourtant, tu vis encore! / Tu vas te reconnaître au lever de l'aurore / Amèrement la même..." (Poésies 105). ["Thing of mystery, ME, are you living yet! / When dawn's curtain lifts, you will recognize / Your same bitter self..."] (Poems 91). The painful awareness of the inevitable sameness of her situation, in spite of the passage of time, seals her metamorphic fate of immobility and paralysis.

Escaping from the house, the center of the labyrinth, she resigns herself to the death of her ideal now effaced by the disfiguring effects of mist:

Con la vaga esperanza de haberme equivocado de calle, de casa, continuó errando por una ciudad fantasma. Doy vueltas y más vueltas. Quisiera seguir buscando, pero ya ha anochecido y no distingo nada. Además, ¿para qué luchar? Era mi destino. La casa, y mi amor, y mi aventura, todo se ha desvanecido en la niebla. (41)

[With the vague hope of having mistaken the street, the house, I continue to wander through the ghost city. I wander around and around again. I would continue searching, but it has gotten dark and I can't discern anything. Besides, why struggle? It was my destiny. The house and my love, my adventure, all has vanished in the mist.]

Her experience at the maze's center proves a transforming experience that evokes Orpheus' bewildering loss. Having sung of love and passion, the protagonist, like Orpheus, confronts the fragmentation and solitude of the "I" as it comes face to face with loss and mortality:

When Orpheus saw his wife go down to Death,
Twice dead, twice lost, he stared like someone dazed.
He seemed to be like him who saw the fighting
Three-headed Dog led out by Hercules
In chains, a six-eyed monster spitting bile;
The man was paralyzed and fear ran through him

Until his body turned to stone. (271)

Clearly, the sorrow of loss leads to an emotional paralysis in the characters of both stories. Orpheus' encounter with loss and death temporarily freezes him in a paralyzing "melancholy-mad[ness]" (271). The protagonist's problematic self, dispossessed of the identity derived from her poetic vision, comes face to face with her image in the frozen mirror of death, a startling reflection that contrasts with the beauty of her initial self-discovery in Narcissus' pool (14). She contemplates suicide, but immediately she realizes the futility of the gesture:

Me asalta la visión de mi cuerpo desnudo, y extendido sobre una mesa en la Morgue. Carnes mustias y pegadas a un estrecho esqueleto, un vientre sumido entre la caderas... El suicidio de una mujer casi vieja, qué cosa repugnante e inútil. ¿Mi vida no es acaso ya el comienzo de la muerte? (42-43)

[I am assailed by the vision of my naked body, stretched out on a table in the morgue. Withered flesh clinging to a narrow skeleton, a sunken belly between protruding hips... The suicide of an aging woman, what a repugnant and useless thing. At most, isn't my life already the beginning of death?]

The protagonist's rejection of suicide after her confrontation with death and fragmentation seems to concord with similar instances that Milligan observes in French women's fictional autobiography from between the wars. Suicide in feminine novels of identity, she asserts:

is invalid not because it represents the logical extension of the heroine's loss of value and identity, nor because it represents the supreme negation of the self. Rather, suicide demands an *a priori* sense of selfhood and an inflated self-worth. (115)

Her identity virtually deconstructed, the nameless protagonist already feels that she is dead. Throughout the text her sense of selfhood has constituted a series of substitutions, significantly, with dead women. Literally a *nobody*, she stands in for Daniel's first wife, and she also tries to absorb Regina's eroticism. As Borinsky points out:

[s]u ser personaje femenino tiene como raíz querer ser *otra* o ser obligada a la equivocación de quién es. La atracción por las muertas, el influjo que ejercen sobre ella, son modos de anotar el hueco de la representación y la concomitante voluntad de llenarlo con nombres, aventuras. (193)

[(h)er being a feminine character has at its core the desire to be *other* or the burden to equivocate who she is. The attraction toward dead women, the influence they exert over her, are ways of registering the emptiness of the representation and the concomitant will to fill the void with names and adventures.]

The deathly self-image of the withered body in the morgue not only symbolizes the death of the ideal, the muse of her text of longing, but it also figuratively represents her final metamorphosis, ending in paralysis and immobility, which epitomizes her final substitutive gesture. The imagery of death

and petrification confirms Massey's assessment of metamorphosis as an act that denotes "a protest in defeat, at the conclusion of a process of evolution rather than somewhere along the growth stages of a psyche." He determines that "[a]lthough metamorphosis has to do with change, it tends to settle in the moments of arrest rather than development" (2). In other words, metamorphosis occurs because resolution, for the protagonist *and* the narrative, becomes impossible. Correspondingly, the protagonist's renunciation denotes a mode of opposition, common to protagonists of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French literature, that illustrates, according to Chambers, a "'modern' form of suicide" that offers "an honorable disengagement that is the only way to survive in a world that offers no better option" (84, 87). Such oppositional practices are enacted in the conclusion of La última niebla through the protagonist's surrender to the monotonous repetition of the empty gestures of daily life, coupled with the destruction of the animating spirit of imagination that provided her with a vibrant, yet ultimately artificial, sense of self. This renunciation, or "suicide by irresolution" (Chambers 87), becomes another way of presenting the unsolvable dilemma that culminates in the protagonist's metamorphosis, in which she becomes immobilized in a "death in life." In the concluding paragraph, the rhetoric of repetition through the image of the effacing mist, the choice of words and the syntactic parallelism of sentences that evoke fixity and rigidity underscore the image of icy immobility that finally petrifies all objects and beings:

Daniel me toma del brazo y echa a andar con la mayor naturalidad. [...] Lo sigo para llevar a cabo una infinidad de pequeños menesteres; para cumplir con una infinidad de frivolidades amenas; para llorar por costumbre y sonreír por deber. Lo sigo para vivir correctamente, para morir correctamente, algún día.

Alrededor de nosotros, la niebla presta a las cosas un carácter de inmovilidad definitiva. (43)

[Daniel takes my arm and starts walking with the greatest ease. (...) I follow him to carry out an infinity of insignificant obligations; to comply with an infinity of pleasant frivolities; to cry from habit and smile out of duty. I follow him to live correctly, and to die correctly, some day.

Around us, the mist lends things the features of an ultimate immobility.]

The metamorphosis of petrification, then, literalizes and materializes the protagonist's final alienation. The narrative figure of amorphous mist, without essence and shape, freezes everything and dematerializes her dreams in order to unveil their insubstantial nature. Both mist and lover prove to be reciprocal figures of each other, and their unsubstantial nature effectively cancels the protagonist's quest for a unified identity, leading to the metamorphic crisis that metaphorically expresses her untenable ontological status. Like Ovid's god of Sleep, both mist and lover harbor the suspended "shapes of [her] empty dreams," through which she strives to create a vital sense of self. In an attempt to

give substance to her amorphous identity, she has journeyed, like Orpheus, down into to the god's mist shrouded cave:

Down where Cimmerians lived a mountain's cave
Concealed the home of Sleep where Idleness,
Languor, and Listlessness slept side by side,
And all at rest in rooms of shadowed ease.
No Phoebus entered there with morning light,
No noons nor reddening twilights touched the floors;
Only fog-breathing Earth held Sleep in her arms,
In shades where cock-crow never wakes the dawn.
[...]
There in the innermost chamber of dark halls,
Draped in black velvet, stands the Sleeper's bed.
The god of Sleep, stretched on the coverlet,
Lies there, his figure languorous and long.
Around him drift the shapes of empty dreams,
As many images as ears of grain in autumn,
As leaves on trees, as sands along the beach. (315)

The shapes of vivid dreams and images wend their way through La última niebla interweaving, like Penelope's tapestry, the text of one woman's desire and quest for identity. Although the immobility of petrification brings her quest to a close, both her anonymity and the duplicity of the text invite the reader to supplement its images and elliptical blanks, enacting, through the act of reading,

the desire and the pleasure inherent in the lyrical texture of her vision. At the same time, the author's duplicitous text, characterized by ambiguity and irony, invites the perceptive reader to tease out meanings that are not expressly conveyed in the narrative. Thus, Bombal's works should not be judged solely on the basis of her "neurotic," "abnormal," and "inarticulate" protagonists, as some critics have argued, beings whose Bovarism condemns them to be interpreted either as victims or archetypes of the essential feminine inherent in the feminine/masculine dichotomy. Metamorphosis, symbolized in the figure of the blurring mist, suggests a textual practice of blending that deliberately obfuscates categories. It erases the boundaries between poetry and prose, reality and imagination, dream and wakefulness, subject and object, and nature and art. As Diane Marting, Marjorie Agosín, and Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman have suggested, we should applaud the "intrepid" aestheticism of a text that decenters and demythifies, through its lyrical metamorphic mist, the confining bourgeois traditions against which its protagonist struggles.

We discern in Bombal's use of the poetics of metamorphosis a means of raising questions as to the construction of feminine identity, which, as Agosín articulates, center around the thematic of love: the nature of love for women, the incompatibility of autonomy and love, and the tyranny of marriage (Las desterradas... 15). The female quest for identity, represented in La última niebla by the Narcissus and Orpheus myths of knowledge, presents the disjunction between a woman's sensual self-image and the conflicting images of passivity and perfection imposed by marriage and social convention, with their consequent

paralyzing effects. In rewriting the myth of Orpheus, Bombal stresses the absolute autonomy of her protagonist's imagination. Rather than uphold her protagonist as a model of womanhood, Bombal not only deconstructs the myths of marriage and romance that are offered as her sole means of self-realization, but she also destroys her protagonist in the process, subverting the social context and the model of passive femininity that the narrative seems to endorse. Just as Flaubert punishes his heroine, Emma Bovary, for attempting to live the romantic image of woman as a mysterious and ethereal creature created for love (Brée 43), Bombal creates protagonists who refuse to thrive under the social constraints imposed on them. As Mora points out, their supposed affinity and integration to a primordial Nature does not bring them any solace or happiness, a fact that undermines interpretations that view them as archetypes of the essential feminine (169).

The intertext of myth, without which metamorphosis loses its significance, provides an interpretive framework through which to evaluate the problematics of the protagonist's conflicted identity. We have seen how Bombal's creative intertextual reinscription and interpretation of the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus provide the symbolic models for the protagonist's quest for identity and its unity. Through her reinterpretation of the myth of Pygmalion and its paradigm of misreading, we have discerned that the protagonist's willful misreading through substitutive error validates and celebrates the autonomy of the imagination. Her reinscription of Pygmalion's error also posits the superiority of the aesthetic work of art over life itself, a notion that echoes Bachelard's views on

the independence of the poetic imaginary, and which aptly describes Bombal's aesthetic practices. Rather than mirror life, great works of art, as McAllester Jones points out, "imply a fundamental break with life" (114).

Deeply influenced by the Symbolist aesthetic that informs much of early twentieth-century Modernist literature, Bombal constructs a world of fiction that is primarily lyrical in its content, language, and structure. She neither describes the social contextual referent that her protagonists inhabit, nor does she make them discursive witnesses who articulate their suffering and analyze the restrictive social conventions that entrap them. She creates what Chambers terms the "trace text," a text which derives its unique identity not from its dependence on the historical context of its production, but from its "interpretability with respect to its reader" (214-215). It is the text, Chambers continues, "that determines the status of its context of production, not the context that determines the status of the text" (215). Therefore, when Bombal's protagonists convert, as Kostopulos-Cooperman suggests, "their inner speech into a pattern of lyrical signs that often seem divorced from the causal and linear relationships that exist in conventional fiction" (9), we are asked as readers to decode the signs and reconstruct their experiences in a present "context of reception" (Chambers 215). We have interpreted such a text from the point of view of a metamorphic poetics that exposes the paradoxical nature of identity, being, imagination, and reality. At the textual level, this paradox presents itself in the metamorphic text, a text that originates from the protagonist's substitutive compensations for absence and desire, and which exhibits its duplicity in the potential for both creative

transformation and destruction through both the appropriation of myth and the deconstruction of romantic discourse through parody.

The personification of the protagonist's desire through which she constructs an artificial self-identity becomes chimerical at the novel's end. Her compensatory gesture of projection "into the emptiness of ultimate loss" (Miller 125) proves as destructive as it is creative, because of the elusive and unattainable nature of the ideal that it attempts to materialize. Although her effort at self-construction emerges as problematic, the text of her desire remains as a validation and defense of the authentic life of the imagination, which attains more reality within the narrative than the world of her life. The protagonist's "mal d'amour" becomes both a remedy and a poison. As an Orphic and divine intoxicant, it unleashes the power of her imagination in order to compensate for the absence of love and to concretize her desire in a powerful, beguiling image. As Valéry explains in a short essay entitled "Mal d'amour":

Aimer passionnément quelqu'un, c'est avoir cédé à son image
puissance de toxique.

Mais ce toxique est un poison vivant, qui se reforme et se multiplie
dans ces régions de l'être où la sensibilité à l'état brut, et les
étranges énergies dont elle dispose sont inaccessibles,
inexprimables—réalité pure. Là se chargent et se déchargent nos
capacités de volupté et de douleur. (Mélange 349)

[To be passionately in love with someone is to have endowed that
one's image with a toxic potency.]

But in this case a living poison, accumulating and multiplying in those regions where the feelings in their crude state and the strange energies at their disposal are inaccessible, inexpressible—raw reality. There is where our capacities for pleasure and pain are loaded and discharged.] (Analects 556)

Spurred on by the toxic beauty of the image of her personified love and desire, the protagonist recreates Valéry's "réalité pure" in a magical narrative that refracts her being through its intertextual technique incorporating mythic appropriation and metamorphic transformation. The protagonist's endeavor does not provide the desired unified identity, and she consequently resembles one of Kristeva's contemporary figures for Narcissus: for "without a precise body or image, having lost [her] own being, a stranger in a world of desire and power," she proceeds to "reinvent love" in a text of desire (356). As a metamorphic text, La última niebla exists in a perpetual present of "becoming," forever animated by the act of reading. The text achieves the identity denied to its protagonist through its inexhaustible potential for metamorphic renewal through interpretation.

As we have seen, such a textual identity clearly situates Bombal's work within the French Modernist tradition, and it secures for her a position in the canon of Latin-American literature as one of its most gifted representatives. María Luisa Bombal incorporated a radically new aesthetic, and in so doing she became a textual model for a new generation of writers, such as Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Elena Garro, who will match her lyricism, borrow her poetics of ambiguity and irony, and

continue her program to free the novel from the tyranny of chronology in order to emphasize the visionary over the real, sustaining thereby the text of desire, modifying it through enduring transformations.

Chapter Five

Elena Garro: Being and Otherness

La imaginación, la loca de la casa,
vale tanto como la historia para
la interpretación de los hechos
humanos.

--Alfonso Reyes

La imaginación, ¡helas!, no es contagiosa,
pero puede ser más peligrosa que la locura,
o acaso la forma peor de la locura. Quizás
sólo debían estar encerrados aquellos que
tienen el poder de imaginar mundos que
no existen o que existen, lo cual es aún peor,
detrás de los mundos visibles.

--Elena Garro

A consideration of the cultural renovations that shaped the Mexican literary landscape in the early decades of the twentieth century is necessary in order to contextualize Elena Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir within the Mexican avant-garde movement. We begin the exploration of Garro's peripatetic literary career with an enigma: why has her name been omitted as one of the precursors of the Latin-American literary Boom, when it is clear that her work fits within the parameters of what is considered the Latin-American New Novel? Second, we assess Garro's intellectual formation within the sphere of influence of the European avant-garde, particularly the Surrealist movement, and the movement's impact on the renewal of Mexican culture. Transplanted Surrealism metamorphoses into a uniquely individual, as well as a national, expression of cultural identity. Third, in order to appraise Garro's predilection for Baroque paradox, we reconsider the congruence between a particularly Mexican Baroque aesthetic and the avant-garde spirit of "rupture" in light of the problematic nature

of the contested term “Magical Realism.” Finally, we appraise Garro’s recently published journal entries in conjunction with Octavio Paz’s reflections on Surrealism in order to reveal Garro’s critical stance, a stance which contests some of the movements most cherished themes, such as the recuperation of primal unity through a reconciliation with the Other.

In La nueva novela hispanoamericana, first published in 1969, Carlos Fuentes characterizes the Spanish-American New Novel as “mito, lenguaje y estructura” (20) [“myth, language, and structure.”] Citing such notable writers as William Faulkner, Malcolm Lowry, Hermann Brock, and William Golding, Fuentes notes literature’s return to its poetic roots in language and structure, and its creation of a separate narrative reality steeped in myth, aspects that are no less authentic than life and reality themselves. He reflects that

[p]aradójicamente, la necesidad mítica ha surgido en Occidente sobre las ruinas de la cultura que negó al mito (¿pero no negó también a su gemelo enemigo, la poesía, *mal-diciéndola?*, ¿quiénes han sido los herejes, los videntes, los tesoreros de todo lo olvidado por la burguesía sino Blake y Coleridge, Nerval y Rimbaud, Lautréamont y Hölderlin, Breton y Péret, Cummings y Char?) (20)

[paradoxically, the necessity for myth has arisen in the West upon the ruins of the culture that negated it (but did it not also negate its twin enemy, poetry, *cursing it?* Who have been the heretics, the prophets, the treasurers of all that which the bourgeoisie has

forgotten if not Blake and Coleridge, Nerval and Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Hölderlin, Breton and Péret, Cummings and Char?]¹

To this enumeration of “heretics,” one could easily add Elena Garro’s name, but her omission from Fuentes’ history and the neglect of her participation in the creation of the New Latin-American Novel become intelligible only in light of the misconceptions that overshadowed her contributions. As Elena Poniatowska mentions in her essay “El golpe de rayo,” “Elena Garro era un nombre maldito” (15); [“Elena Garro was an accursed name.”] An examination of the legend that effaced and deformed her persona as author, as well as her contributions to the literary landscape of Latin America, reveals an eclectic literary formation and aesthetic sensibility rooted in the European avant-garde, the classics of the Western tradition, especially the Spanish classics of the Golden Age, and the culture and folkloric traditions of her native Mexico. Through her assimilation of an avant-garde aesthetic and her intertextual appropriation and transformation of the mythical heritage offered by both the Western and pre-Columbian traditions, Garro rewrites, transforms, and explodes some of the Surrealist’s favorite themes, particularly the myth of a paradise of origins accessible through a discourse of love.

Elena Garro’s novel Los recuerdos del porvenir was published in 1963 during the initial stages of the Latin-American literary Boom. However, it was written in 1953, prior to the publication of two significant works that constitute the

¹ This and subsequent translations are mine unless parenthetically indicated.

cornerstones of the canon, namely, Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo published in 1955 and Cien años de soledad (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez. Yet even as Fuentes considers Rulfo's work the greatest expression of the Mexican novel and the initiator of the new Latin-American novel of the 1970s (16-17), Garro's novel does not appear in his discussion of the Boom's precursors. Garro wrote her first novel in homage to her childhood experiences in Iguala, Mexico, while convalescing from an illness in Switzerland (Carballo, "Elena..." 485). As she would do with much of her subsequent work, she exiled this text to silence and oblivion in a trunk, from which the partially burned manuscript was rescued ten years later and subsequently published (485).

Emir Rodríguez Monegal does acknowledge Garro's precocious classic in his history entitled El Boom de la novela latinoamericana (1972), but the Uruguayan critic mentions Garro in reference to García Márquez's Nobel Prize masterpiece:

Y García Márquez viene asimismo de toda la novela experimental de este siglo, de Borges y de Rulfo, de Carpentier y de Fuentes, hasta de ese extraño libro, Los recuerdos del porvenir (1963), de la mexicana Elena Garro, en que la historia de Francisco Rosas y sus dos queridas (Julia, Isabel) está contada con una óptica y un estilo que anticipan milagrosamente mucho de los mejores hallazgos de Cien años de soledad, hasta la letra menuda de algunas metáforas, de esas apariciones sobrenaturales, del tiempo

congelado en un instante privilegiado, y las bruscas soluciones de continuidad en el relato. (79)

[And García Márquez derives likewise from the whole of the experimental novel of this century, from Borges and from Rulfo, from Carpentier and from Fuentes, even from that strange book, Recollections of Things to Come (1963), from the Mexican Elena Garro, in which the story of Francisco Rosas and his two lovers (Julia, Isabel) is told from an optic and a style that miraculously anticipate many of the best discoveries of One Hundred Years of Solitude, even down to the fine print of certain metaphors, of those supernatural apparitions, of time congealed in a privileged instant, and the abrupt solutions to continuity in the narrative.]

Rodríguez Monegal insists that the uncanny similarities between these two works do not constitute an instance of plagiarism; rather, they illustrate the omnivorous appetite of García Márquez, who assimilated and transformed many great works of the Western literary canon in the totalizing anatomy that Cien años de soledad represents.

In Nueva historia de la novela hispanoamericana (1986), the writer and critic Fernando Alegría corrects Fuentes' omission by placing Garro's name between those of Rulfo and García Márquez, and he states that "[s]i no resulta obvio el por qué pongo este nombre entre los de García Márquez y Rulfo, bastará decir que Garro coincidió con ellos al descubrir las claves de un lenguaje narrativo abierto a la mitificación de la historia americana" (276). ["if the reason

for my placement of this name between García Márquez and Rulfo is not obvious, suffice it to say that Garro simultaneously discovered the key to a narrative language open to the mythification of American history.”] Alegría echoes Rodríguez Monegal’s observations, and he comments that

Es una tentación decir que la novela de Elena Garro queda como una extraña partitura que García Márquez años después ejecutó una gran orquesta. No hablo, por supuesto, de influencias sino de concordancias. Ambos novelistas comparten el conocimiento secreto de la comunicación con el submundo de la realidad fantástica latinoamericana. (227)

[It is a temptation to say that Elena Garro’s novel is like a strange score that García Márquez many years later rendered into a great symphony. Of course, I am not referring to influences but, rather, concordances. Both novelists share the secret wisdom of communication with the undercurrent of fantastic Latin-American reality.]

Illustrating this insight by comparing the unforgettable characters in Garro’s novel with those of García Márquez in Cien años de soledad, Alegría states that they are “de la misma familia” [“from the same family”] as the memorable Buendía clan. Both Rodríguez Monegal’s and Alegría’s essays place Garro in the same literary context as García Márquez; however, their opinions on Garro in relation to García Márquez only reluctantly grant her the acclaim she deserves in the opinion of critics such as Anita K. Stoll, John Brushwood, and Emanuel Carballo.

The references to Garro's novel as "strange" in comparison to those of her contemporaries, as well as its omission from Fuentes' literary history of the novel are particularly notable given that Los recuerdos del porvenir exemplifies Fuentes' characterization of the New Novel as "mito, lenguaje y estructura" (20). The literary context that engendered this novel reveals that its production fits within the ideological and aesthetic parameters of the avant-garde, and Garro's work often exhibits a particular response to avant-garde tenets of rupture and revolution by contesting them through the use of paradox and ambiguity.

As Elena Garro reveals in "A mí me ha ocurrido todo al revés," an autobiographical confession in which she professes a life-long attraction to paradox, she fervently believed that she endured a star-crossed fate (39-51). The curse that dogged her stemmed in part from her indomitable, charismatic, and flamboyant personality, as well as her passionate belief in exposing both the injustice perpetrated by an authoritarian Mexican government and the hypocrisy of Mexican intellectual and cultural elites in an era when such revelations by a woman were considered socially unacceptable and even politically dangerous. Garro, as crusader and activist, became obstinately committed to questioning official history (Cypess 65) and to criticizing oppressive institutions (Rosas Lopátegui 13).

Garro's marriage to the poet Octavio Paz, a figure of international literary stature who would win the 1990 Nobel Prize, proved to be a mixed blessing that ironically contributed both to her renown and to her eventual alienation from public intellectual life. Garro recounts the dysfunctional dynamic of her marriage

in journal entries and poems that have only recently come to light in Rosas Lopátegui's biography. In fact, poetry was considered to be the only genre not explored by this talented author, a opinion dispelled by the appearance of intimate, spare, and often surreal poems that portray the fragmentation of a subject in conflict, as she recounts in the poem "El llano de los huizaches"². In an unpublished interview granted to Rosas Lopátegui in 1997, Garro states that she kept her poetry a secret, because Paz did not tolerate her intellectual and artistic competition in a field he considered his own (18, n.4). Recalling Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own," Rosas Lopátegui observes that Garro's poetry and journal entries become emblematic of her struggle for selfhood and intellectual autonomy, and they represent an authentic voice of self-expression and critical observation silenced by the constraints of an asphyxiating marriage (27).

Initially, Garro's connection to Paz afforded her a cultural environment that mirrored and continued the cultivated atmosphere in which she grew up, an atmosphere that profoundly influenced her formation as a writer (Rosas Lopátegui 135). Paz's world, and his public place in it, offered contact with the tight circle of the Mexican intelligentsia, as well as with some of the preeminent literary figures of the European avant-garde. However, as the couple's relationship soured, and long after it ended, Paz's increasingly powerful literary stature cast a lasting shadow on her life and literary career (Ramírez 44). After

² "Huizache" is the Nahuatl name for a type of acacia tree that grows in desert and semi-desert conditions. It has a fern-like leaf, small, yellow fragrant flowers, very long spines, and is very hardy. Diccionario de Mejianismos, ed. Francisco J. Santamaría (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1959) 608.

her divorce from Paz in 1959 and the government repression that ensued after the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 in which she was implicated, Garro went into self-imposed exile in Spain, and later France, where she bitterly lamented the difficulty of publishing her subsequent work (Rosas Lopátegui 22). She was not able to publish until the 1980s, when her works received renewed academic interest in North-American universities, and the 1990s, following her return to Mexico (Ramírez 55). Commenting on the author's peripatetic life as well as the censorship that plagued her, Rosas Lopátegui observes that, Garro "fue silenciada por 'las cabezas bien pensantes,' la misoginia y la corrupción" (27); ["was silenced by 'well-thinking heads,' misogyny, and corruption"].

As is the case with the contradictory biographical information concerning Elena Garro, even the date of her birth remains dubious. It appears in interviews, biographical notices, and anthologies variously as December 11, 1920, 1916 (Toruño 59), or 1917 (Ramírez 33, Rosas Lopátegui 137). Born in Puebla, Mexico, Garro spent an idyllic childhood in the provincial town of Iguala in the state of Guerrero, and she grew up in a household where books, reading, music, and culture were central to family life. Her parents' large library afforded her intellectual appetites a wide range of reading choices, ranging from the Spanish, Greek, and Latin classics (Muncy, "The Author Speaks..." 27) to the Baghavad Ghita and the Upanishads (Poniatowska, Octavio Paz... 28). In an interview with Michèle Muncy, Garro recalls reading Homer's Iliad when she was eight years old, deeply moved by the epic's heroic values (32-33). Her fondness for that work becomes evident in thematic and character appropriations, as well as the

intertextual references that appear in Los recuerdos del porvenir. The violence that paralyzes the fictional town of Ixtepec, as well as the town's isolation of the outsider, Julia, as the locus for its torments, have their antecedents in the epic assault on Troy and the notorious captivity of the Spartan queen, Helen.

Garro's intellectual education was fostered by her father, a progressive, well-educated Spaniard known as a theosophist and orientalist (Poniatowska, Octavio Paz... 28), a gentleman who believed in women's education. He taught his daughters Latin and French as well as an enduring passion for the Spanish Renaissance classics (Muncy, "The Author Speaks..." 26-27, 33). Garro credits her Mexican mother, an avid reader and an engaging *raconteuse*, for her own imaginative storytelling talents (27). She recalls that her parents allowed her to grow up in absolute freedom, a factor that encouraged her rebellious nature. From them she gained an appreciation for "la imaginación, las múltiples realidades, el amor a los animales, el baile, la música, el orientalismo, el misticismo, el desdén por el dinero y la táctica militar leyendo Julio César y a Von Clausewitz" (Carballo 477); ["the imagination, multiple realities, the love of animals, dance, music, orientalism, mysticism, disdain for money, and military tactics through reading Julius Caesar and Von Clausewitz."] Her parents' progressive views and eclectic cultural legacy left her a firm belief in the powers of the imagination to uncover truth (Cypess 66), and an abiding faith in its potential to create separate fictional worlds that revealed to her "la posibilidad de vivir dentro de una realidad infinitamente más rica que la realidad cotidiana"

(Garro, El árbol 9). ["The possibility of living within a reality infinitely richer than daily reality."]

Imagination and freedom inform and influence Garro's Baroque aesthetic of paradox which deliberately fuses opposites in order to deliver an ambivalent and subversive message. Garro explores the concept of paradox to great effect through the naïve optic of her childhood memories, her lost paradise, which she claims are the greatest influences on her work (Rosas Lopátegui 11). Rosas Lopátegui cites Emmanuel Carballo, the Mexican critic who has written of Garro most extensively: "[c]reo que la religión de Elena es la infancia y la mayor influencia en su literatura es ella misma en sus primeros años de vida. Es la creadora de un realismo que ya no es realismo crítico...." (11). ["I believe that Elena's religion is childhood and that the greatest influence on her literature is she herself, in her first years of life. She is the creator of a realism that is no longer critical realism."] Much as was the case in Proust, Garro's unique view of reality, from which she creates "paraísos posibles" (11) distinguishes her as an innovator of a type of realism that Carballo characterizes as embracing the antithetical innocence of the fairy tale and the horror of the fantastic, while maintaining a unique Mexican point of view devoid of national prejudices (Carballo, "Elena..." 487).

Garro's insistence on the autonomy of the imagination also explains her passion for the Spanish classics, with their accent on the marvelous and the whimsical, aspects that also characterize her own literary works (Muncy, "The Author Speaks..." 33). In addition to the Iliad and other works of classical

antiquity, Garro has reiterated on many occasions her fondness for Spanish Golden Age literature, especially the theater. In the preface to her one-act play El árbol (1967), for example, she mentions memorable works by Baroque authors such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón, and Tirso de Molina, as well as the anonymous work, “La Estrella de Sevilla,” and she credits them for initiating her into “el deslumbrante mundo de la fantasía española del cual no acabo de salir” (9). [“the dazzling world of Spanish fantasy from which I have not yet emerged.”] She does not think highly of the contemporary avant-garde, who, in her estimation, pale in comparison with the Baroque:

Para mi vergüenza no leo casi nunca los autores modernos de vanguardia, me parecen ramplones y faltos de imaginación, comparados con los incomparables y eternos vanguardistas españoles. Un baño diario en su inagotable fantasía es lo que deseo a todos aquellos que quieren permanecer siempre jóvenes.
(11)

[To my chagrin I almost never read modern avant-garde authors, they seem to me vulgar and unimaginative, compared to the incomparable and eternal Spanish avant-garde authors. A daily bath in their inexhaustible fantasy is what I desire for those who wish to stay forever young.]

Garro's praise of the Baroque and her curious comment on the avant-garde warrant further examination, since critics have variously described her work as

both Surreal and Magical Realist, terms that she came to abhor, and whose influence she eventually denied (Ramírez 28).

Many critics, among them Toruño, Stoll, and Carballo, have surmised that Elena Garro received a rich cultural legacy from Octavio Paz, a heritage reflected in her work. Poniatowska correctly points out that Garro has been practically obscured by Paz's fame, and she states that "Garro ha quedado tan confundida con Octavio Paz que muchas veces resulta difícil separar su obra y su vida del nombre del poeta" ("Elena Garro: la partícula revoltosa" 101). ["Garro has become so confused with Octavio Paz that it often becomes difficult to separate her work and her life from the poet's name."] In this respect, Garro resembles the figure Virginia Woolf named "Shakespeare's sister," left at the stage door, unable to exercise her life's vocation, the theater, and later turning to fiction whose production she often hid, because her considerable talent was underappreciated in the restrictive social environment in which she lived (Rosas Lopátegui 18-20, 27). Nevertheless, we must of necessity examine Paz's relationship to Garro's work, because both authors shared a similar cultural legacy to which they responded in largely individual ways: Paz, through poetry and the essay, and Garro, through fiction and the theater, and secretly, through journals and poems, many of which remain unpublished.

In her article "Elena Garro y el surrealismo," Stoll credits Paz's distillation of Surrealist technique and ideology to fit his own Mexican circumstances with the dissemination and transformation of this European movement into a Latin-American context (112). She then examines the Surrealist elements that surface

in Garro's work. Underscoring points of contact between Garro's Magical-Realist fiction and Surrealism, she categorizes as Surrealist the importance of transformation in Garro's work, specifically through the idealization of woman as an agent of transformation, and the fusion of two distinct world views and configurations of time: a pre-Columbian, mythical perspective with its concept of cyclical time, blended with a European, historical outlook characterized by a linear temporal sense. Stoll also qualifies as Surrealist Garro's belief in the magical power of words (a concept shared by André Breton), the surprising quality of her images, her anti-authoritarian stance, her delight in the fusion of paradox and contradiction through the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality, and a predilection for the Gothic (113-116). To this list of Surrealist techniques and themes, one could add Garro's nostalgic quest for, and remembrance of, an ahistorical paradise of origins where duality is abolished, a sanctuary which can be accessed through fantasy (Eigeldinger, Mythologie... 252). While Garro's lost paradise consists of the golden age of childhood with its innocence and promise, the Surrealist Breton seeks the same innocence in his "âge d'or," through the reconciliation of opposites achieved by means of reciprocal love. According to Eigeldinger's interpretation of this myth, "[l]'amour unique est en quête de l'espace et du temps de l'âge d'or, qui détient les secrets de la transparence perdue et rétablit le couple prédestiné dans le sentiment de l'innocence originelle" (255). ["exceptional love seeks the space and the time of the golden age, which holds the secrets of lost transparency and reestablishes the predestined couple in the feeling of original innocence."] While the search for an

innocent paradise remains an ambivalent theme in Garro's work, it remains to be seen whether Garro developed these ideas primarily through her contact with Paz, since mutual correspondences exist between the texts of both authors, or whether they result from the Baroque sensibilities that characterize the soul of Mexican culture, values that she acquired as a child, and which she eventually combined admirably with European avant-garde ideas acclimated to a new cultural context.

Before Garro traveled with Paz to Paris where they both met the avatars of the Surrealist movement in 1937 and 1946, the avant-garde was a well established phenomenon in Latin-American culture. According to literary historians Gilberto Mendonça Teles and Klaus Müller-Bergh, a proliferation of avant-garde manifestoes swept the continent beginning in 1921. Many of these appeared in national newspapers either in translation or appropriated and adapted by native critics. Among these pronouncements figured Marinetti's Futurist ideas of rupture, Apollinaire's conciliatory "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes" (1918), a dictum of a new poetic aesthetic that balanced the best of the classical tradition and the spirit of the new, and Surrealism's precepts concerning intuition and dream (30). These avant-garde ideas became very quickly incorporated with political ideals, which in turn recast the avant-garde as a medium that could address nationalist preoccupations, providing a subversive mode of dismantling "los elementos simbólicos, primero de la Metrópolis colonialista y después de la Europa, emisora de elementos de vanguardia" (31). ["the symbolic elements, first of the colonial Metropolis and then of Europe,

transmitter of avant-garde principles.”] The avant-garde movement in Latin America tended to address two particular ideas; first, it provided a means of reevaluating national and historical issues and themes in a novel way, resulting in the heightened estimation of the continent's, especially Central America's, pre-Columbian past as well as the celebration of its “mestizaje” or hybrid nature; second, it encouraged the exploration of the linguistic possibilities of language in order to find an authentic American expression that could rival its European models in virtuosity and technique (32). These two dynamic tendencies, as Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh observe, created a new message, a composite of the European avant-garde and of a uniquely American response to it that simultaneously and paradoxically revealed the tension between the European and American world-views (32). The avant-garde did not manifest itself uniformly and in equal strength across the continent. It was considerably tempered in the southern cone, as the new expression of avant-garde thinking and art began to arrive much earlier than in the rest of the continent, where it had time to mature into distinctive national expressions (71). However, the northern part of the continent experienced the ideology of rupture, renovation, and experimentation much more acutely (71).

Both of these literary historians single out Mexico and Central America as the most important regions in the context of avant-garde culture, due in part to the region's rich and enduring pre-Columbian heritage, and to a deep awareness of colonial cultural traditions (77-78). Mexico, in particular, became the theoretical epicenter of the avant-garde movement, because of its recent historical trauma,

the Revolution. The ensuing political explosion and period of reform that followed it created a favorable environment in which to put into practice the revolutionary theories advocated by the Surrealists. The Mexican aesthetic of rupture was expressed principally through the media of painting and sculpture, set forth through the pronouncements of muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who synthesized the movement's European styles, such as Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, and Dadaism, while he advocated the universality of an aesthetic enterprise based on the particularity of Mexican culture. He expounds this view in the "Manifiesto del sindicato de obreros, técnicos, pintores y escultores de México, o declaración política, social y estética" published in 1923 (99-101). Siqueiros exhibits the revolutionary spirit of the European avant-garde in his advocacy for political change. He demands that the aesthetic renovation of culture come from the reappraisal of Mexico's indigenous past, pointing out that "*el arte del pueblo de México es la manifestación espiritual más grande y más sana del mundo y su tradición indígena es la mejor de todas*" (author's emphasis) (99). ["The art of the Mexican people is the greatest and healthiest spiritual manifestation in the world and its indigenous tradition is the best of all."]

The new estimation of Mexican culture was also promoted by the Mexican poet and essayist Alfonso Reyes, who envisioned a new Latin-American identity based on the utopic synthesis of pre-Columbian indigenous culture and European culture:

[s]oñamos, como si nos acordáramos de ella (Edad de Oro a la vez que Tierra Prometida) en una América coherente, armoniosa,

donde cada uno de los fragmentos, triángulos y trapecios encaje, sin frotamiento ni violencia, en el hueco de los demás. ("Capricho..." 77-78)

[We dream, as if we remembered it (the Golden Age as well as the Promised Land) in a coherent, harmonious America, in which each fragment, triangle and trapeze fits without friction or violence into the remaining spaces.]

As Reyes' observation demonstrates, the Mexican avant-garde not only celebrated its indigenous culture, but it also turned to the country's colonial past with its rich cultural legacy. The recuperation of Mexico's colonial past through its classical Baroque texts became one of the aims of the Mexican avant-garde movement. Scholars such as Abreu Gómez interpreted the Baroque works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in series of essays, and the works of Sigüenza y Góngora and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón were reedited after years of obscurity (78).

Two groups in particular were responsible for the reappraisal of Mexico's indigenous past and the dissemination of Surrealist principles (Langowski 32). The first, the *Estridentista* movement, centered around the figure of Manuel Maples Arce, who, in conjunction with other writers, published manifestoes inspired by Apollinaire's ideas of simultaneity and the new. As Maples Arce states in item VII of his "Comprimido estridentista" (102-110), the group advocated an aesthetic of rupture that synthesizes all the "isms," not in a conciliatory gesture of syncretism, but in an effort to create an authentic aesthetic expression based on spiritual urgency, in order to convey the encompassing and

polymorphic nature of emotion and sensory information. His “Comprimido estridentista” self-consciously displays the linguistic aims of renovation and rupture with its extensive use of puns, neologisms, vulgarity, and machine-like rhythms. The other group, *Los contemporáneos*, who took a “universalist approach to poetry and art,” (Wilson 2-7), disseminated the European avant-garde aesthetics through a literary journal by the same name, published between 1928 and 1933 (Langowski 32). The aesthetic of rupture advocated by Maples Arce’s manifesto finds itself echoed in the titles of the essays that appeared in the journal, such as that of art critic Miguel Pérez Ferrero’s “El arte nuevo como agresión” (123-130). As Langowski notes in his study El surrealismo en la ficción hispanoamericana (1982), a measure of the popularity of Surrealism in Mexico, as well as the country’s cultural importance in the diffusion of the avant-garde movement, can be gauged by Breton’s visit to Mexico in 1938, Benjamin Péret’s six-year residence in that country between the years 1941 and 1947, and the Surrealist art exhibition organized by Wolfgang Paalen in 1940 (32).

Langowski finds Paz’s aesthetic theories, closely allied to French Surrealism, among the most important literary interpretations of Surrealism in Latin America (32). In an essay, “Razón de ser” (132-135), the text that inaugurates his literary review *Taller* in 1939, Paz acknowledges the cultural legacy of the group whose inheritors receive a stimulus rather than a model:

Si heredamos algo, queremos con nuestra herencia conquistar algo más importante: el hombre. Es decir, la “tarea”, llamemos así a nuestro destino, hoy ligado a nuestra afición y vocación,

profundizar la renovación, dotándola de un esqueleto, de coherencia lírica, humana y metafísica. ("Razón de Ser" 135)

[If we inherit anything, we want to conquer with our inheritance something more important: man. In other words, the "task," as we shall designate our destiny, today tied to our inclination and vocation, is to *deepen* the renewal, endowing it with a skeleton of lyrical, human, and metaphysical coherence.]

Paz added a moral and political component to his predecessors' legacy of universalism, inspired by his exposure to Marx, one which he found perfectly mirrored in Surrealism (Wilson 2-4).

In their recent analysis of the Latin-American avant-garde, Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh list the earliest avant-garde writers such as Rodolfo Usigli, Manuel Maples Arce, Carlos Pellicer, Jaime Torres Bodet, José Gorostiza, Xavier Villaurrutia, Salvador Novo, and Agustín Yañez, and they enumerate their descendants, Octavio Paz, Juan Rulfo, and Elena Garro (78). The inclusion of Garro with the names of Paz and Rulfo attests to the cultural legacy that informs her work, and to the heightened estimation of her *oeuvre* as equal in importance to that of the better known authors.

Garro offers a glimpse of this exhilarating epoch in her country's cultural history in Memorias de España, 1937. Published in 1992, this personal testimonial invites us to witness an important moment in the literary history of Mexico, her experience of the Spanish Civil War, as well as her introduction to the Parisian literary scene that same year. The significance of Mexican aesthetic

renewal in her own literary apprenticeship can be deduced from the emphatic position her intellectual formation occupies in the opening lines of her memoir. In the first paragraph she establishes the classical roots of her intellectual foundation, while she reveals her own naïveté toward the revolutionary spirit that informed the avant-garde, the perspective that motivated Paz and Garro's journey to Spain in 1937:

Yo nunca había oído hablar de Karl Marx. En casa y en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras estudiábamos a los griegos, a los romanos, a los franceses, a los románticos alemanes, a los clásicos españoles, a los mexicanos, pero a Marx, ¡no! El latín era obligatorio, así como las raíces griegas; era una educación muy diferente a la de ahora.

(5)

[I had never heard of Karl Marx. At home and in the College of Philosophy and Letters we studied the Greeks, the Romans, the French, the German Romantics, the Spanish classics, the Mexicans, but Marx, no! Latin was required, as well as the Greek roots; it was a very different education compared to today's.]

Garro's reminiscence reveals the integration of the classical tradition and European intellectual thought that characterized post-revolutionary Mexico, a process promoted by a group of intellectuals who called themselves the "Ateneo de la Juventud" (1909-14). Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, and José Vasconcelos became its most illustrious members. *The Atheneum* provided the intellectual framework for the future members of *Los contemporáneos* through a

lecture series that focused on classical and Latin-American themes, lectures whose demand for aesthetic and ideological renewal paved the way for the greater universalism of *Los contemporáneos* (Carballo, "Alfonso Reyes" 111-12). On the same page as her denial of Marx, Garro mentions the profound influence which *Los contemporáneos* exercised on the writers of her generation, and she credits them with the cultural renewal of Mexico and her own introduction to European avant-garde literature:

El grupo de los "Contemporáneos" reinstaló la cultura en México después de la Revolución y de la sangrienta Revolución cristera. Los "Contemporáneos" no eran políticos, sólo eran eruditos. Ellos nos enseñaron a T.S. Eliot, a André Gide, a Joyce, a Malraux, a Mallarmé. (5)

[The "Contemporáneos" reinstated culture in Mexico after the Revolution and the bloody Cristero Revolution. The "Contemporáneos" were not politicians; they were scholars. They introduced us to T.S. Eliot, André Gide, Joyce, Malraux, and Mallarmé.]

As Garro defends her classical formation, she mentions the leading writers of the European avant-garde, but she does not name any Surrealists. This may be due to her preference for the thematic content of the Classical texts, such as those of the Spanish Baroque, in which she detects the element of the incongruous and the autonomy of the will and imagination so prized by the

Surrealists. They contain “la fantasía que más entiendo” (10); [“the fantasy that I best understand”], as she states in the preface of her drama El árbol:

[m]e proclamo discípula, mala, pero discípula, de los escritores españoles. No sólo de los autores de teatro sino de los prosistas, desde los clásicos, hasta Valle Inclán, Gómez de la Serna, etc., que me han enseñado el disparate, ya que no he podido alcanzar su imaginación y fantasía. (10)

[I proclaim myself a disciple, a poor one, but a disciple, of Spanish writers. Not only of the authors of drama, but also of the prose writers, from the classical ones up to Valle Inclán, Gómez de la Serna, etc., who have taught me the art of the absurd, although I have not been able to reach their level of imagination and fantasy.]

These authors share with the Surrealists the concept of the absurd and the marvelous existing simultaneously within the quotidian, into which the marvelous irrupts to create a self-conscious situation of awareness, otherness, or “desengaño,” an ironic and paradoxical revelation of truth. Garro’s predilection for the Baroque rather than Surrealism resonates with what González Echevarría sees as an overall preference in Latin-American sensibilities for an aesthetic that prizes difference and incongruity, one better suited to the expression of a particularly American point of view: “the plurality of New World culture, its being-in-the-making as something not quite achieved, of something heterogeneous and incomplete” (198-199).

Certainly, Garro was not the first to detect a Baroque spirit permeating the aesthetics of the avant-garde. Part of the Mexican avant-garde program, influenced by Apollinaire's dictum of a new poetic aesthetic balanced between the best of the classical tradition and the spirit of the new (Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh 30), included a renewed interest in, and the recuperation of, Baroque colonial texts. Specifically, the Latin-American avant-garde admired the dynamic appropriation and transformation of classical texts by the Baroque writers, as well as the inclusiveness that allowed for the blending of high and low culture, and the margins and the center. While the Baroque validated the character of American language and expression, it also allowed for the expression of Otherness that ensued from a Latin-American sense of difference (González Echevarría 197-198). In the Mexican context the Baroque example offered a novel method through which to express its complex reality of cultural mixture (Oropesa 4-6), bridging opposing cultural traditions and forms in order to create "a porous national literature" that would harmonize them (xii). On the level of the individual, the paradox that arose from the aesthetic of difference, which embraced the strangeness of Otherness, disclosed, "a sense of one's own rarity, of oddity, of distortion" (González Echevarría 198). The Baroque aesthetic admitted the blending of discourses, often dissonant, that valorized the composite nature of New World culture, nations, and individuals. The peculiar constitution of these entities could now be legitimized due to an avant-garde's ideology of rupture that shifted its focus from the center to the periphery in search of novelty and authenticity.

A similar agenda of self-searching and appraisal informed the Spanish “Generation of ‘27,” a diverse group of young poets so named because of their gathering in 1927 to celebrate the tricentennial anniversary of the Baroque poet Luis de Góngora’s death (Paz, Hijos del limo 204-205). These writers and critics assembled in order to recuperate and reevaluate the forgotten, once superlative Baroque author who created verse characterized by its formal architecture, elaborate conceit, linguistic virtuosity, and daring metaphors. They perceived significant resonances between the avant-garde and Góngora’s aesthetics. His work served as a model of linguistic renewal as well as a classic example of the conceptual genius of cerebral poetry, the ultimate example of art-for-art’s sake valued by many members of the “Generation of ‘27” (González Muela and Rozas 7-9). This group’s rehabilitation of the Baroque master’s works influenced his reappraisal in Latin America as well, since many of its members, whom Garro met through *Los contemporáneos*, emigrated to Mexico to escape the Spanish Civil War.

The Baroque aesthetic, in which the extraordinary, the grotesque, the marvelous, the paradoxical, and the incongruous proved so attractive to Spanish Baroque sensibilities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, found expression in the prose, poetry, and drama of such notable figures as Cervantes, Calderón, Góngora, Quevedo, and Gracián. With the conquest of the New World, already a mythical construct in the figure of a paradise of origins in the Baroque imagination, the Baroque aesthetic of difference became actualized in the

previously unknown continent through the marvelous, that much-contested term in Latin-American literary criticism.

Alejo Carpentier situates the “marvelous real” in the historical event of the conquest, the violent merging of two antithetical world-views, in which it is embodied in strange, amazing, terrifying, ugly or simply inexplicable situations, cultures, and objects encountered by the conquerors. He emphatically distinguishes the “marvelous real” from “Magical Realism” and Surrealism, by reassigning the term “Magical Realism” to its original author, Franz Roh, and by restricting its definition to its original use, as a term to describe a certain type of art in which “se combinan formas reales de una manera no conforme a la realidad cotidiana” (“Lo barroco...” 129); [“real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality”] (“The Baroque...” 103). Furthermore, Carpentier does not ascribe the “marvelous” as it is understood in Surrealism to the context of the marvelous real to be found in Spanish America. He limits the marvelous in Surrealism to its expression in painting, where “todo está premeditado y calculado para producir una sensación de singularidad” (“Lo barroco...” 130); [“everything is premeditated and calculated to produce a sensation of strangeness”] (“The Baroque...” 103-104); and he objects to the application of such a contrived Surrealist aesthetic to the expression of American authenticity. However, his dismissal of Surrealism in favor of what he terms the “marvelous real” betrays the tendency, noticed by Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh, to deny the European roots of the Latin-American avant-garde in order to stress its originality (23).

The humor and irony that result from the juxtaposition of the incongruous, are the “effect[s] of ‘objectified’ surprise” that are intentionally fabricated, and the irony arising from such aesthetic experiments represents a critical response, “a challenge, an injunction to reevaluate the nature of art, of the world, of human perception” (Genova, “How Modern...” 89). In contrast to “manufactured mystery,” Carpentier posits the existence of the marvelous as “latent and omnipresent,” a commonplace occurrence in Latin-American reality, culture, and history. The interpretation of this exotic reality through a sensibility already attuned to the Baroque aesthetic of exuberant vitality requires “un lenguaje apto para expresar nuestras realidades” (“Lo barroco...” 135); [“a language appropriate to the expression of our realities”] (“The baroque...” 107). In this manner the Surrealists’ aim of rupture and renewal intersects with Carpentier’s interpretation of the Baroque and the marvelous real, and in the end, the marvelous aspect of Latin-American reality becomes a subjective matter of interpretation; after all, its magic can only be revealed from the vantage point of the observer’s own perception of apparent incongruities. In defense of Breton, one must reiterate that he also rejected the deliberate and forced interjection of the mysterious into art as well as life not only as inauthentic, but ultimately, as without merit. The “marvelous,” he elucidates, can only be experienced when the artist surrenders to the possibility of its unexpected manifestation in art and life (La Clé... 12). However, Carpentier firmly believes that the marvelous as a construct and as a cultural phenomenon manifests itself more readily within Latin-American reality.

Since Breton's observation proves to be similar to Carpentier's opinion of the "marvelous real," the Cuban essayist's ideas provide evidence of the avant-garde's swift acceptance, appropriation, and transformation of the new aesthetic in Latin America (Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh 23). Amid the preexisting Baroque sensibility deeply rooted in the Latin-American cultural tradition, the native avant-garde reinvigorates this dynamic force with its own spirit of iconoclastic novelty, thereby authorizing the individual and the national projects of interpretation of the marvelous American reality.

The problem of the "marvelous real" or its widely-accepted synonym "Magical Realism," can then be understood in terms of the transformation and acclimatization of the avant-garde movement to a new reality in which it serves a different aesthetic and ideology. In particular, Surrealism's emphasis on the interpretation of the marvelous shares important affinities with the Magical Realist's conception of the marvelous. Luis Leal's definition of "Magical Realism," for example, closely follows Carpentier's idea of "the marvelous real." Leal carefully separates the concept from fantastic, magical, psychological, and Surrealist literatures for a variety of reasons; first, he claims that Magical Realism does not rely on the fabrication of oneiric states, distorted reality, or imagined worlds; in other words, it does not designate escapist literature. Second, Magical Realism does not aim to evoke emotions, but rather to express them. Third, it does not delve psychologically into the motivations or actions of characters; it merely presents them. Finally, Leal claims that it is not an aesthetic movement ("Magical Realism..." 121). Instead, Leal maintains that Magical Realism

exemplifies a particular response to and interpretation of reality, as well as an exploration of the mysterious interplay between the individual and his circumstance:

¿Cuál es esa actitud del magicorrealista ante la realidad? Ya hemos dicho que no crea mundos imaginarios en los que podamos refugiarnos para evitar la realidad cotidiana. En el realismo mágico el escritor se enfrenta a la realidad y trata de desentrañarla, de descubrir lo que hay de misterioso en las cosas, en la vida, en las acciones humanas. ("El realismo mágico..." 232-233)

[What is the attitude of the Magical Realist toward reality? I have already said that he doesn't create imaginary worlds in which we can hide from everyday reality. In Magical Realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts.] ("Magical Realism..." 121)

This stance toward reality, he continues, has its origins in the "marvelous real" embodied in the American continent's discovery and its historical reality ("Magical Realism..." 121-122). In this respect, Leal's views coincide with Carpentier's suggestion that the marvelous in Latin-American reality derives from a particularly subjective mode of perceiving it, one that remains inherent in the convergence of opposing world views and in the individual's sense of difference.

How do Carpentier's and Leal's pronouncements diverge from self-conscious Modernism, and from its emphasis on individual subjective experience

as well as its stress on the autonomy of the imaginary? How do these authors' interpretation of Magical Realism differ from Surrealism's valuation of subjective experience, as well as from its efforts to capture in word and image the viewer's awareness not only of a suprareality hidden behind objects and reality, but also of the marvelous that lies hidden in the quotidian? If meaning within the avant-garde project depends "on the context in which the object is perceived, the emphasis placed on the individual beholding eye" (Genova, "How Modern..." 89), does this not recall Leal's conviction that Magical Realism comprises a particular individual's stance or perception of reality and a peculiar awareness of the incongruity between self and circumstance?

These affinities render the term "Magical Realism" problematic, as Langowski has observed. Its intimate kinship with French Surrealism, a term Langowski uses so inclusively as to denote the entire avant-garde, proves that "el surrealismo ha sido un movimiento penetrante; que es posible hallar sus características aun bajo otros nombres en la ficción hispanoamericana" (36); ["Surrealism has been a penetrating movement; it is possible to find its characteristics even under other names in Hispanic-American fiction."] Ultimately, Langowski's observation suggests that the obstacle to interpretation lies in terminology, a problem that Genova addresses while she notes the "complex, protean" qualities inherent in the terms "modern" and "surreal" ("How Modern..." 83). Mendonça Teles and Müller-Bergh, supported by their comprehensive study of the diffusion of the avant-garde in Latin America, concur with this assessment. They recognize that the most important methodological problem facing the

scholar remains not only the proliferation of terminology to refer to the avant-garde, an aesthetic ideology that has itself lost its own signification as these problems of definition prove, but also a continuing bias of interpretation founded on the nationalistic and continental desire to demonstrate the originality of Latin-American literary movements (23).

The novelty and the exoticism of Latin America, a territory of synthesis and Otherness, proved powerfully attractive to the French Surrealists who visited Mexico, as they saw in this Otherness the living expression of their own aesthetic aims. Likewise, Latin Americans perceived in the avant-garde not only a means to evoke the novelty of the continent, but also a mode that prized the autonomy of individual consciousness and allowed for a unique way of contemplating the Otherness within. However, the reflection at which both the European and the Latin-American gaze in the mirror represents none other than the synergy of cultures, a decentered perspective infused with the Baroque spirit of rupture.

Elena Garro sensed intimately the alienated position of the Other that she occupied as a woman endowed with imagination and talent, marginalized to the periphery of intellectual and social life. She expressed this sense of isolation, comparable to madness, in a journal entry from 1947:

La imaginación, ¡helas!, no es contagiosa, pero puede ser más peligrosa que la locura, o acaso la forma peor de la locura. Quizás sólo debían estar encerrados aquellos que tienen el poder de imaginar mundos que no existen o que existen, lo cual es aún peor, detrás de los mundos visibles. (Cited in Rosas Lopátegui 163)

[Imagination, alas!, is not contagious, but it can be more dangerous than madness, or even the ultimate form of madness. Perhaps only those who have the power to imagine worlds that do not exist, or that exist, even worse, behind visible worlds, should be locked up.]

Garro's journal observations form a direct and personal critical response to the ideas with which she and Paz came into contact through the avatars of the avant-garde movement during their residence in Paris between 1946 and 1962. Paz finally met Breton in 1950, and he maintained a close, admiring relationship with him until Breton's death, an experience that Garro confirms in her journal and that Paz recounts in the essay, "André Breton o la búsqueda del comienzo," collected in Corriente alterna (1967). In this essay, Paz interprets Breton's ideas on automatic writing, and the analogical relationship between language and nature, as well as the magical power of words to create distinct realities and to reveal the marvelous. Specifically, he interprets Surrealism's concept of a return to an original paradise and the Other as a means of this return, as well as the revelation of a unique, marvelous reality that becomes possible through the centrifugal force of rupture and renovation embodied in the innocence of man:

El surrealismo es un movimiento de liberación total, no una escuela poética. Vía de reconquista del lenguaje inocente y renovación del pacto primordial, la poesía es la escritura de fundación del hombre. El surrealismo es revolucionario porque es una vuelta al principio del principio. (Corriente... 55-56)

[Surrealism is not a school of poetry but a movement of liberation. A way of rediscovering the language of innocence, a renewal of the primordial pact, poetry is the basic text, the foundation of the human order. Surrealism is revolutionary because it is a return to the beginning of all beginnings.] (Alternating... 50)

The *Other* presents the means of returning to this principle, the double self evoked by means of the word, as well as the *Other* represented by the proletariat, by colonial slaves, by primitive myths, and by revolutionary utopias whose centrifugal force destabilizes the power vested in institutions and received truth (Corriente... 57). Such revolutionary destabilization clears the path for the revelation of a unique reality, as he concludes in the following observation, “[r]ebelión y revelación, lenguaje y pasión, son manifestaciones de una realidad única. El verdadero nombre de esa realidad también es doble: inocencia y maravilla. El hombre es creador de maravillas, es poeta, porque es un ser inocente” (Corriente... 57). [“Rebellion and revelation, language and passion are manifestations of a single reality. The true name of this reality is also a double one: innocence and marvels. Man is the creator of marvels; he is a poet because he is an innocent being”] (Alternating... 52). Paz believes that innocence and wonderment reside particularly in women, children, lovers, the inspired, and the insane, because their inherent ingenuousness and lack of responsibility predispose their words and deeds to a certain aesthetic candidness through which cosmic truths are revealed. They are often perplexing and contradictory “signs,” whose signification must be interpreted in order to be deciphered

(Corriente... 57). Paz typically includes the misogynist objectification of women in this instance as “magnets” and “lightning rods,” passive receptors of some divine madness to be recorded and decoded by the privileged poet or as the receptacles through which the reconciliation between the human and the natural are effected, and through whom, as though over a “bridge,” man can reach the mythical paradise (58). In the essay Paz best reveals his admiration for Breton in the following observation based on his recollection of the French iconoclast as a person, in which he admits that his own writing maintains a silent dialogue with the Surrealist master, a conversation comprised of “*réplica, respuesta, coincidencia, divergencia, homenaje, todo junto*” (Corriente... 58); [“objections, answers, agreement, disagreement, homage, all these things at once”] (Alternating... 53). In a sense, the same could be said of Garro’s fiction and drama, which at times comprises a retort, answer, coincidence, and divergence from Paz’s reflections on the avant-garde.

In contrast to Paz’s open admiration of Breton and Surrealism, Garro, the marginalized Other extolled in Paz’s essay, kept a critical, intellectual distance from the Parisian revolutionary intellectual circle that her husband frequented and admired. Garro’s frustration reflects the alienated position of women vis-a-vis Surrealism as a movement of “liberation,” and it reveals the movement’s underlying misogyny, a tendency that Jennifer E. Milligan has noted:

The Surrealists chose to mythify and glorify woman as a muse, or source of poetic inspiration, through the juxtaposition of the spiritual and carnal in her. Women, however, were not valued as creators in

their own right, and the objectification inherent in this process, which implicitly denied female autonomy, alienated many women writers. (31)

A keen observer of the cultural milieu of post-war Paris, Garro came to disdain the intellectuals' revolutionary ideology as she perceived the glaring hypocrisy that arose between the ideological stance and the practice of those ideals. Garro was especially critical of the dysfunctional social dynamic between men and women, and of the crisis of identity visited upon both sexes by contemporary society (Rosas Lopátegui 149). During this time she wrote poignantly of her own fragmentation and loss of identity as a woman on the periphery of revolutionary circles, in poems such as "Soledad" and "El llano de huizaches," a poem that records in a Cubist style her own disembodied voice as it calls her name while gathering to herself the various parts of her disjoined body in a desperate effort to achieve psychic wholeness (cited in Rosas Lopátegui 166-167). She criticizes the intellectuals' celebration of the revolutionary ideals of liberty, and she sardonically observes: "El mundo es un asco... ¡Oh, libertad, libertad, cuántos crímenes se cometen en tu nombre! Me da risa. La libertad no existe con mayúscula. Simplemente es un espacio vital y espiritual, que termina en donde empieza el espacio del otro" (168). ["The world is disgusting... Oh, liberty, liberty, how many crimes are committed in your name! It makes me laugh. Liberty with a capital letter does not exist. It is simply the living and spiritual space that ends where the space of the other begins."] While she excoriates the bombastic praise of revolutionary ideals, Garro observes the intellectuals' egotistical striving

for power (170), and she reveals that the freedom the radical intellectuals extol proves to be an empty gesture. Garro's self-censorship of her poetry³ illustrates the problematic nature of intellectual and creative autonomy for feminine imagination, and exemplifies a generalized practice among Hispanic women writers that results from both literary convention and social repression (Mora, "Crítica feminista..." 5-6). As Garro's critical assessment of the revolutionary literati attests, freedom of expression through the free exercise of the imagination proves particularly elusive for women, a plight that renders intelligible her equation of imagination with an exceptional form of madness.

In light of the multiplicity of the New World avant-garde in which Elena Garro participated, the shifting figure of metamorphosis becomes the perfect vehicle to convey the paradoxical problematic of Otherness, gender, and incompleteness. As a metaphoric figure it externalizes and renders concrete the radical sense of estrangement that the individual experiences toward the self and the external world, due to the restrictive roles allotted to him or her in the Latin-American social context. Metamorphosis not only portrays the striving for identity of New World protagonists, but it also represents emblematically the tension inherent in a Baroque spirit of appropriation, fusion, and paradox that can be found in New World texts. From the prodigious genius of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the finest representative of New World Baroque, to Elena Garro's fiction and drama influenced by the ideological aesthetics of the Surrealist movement, the dynamic of blending inherent in the process of metamorphosis joins distinct

³ Rosas Lopátegui records that Garro hid her poetry and journal entries from Paz's critical scrutiny, and that she burned some of them on his request (24).

world views and modalities of perception into a seamless composite whole, the text, without denying either the origins of its cultural antecedents, or the individuality of its constituent parts.

Like an improvised riff, the Latin-American avant-garde forms a complex web of interlaced connections with its borrowed models, historical reality, and mythical and colonial past. It grows organically, incorporating the received models while acclimating them to the particular circumstances of each nation, and to the imperatives and needs of a particular author. Garro shows us the plurality and multidimensionality of reality and time, the undying nostalgia for the innocence of a golden age, the Surrealists' most cherished myth, and the impossibility of its fruition in the satisfaction of desire and love for female protagonists. In this aspect, Garro's novel repeats the leitmotif of Bombal's work, which examines a failed discourse of courtly love and shows its impossibility for a woman. If the reconciliation between opposites and the journey to a lost paradise of origins resides in the woman's body, as the Surrealists believe, both authors prove that neither desire nor the longed-for paradise offer the redemption or fulfillment that their female protagonists seek. In this respect, both authors present different versions of Kristeva's contemporary exiled Narcissus. The quest fails, according to Kristeva, because the "particularity" sought through love's mirror cannot be reflected without showing its fragmentation, as she elaborates:

Tous les discours d'amour ont traité du narcissisme, et se sont constitués en codes de valeurs positives, idéales. Théologies et littératures, par-delà le péché et les personnages démoniaques,

nous convient à cerner dans l'amour notre territoire propre, à nous ériger comme *propres*, pour nous dépasser dans un Autre sublime, métaphore ou métonymie du souverain *Bien*. C'est parce que nous manquons aujourd'hui de *propre*, couverts de tant d'abjections, et que les jalons qui assuraient l'ascension vers le bien se sont avérés douteux, que nous avons de crises d'amour. Disons-le: des manques d'amour. (14)

[All the treatises on love have dealt with narcissism and have been constituted as codes of positive, ideal values. Theologies and literatures, beyond sin and diabolical characters, call us to circumscribe our own territory within love, to constitute ourselves as *particular*, in order to go beyond ourselves in a sublime Other, metaphor or metonymy of the sovereign *Good*. It is because today we lack being *particular*, covered as we are with so much abjection, because the signs that insured our ascent toward the good have been proven questionable, that we have crises of love. Let's admit it: failures of love.]

Both authors end their protagonists' quests for individuation in alienation and the dissolution of the self, which they portray metaphorically through the dynamic of metamorphosis. Rather than reach a yearned for reconciliation and emancipation, woman's frustrated desire ends in petrification. If Breton places his hope and faith in a paradise where reciprocal love can flourish through the exercise of desire's freedom outside of social constraints, a paradise that can be

reached through the presence of Eros embodied in woman (Eigeldinger, Mythologie... 253-254), both Maria Luisa Bombal's and Elena Garro's narratives prove that for woman as Other, such a paradise represents nothing more than an abyss where dreams, desire, and selfhood are annihilated. Looking inward into Narcissus' black pool, the estranged self represents none other than Kristeva's wounded Narcissus in exile, deprived of love, in search of a particularity that proves as elusive as the changeable waters that now fracture a woman's image.

Chapter Six

Through the Obsidian Mirror: Temporal Metamorphosis in

Elena Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir

Per me si va nella città dolente,
Per me si va nell' eterno dolore,
Per me si va tra la Perduta Gente.
-- Dante, Inferno III, 1-3

Toma mi collar de lágrimas. Te
espero en ese lado del tiempo
en donde la luz inaugura un
reinado dichoso: el pacto de los
gemelos enemigos, el agua que
escapa entre los dedos y el hielo,
petrificado como un rey en su orgullo.
Allí abrirás mi cuerpo en dos, para
leer las letras de tu destino.
-- Octavio Paz, "Mariposa de obsidiana"

The theme of time forms the heart of Elena Garro's novel, Los recuerdos del porvenir. Objectified within an enigmatic stone, a petrified character, time and memory refract into multiple dimensions that determine the retrospective momentum of the narrative. A stone monument burdened with the tragic history of a town symbolizes the story, and, mediated through an unreliable collective narrator, the town. The narrative unfolds, retrospectively, as the town contemplates itself as through a mirror. Garro fractures the conventional sense of linear time by appropriating the matrix of the cosmic myth of renewal as the structural framework of her novel. The myth of cosmic birth and destruction constitutes a universal archetype at the core of a nostalgic quest for origins. Notable modern manifestations of this archetype include the Surrealists' myth of a golden age, a trope in which undifferentiated totality may be achieved through

a cosmic, atemporal union with the Other. The nostalgia of renewal also constitutes the marrow of utopic dreams, whether mythical or political.

In this chapter, we will examine the momentum of Garro's narrative, which depends on the very contrast between historic and mythic notions of time, and which rests on four key characters, each of whom fulfills the functions of the divine androgynous pairs of cosmic beginnings and endings. These characters form a quartet of beings whose synthesis constitutes "the protagonist" and provides the counter balance to the narrative's collective narrator. Second, we will determine how Garro borrows a constellation of crucial themes that comprise the drama of cyclical creation and destruction in order to provide a structural framework for a series of critical milestones that mark the ascending and descending movements of her novel. Taking advantage of the intertextual framework of various mythical traditions, Garro produces a parody of the quest for unity which she deconstructs through laughter in the first half of her novel, and through tears in the second half, inverting the motifs of the quest to show its ultimate fragmentation. Throughout this chapter, we will demonstrate how Garro confounds her readers with Baroque conceits, such as cases of confused identities, examples of internal duplication, and instances of misreading that deliberately deny narrative closure in order to enhance the self-referential nature of her text. Ultimately, through literary metamorphosis, Garro's narrative engenders the mirror that unleashes an apocalyptic destruction while providing the reflexive means to perpetuate the text infinitely, thereby objectifying the dynamic principle of cosmic renewal.

A cloud of legend surrounds Elena Garro's personal and literary history, an imaginative construct as enigmatic and fascinating as the Mexican author's fictional work, and the web of intrigue—a mixture of both fact and fiction—surrounded the author throughout her peripatetic career. The mysterious aura surrounding her name and reputation has contributed to Elena Garro's legendary status, which has continued to grow since her death in 1999, and it results from the renewed interest in her early and late textual production, much of it only recently made public. In particular, the seminal novel Los recuerdos del porvenir, published in 1963 and winner of the Xavier Villaurrutia Prize, has achieved the status of canonical literature as a precursor of the narratives of the Latin-American Boom of the late 1960s and 1970s. Anita K. Stoll characterizes Garro as one of Mexico's "most important contemporary writers," an artist "widely recognized as one of the most creative writers of the century" (Introduction 11). For Patricia Rosas Lopátegui, Garro's novel represents one of the first and finest examples of Latin-American "magical realism" (11-13). In addition, Rosas Lopátegui, who interviewed Garro extensively during the writer's final years and obtained her permission to write the biography, identifies the author and playwright as "una de las figuras más polémicas, contradictorias y fascinantes de la cultura mexicana," and "una de las voces más importantes de la literatura contemporánea" (11); ["one of the most polemic, contradictory, and fascinating personalities of Mexican culture"], and ["one of the most important voices in contemporary literature."] Octavio Paz, her husband of thirty years, with whom she had a decidedly conflictive relationship, believed that Los recuerdos del

porvenir was one of the best Mexican novels of the twentieth century (Poniatowska, "Elena Garro y sus tormentas" 6).

Garro uses as the novel's background the Cristero Rebellion of 1927-1929, an armed insurrection that resulted from a conflict that pitted Church interests against government reforms, and the old aristocracy against a new ruling class intent upon developing a post-revolutionary nationalism. In the story, the town of Ixtepec functions as a collective narrator who recounts retrospectively the violence and fear that seized and paralyzed its inhabitants during that epoch. A stone monument bearing an inscription represents the petrified body of the town's representative, Isabel Moncada, and the interpretation of the stone by the town triggers the collective narrator's memory as it establishes the novel's mythopoetic tone. The plural narrator, a collective functioning as the Greek chorus, begins the retrospective recounting of the tragic tale of the city and its leading aristocratic families through a reading of the inscription which describes the victim's fate, although it remains hidden to the reader until the concluding paragraph of the novel.

The stone, the depersonalized, metamorphosed body of Isabel, bears the signs of both the town's and her own traumas, and it stands as a memorial that invites the passerby's meditation. Embodying the "halfway state" inherent to metamorphic transformation, Isabel remains "as a memorial example still present within the human community," a sign of the guilt that "has not been completely punished or expiated" (Miller 2). Isabel literalizes the town's collective memory, and as a stone she represents a variant of Barkan's "figures in the mirror" (90),

and her petrification symbolizes transformation into image, a metamorphic reduction that displaces her to a Narcissistic “mirror region” in which her identity may only be discovered by the reader (90-91). As the introductory paragraph of the story reveals, the “apparent” stone represents an unreliable signifier whose many refractions of the town’s memory are as slippery as water. Its mirror reflections project infinite shafts of colors and time, blending not only one memory, but many, not one time but the convergence of past, present, and future suggested by the title of the novel. Like Echo whose bones turn into thin stones, the petrified Isabel is “heard by all who call; her voice has life” (Ovid 76). The voice *interpreted* through the communal narrator illustrates in turn a linguistic metamorphosis, and it enacts the dynamic of transformation at the textual level. Therefore, the metamorphosis that concludes the novel and impels its retelling through substitution and transference has less to do with transformation as a mythical fictional device than with the aesthetic experience that it engenders. The novel itself, then, gives the reader an exercise in “literary metamorphosis,” which according to Clarke entails an instance of “manifest absurdity,” and becomes a “reliable indicator of allegorical irony, urging the reader to reconstruct the particular pretexts undergoing parodic transformation” (1). Seen in this light, Isabel’s transformation ultimately takes on an ambivalent meaning.

In keeping with this incongruity, the translation that takes place in the first paragraph of Garro’s narrative also confronts us with prosopopoeia as Miller defines it. The depersonalization of Isabel into an object marks her as a shifting signifier that reenacts a sophisticated act of substitution. As the objectification of

the process of metamorphosis, the memorial stands for a sign, a surrogate, a projection, and a loss. Already mediated by the secondary voice of the communal narrator, the monument's signifying presence alerts readers that its "reading" represents an instance of misreading (Miller 121-122, 125). The opening paragraph of the novel, rich in Proustian echoes, conveys the sense of fragmentation and eternal repetition inherent in the process of many readings, and it hints at the circularity of a plot that offers a possibility of multiple interpretations as well as a refusal of closure:

Aquí estoy, sentado sobre esta piedra aparente. Sólo mi memoria sabe lo que encierra. La veo y me recuerdo, y como el agua va al agua, así yo, melancólico, vengo a encontrarme en su imagen cubierta por el polvo, rodeada por las hierbas, encerrada en sí misma y condenada a la memoria y a su variado espejo. La veo, me veo y me transfiguro en multitud de colores y tiempos. Estoy y estuve en muchos ojos. Yo sólo soy memoria y la memoria que de mí se tenga. (11)

[Here I sit on what looks like a stone. Only my memory knows what it holds. I see it and I remember, and as water flows into water, so I, melancholically, come to find myself in its image, covered with dust, surrounded by grass, self-contained and condemned to memory and its variegated mirror. I see it, I see myself, and I am transfigured into a multitude of colors and times. I am and I was in

many eyes. I am only memory and the memory that one has of me.]

(Simms trans. 3)

The novel's opening lines place the reader in fact at the conclusion of the novel, and they invite participation in the paradoxical retrospective interpretation, or "misreading" of the textual mirror's refractions. Thus, the reader becomes aware of the duplicitous nature of a narrative itself. Through the technique of *mise en abyme*, the story itself stands for the product of a reflection already mediated by an interpreter, the town. The collective narrator reads the stone's inscription, written long ago by the *curandera* Gregoria, and mediates an interpretation that both obscures and prompts the beginning of the narrative:

Soy Isabel Moncada, nacida de Martín Moncada y de Ana Cuétara de Moncada, en el pueblo de Ixtepec el primero de diciembre de 1907. En piedra me convertí el cinco de octubre de 1927 delante de los ojos espantados de Gregoria Juárez. Causé la desdicha de mis padres y la muerte de mis hermanos Juan y Nicolás. Cuando venía a pedirle a la Virgen que me curara del amor que tengo por el General Francisco Rosas que mató a mis hermanos, me arrepentí y preferí el amor del hombre que me perdió y perdió a mi familia. Aquí estaré con mi amor a solas como recuerdo del porvenir por los siglos de los siglos. (292)

[I am Isabel Moncada, the daughter of Martín Moncada and Ana Cuétara de Moncada, born in the town of Ixtepec on December 1, 1907. I turned into stone on October 5, 1927, before the startled

eyes of Gregoria Juárez. I caused the unhappiness of my parents and the death of my brothers Juan and Nicolás. When I came to ask the Virgin to cure me of my love for General Francisco Rosas, who killed my brothers, I repented and preferred the love of the man who ruined me and ruined my family. Here I shall be, alone with my love, as a memory of the future, forever and ever.] (288-289)

The twice removed interpretation of Isabel's petrification presents its readers with a paradigm of writing, in Clarke's words, "an allegory of writing and its effects—reading, (mis)interpretation, figuration, intertextual transmission, and so on" (2).

The plot centers on the opposition and paradoxical accommodation between the occupiers and the town's old aristocratic families, and it captures the paralyzing repetition of sadistic violence perpetrated against its most vulnerable citizens, the marginalized Indians on whom both parties prey in order to protect and further their own interests. The town's interpretation of events focuses particularly on the saga of the Moncada family and its offspring, Isabel and her brothers Nicolás and Juan (whose role in the novel is minor). In contrast to the old provincial families, the besieging government forces of reform are presented as "outsiders," and they consist of the tyrannical General Francisco Rosas, his lieutenants and their respective lovers, lodged in the ironically named "Hotel Jardín," the officers' garden of earthly delights where the women are kept as sexual slaves. However, subordinated to this plot, and configuring the mirror image of the novel's structure, we find the respective relationships of desire that

motivate the actions of the *quadrivium* of important characters, Nicolás and Isabel, and Felipe and Julia.

Many critics have focused their attention on the plight of the principal female characters of this novel, particularly Isabel. She has been interpreted as an “anti-Antigone” by Jean Franco, who explains Isabel’s petrification as a punishment for having “chosen reason of the state over family and community” (136); others consider her a representative of the paradoxical figure of “la Malinche,” a feminine archetype of treason who inhabits the Mexican folkloric and literary imagination (Cypess, “La figura de La Malinche...” 119). According to these authors, the primary feminine figures of the novel, Isabel and Julia, embody the problematic nature of being female within Mexican society (117). Many, including Franco, Anderson, Carballo, Dauster, Boschetto, and Cypess consider Julia and Isabel as a dyad, mirror images of the same figure. Dauster, for instance, sees in their duality the representation of mythical and historical time, and an inversion of the folkloric stereotype of Virgin and whore (“Elena Garro...” 65).

Critics also acknowledge the mythological component of Garro’s work, as is the case in Anderson’s assessment in which Garro uses myth in order to develop mythical aspects of cyclical time. According to Joan Marx, who has studied the Mesoamerican influence in Garro’s work, the author’s mythological appropriations evoke the themes of love, the quest, alienation, violence, and solitude. Both of these critics would agree that Garro focuses on the theme of time through the appropriation and combination of European and pre-Columbian

myth. However, few critics have considered the mythic and symbolic significance behind the fundamental relationships that exist between these female characters and their male counterparts. Undoubtedly, each specular half of the novel is indeed governed by the two female characters, but their actions are determined by relationships to a significant male character who serves as the catalyst for the female's actions. A reconsideration of the dyad Julia/Isabel to include their mythic consorts Nicolás/Felipe provides a more complex interpretation of the characters' mythopoetic function, and it elucidates the novel's temporal structure. Garro's use of the foursome to deny the narrative a single protagonist proves revolutionary, for instead of one leading character, an entire cast of characters unite their voices to create the symphonic score of the novel.

Following the cosmological cycle of creation and destruction, the narrative mirrors a circular movement from romance to tragedy. More importantly, the reconsideration of the pairs Isabel/Nicolás and Julia/Felipe explicates the confounding petrification that concludes the novel, a puzzling turn of events that many feminist critics such as Franco consider as inconsistent of the strong female character Isabel, as it represents a fate that often portrays women as victims. Lucía Melgar articulates the tension in the seemingly antithetical presentation of Isabel in the following rhetorical question: "cabe preguntarse si puede considerarse Los recuerdos del porvenir como una novela feminista y al mismo tiempo aceptar el castigo de Isabel en los términos de la voz narrativa" (59); ["it is fitting to ask if Los recuerdos del porvenir can be considered a feminist novel and at the same time accept Isabel's punishment in the terms of the

narrative voice.”] She relates this tension to the ambivalence inherent in Isabel’s character and gender—incongruities which are compounded by the collective narrative voice as it offers an “official” account of Isabel’s story that may be contrasted with a contradictory subtext (60). The perceived “inconsistencies” of a character’s inexplicable actions, from a feminist point of view, reveal the a problematic aspect of feminist criticism that Diane Purkiss terms “ ‘images of women’ feminism,” which demands that the rewriting of myth by women provide “‘positive’ images of women [that are] somehow timeless.” Such interpretations, she continues, deny the “literariness of literature,” and they fail, because of the fallacious assumption that “stories can be excised from text, culture and institution” (441-442). In other words, analyses that interpret Isabel’s petrification as an event that ought to reveal an epiphanic moral truth or as a failure to present a “positive” female character result in contradiction, because they fall short of considering the literary nature of Isabel’s metamorphosis, with its undertones of textual ambivalence and irony, classic hallmarks of Modernist and avant-garde writing. Therefore, an exploration of the significance of the dyadic relationships between Isabel and Nicolás and Julia and Felipe casts light on the complexities offered by Garro’s text. In addition, an examination of the intertextual function of the Surrealists’ myth of origin, founded on the ancient myths of divine androgyny, also proves helpful in that it functions as the subtext that Garro transforms through parody in the narrative.

The Surrealist “*âge d’or*” represents the inheritance of a long tradition of the utopian belief in a lost Eden, which abolishes history and duality. Through a

nostalgic evocation, poetry revives this *locus* of innocence with love and imagination (Eigeldinger, Mythologie... 243-244). The Surrealists believe that the poet attains this space of longing through the free expression of love, desire, and eroticism mediated through a woman's body (254). The all-encompassing, reciprocal love that results from the mystic union actualizes the lost Eden, in which nature is reconciled, time is abolished, and an original innocence is regained:

L'âge d'or de l'amour se trouve à l'intersection du passé et du présent, il les relie en recouvrant l'ingénuité première, réintégrée dans le vécu, et il s'oppose à "l'âge de boue", constitué par l'univers politico-social contemporain. Comme l'âge d'or de Novalis, il resurgit de son passé mythique et s'ouvre sur le futur. (Eigeldinger, Mythologie 255)

[The golden age of love can be found at the intersection of the past and the present, it reunites them by recuperating original innocence, reintegrating it into experience, and it is opposed to the "age of mire," constituted by the contemporary politico-social universe. As with Novalis' golden age, it surges forth from its mythical past, and opens outward toward the future.]

The myth stresses the intersection of two concepts of time, one posited outside the historical, in an age of myth, and contrasted with a degraded present in which completeness remains out of reach. As Paz points out, Eros, embodied in the

couple who symbolically represent cosmic unity, makes the recovery of the atemporal time of unity possible (Corriente alterna 58).

Many mythological traditions portray the myth of androgyny in the form of a divine pair whose significance relates to cosmogonic and eschatological concepts of time. The couples Julia/Felipe and Isabel/Nicolás, personifications of the thematic of time that they symbolically embody, govern the novel's structural ascendant and descendant movements, its specular form, and they elucidate the metamorphic finale subordinated to the aesthetic, thematic, and structural imperatives of the narrative. Garro's emphasis on the aesthetic aspect of her work rather than on its plot transforms her novel into a literally metamorphic text.

As the novel's title suggests, a complex concept of time constitutes Garro's primary concern. The title, Los recuerdos del porvenir, reflects an intertextual kinship to a work that may have inspired it, Los pasos perdidos [The Lost Steps], the notable novel by Alejo Carpentier, published the same year that Garro began to write her novel (Méndez Rodenas "Tiempo femenino..." 849). As a textual record of the collective memory of a town which thematically appropriates and deconstructs the myth of origin of the Surrealists, Garro's title reflects the thematic content of Carpentier's novel: the search for a primordial origin in which duality and the historical concept of time may be abolished. In Los pasos perdidos, the protagonist undertakes a voyage in search of origins, deep into the Amazon, in order to shed the anonymity and alienation caused by degraded modern society and to recover a lost unity. Reinterpreting the Surrealists' quest for the golden age, the protagonist seeks to achieve oneness

and transcendence through a union with the Other, the primordial forest, and its symbolic referent, woman. At the conclusion of the novel, after the protagonist returns from his journey to the center of origins, he wanders the labyrinthine streets of a large city described in apocalyptic terms. Reflecting on the human idea of time and destiny, the protagonist recalls the name of a tavern, "Los Recuerdos del Porvenir," which he entered upon reaching the threshold between forest and civilization, and he muses, "Yo vivo aquí, esta noche, de tránsito, acordándome del porvenir—del vasto país de las Utopías permitidas, de las Icarias posibles. Porque mi viaje ha barajado, para mí, las nociones del pretérito, presente, futuro" (311-312); ["I live here, tonight, in transit, remembering the future—the vast country of permitted Utopias, of possible Icarias. Because my journey has shuffled, for me, the notions of past, present, and future."] Méndez Rodenas points out that Garro retraces Carpentier's steps in order to refute the masculine notion of a paradise of origins centered on the notion of woman as primordial Other ("Tiempo femenino..." 849-859). In contrast to the Cuban, the Mexican accomplishes this task by appropriating the myth and deconstructing it in order to show the untenable nature of an ideology based on absolutes. She also undermines the apocalyptic promise, the cosmic renovation through the restoration of a utopian world, by maintaining the apocalyptic vision of destruction without offering its promised redemption. Instead, the narrative evokes a cyclical pattern of repetitive destruction that denies the assurance of a utopian renewal. In this way, Garro's vision echoes the fatalistic vision of pre-Columbian cosmological myths which interpreted the destructive agency of time.

The desire to escape historical time (or to reach the age of the Center) through the union with the Other, either erotically or by means of poetry, fascinated the Surrealists (Paz, Corriente... 63-64). Octavio Paz, who best synthesized the Surrealists' aesthetic and political aims within a Latin-American context, provides an exemplary interpretation of the Surrealists' myth of the golden age in one of his most ambitious lyrics, the vast poem entitled Piedra del sol (1957). In its elaboration, Paz achieves a sense of universalism through the work's analogies to world myths of destruction and rebirth, as he weaves together Western historical time and the cyclical, cosmic time of myth by structurally imitating the circular form of the Aztec sunstone calendar. Throughout the work, he conveys themes of duality through symbols such as Venus, a planet of cosmic and temporal importance to Western, Near Eastern, and Mesoamerican cultures (Wilson 90). Representing the androgynous divinity Quetzalcoatl, Venus was central to the Mesoamerican calendrical system and its cyclical appearance and disappearance in the night and morning skies was linked to a 52-year cycle of destruction and rebirth. Therefore, the planet stood for an unstable and dynamic universe that oscillated between order and disorder (Carrasco 91-94). The poem represents the mythical pattern of the quest with a characteristic descent into a spiritual dark night, a journey into light, and a search for the center of being. In the Surrealist paradise, the poet and the Other abolish time and history through the agency of Eros, as they fuse all dualities and glimpse the sublime joy of totality and primordial innocence. Following the cosmic wheel of creation and destruction, the lover/poet journeys from the transfiguration

of communion and integration to a fall, disintegration, and ultimate alienation (91-93). Woman, the poet's Other, represents an ambivalent archetypal figure of creation and destruction, the vehicle through which the poet experiences both unity and Otherness that lead him to his true self (96). Thematically, Paz's poem admirably illustrates the Surrealist concept of a golden age situated, according to Eigeldinger, within "un temps et un espace perdu dont les hommes coservent la nostalgie dans leur mémoire archétypale" (243); ["a lost time and space whose nostalgia man conserves within his archetypal memory."] As Paz's poem suggests, reciprocal love provides the means of cosmic union. Further, in an essay honoring André Breton, Paz reiterates that the communion between the couple abolishes all duality in order to transcend historic time:

Si los hombres somos una metáfora del universo, la pareja es la metáfora por excelencia, el punto de encuentro de todas las fuerzas y la semilla de todas las formas. La pareja es, otra vez, tiempo reconquistado, tiempo antes del tiempo. (Corriente... 58)

[If we are a metaphor of the universe, the human couple is the metaphor par excellence, the point of intersection of all forces and the seed of all forms. The couple is time recaptured, the return to the time before time.] (Alternating... 53)

A similar thematic of love, the trajectory of rise and fall, and the circular structure of creation and destruction inform Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir. In the novel, as in Paz's work, the union of two lovers, Julia and Felipe, stops historical time and allows them to escape the confines of the narrative itself into

the orality of legend. However, Garro appropriates the myth in order to reverse its outcome, and readers find their expectations confounded from the outset of the novel as they are confronted with such a duplicitous text. The petrification of Isabel, which concludes the novel, signals the quest's failure, and it represents the fall into an alienation that accompanies the search for the center of unity. The resulting monument mocks the reader through its ambiguity and renders its subsequent interpretations suspect misreadings that ultimately deconstruct the romance of origins achieved through the union with an elemental feminine. The quest, from Garro's point of view, results in immobility, cyclical repetition, and failure, a vision that recalls not a paradise of origins, but a hell worthy of Dante's *Inferno*. At the structural level, the aspects of permanence and the cyclic repetition enact themselves in a text that has neither a beginning nor an end, one which frustrates the desire for closure. Méndez Rodenas has characterized this temporal aspect of Garro's novel as coinciding with a feminine time reminiscent of Hélène Cixous's "textual feminine body," which offers a multiplicity of readings and which denies a conclusion ("Tiempo femenino..."851).

After Méndez Rodenas' elaboration of the concept of cyclical time present in Garro's work, a return to Paz's reflections on the confluence of past and future into a present of multiplicity is enlightening. At the conclusion of Los hijos del limo (1974), Paz writes of the plurality of history which renders all time multidimensional (215), an interpretation that echoes the Aztec sunstone's cosmic ideologies, as well as the conclusion of Carpentier's Los pasos perdidos. Paz praises contemporary literature's capacity to affirm a time of origins in the

present, rather than in the past, a moment in which both beginning and end, past and future are reconciled and become “dimensiones del presente”; [“dimensions of the present”]. The present, he states, becomes “el valor central de la tríada temporal”; [“the central value of the temporal triad”] (220-221). His image of time endorses a narrative practice that conceives of the novel as an open-ended structure that denies its reader finality in order to sustain a continued transformation and reinterpretation in a time of eternal becoming.

Garro's novel fulfills the expectations delineated by Paz, for she makes possible the irruption of mythical time in her narrative through the intertextual play of myth, both Western and non-Western, and by appropriating the *gravitas* of ancient tragedy, as can be surmised from the numerous allusions to fate and destiny that appear in the text. In addition to the principal motif of the androgynous pair, the frequent borrowings of mythical material from Mesoamerican origins, as well as from Greek and Roman sources such as epic, tragedy, philosophy, and mythology, establish from the outset of the narrative a sense of the fatal destiny that inexorably leads its characters to their certain doom.

Following the paradigms of intertextuality, Garro sets the stage for the unfolding of tragic circumstances from the beginning of the narrative by modeling the Moncada family on other famously doomed families, the houses of Atreus and Labdacus, and their histories on the struggles between Greece and Troy and between Carthage and Rome. The novel contains a subtext of incest peculiar to cosmic myths, including pre-Columbian ones, whose protagonists often consist

of a divine pair that initiates both cosmic creation and destruction. In addition, the motif of incest relates Garro's motifs to Ovidian themes of transformation, for as a symbol of "confusion and contagion," incest embodies the metamorphic transaction (Barkan 91). These mythopoetic themes, which constitute the core of the myth of reintegration, represent the mythological intertext that informs the Surrealist myth of origins residing in a golden age of undifferentiation and innocence.

In order to integrate these apparently divergent yet universal sources, and to juxtapose two separate concepts of time, Garro focuses her transformation on the ancient myth of androgyny, which as a component of the myth of reintegration has been widely interpreted by the Romantics, the Symbolists, and the Surrealists. Associated with concepts of eternity and time, the divine androgynous couple symbolize an anthropomorphic representation of the cosmic myth of renewal. A symbol of Oneness, the divine couple preside over periods of rebirth and destruction, signifying the alpha and the omega that mark the completion of the cycle that generates time (Eliade, The Two and the One 149). As a cosmological and eschatological myth, its operating principle holds opposition and duality in tension, cyclically enacting the transition between birth and destruction through the ritual confusion of opposites (122). It represents a universal myth of unity which reveals a nostalgia for a place of origins beyond time and history as well as the desire to escape the conflicts of the human condition:

The fact that these archaic themes and motifs still survive in folklore proves that the mystery of totality forms an integral part of the human drama. It recurs under various aspect and at all levels of cultures life—in mystical philosophy and theology, in the mythologies and folklore of the world, in modern men's dreams and fantasies and in artistic creation. (Eliade, The two... 123)

Metamorphosis becomes an apt figure through which to convey the tension of duality which engenders destruction and the nostalgic urge for transcendence, since the dynamic of transformation often emblemizes the confusion of opposites and the urge to abandon identity in order to embody Otherness.

Garro's novel features all the structural and thematic elements of the cosmic cycle enacted by the androgynous couple described by Mircea Eliade. First, the beginning of Los recuerdos del porvenir paradoxically follows its end. The characters, Julia and Isabel, incarnate the scapegoats that allow the town to cast out its sin, while it anticipates the arrival of a savior incarnated in the messenger of illusion, Felipe and the mysterious Abacuc, who are expected to liberate the town. In addition, the narrative features a symbolic return to Hesiodic Chaos with its characteristic and carnivalesque confusion of opposites, significantly initiated by a party. Furthermore, the plot features a symbolic resurrection of the "dead" through the disappearance and theft of a corpse, and later, through the interpretation of the stone memorial; the performative act of reading the monument initiates the narrative itself and reintegrates Isabel and the town of Ixtepec among the living as a multiple narrative voice. Finally, the two

mirror-image halves of the novel are presided over by two couples, Felipe and Julia, and Isabel and Nicolás, who fulfill the mythical roles of the androgynous or hermaphroditic couple. Felipe and Julia are associated with transcendent love, creation, and illusion; they therefore embody the spirit of romance. The story of their meeting, their magical, spellbinding influence on the town, and their final mysterious disappearance close the first half of the novel, and the couple dynamically enact the upward motion, or *anodos*, inherent in the comic spirit. As the symbol of vitality, the pair embody, in Joseph Campbell's words, "the wild and careless, inexhaustible joy of life invincible" (28). On the other hand, Isabel and Nicolás, as befits their tragic function, preside over destruction. Isabel's stony transformation in conjunction with the death of her brother, the symbolic consort, preside over the downward motion, or *kathodos*, of the tragic spirit which ends in fragmentation and disintegration (Campbell 26). Their actions precipitate the conclusion of the second part of the novel. Throughout the novel, Garro depicts the disintegration of the Moncadas' world, and by extension, that of old Mexican aristocracy, through the inversion of the trope of prosopopoeia, exemplified in Isabel's petrification. Depersonalization constitutes in Miller's view a "defacing" gesture

that reveals the linguistic artifice by which [prosopopoeia] operates, projecting a wholeness extrapolated from parts, pieces, and fragments [...]; a voice that is imagined to speak certain words; a proper name that is both idiosyncratic and at the same time the

ascription of putative wholeness; an inscription that may become illegible, mere marks on stone. (227)

Through the defacing gesture of petrification, Garro illuminates the failure of an ideology associated with violence to produce a significant change in human affairs. The author's use of metamorphosis as a subversive conceit that undermines and criticizes authority is reminiscent of Ovid's intentional rebuke of Augustan power in the Metamorphoses.

In the end, the interpretation of the metamorphosis (the stone's significance and its inscription) becomes meaningful in the context of textual creation, for the reading, or misreading as the case may be, of Isabel's petrified body by the collective narrator constitutes the text. In addition to literalizing Isabel's solitary and inarticulate plight, and concretizing a town's metamorphic paralysis through grief and violence, petrification and depersonalization represent other instances of the "paradox of artistic creation" (Miller 8), a self-reflexive gesture that points to the text's linguistic creation. Much as in Bombal's narrative, Garro's text takes advantage of the "tropological errors" of prosopopoeia, substitution, and misreading, which in and of themselves contain the seeds of their own destruction (Miller 127).

A series of allusions links the Moncada family's tragic destiny to an unspoken sense of guilt and establish their doom from the beginning. The patriarch of the family, Don Martín Moncada, feels the weight of an inexpressible fate: "había presencias extrañas en torno a su casa, como si un maleficio lanzado contra él y su familia desde hacía muchos siglos hubiera empezado a

tomar forma..." (24); ["strange presences surrounded his house, as if a curse put on him and his family many centuries ago had begun to take effect..."] (18). A Janus-like figure who presides over thresholds and beginnings and endings, Don Martín is haunted by another reality that permeates his waking moments. He lives in two worlds, the temporal and the atemporal, an aspect of his personality symbolized by the interruption of time that allows him to drift into a timeless realm of memory, where he recollects events that have not yet come to pass (21). His servant and double, Félix, performs a ritual of stopping all the clocks in the house in the evening, allowing its inhabitants to gravitate toward the atemporal dimension that dwells in the Moncada household:

Sin el tictac, la habitación y sus ocupantes entraron en un tiempo nuevo y melancólico donde los gestos y las voces se movían en el pasado. Doña Ana, su marido, los jóvenes y Félix se convirtieron en recuerdos de ellos mismos, sin futuro, perdidos en una luz amarilla e individual que los separaba de la realidad para volverlos sólo personajes de la memoria. (20)

[Without the ticking, the room and its occupants entered a new and melancholy time where gestures and voices moved in the past. Doña Ana, her husband, the children, and Félix were changed into memories of themselves without a future, lost in a yellow, individual light that separated them from reality to make them only personages of memory.] (14)

Suffocated by the superficiality of the provincial aristocracy of the town, Don Martín and his family feel the attraction of another force, that of a memory of wholeness achieved through death. Don Martín knows that “el porvenir era un retroceder veloz hacia la muerte y la muerte el estado perfecto, el momento precioso en que el hombre recupera plenamente su otra memoria” (34). [“That the future was a swift retrogression toward death, and death the perfect state, the precious moment in which man fully recuperates his other memory”] (28). Don Martín’s prophetic insight must be kept in mind at the conclusion of the novel, as his double nature, simultaneously being and not being in the world, determines the symbolic agency of his children. In addition, Garro emphasizes the family’s relationship to time and destruction as she connects them to the stars, symbols of cosmic time, fate, and destiny: “Un misterioso río fluía implacable y comunicaba el comedor de los Moncada con el corazón de las estrellas más remotas.” (35). [“A mysterious river flowed implacably, and connected the Moncadas’ dining room with the heart of the remotest stars”] (29). Thus, from the beginning of the novel, the members of the Moncada family trace their tragic destiny to “un presente indecible” (35) [“an indescribable present”] (29) that immobilizes them.

The town of Ixtepec itself, a circular hell that recalls Dante’s unforgettable *Inferno*, has been paralyzed by repeated acts of violence that freeze it in an eternal present, a time that abolishes any possibility of hope that might be vested in the future:

Los días se convierten en el mismo día, los actos en el mismo acto y las personas en un solo personaje inútil. El mundo pierde su variedad, la luz se aniquila y los milagros quedan abolidos. La inercia de esos días repetidos me guardaba quieto, contemplando la fuga inútil de mis horas y esperando el milagro que se obstinaba en no producirse. El porvenir era la repetición del pasado. Inmóvil, me dejaba devorar por la sed que roía mis esquinas. Para romper los días petrificados sólo me quedaba el espejismo ineficaz de la violencia, y la crueldad se ejercía con furor sobre las mujeres, los perros callejeros y los indios. Como en las tragedias, vivíamos dentro de un tiempo quieto y los personajes sucumbían presos en ese instante detenido. Era en vano que hicieran gestos cada vez más sangrientos. Habíamos abolido al tiempo. (64-65)

[All days seem like the same day, acts become the same act, and all persons are a single useless person. The world loses its variety, light is annihilated, and miracles are abolished. The inertia of those repeated days kept me quiet as I contemplated the vain flight of my hours and waited for the miracle that persisted in not happening. The future was the repetition of the past. Motionless, I let myself be consumed by the thirst that rankled at my corners. To disperse the petrified days all I had was the ineffectual illusion of violence, and cruelty was practiced furiously on the women, stray dogs, and Indians. We lived in a quiet time, and the people, like the actors in a

tragedy, were caught in that arrested moment. It was in vain that they performed acts which were more and more bloody. We had abolished time.] (58)

Future and past converge in a frozen present punctuated by violence, and the mythical fatalism of Greek tragedy paralyzes the inhabitants in complete inertia. Ixtepec's time depicts the cyclical rhythm of the everyday life of a provincial town as described by M. M. Bakhtin. In such towns, time itself

is without event and therefore almost seems to stand still. Here there are no "meetings," no "partings." It is a viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space. And therefore it cannot serve as the primary time of the novel. Novelists use it as an ancillary time, one that may be interwoven with other noncyclical temporal sequences or used merely to intersperse such sequences; it often serves as a contrasting background for temporal sequences that are more charged with energy and event. (248)

Garro contrasts the cyclical, frozen time of the present with the ascendant and descendant movements of the cosmic pairs, in order to render a paradoxical sense of retrospection that nevertheless proceeds in an opposing forward movement of unfolding. The ambivalent Janus-like perspective conveys the uneasy feeling of a threshold experience which becomes literalized in the petrification of Isabel.

The sense of a cosmic circularity implied by this perspective has its complement in the mythical constructs of Mesoamerican cultures which conveyed a hierarchical relationship of power between the rhythms of the heavens and those on earth (Carrasco 168). The sense of circularity, repetition, and violence alluded to throughout Garro's novel parallels the pre-Columbian concept of cosmic time carved in the "Piedra del Sol," the Aztec sunstone calendar that reflects a millenarist conception of time as a series of repeated creations and destructions:

The Mesoamerican cosmos had several distinctive qualities, including the fact that the cosmic setting was a dynamic, unstable, destructive one distinguished by sharp alternations between order and disorder, cosmic life and cosmic death. The cosmic order was marked by combats, sacrifice, and rebellion, as well as by harmony, cooperation, and stability. But the former actions always seemed to overcome the latter. Also, it was clear that this extraordinary cosmos demanded extraordinary ritual responses from the keepers of the four quarters, including elaborately planned human sacrifices. (Carrasco 91)

The mythical devastation of cosmic order had political connotations as well, since the Mesoamerican cosmological myths often supported official structures. To this end, the myth of Quetzalcoatl, the god of creativity and harmony who presided over cosmic beginnings and endings, becomes particularly significant, because his incestuous relationship with his sister,

Quetzalpetlatl brings about the collapse of the his mythical city, Tollan. Carrasco's interpretation of the story, on both mythic and political levels, offers an instructive perspective from which to consider the fate of Ixtepec and the Moncada siblings:

[T]he destiny of the political state is total collapse initiated by the betrayal of ritual vows, confusion of identity, the disgrace of kingship, and trickery by an enemy. [...] At the cosmological level there is the shift from orderly motion of the cosmos to its chaotic and pathetic disintegration. (178)

Carrasco's illustrations of the political applications of the millenarist myth elucidate Ixtepec's destruction, initiated by the actions of the double pairs. Ixtepec's immobility results from the failure of its leadership, both that of the old aristocracy and that of the new post-revolutionary authorities that oppress its citizens, and from the betrayal of the promises of the Revolution (Los recuerdos... 153-154.) Both sides practice deceit in order to protect their interests, and the confusion of identities embodied in the cosmic myths of incest is represented by the disappearance of characters, bodies, and the fused destinies and identities of both Isabel and Nicolás, who indeed bring about the destruction of the leading families and the outside forces that govern the town, enacting the city's destiny of cosmic destruction forecast from the beginning of the novel. The "speaking mirror" that opens the narrative provides the collective narrator with a reflective surface within which to contemplate the town's millenarian fate of repeated destruction:

Quisiera no tener memoria o convertirme en el piadoso polvo para escapar a la condena de mirarme.

Yo supe de otros tiempos: fui fundado, sitiado, conquistado y engalanado para recibir ejércitos. Supe del goce indecible de la guerra, creadora del desorden y la aventura imprevisible. Después me dejaron quieto mucho tiempo. Un día aparecieron nuevos guerreros que me robaron y me cambiaron de sitio. Porque hubo un tiempo en el que yo también estuve en un valle verde y luminoso, fácil a la mano. Hasta que otro ejército de tambores y generales jóvenes entró para llevarme de trofeo a una montaña llena de agua, y entonces supe de cascadas y de lluvias en abundancia. Allí estuve algunos años. Cuando la Revolución agonizaba, un último ejército, envuelto en la derrota, me dejó abandonado en este lugar sediento. Muchas de mis casas fueron quemadas y sus dueños fusilados antes del incendio. (11)

[I wish I had no memory, or that I could change myself into pious dust to escape the penalty of seeing myself.

I knew other times: I was founded, besieged, conquered, and decked out to receive armies. I knew the unutterable joy of war, which creates disorder and unforeseen adventure. Then they left me undisturbed for a long time. One day new warriors appeared who robbed me and changed my position. Because there was a time when I was in a green and luminous valley, of easy cultivation,

until another army with drums and young Generals came to take me as trophy to a highland where there was much water, and I learned of waterfalls and rains in abundance. I was there for several years. When the Revolution was in its final agony, a last army, encircled with defeat, left me abandoned in this dry place. Many of my houses were set on fire, after their owners had first been shot to death.] (3-4)

Doom for Ixtepec is foreshadowed from the beginning as the collective narrator rereads its destiny in the stone that Isabel becomes at the novel's conclusion. The town's cyclical destruction recapitulates a historical cycle of violence from the remote past, continuing through the Revolution. Implicitly, the town's inevitable cycle of destruction reiterates the petrified victim's fate. For, in the instance of reading, the narrator is reminded of the pair, Nicolás and Isabel, whose will to escape the paralyzing forces of cosmic destiny, if only through death, precipitates the novel's conclusion. The couple's dream of escaping the provincial town proves more life-affirming than the death-in-life offered by the provincial town: "[e]llos, los Moncada, no morirían en su cama, en el sudor de unas sábanas húmedas, pegándose a la vida como sanguijuelas" (18-19). ["They, the Moncadas, would not die in their beds, in the sweat of damp sheets, clinging to life like leeches"] (11). The siblings' "intimate contagion," to borrow Barkan's phrase, and the constellation of allusions to death that surrounds them, mark the pair as symbols of a cosmic and Dionysian force related to chaos.

Garro foreshadows the children's association with destruction from the beginning of the novel. The townspeople perceive the Moncada siblings as different, and they predict that "no van a acabar bien" (14); ["They'll come to no good end"] (6). Both Nicolás and Isabel play in two trees which they name "Rome" and "Carthage," and in their childish play they threaten each other with mutual devastation, games that foreshadow their fate at the conclusion of the novel. Significantly, Isabel occupies "Carthage," and upon the threat of ruin issued from "Rome," the collective narrator states that "La niña sabe que a 'Roma' se le vence con silencio" (13); ["The girl knows that Rome will be conquered by silence"] (5). The trees' names and the narrator's statement eventually cast light on the ambiguous significance of the petrification that occurs at the end of the narrative. Carthage's annihilation foretells Isabel's fate, for Rome, representing both the town's authority and her brother's will to destruction, becomes a catalyst for her transformation. Even as Isabel's petrification stands as a form of silencing, within the novel silence becomes a subversive tool that the female characters employ in order to preserve their integrity and to bring about the destruction of their oppressors. Therefore, the children's amusements mirror the direction of the plot toward an inevitable end.

Both Nicolás and Isabel envision their escape from the stagnant provincial town as a rupture within a present time that has physically and spiritually fragmented them. Even the materiality of their bodies seems too confining; Nicolás exclaims ¡Yo no quepo en este cuerpo! (35); ["I don't fit in this body!"] (29), and Isabel, who exhibits the same double nature as her father, also shares

his sense of unease. Like her father, she occupies two separate realms: “Había dos Isabeles, una que deambulaba por los patios y las habitaciones y la otra que vivía en una esfera lejana, fija en el espacio” (31); [“There were two Isabels, one who wandered through the rooms and the patios, and the other who lived in a distant sphere, fixed in space”] (25). Reiterating the Moncada’s cosmic association, Isabel’s mother describes her as a short-lived but magnificent comet, a comparison that associates the child with myths of destruction and renewal, as does her assertion that the child’s existential desire to reject and isolate herself from “el Todo” constitutes a hell: “Isabel podía convertirse en una estrella fugaz, huir y caer en el espacio sin dejar huellas visibles de ella misma” (32); [“Isabel was capable of changing into a shooting star, of running away and falling into space without leaving a visible trace”] (26). Her characterization as a Mephistophelean spirit of negation underscores her role as a catalyst for destruction, a fate prefigured from the beginning of the novel.

Isabel, as Melgar points out, does not fit within the parameters of passive femininity defined by her society (64). She has a youthful masculine profile (29), and the town notes her masculine characteristics, such as valor and defiance (266). In fact, Isabel’s and Nicolás’ traits become blended on several occasions (247, 271), a deliberate confusion that establishes their dual nature; their combined actions manifest a singular force of rupture and disorder. As a non-conformist and rebellious child, Isabel prefers to climb trees with her brothers (13), to dance with wild abandon (14), and to express unpopular political opinions (91). While Nicolás ascribes special “powers” to her, their mother acknowledges

her difference and dismisses her boyish pranks as those of a “bad” child (13). In addition, Isabel rejects the secondary position she must conventionally assume as a young woman, and she bristles at the prospect of being exchanged as merchandise in matrimony, the only future afforded to her by the social norms that govern her life. She vows never to be married and to escape its confines by any means:

—No me voy a casar—contestó la hija.

A Isabel le disgustaba que establecieran diferencias entre ella y sus hermanos. Le humillaba la idea de que el único futuro para las mujeres fuera el matrimonio. Hablar del matrimonio como de una solución la dejaba reducida a una mercancía a la que había que dar salida a cualquier precio. (24)

[“I am not going to get married,” the daughter answered.

Isabel disliked having differences made between her and her brothers. The idea that a woman’s only future was matrimony she found humiliating. For them to speak of marriage as a solution made her feel like a commodity that had to be sold at any price.]

(17)

The prospect of marriage not only disgusts Isabel, but it also displeases both the servant, Félix, Don Martín’s alter ego, and her brother Nicolás, who abhors the idea that she might leave the confines of the patriarchal home with a stranger. The text contains numerous references that imply an incestuous attachment between the two siblings, a notable detail that relates them to the

divine androgynous pair who presides over many cosmological myths of regeneration. The possibility of a marriage for his sister torments Nicolás, and he perceives it as a deceitful act on the part of his father and Isabel; he suffers from jealousy at the mere idea of Isabel's potential suitor. He dreams of their joint escape, to leave behind the stagnant town, and to keep alive a secret pact between them: "[Isabel] Lo traicionaba, lo dejaba solo, rompía el lazo que los unía desde niños. Y él sabía que tenían que ser los dos: huirían de Ixtepec" (18); ["She was betraying him, leaving him alone, breaking the bond that had united them throughout their lives. And he knew that they had to be together: they would run away from Ixtepec"] (11). When sent to work in the mines of Tetela for economic reasons, Nicolás distrusts his father's motivation for the separation of the siblings, and he imagines that his father intends to redirect Isabel's attention to the subject of marriage: "No quería confesarse que en sus vueltas al pueblo temía encontrarse con la noticia del matrimonio de su hermana, y que ese temor inadmisibile lo atormentaba" (33); ["He did not want to admit that each time he went back he was afraid of being confronted with the news of his sister's marriage and that this inadmissible fear tormented him"] (27). After his departure for the mines, a chthonic symbol that connects Juan and Nicolás to the underworld, Nicolás languishes during the separation from his sister. Isabel, mirroring his anguish, turns away from the world as if transported to a different temporal reality (31), assuming a stony remoteness that prefigures her final fate.

References to the siblings' shared and inescapable fate abound in the novel. However, none convey a more powerful and symbolic sense of destiny

than a strange flashback that Isabel experiences in the darkness and solitude of her room while contemplating Nicolás' absence. She reflects on the memory of her brother's voice soothing her fears in the darkness of the room which they had shared as children, as they would imagine themselves the protagonists of a folktale told by their neighbor, the old Dorotea:

Y Nicolás e Isabel bajaban de la mano hasta el cuento de Dorotea. Asustados, se encontraban debajo de la bóveda subterránea donde se guardan las vidas de los hombres. Ardían millones de velas de distintos tamaños; algunas eran ya pábilos chisporroteantes. La mujer negra que se paseaba entre ellas se acercaba y las apagaba de un soplo. Entonces los dueños de las velas morían sobre la tierra. Nicolás salía del cuento con la voz insegura.

—Tu vela está del mismo tamaño que la mía... (155)

[And Nicolás and Isabel descended hand in hand to Dorotea's story. Terrified, they found themselves down in the subterranean vault where men's lives are kept. Millions of candles of different sizes were burning; some were nothing but sputtering wicks. When the black woman who walked up and down among them blew out a candle, its owner on earth died. Nicolás came out of the story with a tremulous voice.

"Your candle is the same size as mine.]" (149)

The image of fate in the story, the “black woman,” reflects a pre-Columbian configuration of the fates, and her telluric nature places her within a chthonic realm from which spring all creation and destruction. Nicolás understands the single destiny that unites him to Isabel, and their shared fate is forecast in this instance and throughout the narrative through his ironic refrain, “Nos iremos de Ixtepec...” (262). The references to the chthonic, to the celestial, and to the theme of flight establish the pair’s connection to a cosmic dimension free from the frozen time of the town of Ixtepec, and the allusions confirm the pair’s function as catalysts of change. In addition, the deliberate blending of their features and characteristics, and the incestuous nature of their relationship underscore the mythic symbolism inherent in their attachment.

In Chapter Two we elaborated the Mesoamerican concept of cosmic divinity, but a more detailed consideration regarding the terrifying aspect of the feminine will elucidate Isabel’s transformation into stone at the conclusion of the novel. In light of the cosmic significance of the androgynous female and the hierophantic value of stone itself (Carrasco 79), Isabel’s petrification takes on a deliberately ambivalent meaning that increases the ambiguity of the literary metamorphosis. Her transformation into stone may in fact be less a sign of punishment, a decidedly Western, Biblical, interpretation of petrification, and more symbolic of magical power, divination, and regeneration, since in Mesoamerican mythology stones are imbued with the androgynous energy of Ometéotl and have a supernatural significance (Rostas 370), an issue

considered below in conjunction with the analysis of the events leading to her actual petrification.

Susanna Rostas, in an examination of feminine divinity in Mesoamerican mythology, states that Cihuacóatl, or "Snake Woman," represented the most formidable female Aztec divinity, and her image results from the synthesis of the earlier Chichimec goddess, Itzpapálotl, or "Obsidian Knife Butterfly" (370, 373). As a warrior and destroyer, her androgynous nature was signified by her attributes, two knives that crowned her head like a diadem, and the swaddled obsidian blade of sacrifice which she carried on her back like a child. The Aztecs considered her the most bloodthirsty deity of their pantheon, because she represented the gods' collective need for human sacrifice (Rostas 370-71). Nicholson notes that she was a harbinger of evil, wars, and misery (112). Significantly, her great stone image was housed in a "black house," a temple in the proximity of the great pyramid dedicated to the principal Aztec warrior-god Huitzilopochtli, her consort or son, depending on the variant of the myth. In the cave-like darkness of her dwelling, her untouchable and blood-drenched stone image was appeased by human sacrifices every eight days (Rostas 370). According to Rostas, Cihuacóatl and many other female goddesses were at "the center of a death cult which was of the greatest importance to the Aztecs" (381). They represented the terrifying processes of a devouring life force whose cycle of destruction ensured the continuance of life. Cihuacóatl "exemplified in an extreme form" the cycle of regeneration and destruction, "blood being linked to the fecundity of the earth" (Rostas 382), and the terrifying goddess reappears as

the “black woman” that Nicolás and Isabel envision in a cave, extinguishing the flames of sputtering candles that have reached their end.

Aztec myth also offers a contrast to the devouring divine female in the figure of the goddess of love, Xochiquetzal or “Precious Flower.” Rostas notes that as the “most female of the Aztec goddesses,” the conceptions of Xochiquetzal’s femininity manifest a marked contamination by European myths and ideals of womanhood (377). As an Aztec version of Aphrodite, she represents the maiden, the goddess of love and sexual pleasure. Flowers and fruit comprise her attributes, and she dwells in a paradise in which grows the “world tree.” However, just as is the case of her Greek counterpart, she incarnates many aspects of love, and she becomes the divinity of fertility, a patroness of raw passion and sexual lust. In her seduction lie the potential forces of destruction. Rostas maintains that she originates from Huastec (378), and she represents the “Dama huasteca” of Paz’ prose poem of the same name in ¿Águila o sol?, written between 1949 and 1950, the approximate years of both Paz’s and Garro’s rediscovery of pre-Columbian myth through the work of French ethnographers (Wilson 57-58). The sexual allusions to water and to the reconciliation of male and female within her womb intimate the promise of unity through reciprocal love and further resemble attributes of Aphrodite, who also emerged out of the waters:

Ronda por las orillas, desnuda, saludable, recién salida del baño,
recién nacida de la noche. En su pecho arden joyas arrancadas al
verano. Cubre su sexo la yerba lacia, la yerba azul, casi negra, que

crece en los bordes del volcán. En su vientre un águila despliega sus alas, dos banderas enemigas se enlazan, reposa el agua. Viene de lejos, del país húmedo. Pocos la han visto. Diré su secreto: de día, es una piedra al lado del camino; de noche, un río que fluye al costado del hombre. (¿Águila o sol? 289)

[She roams the shores, naked, healthy, recently emerged from her bath, newborn to the night. On her breast glow jewels ripped from summer. The long, straight grass, the blue, almost black grass that grows at the foot of the volcano covers her sex. In her womb, an eagle unfurls its wings, two enemy flags embrace, the water rests. She comes from afar, from the humid country. Few have ever seen her. I'll tell her secret: by day, she is a stone at the edge of the road; by night, a river that flows by man's side.]

Garro's silent, unfathomable protagonist Julia appears to fulfill the role of Xochiquetzal (Marx, Aztec Imagery... 10-11). As General Rosas' war prize and mistress, her origins are mysterious and, as the "querida de Ixtepec" and "mujer de peligro," she evokes both the admiration and hatred of the town (41). For Ixtepec, Julia incarnates "la imagen del amor" (97) and her otherworldly beauty is associated with the sensuality of nocturnal flowers and the ripeness of fruit (41). Always clothed in the color rose (which characterizes her luminescence), she possesses a mysterious exotic aura that captivates the town (95). Significantly, the color rose is associated with Aphrodite, and the hue's semantic connection to the rose, a flower whose name is derived from the Latin *ros* for "dew," marks it as

a color that symbolizes rebirth and initiation (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 814). The General keeps her in the "Hotel Jardín," a "paradise" of earthly delights that recalls Xochiquetzal's garden, in which the military officials maintain their captive women as sexual slaves (42). As a captive "Helen," she inspires desire in men and envy in women (47), and she and the other women from the hotel provide the town with its only form of entertainment through voyeurism and gossip (48). As a result, she incarnates the *pharmakos*, the magician and the scapegoat, and her presence attracts the concentrated ire and admiration of the town as it blames her ethereal beauty and her impassive remoteness for the General's frustration, which often manifests itself as violence against marginalized inhabitants. The familiar "la culpa la tiene Julia"; ["Julia is to blame"] becomes a leitmotif throughout the novel, as the town refuses to come to terms with its own inequities and its participatory role in the General's repression by transferring its sense of guilt onto Julia. As a mysterious outsider, she incarnates the ultimate scapegoat.

The young woman's unassailable remoteness and silence only serve to heighten her mystery and desirability. While the General possesses her physically, he nevertheless fails to impose his being on her impenetrable psyche. On the contrary, her presence paradoxically evokes for him an unspeakable and melancholy nostalgia that tortures him, an absence that illuminates her role as a supplemental Other. Her engulfing proximity abolishes all past and future, and her memory, which he describes as "la memoria del placer" ["the memory of

pleasure”], excludes him and remains as veiled to him as an impregnable fortress:

El día de su encuentro con Julia tuvo la impresión de tocar una estrella del cielo de la sierra, de atravesar sus círculos luminosos y de alcanzar el cuerpo intacto de la joven, y olvidó todo lo que no fuera el resplandor de Julia. Pero ella no olvidó y en su memoria seguían repitiéndose los gestos, las voces, las calles y los hombres anteriores a él. Se encontró frente a ella como un guerrero solitario frente a una ciudad sitiada con sus habitantes invisibles comiendo, fornicando, pensando, recordando, y afuera de los muros que guardaban al mundo que vivía adentro de Julia estaba él. Sus iras, sus asaltos y sus lágrimas eran vanas, la ciudad seguía intacta. (80)

[The day he met Julia he had the impression of touching a star from the sierra sky, of crossing its luminous circles and reaching the girl's intact body, and he forgot everything but Julia's splendor. But she did not forget and in her memory continued the repetition of gestures, voices, streets, and men that preceded him. When he was with her he felt like a lonely warrior in the presence of a besieged city with its invisible inhabitants eating, fornicating, thinking, remembering, and he was outside of the walls that guarded Julia's inner world. His rages, his fits, and his tears were to no avail: the city remained intact.] (73)

In keeping with her image of love, and as a symbol that inspires envy and admiration, Julia remains a passive and powerless recipient of the General's passion and violence. As the General becomes consumed by his inability to possess her completely, he becomes jealous and brutal, savagely beating her on occasion. In turn, Julia responds to his force through a petrified silence that stubbornly denies him (126-127). However, Julia presides over luminosity and illusion, and she has therefore the power to distract the populace from its woes and from its guilt, containing the General's violence through the forgetfulness she evokes in him, and delaying the advent of destruction that inevitably results after her departure. While she remains with him, she also embodies the sacrificial aspect of the *pharmakos*. Her unassailable and obstinate remoteness, evoking both hatred and admiration, endows her with special powers that even the General cannot harness. Sharon Magnarelli observes:

[T]he rite of sacrifice confers certain powers, although ultimately no authority, on the victim herself. In a paradoxical manner, the victim [...] takes on the powers of a goddess who is simultaneously an object of scorn *and* venerated and who must accept her "noble" position of victim and submit willingly in order to sanctify, ennoble, and justify the actions of her sacrificer. Later, when she has been converted into a quasi-goddess figure, she can now absolve the guilt of her sacrificer(s). (97)

However, although passive, Julia does not accept her role willingly, and her impenetrable remoteness and silence delay the absolution of both the

General's and the town's guilt. Garro frustrates the scheme of sacrifice by interjecting Julia's double into the narrative, a double who, through his own magical agency, will substitute the sacrifice with illusion. Her mythical consort, the stranger Felipe Hurtado, personifies the magical counterpart to the sacrifice in the dual term, *pharmakos*. His arrival initiates time, temporarily lifts Ixtepec out of its circular stagnation, and impels Julia to decisive action.

Felipe Hurtado represents a Hermetic catalyst of transformation. As the Greek god Hermes, the stranger personifies the intermediary between humanity and the divine, and he presides over crossroads and thresholds. A metamorphic trickster figure who incarnates a *pharmakon*, or catalyst of transformation, he "is simultaneously the god of hermetics and hermeneutics, of the mystery and of its unraveling" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 500-501). Clarke categorizes the divine messenger as personifying "the medium of symbolic transmissions," a gifted rhetorician who specializes in "linguistic stealth" (5). Accordingly, Felipe controls the climactic ending of the first half of the novel, and through theft and the illusion of a theatrical performance, he distracts the town of Ixtepec in order to "steal" away, along with his counterpart, Julia. Anderson has studied Felipe's role as a messenger of hope, regeneration, and change, who nevertheless fails to motivate the citizens of Ixtepec to take action against the paralysis that immobilizes them ("El ahogado..." 102-106). However, an analysis of Felipe's role that fails to take into account Julia's complementary capacity in the cycle that closes the first part of the novel does not provide a complete picture of his role in relationship to the narrative structure as a whole. In order to bring about the

upward momentum of the narrative, the *anodos*, which marks the halfway point of the novel, he must be joined with the Other, Julia.

The narrative establishes the mysterious and even magical nature of Felipe from the moment of his arrival on an empty train, carrying a small suitcase. Surprise, delight, and suspicion follow in his wake (38). The townspeople continually refer to him as “el forastero” or “el extranjero” [the outsider or stranger], and they suspect that he has come for Julia (75). He possesses an aura of otherworldliness that complements Julia’s own exoticism, and this aspect is repeated throughout the first part of the narrative: “¡Es otra cosa, algo que no hemos visto por aquí! (39); [“He’s something else, something we haven’t seen around here!”] (34).

Upon arriving, he walks without hesitation to the Hotel Jardín, where he meets Julia, wrapped in a bright pink robe, and the pair converse, as if they had always known each other (40). Significantly, the narrator describes Julia’s physical appearance and her mysterious effect on the townspeople for the first time in the narrative in conjunction with the stranger’s arrival, establishing the pair’s magical connection (41). Denied lodgings in the Hotel Jardín because of the General’s violent jealousy, Felipe receives the hospitality of Don Joaquín, Isabel’s and Nicolás’ uncle, who allows the stranger to stay in a pavilion in the host’s enigmatic, mysterious garden. The specular counterpart to the Hotel Jardín where Julia presides as goddess of love, Don Joaquín’s garden becomes the *locus amoenus* of enchantment and illusion, a negative Paradise, characteristic of Ovidian landscapes:

Un vapor se levantaba del jardín. Las plantas despedían olores húmedos y penetrantes. Las grandes hojas carnosas con los tallos llenos de agua se mantenían erguidas a pesar de la violencia del calor. Los macizos de plátanos se llenaban de rumores extraños, la tierra era negra y húmeda, la fuente lucía su agua verdosa y en su superficie flotaban hojas en descomposición y enormes mariposas ahogadas. (56)

[A mist rose from the garden. The plants gave off dank, penetrating odors. The large fleshy leaves with stalks full of water remained upright despite the intense heat. The clumps of banana plants were filled with strange noises, the earth was black and humid, the fountain disported its greenish water while decaying leaves and huge drowned butterflies floated on the surface.] (50)

At night, the garden becomes a luminous site of mystery from which emanates the soporific fragrance of flowers. Walking through it, the stranger leaves no footprint (56) and his enigmatic demeanor causes rumor and speculation. As an ambivalent signifier, he denotes something different for each person; for some he resembles a thief and an ominous sign of disaster, while others, particularly the Moncada siblings, regard him as a welcome harbinger of good fortune whose arrival breaks the spell of petrified time that plagues the town:

La noticia de la llegada del extranjero corrió por la mañana con la velocidad de la alegría. El tiempo, por primera vez en muchos

años, giró por mis calles levantando luces y reflejos en las piedras y en las hojas de los árboles; los almendros se llenaron de pájaros, el sol subió con delicia por los montes y en las cocinas las criadas comentaron ruidosas su llegada. El olor de la tisana de hojas de naranjo llegó hasta las habitaciones a despertar a las señoras de sus sueños inhábiles. La inesperada presencia del forastero rompió el silencio. Era el mensajero, el no contaminado por la desdicha. (65)

[News of the stranger's arrival coursed through the morning with the speed of joy. Although this had not happened in many years, time whirled through my streets, causing lights and reflections on the stones and the leaves of the trees; the almond trees were filled with birds, the sun rose with delight in the mountains, and in the kitchens the servant girls chattered noisily about his coming. The scent of orange tea permeated the rooms to awaken the ladies from their foolish dreams. The stranger's unexpected presence broke the silence. He was the messenger, the one who was uncontaminated by the misfortune.] (58-59)

Felipe's *pharmakon* consists of illusion and words, specifically the illusion of the theater. Upon asking his hosts if there is a theater in town and receiving a negative reply, Felipe diagnoses the town's affliction as a lack of illusion: "—Es una lástima! aseguró éste con tranquilidad. Los demás se miraron sin saber qué decir. —La gente vive más feliz. El teatro es la ilusión y lo que le falta a Ixtepec

es eso: ¡La ilusión!” (74); [“‘That’s too bad!’ he said calmly. The others stared at one another without knowing what to say. ‘People are happier when they have a theater. It provides a little illusion and that’s what Ixtepec needs: illusion!’”] (67).

During the oppressive summer heat of August and the impending rains that promise to diffuse its petrifying spell on the town, Felipe and Isabel decide to put on a play in order to break the town’s inertia (118). The pavilion in Don Joaquín’s magical garden becomes the site of the theatrical production, and Isabel and Felipe, its main protagonists: “En la obra, Isabel dejaba de ser ella misma y se convertía en una joven extranjera. Él era el imprevisto viajero y las palabras formas luminosas que aparecían y desaparecían con la magnificencia de los fuegos de artificio” (119); [“In it, Isabel ceased to be her usual self and was transformed into a young foreign girl. He was the unexpected traveler, and the words were luminous shapes that appeared and disappeared with the magnificence of fireworks”] (112). Isabel wears a red dress, foreshadowing the dramatic reversal of the narrative, since it is a color she will don at the novel’s conclusion, and pronounces her prophetic lines. The collective narrator considers the scene retrospectively, and contemplates the augury represented within the play, the *mise en abyme* that ironically reflects, as in a mirror, the novel’s surprising conclusion:

Vuelvo al pabellón y escucho todavía flotantes las palabras dichas por Isabel y que provocaron su interrupción: “¡Mírame antes de quedar convertida en piedra!...

Las palabras de Isabel abrieron una bahía oscura e irremediable. Aún resuenan en el pabellón y ese momento de asombro allí sigue como la premonición de un destino inesperado. Los tres hermanos se miraron a los ojos como si se vieran de niños corriendo en yeguas desbocadas cerca de las tapias del cementerio cuando un fuego secreto e invisible los unía. Había algo infinitamente patético en sus ojos. Parecieron siempre mejor dotados para la muerte. Por eso desde niños actuaron como si fueran inmortales. (120-121)

[Returning to the pavilion, I hear Isabel's words, which caused her to stop short, still floating on the air: "Look at me before I am turned to stone!"

Those words opened a dark, unbridgeable chasm. They still echo in the pavilion, and that moment of surprise persists like the premonition of an unforeseen destiny. The brothers and sister looked into each other's eyes as if they saw themselves as children racing off on runaway mares near the cemetery walls when they were united by a secret, invisible fire. There was something infinitely pathetic in their eyes. They had always seemed somehow better suited for death. That was why since childhood they had acted as if they were immortal.] (114)

As a site of enchantment, the magic pavilion presided over by Felipe becomes a gateway of transformation, a threshold to a mirror world in which memory and time converge to bring together the ascendant and descendant

motions of the novel in one instant. According to Bakhtin, the threshold represents a "chronotope" that "is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life," and it denotes a *locus* of "falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (248). In fact, after Julia decisively leaves the Hotel Jardín in order to break with the past (137), the pavilion becomes the site of the lovers' reintegration and liberation. Julia, ethereal and luminescent, meets Felipe at the threshold of the pavilion's door, and they enter the magical space side by side, "como si pertenecieran a un orden diferente" (134); ["as if they belonged to another order"] (127). Having transcended the mundane world of Ixtepec as well as her fate through her encounter with Felipe, Julia returns to the Hotel Jardín so visibly changed that neither passersby nor the General recognize her. Her transformation consists of shedding the past in order to walk into the future: "Detrás de ella iban quedando sus fantasmas: se deshacía de su memoria y sobre las piedras de la calle iban cayendo para siempre sus domingos de fiesta, los rincones iluminados de sus bailes, sus trajes vacíos, sus amantes inútiles, sus gestos, sus alhajas" (136). [Dropping behind her were her ghosts: she divested herself of the memory of them, and on the stones in the street were falling for all time her festive Sundays, the illuminated corners of her dances, her empty dresses, her useless lovers, her gestures, her jewels"] (130). Transformed by the single objective to abandon the confines of Ixtepec, she even sheds her shoes, a symbolic gesture of rejection of all earthly materiality which represents her transcendence into another realm.

After the couple's fateful meeting, the expectation of a terrible doom assails the town, and the couple's transgression provokes the anticipated violence and sacrifice of the offenders (138). The General and his minions await Felipe at Don Joaquín's gates, and the chorus broods, "La noche espera a su víctima" (144); ["The night awaited its victim"] (137). However, in keeping with the vitality symbolized by the pair, the author takes advantage of the inversions initiated by the "threshold experience," for the chronotope of the threshold inaugurates an instantaneous time which "has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time," producing the "all-embracing chronotopes of *mystery-* and *carnival-time*" (Bakhtin 248). During this mysterious moment of inversion, Garro frustrates the reader's expectations and employs the theatrical device of *deus ex machina* in order to extricate the pair of lovers, Felipe and Julia, from the circular hell of Ixtepec, reminding her readers of the surprising conclusions of Euripidean drama. In fact, the moment Felipe crosses the threshold of Don Joaquín's gates, time "se detuvo en seco" (145); ["stopped dead"] (138), and the town became petrified into a circular hell suspended outside of time and submerged in darkness. While the temporal violation turns the world upside down, Ixtepec enters the time of mystery wherein the *pharmakos*, Felipe, having joined his Other, Julia, in a cosmic sexual union, defeats the forces of death through the comic laughter engendered by Garro's parody of romance. The motif of Julia's "theft" suggests the triumph of life over death and enacts a symbolic resurrection (Bakhtin 222). The lovers' escape literalizes the Surrealists' belief in the transcendent power of love to abolish all

opposition in a momentary glimpse of totality and paradise that resides outside of historical time. Symbolizing the cosmic pair presiding over beginnings and endings, their union and flight closes Part I of the novel with the upward dynamic characteristic of the comic spirit. Textually, Felipe and Julia escape the realm of the historical represented by the space of the narrative itself, for their flight cannot be verified by the immobilized narrative voice, but rather, it becomes a matter of hearsay, an account told by a mule-driver passing through the town (a device which Rulfo uses). The couple vanishes, and the story enters the space of orality that typifies the fairy tale:

Se asustó al ver que sólo en Ixtepec seguía la noche. Nos dijo que es más negra doreada por la mañana. En su miedo no sabía si cruzar aquella frontera de luz y sombra. Estaba dudando cuando vio pasar un jinete llevando en sus brazos a una mujer vestida de color de rosa. [...]

Supimos que era ella por las señas de su traje rosa, la risa y las cuentas de oro que llevaba enroscadas al cuello. Iban al galope.

Al salir de la noche se perdieron por el camino de Cocula, en el resplandor de la luz rosada del amanecer. El arriero entró al pueblo y nos contó cómo todo Ixtepec dormía redondo y negro con las figuras inmóviles en las calles y en los balcones. (146)

[It frightened him to see that the night continued only in Ixtepec. He told us that the night seemed darker when it was surrounded by the morning. In his fear he did not know whether to cross the border

between light and darkness. He was still hesitating when he saw a man on horseback with a woman in pink in his arms. [...]

We knew it was she because of his description of the pink dress, the laughter, the gold beads. They galloped away.

When they emerged from the night they disappeared on the road to Cocula, in the splendor of the rose-colored light of dawn. The mule-driver came into town and told us how all Ixtepec was sleeping round and black, with motionless figures in the streets and on the balconies.] (138-139)

As catalysts who initiate change, the pair's disappearance plunges the town into silence and timeless immobility. Both Julia and Felipe were signs of mystery and illusion (149). In their place the repetitious cycle of violence and death returns to obliterate mystery and miracles, a stasis achieved through the suppression of the Church and religious rites, an event that interjects the historical backdrop of the Cristero Revolt into the novel. Ironically, the motifs of theft and the confusion of identities return again to become the agents that provoke the climactic events of the second half of the novel.

The increasing violence, due to the town's revolt against the military's brutal suppression of the Church, parallels Isabel's dark descent into alienation. She abandons herself to an inexorable attraction of time that feels strangely familiar: "la joven se dejaba llevar por sus pasos precisos a un futuro que recordaba con lucidez" (161-162); ["the young girl let herself be carried along by its precise movement to a future she remembered clearly"] (156). The author

describes a world turned upside down in which disorder overtakes order, the portraits of revolutionaries and dictators take the place of religious images, the Church's sacristy becomes a military command post and jail, and rocks, stoning, and petrification abound through adjectives describing the town's fearful paralysis. The collective narrator sums up the town's predicament: "Empecé a tener miedo del castigo y miedo de mi cólera. [...] Nadie venía. Nadie se acordaba de nosotros. Sólo éramos la piedra sobre la cual caen los golpes repetidos como una imperturbable gota de agua" (165); ["I began to be afraid of punishment, afraid of my anger. [...] No one came. No one remembered us. We were only the stone on which repeated blows fell like imperturbable drops of water"] (159).

Significantly, during this time of confusion, the General's lieutenants attempt to stone to death the sacristan, Don Roque, while the village priest, Padre Beltrán, vanishes. The disappearance of the priest and the sacristan's body instigate the General's most aggressive repression, for the theft of the body not only represents a defiance of the military's authority, but it also fuels the town's hope for salvation. The body offers another instance of the *pharmakon*, or catalyst of transformation, for it has been translated into a sign whose interpretation and possession determines the fate of the town. As an image of the General's power over the people of Ixtepec, its possession symbolizes mastery of the town itself. However, as long as the body remains hidden from the General and his forces, it continues as a powerful symbol of resurrection. As Bakhtin suggests, the disappearance of a corpse signifies a defiant gesture that staves

off death, since the body's absence is equivalent to an "absence of death," and therefore it connotes resurrection (222). Ironically, although the town's women do not exercise any authority through language and voice, they do possess the power of the sign, the stolen body, and their impassive faces and stony silence protect the knowledge of its hiding place, the local whorehouse (Los recuerdos... 190), itself a metaphorical place of exchange that occupies shifting and permeable borders. The women's gesture further mocks the General and fuels his ire over Julia's disappearance, for which he blames the town.

As long as the body remains unrecovered, the General's power dissipates and the town becomes incorporeal, like "un espejo de piedra" (182); ["a stone mirror"] (176) that traps him in its distorted reflections and threatens to dissolve his memory and render him insubstantial:

Se hundía en un espejo y avanzaba por planos sin fondo [...]. Lo cegaba el reflejo del silencio [...]. Así le habían arrebatado a Julia, engañándolo con gritos que nadie profería y enseñándole imágenes reflejadas en otros mundos. Ahora se la mostraban en los muertos equivocados de los árboles y él, Francisco Rosas, confundía las mañanas con las noches y los fantasmas con los vivos. Sabía que se paseaba en el reflejo de otro pueblo reflejado en el espacio. (182)

[He sank in a mirror, he moved through bottomless planes [...]. He was blinded by the reflection of silence [...]. That was how they had taken Julia away from him, deceiving him with shouts that no one

uttered, showing him images reflected in other worlds. Now they showed her to him in the mistaken dead in the trees and he, Francisco Rosas, confused mornings with nights and ghosts with living people. He knew that he moved about in the reflected light of another town reflected in space.] (175-175)

Ixtepec becomes a site of transformation characterized by mirrors, silence, and disintegration, apt to initiate a metamorphic change at any moment. General Rosas attributes the change to the body's disappearance (186). Therefore, reminiscent of Isabel's observation that "Rome" can be conquered through silence, the women, through the appropriation of the sign and their maintenance of an impenetrable silence, now triumph over "Rome" (187).

Within this time and space of mirrors, reflections, and equivocations, the women organize a fiesta, in fact a Trojan horse designed to distract the General and his lieutenants in order to smuggle the sacristan's body and the village priest out of town. The fiesta magically dissipates the fear that has gripped the town and its anticipation is compared to a madness (194). However, as the mirror image of the Moncada's theater production and Felipe's magic pavilion, the fiesta also takes place in an enchanted garden, a suitable backdrop for a Dionysian ritual time open to contagions, inversions, and substitutions:

Ixtepec esperaba el instante de la fiesta. La casa hechizada esperaba con nosotros. [...] El jardín se abría como un hermoso abanico de reflejos. La fuente, con el agua renovada, repetía las ramas de las acacias adornadas con faroles japoneses que abrían

caminos luminosos en el agua y en los prados. [...] El maestro Batalla sentó a sus músicos bajo los naranjos y sus violines llenaron el follaje de augurios. Un resplandor solar salía por los balcones y el zaguán hasta la calle oscura. (196)

[Ixtepec waited for the moment of the fiesta. The enchanted house waited with us. [...] The garden opened like a beautiful fan of reflected lights. The fountain, with fresh water, repeated the branches of the acacias adorned with Japanese lanterns, which opened bright paths in the water and on the lawn. [...] Maestro Batalla installed his musicians under the orange trees and their violins filled the foliage with the promise of things to come. A solar splendor streamed through the balconies and the door, down to the dark street.] (191)

As Paz observes in El laberinto de la soledad (1950), the fiesta takes place in an interstice in time in which everything attracts its opposite. As a symbol of power and regeneration, it may transform itself into “una trampa mágica” [“a magic trap”] in which everything occurs in an atemporal, enchanted, and mythic space. Chaos replaces order, characters take on ephemeral roles, and license reigns, transfiguring the mythic time of the fiesta into a Black Mass (71-72).

Characteristic of this interval of inversion and contagion, Ixtepec’s fiesta becomes a dance of death, as the General, aware of the plot to smuggle the corpse and the priest out of town, prepares to ensnare the partygoers in their own trap. The collective narrator conveys the confusion that brings about the

tragic reversal in the midst of the festivities by attributing the disorder to the unreliability of memory itself: "La memoria es traidora y a veces nos invierte el orden de los hechos o nos lleva a una bahía oscura en donde no sucede nada" (197); ["Memory is treacherous and at times inverts the order of events or brings us to a dark inlet where nothing happens"] (192). When the General attempts to leave, Isabel boldly distracts him by inviting him to dance, stepping in to become a character in the evolving masquerade (Melgar 68). Within this dangerous realm of unexpected inversions, the dance becomes a ritualized waltz of enemies evaluating each other, a culminating moment that marks her as the offering that casts out all sin: "Los dos giraron al compás de la música. Ella, arrebolada y con los ojos fijos en el General, parecía vagar en un mundo sangriento. Francisco Rosas la miraba de soslayo, sin atreverse a dirigirle la palabra" (201); ["The two twirled in time to the music. Isabel, her cheeks rouged and her eyes riveted on the General, seemed to be roaming through a bloody world. Rosas watched her obliquely, not daring to speak"] (196). Isabel, in contrast to her double, Julia, appropriately wears red, the color favored by Dionysus' maenads. The emblematic color of the warrior, red connotes at once a chthonic and a solar hue (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 792-793), and its incandescence is repeatedly emphasized in relationship to her disturbing gaze. In the text, the glowing color is compared to a stone which itself embodies ambivalent properties of regeneration and prefigures Isabel's petrification. The festive party metamorphoses into a nightmarish "black mass," when the General places all the partygoers under house arrest, preventing them from leaving and forcing them to become mimes in

a dance of death, aware of the catastrophic turn of events that has reversed their plans. The initiate, in her red dress that “pesaba y ardía como una piedra puesta al sol” (207); [“weighed and coruscated like a stone in the sunlight”] (201), divines her fate through a revelation that culminates in the ritual chaos:

—Siempre supe lo que está pasando... También lo supo Nicolás...

Desde niños estamos bailando en este día...

Las palabras de Isabel provocaron derrumbes. [...]

Una lluvia de siglos se desplomó sobre la fiesta de Ixtepec. (206)

[“I always knew what was going on. Nicolás knew, too. Since we were children we have been dancing on this day.” Isabel’s words caused landslides. [...]

A rain of centuries fell on the party in Ixtepec.] (201)

Both Nicolás and Isabel are unequivocally linked in their tragic fate. The plan to smuggle Padre Beltrán and the sacristán (who miraculously survived his stoning) out of Ixtepec, where the Moncada brothers await, fails. The siblings are destined to close the mythical cycle that will destroy Ixtepec.

As if symbolically to enhance the nightmarish aspect of the party, the events are recounted from three different points of view, a Proustian device which not only intensifies the aspect of repetition and immobility, but it also emphasizes the impossibility of escape: the partygoers become caricatures trapped in the never-ending infernal fiesta; the “savior,” the anticipated, prophetic Abacuc, who with his liberating forces will renew Ixtepec, never materializes; and the plan to smuggle the sacristán and the priest, both symbolically “resurrected”

from the dead, is turned upside down, causing the *real* death of Juan and the capture of Nicolás. Finally, in accordance with the series of reversals, the kept women of the Hotel Jardín who attempt to escape its less than paradisiacal realm are thwarted in their efforts. The aspect of simultaneity continues to repeat itself as the novel reaches its end, wherein all temporal perspectives coincide with Isabel's petrification. From another perspective, the multiple points of view undermine the veracity of any single interpretation of the final event of petrification, as less than reliable narrative voices mediate its retelling, significantly enhancing the deliberate ambiguity of Garro's text.

The General's success in reversing events and triumphing over Ixtepec is symbolically marked with the possession of its prize, Isabel, who substitutes for Julia in the Hotel Jardín. However, his conquest quickly becomes a Pyrrhic victory (244). As befits Isabel's symbolic stature of "destroying angel," the incarnation of the goddess Itzpapálotl or "Obsidian Knife Butterfly," the young woman's all-encompassing presence in the Hotel Jardín proves to be an annihilating force that negates the locale's prior association with vitality, lust and eroticism. Nicholson notes that the goddess

seems to represent those delights that man, fallen from grace, has been deprived of; for there is a story that one day while picking roses in a garden she pricked her finger. Blood having once been caused to flow, she was obliged to deprive man of his happy pleasure-ground. (110)

Furthermore, Itzpapálotl represents the feminine manifestation of Itzlacoliuhqui, the god of the sacrificial knife and of “ice and blindness and cold and obstinacy” who is associated with the powers of darkness (110). He was “cast down from heaven and blinded, so that on earth he was said to strike indiscriminately at his victims like the blind Greek fates” (110). Isabel’s obstinate gaze and her disturbing red dress, symbolic of blood sacrifice, intimidate the General, who prefers docile women, and he feels suffocated by her presence: “el cuarto se llenó de lianas y de hojas carnosas. No quedaba lugar para él, ni para su pasado, se ahogaba... ‘Ocupa todo el cuarto’, se dijo, y en ese momento se dio cuenta de que había cometido un error irreparable” (246); [“the room was filled with lianas and fleshy leaves. There was no space for him, or for his past; he was choking. ‘She takes up the whole room,’ he said to himself, and at that moment he realized that he had made an irreparable mistake”] (239). Long before her actual petrification, Isabel’s change begins at the point of the epiphany culminating in the fiesta. After her arrival at the Hotel Jardín, Isabel’s features begin to blend with those of Nicolás, her cosmic consort, confusing their identities and further unsettling the General (246). Isabel metamorphoses into an enigma ensconced at the center of a labyrinth, a protean signifier who defies interpretation even as she invites it, a sign that disrupts and erases prior signs and leads to misreadings and error: “Su nombre borró al recuerdo de Julia y su figura escondida detrás de la persianas se convirtió en el único enigma de Ixtepec” (249); [“Her name erased the memory of Julia, and her figure hidden behind the blinds became the only enigma of Ixtepec”] (243). As an inversion of

Julia, who symbolized vitality, eroticism, and plenitude, Isabel induces discord and chaos: soldiers begin to disrespect their superiors, the kept women become disheveled and refuse to comply with their conquerors. The General and the women of the Hotel Jardín begin to fear Isabel's penetrating gaze, whose disturbing intensity is reiterated in the text, along with her somber, spectral appearance in the fiery red dress. In fact, her eyes and those of her brother fuse into the same singular penetrating gaze that torments the General, who now fears the young woman:

recordó la entrevista que había tenido ese día con Nicolás; los dos hermanos lo habían mirado con los mismos ojos. "Ya no quiero estar bajo estos ojos." No era justo tener el mismo par de ojos mirándolo de día y de noche. [...] No quería dejarse ver desnudo por esos ojos que lo observaban desde un rincón desconocido. (251)

[he remembered the interview with Nicolás earlier that day; Isabel and her brother both looked at him with the same eyes. "I don't want to be looked at by those eyes any longer." It was not fair that he should be subjected to the same eyes both day and night. [...] He did not want to be seen in his nakedness by those eyes that observed him from an unknown vantage point.] (245-246)

Like an avenging goddess of the underworld, Itzpapálotl, the Gorgon Medusa, or the Erinnye, Isabel presides in silence and solitude over a realm of loss and emptiness in the now chthonic Hotel Jardín. If delight and plenitude

accompanied Julia's presence in the hotel, Isabel's appearance brings the opposite, strife and the death of pleasure. In contrast to Julia, the "rose" of the Hotel Jardín, Isabel represents that flower's symbolic counterpart, the narcissus, Proserphina's flower, and to pick the flower, as the General does, opens the gates of the underworld (Morford and Lenardon 228). Progressively depersonalized, Isabel's penetrating eyes embody a metonymical substitute for the young woman, and their defiant gaze is described in conjunction with the red dress, depicted as burning, blazing, or brilliant (266). By association her gaze turns into a fiery stare, a detail that connects her to the destroyer, the Medusa and to petrification itself, and it establishes the metaphysical significance of her gaze as the "eye of Dharma which is set on the bounds of unity and multiplicity, of emptiness and non-emptiness, and is therefore able to apprehend them simultaneously" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 363). Her portrayal as passive, mute, and immobile in conjunction with her disturbing Medusa-like stare, characterizes the portrayal of the demonic in women's twentieth-century poetry (Ostriker 321). Like that of the Sybil, Isabel's oracular vision directs itself both inwardly and outwardly, and her clairvoyance, as well as that of Nicolás, threads the entire narrative, particularly in the episodes of the theater and the fiesta, symbolic *loci* of the multiplicity of manifestation. After her epiphanic vision at the party, Isabel becomes endowed with a vision that unifies the temporal and the eternal, one that establishes her existence in a non-dimensional present in the Hotel Jardín. Her piercing gaze, then, becomes the expression of conscience, and it has the capacity to annihilate manifestation (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 363). The Hotel

Jardín designates the gateway to her spiritual transformation, and her existence in an atemporal, eternal present manifests itself through the progressive change, of her metamorphosis into stone. In this context, stone takes on an oracular significance as it embodies, like the Greek Omphalos stone, a material threshold between the earthly and the divine worlds, a figure which also signifies regeneration (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 933-34). For the Aztecs, stones served as the sacred materials for mirrors and obsidian blades of sacrifice, manifestations of the goddess Itzpapálotl, or "Obsidian Knife Butterfly," who had been transformed into obsidian by the gods after they cast her into a fire (Rostas 372). Nicholson confirms the important symbolism of obsidian, a material which was considered to have fallen from the stars. Therefore, Itzpapálotl incarnated "the soul in the most permanent form, crystallised into rock," and she represented the vital energy of the cosmos that permeated matter (110). A chthonic goddess, she is also an oracular deity, and she incarnates the "Mariposa de obsidiana" (1951) of Paz's prose poem, the figure whose body reveals the Other's destiny:

Yo soy [...] la pequeña piedra solar: si me rozas, el mundo se incendia.

Toma mi collar de lágrimas. Te espero en ese lado del tiempo en donde la luz inaugura un reinado dichoso: el pacto de los gemelos enemigos, el agua que escapa entre los dedos y el hielo, petrificado como un rey en su orgullo. Allí abrirás mi cuerpo en dos, para leer las letras de tu destino. (280)

[I am [...] the small solar stone. If you touch me the world is set ablaze.

Take my necklace of tears. I await you on the other side of time where light inaugurates the blissful realm: the pact of the enemy twins, water that slips through fingers, and ice, petrified like a king in his arrogance. There you will open my body in two and read the alphabet of your destiny.]

In true Ovidian fashion, the threshold experiences of the fiesta, the hotel, and Nicolás' condemnation combine to initiate Isabel's catastrophic crisis and prefigure her final, physical metamorphosis. She begins to change before the General's eyes, as she serves as an oracular mirror of his guilt and annihilates his memories. The young woman hears the sound of sand pouring in her head, and she gradually feels surrounded by its dusty embrace: "parecía, en efecto, estar cubierta de polvo" (251); ["she seemed, in truth, to be covered with sand"] (245).

Incarnating the singular principle of destruction that both she and Nicolás personify, Isabel lives within a temporal time determined by the memory of what is to be, which she occupies with her sibling, her symbolic double (251). As if to echo his sister's thoughts, Nicolás dwells in the same temporal frame:

Su pasado no era ya su pasado, el Nicolás que hablaba así era un personaje desprendido del Nicolás que lo recordaba desde la celda de la cárcel. [...] Él como Isabel, tampoco recordaba con exactitud la forma de su casa ni los días que había pasado en ella; su casa

ya sólo era un montón de ruinas olvidadas en un pueblo pavoriento y sin historia. [...] Recordaba su futuro y su futuro era la muerte en un llano de Ixtepec. La traición de Isabel abolió la muerte milagrosa. Ya no darían el paso hacia el misterio. [...] No había escapado al crimen, no había escapado a la muerte del pueblo. Obstinado, trataba de imaginar lo que haría Isabel para encontrarse con ellos en ese futuro tan cercano como la puerta de su celda. (265)

[His past was no longer his past, the Nicolás who spoke those words was a personage detached from the Nicolás who remembered them in his jail cell. [...] Like Isabel, he did not remember with exactitude the shape of his house or the days he had spent in it; now his house was only a heap of forgotten ruins in a dusty town with no history. [...] He remembered his future, and his future was death in a field in Ixtepec. Isabel's betrayal abolished the miraculous death. They would no longer move toward the mystery. [...] He had not escaped crime, he had not escaped death in the town. Obstinate he tried to imagine what Isabel would do to be with them in that future, as close as the door of his cell.] (259)

Nicolás sees himself as the sacrificial victim of the collective violence of the old aristocratic community and the government forces. As the figurative "offspring" of his community, he perceives that he and his siblings have been fated to atone for its "sins." Although Nicolás interprets Isabel's alliance with the General as

treason, he believes in their shared destiny, even in an escape through a “miraculous death” that will release them from the cycle of violence that immobilizes Ixtepec. Thus, death represents an act of the will, rather than a surrender, an act that contrasts with the inertia of the town: “No puede quedarse aquí, no puede dejarnos aquí [...] ¡Nos iremos de Ixtepec, nos iremos!” (265); [“‘She can’t stay here, she can’t leave us here’ [...] ‘We’ll go away from Ixtepec, we’ll go away!’”] (259).

In fact, the General does indeed cast all the blame on the Moncadas for the repetitious cycle of crime and violence which he has authored, which has paralyzed the town, and he refuses to allow the chance to escape its frozen time (260). However, the siblings’ will to destruction abolishes all memory. Rather than confer redemption on the sacrificer, the death of the siblings destroys him. Their deaths rob him of Julia, haunt the General with their shadows, and deliver him into the nothingness of oblivion without granting him the peace he desires: “la nada era estar fuera de ese cuarto, de esa vida, era no volver a caminar el mismo día durante tantos años: el sosiego” (272); [“nothing was to be out of that room, out of that life, not to walk through the same day again for so many years: peace”] (267). Isabel’s presence, her disturbing gaze and red dress function as the reflecting substance through which he perceives his phantasmagoric Otherness. Her eyes become her brother’s eyes, and her face blends into his face (271), and recalling Antigone, she demands the life of her brother, now sentenced to death.

However, Nicolás refuses to be saved, and in another gesture reminiscent of Antigone, he wills his own death through a confession that assures his fate and usurps the General's power over him: "Nicolás quería morir por su propia mano" (266); ["Nicolás wanted to die of his own hand"] (260). In an attempt to comply with Isabel's wishes to save her brother, the General substitutes another victim for him; however, Nicolás denies him that ambiguous redemption. At the cemetery, after the firing squad shoots the surrogate victim, as well as the priest and the "traitors" who organized the fiesta, Nicolás appears and demands his destiny, denying the General's atonement and destroying him in the process: "Su carrera de General mexicano acababa de ahogarse en la sangre de un jovencito de veinte años" (287); ["His career as a Mexican General had just collapsed in the blood of a twenty-year-old boy"] (282). Paralyzed, rudderless, the General now is figuratively dead, "También él era un fusilado de la suerte" (287); ["He was a person who had been executed too—by fate"] (283).

Isabel's literal metamorphosis into stone simultaneously parallels her brother's path to the cemetery where the executions take place, and her petrification is prefigured through words that convey her disintegration and immobility, while her Otherness is conveyed through the absence that fills her disembodied being. Her brother's name, shouted like that of a messiah by the populace as the soldiers lead him away, rains down on her like stones (282). Her surroundings become unfamiliar, and she finds herself in "un paisaje inmóvil en donde la tierra y el cielo eran de piedra" (283); ["a motionless landscape where the earth and the sky were of stone"] (278). The women of the Hotel Jardín

become strange and have eyes of stone, and the townspeople whom she sees resemble animals. Gregoria, the *curandera*, guides Isabel to the cemetery to plead for her brother; however, Isabel's figurative petrification impedes her progress. Paralleling the death of her brother, Isabel also incarnates the sacrificial victim as the text implies with the deliberate use of the ambiguous third-person verb, "expiara," and the possessive pronoun, "sus," which may refer either to Isabel's, to Nicolás', or even the town's sins: "Sólo Cástulo deseaba que Isabel obtuviera la vida de su hermano, Ixtepec entero quería que expiara sus pecados" (284); ["Cástulo was the only one who wanted Isabel to obtain the life of her brother; all Ixtepec wanted (her/him) to pay for (her/his/its) sins"].¹ Isabel's material petrification occurs when she becomes aware of her brother's execution and of the General's betrayal. Therefore, the treasonous act itself represents the threshold experience that provokes her final, literal metamorphosis.

As Gregoria and Isabel journey toward the cemetery, the young woman's strange appearance in the flashing red dress frightens all who set eyes on her. The narration shifts to Gregoria's point of view, and Isabel's petrification becomes cloaked in ambiguity, for the old Sybil believes that Isabel's stony demeanor and silence represent symptoms of a bewitching spell, and she decides to lead her to the sanctuary of the Virgin where Isabel's passion for the General may be exorcised. Similar to other victims of Ovidian transformation, Isabel is silenced, unable to give voice to her own story; she now inhabits another temporal realm in which she hears the incantation of the magic words of

¹ My translation. The Simms translation does not adequately render this ambiguity, and incorrectly attributes the sin to Isabel: "all Ixtepec wanted her to pay for her sins" (279).

a childhood game of statues, and she shares this space in fixity with her brothers. The metamorphosis begins to occur through the literalization of similes that refer to the metaphoric fragmentation of her heart: "Isabel estaba en el centro del día como una roca en la mitad del campo. De su corazón brotaban piedras que corrían por su cuerpo y lo volvían inamovible" (289); ["Isabel was in the center of the day like a rock in the middle of the countryside. From her heart stones sprang forth; they ran through her body and made it immovable"] (285).

Gregoria's interpretation of events contrasts with a subtext that casts doubt on her recollection of events, increasing the textual ambiguity of the passage. The few words that Isabel utters obsessively refer to Nicolás' death and to the General's duplicity, and they stand in juxtaposition to Gregoria's prayers to the Virgin. In addition, the description of Isabel's petrification is prefaced by "Dijo Gregoria que..." ["Gregoria said that..."], thus the reported third-person speech casts doubt on Gregoria's interpretation of the petrification. Gregoria misinterprets Isabel's declaration, "¡Aunque Dios me condene quiero ver a Francisco Rosas otra vez!" (291); ["Although God may condemn me, I want to see Francisco Rosas again!"] (286), as a blasphemous admission of her treasonous passion, and the description of Isabel's petrification follows soon after:

De sus ojos salieron rayos y una tempestad de rizos negros le cubrió el cuerpo y se levantó un remolino de polvo que volvió invisible la mata de pelo. En su carrera para encontrar a su amante, Isabel Moncada se perdió. Después de mucho buscarla,

Gregoria la halló tirada muy abajo, convertida en una piedra, y aterrada se santiguó. Algo le decía que la niña Isabel no quería salvarse. (291)

[Lightning came out of her eyes, a tempest of black curls covered her body, and a whirlwind of dust rose and made the locks of hair invisible. In her rush to find her lover, Isabel Moncada got lost. After looking for her for a long time, Gregoria found her lying far down the hill, transformed into a stone. Terror-stricken, she crossed herself. Something told her that the Señorita Isabel did not want to be saved.] (287)

Notwithstanding Gregoria's account of Isabel's petrification, easily misread as a punishment for her treason, Isabel's statement should be reconsidered in light of the significant emphasis placed upon her gaze and that of her brother in the segments leading up to the petrification. In addition, the theatrical production in the magic pavilion of Part I of the novel presents a *mise en abyme*, an internal duplication of the narrative that bears a dialectical relationship to the novel's ambivalent ending. In the theater episode, Isabel, clad in red, declaims "¡Mírame antes de quedar convertida en piedra!..." (120); ["Look at me before I am turned to stone!"] (114). While the statement certainly conveys a foreshadowing of her destiny, both the statement and the insistent motif of the siblings' perturbing gaze enhances their symbolic value as mirrors of conscience that reflect the communal guilt of the town and its military leaders, thereby configuring their joint function as scapegoats. Reminiscent of the events leading up to the finale of the

Shakespearean play, Hamlet, the community's guilt, based on a self-interested desire to preserve power and status, has been transferred to the Moncadas, in a stony horror that destroys the town and denies its redemption and return to order. By their refusal to become willing victims, Isabel's and Nicolás' self-destruction negates the renewal. The victimizers become, in the end, victims paralyzed by their own deeds.

Isabel's petrification and her brothers' deaths are eerily paralleled in the beginning of Paz's prose poem, "Mariposa de obsidiana." Were it not for her silencing through petrification, Isabel's voice could substitute for the first-person voice within the poem:

Mataron a mis hermanos, a mis hijos, a mis tíos. A la orilla del lago de Texcoco me eché a llorar. Del Peñón subían remolinos de salitre. Me cogieron suavemente y me depositaron en el atrio de la Catedral. Me hice tan pequeña y tan gris que muchos me confundieron con un montoncito de polvo. Sí, yo misma, la madre del pedernal y de la estrella, yo, encinta del rayo, soy ahora la pluma azul que abandona el pájaro en la zarza. Bailaba, los pechos en alto y girando, girando, girando hasta quedarme quieta; entonces empezaba a echar hojas, flores, frutos, En mi vientre latía el águila. Yo era la montaña que engendra cuando sueña... (280-282)

[They killed my brothers, my sons, and my uncles. At the edge of lake Texcoco I began to cry. From the Rock ascended whirlwinds of

salt. They picked me up softly and deposited me in the vestibule of the Cathedral. I became so small and gray that many mistook me for a small heap of dust. Yes, I, the mother of obsidian and of a star itself, I, pregnant with a thunderbolt, am now the blue feather that a bird abandons in the brambles. I used to dance, my breasts high, and spin, spin until I became still; then I began to sprout leaves, flowers, and fruit. In my womb throbbed the eagle. I was the mountain that engenders itself as it dreams...]

Stone, dust, thunderbolts, and final stasis characterize both the poem and the episode of Isabel's petrification. The religious reference also connects both poem and passage together, as Gregoria, upon finding the stone, pushes it up a slope in order to deposit it at the Virgin's sanctuary, the Virgin of Guadalupe being one of the syncretic appropriations of Itzpapálotl, or "Obsidian Butterfly," as well as Tonantzin (Paz 280, fn.83). Additionally, in Paz's poem, the stone goddess engenders life in stillness through dreaming, a detail that relates her to Isabel, whose monumental form engenders the story and establishes her as the mirror of the text. Isabel's transformation into stone represents a reconciliation of duality, and reiterates her mythical function as Itzpapálotl, the personification of dynamic cosmic forces which are never destroyed. As Nicholson observes of the Nahua cosmogony, "the vital energy (which we may surely equate with soul, obsidian) continues independently of space, time, and matter. It is the vital energy that is real: nothing else. Material things are mere appearance, simply

one of the forms this energy can assume. Everything that exists is changing constantly; and change itself, life, is eternal" (110)

The road on which Isabel metamorphoses into a monument that initiates the narrative amplifies the symbolic value of the petrification. Instead of escaping the narrative, Isabel becomes the textual body that contains the history of the trauma of the citizens of Ixtepec, just as she also reflects its culpability. The road itself represents the confluence of temporal and spatial paths that converge on the stone's mirroring surface. As a threshold itself, the road exemplifies the "point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement" (Bakhtin 244). Therefore, following the mythic paradigm of the cosmic cycle of renewal through destruction, it is fitting that the memory of Isabel and Nicolás, of whose symbolic androgyny renders them one in the conclusion, presides over the ruin of Ixtepec, whose destruction ironically initiated the narrative. The road, as a metaphor for the text itself, invites the passerby to interpret the stone at its edge in order to recreate the narrative, reawakening the vitality and hope, represented by Felipe and Julia, of an alternative ending that might provide redemption. If Felipe and Julia embody the harbingers of illusion presiding over beginnings, Isabel and Nicolás represent the pair whose incestuous relationship activates the devastation of the town, and therefore the pair necessarily presides over the conclusion of the narrative.

Significantly, a similar aesthetic conceit completes Gabriel García Márquez's novel, Cien años de soledad (1967). The incestuous union of Amaranta Úrsula and Aureliano Babilonia becomes the catalyst that not only

initiates Macondo's apocalyptic destruction and repeats Ixtepec's calcinated ending, but it echoes Melquíades' encoded manuscript, which represents the text of the narrative. In this romance of close relatives, the past, present, and future coalesce in one instant of transcendent lucidity:

La protección final, que Aureliano empezaba a vislumbrar cuando se dejó confundir por el amor de Amaranta Úrsula, radicaba en que Melquíades no había ordenado los hechos en el tiempo convencional de los hombres, sino que concentró un siglo de episodios cotidianos, de modo que todos coexistieran en un instante. (351)

[The final protection, which Aureliano began to discern when he allowed himself to be confused by Amaranta Úrsula's love, lay in the fact that Melquíades had not ordered events in the conventional time of men, but rather he concentrated a whole century of daily events in such a way as to make them coexist in an instant]

The apocalyptic ending of Ixtepec comes to pass as described in cosmic myths of renewal, and its hopes for reconciliation seem paradoxical. If Julia and Felipe correspond to semi-divine figures of magic and illusion that distract the town from its iniquities, the reciprocal love that results in their transcendent union becomes a deceptive and parodic fairy tale that produces the miracle of redemption in the comic climax of the story in order to bring about the dramatic reversal of the narrative. Seen in this light, Gregoria's inscription on the stone, which presents Isabel's petrification as punishment for misguided love,

represents the *curandera*'s own misconception of events that distracts the reader from its implicit meaning. The deliberate misreading enhances the ambiguous ending of the novel, completing Garro's parody of romance, and it reveals Garro's love of Baroque artifice. From another perspective, Isabel's and Nicolás' joint act of willed self-destruction illuminates the failure and hypocrisy of modern revolutionary eschatologies, such as the Surrealist utopian golden age or those political ideologies which are vested in the Marxist myth of social renewal (Eliade 155). Through the parody of the myth of reintegration and its systematic deconstruction, Garro reveals the emptiness and sterility at the heart of revolutionary movements, as she manipulates the inescapable tedium of cruelty and greed that infects their ideological purity, and she implies that a regeneration based on absolutes of necessity harbors the seeds of its own destruction. The cyclical nature of the violence inherent in political movements of rupture and renewal informs the passage which directly precedes Gregoria's misleading inscription. Narrated by the collective narrator, the citation, rather than Gregoria's version, becomes the key that reveals the novel's leitmotif of stasis within violence:

Vinieron otros militares, a regalarle tierras a Rodolfito y a repetir los ahorcados en un silencio diferente y en las ramas de los mismos árboles, pero nadie, nunca más, inventó una fiesta para rescatar fusilados. A veces los fuereños no entienden mi cansancio ni mi polvo, tal vez porque ya no queda nadie para nombrar a los

Moncada. Aquí sigue la piedra, memoria de mis duelos y final de la fiesta de Carmen B. de Arrieta. (292)

[Other officers came to give land to Rodolfito and to repeat the hangings in a different silence in the branches of the same trees, but no one, ever again, invented a fiesta to redeem men from execution. There are times when strangers do not understand my fatigue or my dust, perhaps because now there is no one to mention the name of the Moncadas. The stone, the memory of my suffering, and the end of the fiesta of Carmen B. de Arrieta are here.] (288)

Ultimately, the stone mirror reflects the betrayal of the Mexican Revolution, the historical subtext of the novel. Petrification does not represent Isabel's punishment for treason, nor does Isabel embody the archetypal Mexican folkloric figure of treason, la Malinche. Instead, viewed through the lens of myth, the petrified Isabel becomes an oracular "talking" stone, a rock animated with the spirit of the divine and endowed with the power of creation (Carrasco 79). The stone's interpretation, through the spiritual agency of the reader, becomes instrumental in the regeneration of the narrative. The stone mirror's material permanence refuses closure not only by captivating the reader in its reflections, but also because, as a sign of vengeance beyond death, it stands as an admonishing monument of the failures of revolutionary ideology.

In Los recuerdos del porvenir, Garro selects the theme of periodic destruction and recreation in order to weave mythical time into the circular time of

an eternal present, a periodicity culminating in the destruction reflected in the Aztec sunstone calendar. Instrumental to the cyclical movement of time, the divine androgynous pair that governs the ascending first part of the novel, as well as the descending second half, conveys the nostalgia for a lost paradise vested in the utopian ideals that are of primary concern not only to the Surrealists, but also to such Latin-American authors as Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, and Gabriel García Márquez. Introducing the mythic constructs that underlie revolutionary utopian ideologies, Garro, in Ovidian fashion, undermines them through parody, revealing their hidden underbelly of corruption and violence. The utopic Hotel Jardín, for example, which houses the government forces of reform and their whores, later becomes a space of loss and desolation. In parallel fashion, Don Joaquín's magic garden, the heart of Ixtepec's old aristocracy, remains frozen in time. The repetition of violence immobilizes the town in a perpetual paralysis out of which there can be no escape. Isabel's petrification, an intertextual link to Ovidian myths of transformation, exemplifies the metamorphic paradigm that afflicts characters beset by intolerable, liminal experiences whose only possible escape comes through transformation into Otherness. Their metaphoric flight denotes not a death, but rather a postponement of death that preserves them in an eternal present of becoming. Transformed into the stone mirror of the text, Isabel as Itzpapálotl convokes the resurrection of the dead and presides over the temporal fusion of past, present and future, recreating the narrative in perpetuity:

En otros tiempos cada hora nacía del vaho de mi aliento, bailaba un instante sobre la punta de mi puñal y desaparecía por la puerta

resplandeciente de mi espejito. Yo era el mediodía tatuado y la medianoche desnuda, el pequeño insecto de jade que canta entre las yerbas del amanecer y el zenzontle de barro que convoca a los muertos. (Paz "Mariposa de obsidiana," 281-282)

[In other times each hour was born from the vapor of my breath; it danced an instant on the point of my dagger and disappeared through the dazzling door of my small mirror. I was the tattooed noontime and the naked midnight, the small jade insect that sings in the grasses of dawn and the clay mockingbird that calls the dead.]

Taking into account the magical connotation of time and divine, undifferentiated essence imbued in the materiality of stone, one may consider Isabel's transformation a transcendence rather than a punishment for sins. She transforms her role as the *pharmakos*, the sacrifice, into that of the sacrificer, an avenging and oracular divinity whose gaze becomes like the sacrificial obsidian blade, and whose mirror-like surface reveals the horror of a town's and General Rosas' violent deeds. Isabel's oracular gaze defeats them all, and it annihilates the memory and the nostalgia for a paradise that remains forever beyond their reach.

Conclusion

Nothing retains the shape of what it was,
And Nature, always making old things new,
Proves nothing dies within the universe,
But takes another being in new forms.
What is called birth is change from what we were,
And death the shape of being left behind.
Though all things melt or grow from here to there,
Yet the same balance of the world remains.
-- Ovid, Book XV Metamorphoses

María Luisa Bombal's La última niebla and Elena Garro's Los recuerdos del porvenir represent twentieth-century palimpsests of Ovid's Metamorphoses. Their texts offer a revision of myths that resonate with readers, because they elaborate the great themes embodied in Ovid's work, such as love, passion, fragmentation, and alienation. Textually, the reinscription of Ovid's matrix also allows the authors to disclose, in literary fashion, social and historical preoccupations through parody and irony. To a certain extent, rewriting myth also allows the authors to invent themselves, as Rosario Ferré has observed, in order to "disipar su temor a la pérdida y a la muerte, para enfrentarse cada día al esfuerzo que representa vivir" (39); ["restore their fear of loss and of death, to face every day the effort that living represents"]. The consoling aspect of writing certainly remains in the background of Ovid's Metamorphoses, for he completed his masterpiece shortly after his censure in second-century CE Rome, and his poem stands as an irreverent text that resists authority, even as it averts alienation and loss. By means of his text the poet frees himself through laughter at the gods and at death, and he transcends his existential situation by writing about life-giving, transforming passion. Passion becomes the metamorphic

pharmakon that transfigures the most memorable female characters of Bombal, Garro (and Ovid) from ordinary and timid beings, into magnificent, immortal creatures that captivate the imagination. Their “anarchic ardour” overpowers social constraints and affirms the life force over all else (Gregory xix), granting them, if only temporarily, the freedom to actuate their desires. For this reason their transformations remain eternally fascinating and enigmatic. Therefore, the trope of metamorphosis, embodying the irrepressible force of mutation, represents a seditious figure that best captures the intensity of invincible life, disrupting human order, hierarchy, and authority when these stand in the way of the expression of imagination and vitality.

As a figure, metamorphosis offers not only an inexhaustible source of exploration, but it also resists definition. Heraclitus’ epigram on the subject of change aptly captures the paradoxical nature of the concept: “In the same river we both step and do not step, we are and are not” (Cit. in Kaufmann and Baird 16). Heraclitus affirms that continuity of flux permeates all life, and he stresses the only knowable absolute, *panta rhei* [“things change”]. The trope presents us with motifs of transformation that raise profound questions about the meaning of change in all aspects of life, from obvious physical considerations, to transcendent, and, ultimately, metaphysical implications. As a poetic conceit, the motif’s lasting appeal throughout literary history marks it as a symbol that provides a powerful means of projecting the human anxieties that surround problems of autonomy and control (Segal, “Ovid’s Metamorphic...” 32). Herein lies one aspect of metamorphosis’ allure for women authors, because their

revision of myth is frequently informed by such anxieties, whether these revolve around the questions of autonomy surrounding the body and sexuality, the preservation of identity, the divided self, or, most importantly, the legitimization of women's authorship and the contesting stance toward the literary traditions they seek to revise (Ostriker 330-331). This study has presented an exploration of the intertextual mythical appropriations and textual transformations of Bombal and Garro.

The inquiry into these authors' reinscriptions of myth began with our observation of a common pattern of metamorphosis in their works, an observable motif that connects their texts to Ovidian metamorphosis. Centered around the aspect of arrest, rather than development, the metamorphoses at the heart of their texts address the subjects of love, passion, and emotion, in short, the psychological and affective realm of characters in crisis.

As Galinsky points out, the subject of Ovid's work centers less around the novelty of metamorphosis itself than around the dilemmas that stimulate transformation, and he argues that Ovid's primary artistic motivation arises from the aesthetic potential inherent in the trope of metamorphosis itself (3). The theme of love in all its manifestations, both sublime and grotesque, remains the principal leitmotif of Metamorphoses, and for this reason the poetic treatment of this subject has continued to influence the literary tradition (3). The poem appeals to the desires, passions, and the taboo, and consequently Ovid's interpretation of traditional myths has centered on the creative portrayal of the transformation of individuals seized by strong human emotions, rather than

focused upon the evocation of the heroic ideals and values that they originally signified in Homeric verse. L. P. Wilkinson notes that Ovid's particular interpretation of myth manifests a more Baroque presentation with its "ceaseless movement, its variety, its fantasy, its conceits and shocks, its penchant for the grotesque and its blend of humour and grandiosity," a conception rather removed from classical ideals of balance and order (70). Gregory credits Ovid with anticipating "the arts of the Italian baroque," because his work accentuates the imagination, the emotions, and the psychological development of female characters (xv). Ovid therefore stresses the sensual and psychological aspects of transformation, and he portrays the physical fluidity of the body, particularly the female body, in order to reveal the "hidden essence of a personality," and its "longings, desires, fears, needs" (Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic..." 12). According to Gregory, Ovid wrote primarily for the female audience of the social circles he frequented, and, following the example of Euripides, he elaborated the "domestic situations" of female characters, writing with compassion about their lives. Concerning the Roman social context that determined Ovid's artistic expression, Gregory observes:

Poets whose friends and readers were women were rather more than likely to become well known. It was scarcely necessary for Ovid to make a conscious choice of Euripides' example. His choice was in the very atmosphere he breathed. He liked women. His Confessions of Women were briefs written in their defense. Whatever arts he possessed were devoted to their cause. His

understanding of their misfortunes, his compassion, his wit, the external polish of his verse made him the fashionable poet of the hour, his verses read aloud at theatres and at public festivals. (xviii)

Ovid's emphasis on emotion, sensuality, and eroticism reflected the "feminine decadence" of an age which clashed with Augustan reforms intended to recuperate the traditional, masculine, heroic values of Roman order and austerity (xix). Consequently, from Augustus' point of view, Ovid's text represented an irreverent exaltation of life which flouted order, decorum, and moral laws, and Gregory maintains that for this reason Ovid was charged with "*lèse-majesté*," irreverence toward the state and its ruler, and he was sentenced to exile (xxi).

The poet's "heretical," "anarchistic," and "reactionary" (xx) text featured several innovations that attract twentieth-century readers and writers. These include the sensitive portrayal of women in love, the emphasis on the affective inner lives of women, and the "extended, often lyrical, dramatic monologue." Gregory observes that "Ovid invented the passionate 'aside,' the 'internal' monologue of drama and fiction" (xx). The Roman poet's irreverence was not only transmitted through the portrayal of transgressive characters, but also through wit and a barely concealed ironical stance toward authority. Gregory surmises that this aspect of Ovid's work in particular appeals to authors writing under difficult political and social conditions, which both Bombal and Garro experienced as women authors writing in a field dominated by the patriarchal control of production and promotion of literary texts, as well as masculine ideals of authorship. The same Ovidian sense of wit and subversive irony animates the

texts of both Bombal and Garro, inviting their readers to consider the ambivalent meanings behind their characters' metamorphic transformations.

In addition to Ovid's sympathetic portrayal of women, and his anarchical affirmation of the imagination and irrepressible life, the beauty of the poet's art lies in the way he recasts his material, for he delights in how the stories are told, and not necessarily in their content (Galinsky 4-5). Ovid's aesthetic practice of mythic appropriation, transformation, and revision, in addition to his delicate elaboration of the topic of love, constitutes an important aspect of his work, for, as an outstanding example of intertextual *praxis*, the text becomes an exemplar that authors have historically emulated. For many of them, the emphatic position that Ovid gives to the imagination and the subjective point of view in formulating literary myth constitute two of the most important aspects of his aesthetic practice. Galinsky maintains that Ovid's exuberance in transmitting the "vitality of myth" arises from "the play of the imagination [which] becomes supreme" (6). Ovid validates the realm of the subjective, the magical, and the imaginary in a way that appeals to a subjective mode of writing and perceiving experience, particularly inner experience. As we have seen in the works of Bombal and Garro, both the innovative and artistic elaboration of a story, as well as the validation of interiority and the imagination become central to their aesthetic practice. Seen in this light, then, metamorphosis as a literary conceit has less to do with the obvious physical manifestations of change, or literal metamorphosis, than with its functional principle within the text itself, or its literary metamorphosis.

Ultimately, metamorphosis becomes an *ekphrastic* device that mirrors the aesthetic transformations of the text itself.

The concept of metamorphosis remains a protean phenomenon, and three of its topical constituents have been addressed in this study—the significance of the metamorphic body, the embodied nature of identity, and the metamorphic text. Occupying the space of the liminal, and portraying a process of “becoming,” metamorphosis represents one of the most powerful metaphors for the multifaceted nature of human identity. As a concept it bridges the contradictions inherent in the human condition, and it therefore transcends explanations of the body, human identity, and gender based on dichotomy, explanations which fail to take into account the actual complexity of human beings. By its very fluidity metamorphosis defies boundaries, structures, and categories, and it challenges the claims to truth at the core of absolutes by deconstructing the abstract scaffolding that supports them, in order to reveal a creative and dynamic cosmos characterized by flux, uncertainty, and contingency. As a master trope that effectively portrays the active ebb and flow of the human adventure of development in all its joy and sorrow, metamorphosis manifests itself most obviously in the transformed body, the *locus* of all transactions between the self and its world. The metamorphic body becomes symbolic of the fluidity, the ambivalence, and the potential for disorder and rupture that haunts all existential anxieties and frustrates a nostalgia for certainty and absolutes. It emphasizes the human insecurities surrounding the fragmentation of the self, it reveals the instability of the body and the embodied nature of subjectivity, and, consequently,

it evokes fears and anxieties related to alienation in the dehumanizing modern world.

The enduring myths of an embattled, yet persisting, consciousness trapped in an alien body appeal to modern sensibilities, because they reveal the embodied nature of identity, intelligence, and imagination, and they stress the subjective nature of experience. Stories of change illustrate these anxieties by actualizing our deepest fantasies and fears of transcendence through metamorphosis, which in turn exteriorizes in a figurative way the hidden essence of human nature. Through the dynamic of inversion, metamorphosis materializes the dark inner corners of the heart in order to reveal the more troubling aspects of the human psyche. The body itself, then, does not illustrate the entire process of metamorphosis as much as it represents the culmination of the completed metamorphic transaction; therefore it becomes the physical sign (*séma*) or outward manifestation of the adventure of change, which often takes place *before being punctuated by a final physical change*. However, because the body becomes the *locus* of all encounters with meaning, it remains the most obvious repository or sign of the "story" of the process of change. By trapping the mind in an alien shape, transformation exposes the fragile construction of the self.

Metamorphosis discloses the unstable nature of the self through threshold experiences which provoke crises, while it simultaneously resolves the dilemma through transformation, thereby advancing both the human adventure and the story. The Heraclitean theme of perpetual change at the core of metamorphosis, then, exposes the cosmic absurdity of the existential condition in order to reveal

its paradoxical certainty: doubt. Out of the uncertainty of our existence arises a nostalgia for unification, which is alluded to by Heraclitus' aphorism: "What is in opposition is in concert, and from what differs comes the most beautiful harmony" (Cit. in Kaufmann and Baird 16). The Greek philosopher's enigmatic observation represents the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the union of opposites that comprises the "mystery of totality," the core of myth, religion, and philosophy (Eliade, "The Two..." 122). However, because doubt and change remain the only constants in a dynamic cosmos, metamorphosis endures as a perennially relevant means of disclosing the tension between a longing for totality and the fear of dissolution. Consequently, metamorphosis embodies an archetypal figure for the questioning of rigid ontological structures and ideologies, particularly those that concern the self. As an allegory of the human journey of self-discovery, the trope of metamorphosis remains fluid and flexible enough to encompass the complex and contradictory synthesis of who we are, were, and will become.

The metamorphic body, as the site "for the intersection of the natural and artificial in the realm of art" (Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic..." 16), also denotes a self-mirroring *ekphrastic* conceit that fictionalizes transformation. *Ekphrasis* traditionally represents a rhetorical device that describes a work of art, such as a painting or sculpture within a textual framework. Etymologically, *ekphrasis* connotes "description," and, technically, the rhetorical figure was understood in antiquity to represent any expository means by which a subject could be evoked before the eyes: *ekphrasis* could describe people, places, seasons, and even

actions (Race 320). Ovid's description of the metamorphic processes at work in the tapestries of both Arachne and Minerva constitutes a classical Roman example of *ekphrasis*, one often compared to the archetypal Greek example, the Homeric description of Achilles' shield. Understood in its original sense, *ekphrasis* and literary metamorphosis function in much the same manner, since the trope of metamorphosis describes the essence of human nature by exteriorizing human emotions as material projections. For example, Niobe's grief paralyzes her to the extent that she gradually becomes a frozen statue, and her transformation literalizes the catastrophic anguish that she experiences into a terrifying image that outwardly projects the emotion's destructive action within the self.

As a mirroring device, metamorphic *ekphrasis* also represents the act of writing itself, as it reveals the dynamic processes of the text's own transformation through the practices of mythic appropriation and its creative reelaboration. Because metamorphosis represents an *ekphrasis* of the movement and structure of the work itself, it constitutes the underlying principle of the text's creation. As a specular *mise en abyme*, it often presents an internal duplication of the transformation of the text that exerts a reciprocal influence on the text itself. Arachne's tapestry exemplifies this practice, for her work of art illustrates the process of transformation and mirrors the process by which the author, Ovid, alters the original mythical material. The very act of transformation that she portrays in the tapestry represents a subversive feat of appropriation and interpretation which brings about her punishment by the goddess Minerva, an

obvious commentary on the artist's competition with the divine in the realm of creation, and an indirect reference to Ovid's own irreverence toward the mythical material.

In addition, metamorphosis presents a sophisticated temporal process that differentiates it from the atemporal metaphor, because it enacts a temporal sequence that underscores the process of becoming, which depends on a before and an after, rather than illustrating the final product of change. Instead of a focus on the terminal boundaries of life, it illustrates the intermediate stages that lie between sameness and otherness. Metamorphosis portrays the artist's own struggle with the potentiality of "becoming" inherent in the act of creation, an accomplishment that also carries the seeds of its own destruction. Textually, metamorphosis points to the ambivalence of signs and language, and it discloses limitations of words as they configure life's most extreme experiences. The motif of metamorphosis, then, expresses the terror and fascination inherent to liminal experiences by granting authors a figure that encompasses and describes the mutable territory between terminal states held in tension, and the trope of change enables them to translate threshold experiences through the mirror of the metamorphic text.

The textual mirror reveals the dynamics and aesthetics of its own transformation through the processes of mythic intertextuality. The Metamorphoses, as an exemplar of literary myth, embodies an aesthetic *praxis* of appropriation, referentiality, transposition, and transformation, a practice that calls attention to its own fictional status and construction in language. It becomes

a “mother-text,” in Susanne Jill Levine’s phrase, that informs any work that addresses the theme of metamorphosis (“A Second Glance...” 54). By means of the dynamics of mythic appropriation, the text establishes a dialogue with a preceding body of tradition through direct reference and allusion, calling attention to the very act of textual creation itself. The power of translation, intermediation, and disfiguration of literary metamorphosis reveals in the ambivalence of language. Consequently, in the process of appropriating the mythic matrix, a parodic quality often becomes manifest in the translation. As an indicator of irony, literary metamorphosis invites the reader to discover the mythical framework encrypted in the text, as it constitutes a flexible structure of patterns and malleable signifiers that are seldom emptied of their significance. In spite of its revisionary and deforming aesthetic, literary metamorphosis embodies evocative and metaphoric functions, and it retains its analogical function, thereby lending cultural authority to a text, which contributes to its coherence and provides the keys to the unraveling of its signification.

As a literary phenomenon, the process of mythopoesis often occurs in periods of crisis and cultural change. This creates an unstable *Weltanschauung* which transcends its own aesthetic purpose to reveal a critical stance toward and a refusal of prosaic reality. In twentieth-century literature, this worldview signals an individual’s increasing sense of alienation vis-a-vis the modern world, and it becomes an ideal means of redirecting the artist’s gaze toward the interior of being, the privileged realm of imagination and consciousness. In the early twentieth century, the interest in the inner gaze and the subjective world, as well

as the revision of mythical themes, which provide illustrative examples of the complexity of self and its journey of inner consciousness, continues to be reflected through the intertextual appropriation and transformation of the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus, both epitomes of the quest for self-knowledge. The interest in the subjective experience of the psyche also provides female authors with a framework that validates women's subjective experience and creativity. Inscribing their own perspectives as marginalized Others within the universal matrix of myth also lends authority to their texts in reference to the literary community as a whole. Women have established historically a critical response to and a dialogue with the mythical tradition, and they have reinterpreted and defaced that tradition to reflect their own predicaments as authors and as human beings. With good reason, their explorations of the myth of Narcissus often center on the exigencies of female identity.

María Luisa Bombal represents just such an author. Having received a French education in her native Chile, having traveled France during the inter-war years to further her education, she adopted a French Modernist aesthetic that evokes, through content, language and structure, the subjective world of her protagonists. She developed a condensed lyrical style which she submitted to the rigors of Post-Symbolist aesthetics, exploiting the richness and suggestiveness of imagery through the techniques of rhythm, musicality, and synaesthesia. The use of metonymy and metaphor links her work to a Proustian aesthetic, and her protagonist's subjective vision suggests the Modernist master's retrospective inner gaze through the operations of memory. Bombal's work offers one instance

of metamorphosis used as a figure of the spiritual transformation of her protagonist and as an aesthetic device that becomes the principle underlying her lyrical text.

In order to delve into the subjective worlds of her protagonist in La última niebla, Bombal reinscribes the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus. Her interpretations of these Ovidian myths end with a figurative petrification that condemns her protagonist to stasis, to a passivity that has become a recurring motif of women's twentieth-century literature, one, Ostriker points out, which is illustrated in images associated with fragmentation, madness, and death (321). However, Bombal postpones the final transformation of her protagonist by reinterpreting the myth of Pygmalion. Through the patterns of substitution and projection that characterize this myth, she opens a breach in the narrative through which the protagonist creates a space in which willful misreading, through substitutive error, projects a text of desire, a self-affirming outlet that compensates for absence and loss. In so doing, Bombal stresses the absolute autonomy and the validity of her protagonist's imagination in comparison with dull, prosaic reality. In addition, the nameless protagonist's quest for identity leads her to retrace Orpheus' journey to the underworld in order to recover her lost unity through communion with the Other. However, the Narcissistic mirror ultimately reveals the problematic nature of her self-concept through its conflicting images of woman. The paradoxical tension between sensual self-image and society's projections of passivity and perfection constitutes an immobilizing force for the protagonist. Consequently, through the adaptation of

the stories of Narcissus, Pygmalion, and Orpheus, Bombal uses the motif of metamorphosis as a means of considering questions about the problematic construction of feminine identity centered around questions of autonomy, woman's notions of love, and the potentially stifling effects of the institution of marriage.

However, by its very flexibility, the trope of metamorphosis paradoxically allows the author to avoid offering final resolution to the questions raised within the text. Through the use of literary metamorphosis as an aesthetic device that parodies and ironically subverts the models it appropriates, Bombal deconstructs the myths of marriage and romance that are her protagonist's only means of self-realization, without offering alternative solutions to her plight. Condemning her protagonist to transformation and final stasis, Bombal calls into question the social context that locks her protagonist in an existential situation that offers no outlet for an authentic expression of self. For the nameless protagonist there literally is "no exit" at the end of the story. Bombal has created a protagonist who refuses to conform, and whose eventual psychic paralysis represents a contradictory transcendence very much in the tradition of Ovid's memorable female characters, such as the emblematic Daphne.

The paradigm of mythical intertextuality and literary metamorphosis are not limited to La última niebla. Bombal employs the same dynamic of appropriation, revision, and deformation in other texts, notably, in the *novella* La amortajada, and in the short story "El árbol." In La amortajada, the body of a dead protagonist incarnates the metamorphic *pharmakon*, or transforming agent,

who inscribes the space of narrative through her retrospective memories, retracing the Orphic journey to the origins of undifferentiated being in order to be reincorporated into an engulfing, cosmic Otherness. Her successful journey actualizes the cosmic myth of renewal whose utopian ideals inspired Modernist as well as Surrealist writers, and it also prefigures the Orphic journey to the underworld retraced in Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo, and like its successor, it combines a symphonic score of disembodied voices that create the web of narrative. "El árbol" rewrites the myth of Daphne from the female protagonist's point of view, and, through the parody of the myth, the story criticizes the social structures that limit women's growth and keep them in a vegetative state of emotional and spiritual stasis. Reversing Daphne's transformation, Bombal breaks the metamorphic spell through the tree's destruction, thereby liberating her protagonist. Finally, Bombal assigns value to her protagonists' subjective experiences, changing them from passive inspirational muses to active agents of transformation who create the textual tapestry through the imagination. Although their metamorphoses certainly raise questions of identity and its fragmentation, in true Ovidian fashion, Bombal offers no ultimate resolution, since the principle of metamorphosis, with its emphasis on flux and doubt, denies such consoling schemes of closure.

In contrast to Bombal's Modernist aesthetic with its undeniable French accent, Elena Garro, through her novel Los recuerdos del porvenir, presents a more radical appropriation of the avant-garde that manifests itself in Mexico. Her interpretation of the aesthetic movement represents a synthesis of the

revolutionary ideals of rupture and renewal of both the European avant-garde, particularly Surrealism, and of Mexico's rich colonial and pre-Columbian heritage. Garro's intertextual appropriation consists of multiple mythical frameworks that fuse into a Baroque blend, and they evoke an authentic voice of Latin-American self-expression. If Bombal directs the Narcissistic gaze inward, in order to transform and actualize the atemporal space of the imagination, Garro projects her inquiry toward the exploration of cosmic time and its multiple layers of reality. She metamorphoses time itself in order to initiate the space of the narrative. As in Bombal's text, the aesthetics of metamorphosis transform Garro's text into a mirror through which time and memory become objectified in the petrified Isabel. In order to weave the various temporal realms together, Garro appropriates the cosmic myth of renewal that informs the Surrealists' ideal of unification, as well as various Mesoamerican myths of periodicity and destruction. At the core of these myths of regeneration lies the universal nostalgia to recover a lost unity and totality that will abolish all duality, and the concept becomes intelligible through anthropomorphized abstractions, personified in a dual androgynous couple whose cosmic union symbolizes the abolition of time and duality (Eliade 114-115). The cosmic union of opposites, with its promise of transcendence and renewal, lies at the heart of all religious and philosophical yearnings for the absolute (Eliade 148).

Appropriating the model from such authors as Octavio Paz and Alejo Carpentier, authors whose poems, essays, and novels reveal nostalgic longing for this utopic ideal, Garro integrates the archetypal paradigm of the divine

couple along with the pre-Columbian mythical tradition of periodicity in order to form the thematic and structural matrix of her novel. Two pairs of characters, a quartet of metamorphic agents, govern the temporal movement of generation and destruction that comprise Part I and Part II of her novel; these pairs form mirror images of each other, and their magic number (four) symbolizes their function as embodiments of the Mesoamerican cosmic divinity presiding over the cardinal points. Felipe and Julia govern the ascendant movement of the novel and preside over its comic spirit, a parody of romance. The second pair, Isabel and Nicolás, control the descendant movement of the novel and initiate the destruction of the town of Ixtepec. Through a parody of the myth of creation and destruction, Garro deconstructs the utopic ideal of reintegration at the heart of Surrealist and revolutionary ideologies, by refusing to enact the longed-for regeneration. Instead, through the petrification of Isabel and through the death of her consort/brother, Nicolás, Garro reveals that the utopic ideals of modern revolutionary eschatologies fail to improve the lives of ordinary people. Through the metamorphosis of time and the petrification of Isabel, Garro underscores the cyclical violence at the core of revolutionary movements by an objectification of the paralysis that results from its corrosive effects on the movements' ideological purity.

However, not all is lost in Garro's novel of annihilation. Isabel achieves transcendence when her metamorphosis resolves the duality that she has incarnated throughout the narrative, and her embodiment in stone represents a release and the achievement of a measure of freedom, since her petrified body,

charged with the magic of an Orphic, prophetic stone, mediates the story. It invites the town of Ixtepec and its leadership to contemplate the horror of their cruelty, and like the avenging Gorgon's stare, the stone statue condemns them to a stasis. The too facile interpretation of Isabel's petrification as a punishment for treason against family and town becomes untenable. Rather, her transformation into stone, reiterated by the symbolism of Mesoamerican myth, takes on another connotation: she becomes the sacrificer instead of the sacrifice, an avenging, oracular divinity incarnated in the sacred obsidian stone that her memorial signifies. While condemning the novel's characters to a perpetual hell of stasis and repetition, evocative of Dante's *Inferno*, the stone mirror materializes the metamorphic text itself; it mediates, translates, and refracts a kaleidoscopic reflection that misleads, obfuscates, and engenders the misreadings that constitute Garro's ambivalent work. She accomplishes this feat by her refusal to present a protagonist, preferring instead a plurivocal point of view offered by the collective narrator as well as the quartet of characters that governs the dynamic movement of the narrative. In addition to contributing to the text's ambivalence, this innovative technique breaks with the Aristotelian unities and makes her text revolutionary, more reminiscent of Spanish Golden Age theater, with its expansive cast of characters, confused identities, and marvelous interventions. Through a metamorphic and Baroque aesthetic, then, the narrative offers a complex view of the blended Mexican reality and identity, while it perpetuates itself by denying closure for the reader, who must reenact the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction through the reading.

Other works by Garro lend themselves to the exploration of metamorphosis, since time forms the principal theme of her texts. The collection of short stories, La semana de colores (1964) offers a variety of narratives, such as “La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas,” in which characters shift between different temporal realms in order to bring the pre-Columbian past to bear upon the present. Many of the stories feature a pair of young sisters Eva and Leli as characters, a device that continues Garro’s use of symbolic pairs to determine the dynamic of the narrative, and whose naïve narrative voices contrast with the themes of violence that permeate the stories. In “El día que fuimos perros,” reminiscent of the *novella* “El coloquio de los perros” by Cervantes, the two sisters metamorphose into dogs and roam the streets in perfect freedom in order to witness the violence of the adult world. “Antes de la Guerra de Troya” presents the transforming potential of literature, as Eva and Leli discover their existential separateness and solitude upon identifying with the war heroes, Hector and Achilles, and upon taking sides against each other. Mesoamerican myth and Surrealism combine in “La semana de colores” in which the two sisters spy on an old Indian *brujo* who keeps the “days of the week” locked up in his compound. Recalling the images of women found in Breton’s Poisson soluble (1924) in which woman represents the incarnation of a nostalgia of unification, the *brujo*’s women, whom he mistreats, represent different colors associated with the days of the week. In a reversal of the Surrealists’ idealizations, they take revenge for their enslavement as abstractions and beat their keeper to death. The theme of metamorphosis may not be limited to these works, since wherever the theme of

time, the multiplicity of reality and characters, and the blend of pre-Columbian and European worldviews appear in Garro's texts, the trope of change exerts its dynamic of transformation at the thematic and structural level.

Both Bombal's and Garro's texts offer distinct modalities of the avant-garde as it manifested itself in the Latin-America in the early twentieth century. Bombal's measured *praxis*, characterized by its optic of interiority, lyricism, mythic protagonists, and self-conscious stance, reveals the French Modernist aesthetic to which she was exposed through her intellectual education in France, and it discloses the important influence of French literature and culture in the literary and intellectual circles of Buenos Aires, where she wrote and published her two principal works, La última niebla and La amortajada. Her work reflects the avant-garde aesthetic in the Latin-American southern cone, tempered by a lengthy process of appropriation, which produced a more moderate mode of expression balanced between the classical tradition and the spirit of renewal envisioned in Apollinaire's *Esprit nouveau*. In contrast to Bombal's Post-Symbolist aesthetic practice, Garro's text offers an example of the more strident avant-garde in which European influences were appropriated, transformed, and synthesized through a Mexican Baroque spirit of fusion, and it retains a vital and deeply-rooted Mesoamerican tradition. Consequently, Garro revises Surrealism's myths and ideology of rupture in the context of her own Baroque aesthetics of ambiguity and paradox. Metamorphosis as a theme and an aesthetic illustrates the tension inherent in the Baroque spirit of appropriation, fusion, and paradox found in many Latin-American texts.

Finally, Bombal and Garro offer two examples of metamorphosis. Bombal's vision of metamorphosis, emblemized by the myths of Narcissus and Orpheus, configures an internal transformation through the emphatic appraisal of the imagination. On the other hand, Garro elaborates the metamorphic trope to its fullest dimension through the illustration of an internal psychic transformation and its attendant manifestation through physical change. The authors' metamorphic texts offer two exemplary models of the evolving tradition of literary myth. Following Ovid's focus on the psychology of characters in crises, Bombal's and Garro's literary metamorphoses reveal the serious intention to expose their protagonists' vulnerable human nature and the difficulties of their existential condition.

However, as is the case in Ovid, the aesthetic *praxis* of metamorphosis discloses an ironic edge and a parodic playfulness that should be remembered as the authors' texts subversively deconstruct literary conventions, and as they critically question traditional institutions as well as revolutionary ideologies. Although their characters' *peripeteia* ends in stasis, their metamorphoses signify a gesture of refusal in the face of existential dead-ends that fail to grant them a desired autonomy. Through the aesthetics of metamorphosis, with its intertextual strategies of appropriation, referentiality, translation, and reinscription, these authors exploit the ambivalence of language in order to subvert essential notions of feminine identity and to convey the paradoxical problematic of Otherness, gender, and limitation. In Bombal and Garro these strategies call attention to the ambivalence and complexity of their texts, as well as to the construction of a

multi-faceted, feminine subjectivity, whose estrangement recalls Kristeva's self-exiled Narcissus. This enigmatic portrayal defies exegeses that essentialize the feminine within dichotomizing paradigms. If the protagonists' quests for fulfillment and individuation fail, they do so in order to prove the deficiencies of images of women as Other and as passive Muse, and to reveal the limitations of the discourse of love. The idealistic goal of unity and resolution promised in the utopian paradise of necessity ends, for all human beings, in alienation and the dissolution of self through the metamorphic mirror of Narcissus' pool. However, the text of that nostalgic desire remains, and it invites the reader to embark on the journey of its discovery in order to recreate the dream, and to recover freedom within its narrative space.

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